CHAPTER FOUR:

DAMBUDZO MARECHERA AND THE ZIMBABWEAN NATION

It is now a commonplace, in speaking of Dambudzo Marechera, to observe in the light of his 'doppelganger' statement (quoted in Chapter One) that his work emphasizes the priority of a universalistic identity, alluded to in the previous chapter.. On the strength of this and other statements by this Zimbabwean writer, Flora Veit-Wild in 'Words as Bullets' (1987:113) characterizes Marechera as a writer who 'refuses to identify with a particular race, culture or nation... .' According to David Pattison (1994: 222), the 'doppelganger' statement embodies Marechera's 'utter rejection of any identity with or responsibility for a specific place or people', an ideological standpoint which distinguishes this Zimbabwean author from Eppel and Vera. There is no doubt that the views of both the above critics appear a sensible interpretation of Marechera's explanation of his relation to locality and culture and that they are validated by autobiographical readings of his texts, more especially *The House of Hunger* (1978) and *The Black Insider* (1990). But one potential problem with this outlook is that the emphasis on Marechera's universalism might discourage an exploration of aspects of his work relating to his nation. Perhaps more disturbing is the reluctance, by critics who privilege a nationalistic critique, even to start to consider that Marechera's work could provide a representation of his nation that is worthy of interest. Dan Wylie (1983) exemplifies a trend in Marecheran scholarship which argues that Marechera failed his country because his work does not serve any nationalist purposes. As Gerald Gaylard (1993:92, 93) has argued, this position is revelatory of what he identifies as a confusion between a 'nationalistic or *ethnicist* political agenda' [emphasis mine], which Marechera did not have, and his 'concern with 'post-colonial and neo-colonial

issues'. Marechera's portrayal as a rebel, manifested in the refusal of Zimbabwean publishers to publish his work, has also contributed to the lack of critical attention to national aspects in his writing, aspects which the present study seeks to redress.

It is against this background that the need for a discussion of Marechera's representation of the Zimbabwean nation, an important aspect of his writing which has not as yet been the object of a detailed analysis, must be seen. As Patrick Brantlinger (1992:260) has pointed out, building on Benedict Anderson (1983) and Homi Bhabha (1990), 'The existence of the nation-state... forms the invisible subtext, context, or horizon of every novel, no matter domestic, privatistic, or perhaps even overtly anti-nationalistic it may be'. Indeed, despite his rejection of nationalist identity, it remains the case that Marechera's corpus - particularly his novellas and short stories - is of great value as a work that not only delegitimizes the concept of nation, as Stewart Crehan (undated) has suggested following Kwame Anthony Appiah (1994), but also represents Rhodesia/Zimbabwe in the new ways the notion of nation is seen at these times. Furthermore, it is evident that, as one of the most prominent Zimbabwean writers who wrote both within his country and in exile, before and after its independence (that is, as a colonized subject and an independent citizen), Marechera occupies a privileged vantage point from which to provide a representation of his nation that is worth examining. This position is, of course, different from that of Eppel who, notwithstanding his birth right and self-perception as a bona fide citizen of Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, is forever cast as the Other by black Zimbabweans, although he too represents both the colonial and postcolonial Rhodesian/Zimbabwean nation

This chapter consists of two sections. The first section examines three texts by Marechera - *The House of Hunger* (1978), *The Black Insider* (1984) and what appear to be as fragments of a novel, 'The Concentration Camp', published in his book *Scrapiron Blues* (1994) - which reveal his representation of Rhodesia/Zimbabwe as a place of captivity and a site of alienation but also as a cultural space. This section also focuses on Marechera's representation of the Zimbabwean postcolonial nation in his books *Cemetery of Mind* (1992) and *Mindblast* (1984). The second and last section discusses the ways in which Marechera, by contrast to Vera, puts into play notions of marginality, mimicry and displacement in his representation of Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. Obviously, an adequate exploration of this topic requires one to take into consideration the largely autobiographical mode of Marechera's writing. As David Buuck (1997:121) has noted, Marechera locates questions of identity within this discursive mode. In his view, Marechera's work consists of a series of 'elaborate conversations between his multiple selves and identities'. As he goes on to argue:

> Marechera constantly relocates himself (and his written self) within the shifting allegiances and constructions of identity, preferring to refract the self into many rather than invent a cohesive and stable subject position. (121)

Buuck's perceptive comment suggests the possibility of examining Marechera's representation of the nation through his narrator's self-representation as a national subject and even the rejection of that identity. Indeed, as will become clear from a few examples in the course of this discussion, one frequently finds in Marechera's texts that the autobiographical narrator assumes different identities depending on the space in which he situates himself. Stuart Hall's (1995) notion of the 'pluralized self', alluded to in Chapter One, can be seen as emphasizing exactly the terms in which Buuck describes Marechera's

work. Indeed, Hall describes this multiplicity of identities in terms of the self's crossing of mental and cultural boundaries. Hall's perspective is helpful to the reading offered in this chapter because it enables one to understand how the nation, as represented in the ways mentioned above, is framed as a space between an ethnic space which Marechera refused to identify with and a universal space he always claimed to be his. This perspective is further clarified if one agrees with Melissa Levin and Laurice Taitz (1997:111) that the thrust of Marechera's autobiographical work lies, as they put it, in the

> splitting off or fracturing of a communal identity in order to write the 'I' into prominence, and a necessary rewriting of the position of the 'I' in relation to particular communities/identities which then allows for the possibility of a reinsertion of the "I" back into the commun(I)ty with which it both identifies and dis-identifies simultaneously. What becomes clear through Marechera's writing is his struggle to locate himself in relation to a range of institutional structures: the family, community, nation and state, and to give definition to these structures.

It is precisely the ways Marechera attempts to locate himself in relation to the nation that this chapter explores, as it insists that he not only rejects family and nation but also adopts a posture that suggests his strong identification with what Daniela Volk (in Anthony Chennells and Flora Veit-Wild, forthcoming) terms 'the universal storehouse of thoughts'. Volk's argument in her essay that Marechera's concern is not so much with the locality of the experiences he narrates but with their universal significance will, nevertheless, be shown to be problematic in terms of an important argument of this chapter, which is that Marechera's treatment of violence and mimicry serves to suggest an intellectual distance between him and his nation.

The raw material for autobiography is memories. In order to understand the representation of the nation in Marechera's texts, it is therefore helpful to concentrate on the narrator's

memories of 'home' insofar as they present Rhodesia/Zimbabwe as a national space. However, an adequate examination of the topic of this chapter requires that one focuses on those aspects of Marechera's work that may illuminate the representation of nation filtered through such recollections of home. Specifically, it seems essential to examine how notions of margins, displacement and mimicry inform his representation of his nation, a task devoted to the last part of this chapter as already indicated. This focus is warranted by the fact that, a bohemian writer, he has written at the margins of his nation; that his work projects the image of this nation from the vantage point of an exile both within his own country and outside; and, finally, that perhaps more than any other Zimbabwean writer, his work conveys the notion of the Zimbabwean subject as an individual who fluctuates between hybridity and mimicry.

PART ONE

In Marechera's first novella *The House of Hunger* (1978), the narrative focuses on the autobiographical narrator's memories of life in a Rhodesian township. From the opening page, the reader is made to realize that the central trope around which these recollections of home are concentrated is the narrator's family home referred to as the 'House of Hunger'. The House is depicted as a nerve-racking place dominated by the brutal presence of Peter, the protagonist's elder brother. It is a place

> where every parcel of sanity was snatched from you the way some kinds of bird snatch from the very mouths of babe. And the eyes of that House of Hunger lingered upon you as though some indefinable beast was about to pounce upon you. (1)

This image of the house as a predatory and violent place that drives its occupants to insanity is reinforced by its personification as an awesome beast. This personification subtly indicates that the reader should interpret the House of Hunger as more complex than the architectural image suggests. The inability to identify the beast represents menace. Thus, more than the harsh conditions of existence, the real danger in living in the House is to the mind. In the scene of the fight between Peter and his young wife Immaculate, the young man says that he is determined to stamp the fighting spirit out of the girl. Yet, somewhat paradoxically, it is this fighting spirit (the narrator implies in his work) which is what is needed to sustain the self in a colonial setting. Because of the danger it presents for the mind, the house is a place where one does not want to stay, as suggested by the opening sentence of the novella: 'I got my things and left' (10). This departure foreshadows other displacements in the text which the characters, and notably the narrator and his friend Patricia, make in order to escape the unwholesome mental conditions at home, a point that is returned to later in the chapter. Throughout the narrative, the house remains the site of violence that the main protagonist crosses, re-crosses, and then flees again so that the novella becomes for Marechera, as Laurice Taitz (in Chennells and Veit-Wild, forthcoming) observes in her essay 'Knocking at the Door of the House of Hunger', 'a journey through the events that have been determinate in forging the narrator's identity'. In her discussion of the novella, Taitz also speaks of 'the inability of the protagonist to move beyond the house of hunger itself'. This assertion seems contradictory in light of her correct characterization of the text as a 'journey'. While it is true that the setting of the title story in the collection remains the house of hunger in the different senses of this trope within Marechera's first novella, the fact that the

narrator-author is able to tell his experiences from where he has the freedom to do so suggests that the protagonist has actually left the house of hunger.

The narrator has vivid recollections of home that reveal it to be a place of violence. The first evocation of violence in *The House of Hunger* appears at the beginning of the novella when the narrator recounts his disinterested intervention in the quarrel between Peter and Immaculate, which precipitates a frenzied reaction on the part of his brother, leading to a violent beating of the girl. Peter, who dominates the family by his physical strength and by virtue of his close affinities with his mother, symbolizes, at the level of the house, the brutal force that, at the level of the nation, holds in bondage a large section of the nation.

The narrator's own physical, as well as verbal, abuses at the hands of Peter also suggest a parallel for the violence and alienation the self experiences at home and the type of alienation it experiences when it inhabits the national space. But Peter's association with violence is, however, doubly-nuanced: he is both a perpetrator and a victim of violence for he is described by the narrator as an angry young man whose imprisonment after being set up by a police spy resulted in a deep hatred for the white-ruled establishment. The description of Peter in this dual capacity in a disunited and fragmented family becomes somewhat emblematic of the mental condition of the colonized nation. It also exemplifies the way in which the novella reveals the intricate relationship between spaces (family, township and nation) and the thin boundaries between them by showing the self to be implicated in a hierarchical structure of violence.

Violence is hardly an ideal for a community that strives to become a nation. Yet in a multiracial society like Rhodesia the possibility always exists that race-motivated violence may erupt. There is a note of pessimism in the novella when the narrating self recounts the beating up he and Patricia, a fellow university student and lover, received from right-wing students demanding the segregation of university residence halls. A fascinating illustration of the self's 'multiple identities' is given in the account of this incident by the narrating, experiencing self, with many layers of identities (inter alia gender, class, race) clearly involved. In addition to occupying a gendered (male) space, by his relationship with Patricia, the narrating self (a student) inhabits a national space insofar as he identifies himself with 'those disturbingly concise and adult youths whom our country either breaks or confines in prisons and lunatic asylums' (71). However, there is also a layer of racial identity given prominence by the racial motive behind the violence, which brings home to the novella's protagonist the realization that he is racially different from his liberal friends.

But even in Rhodesia violence is not always racially motivated, as is evident from the bullying brother, already mentioned, and the narrator's recollection of his being beaten up by two black thugs as he returns home after a meeting with his friend Patrick. The two aggressors are motivated by revenge for the beating up of their friend, Leslie, by the narrator and Patrick. Painfully, he manages to drag himself to the House of Hunger. When he shouts for help, no one comes out to his rescue. He then realises that the House is a deserted place:

> I turned the door handle. The door immediately opened. I walked in. There were no curtains on the windows; and the wind and light streaming through the broken one showed me that this was a big black empty room. There was nothing in it; no furniture, nothing, nothing at all. My mind felt like nothing... . A doorway yawned blankly into me: it led to a smaller room: numb, dark and also utterly empty. I could

> not bring myself to touch the walls to prove that they were really there. For some reason I began to wonder if I was really in there; perhaps I was a mere creation of the rooms themselves. Another doorway brooded just ahead of me. It led into a tiny veranda that looked out over an overgrown wilderness of garden into the starry dark-blue immensity of the night. Was there then nothing here also? Had I called out for nothing? I took a step down from the veranda and as I did so something big and sly slouched suddenly through that wilderness of weeds and maize stalks and disappeared through a hole in the far garden wall. My hand involuntarily rose to my head: the sudden pain had been as though a sliver of the grey matter of my brains had been plucked cleanly with a pair of tweezers.
>
> I ran from that house like a madman who has seen the insides of his ravings. (76-77)

Some critics have approached this episode as an account of a nightmarish reality conceived by a stimulated imagination. While this reading is justifiable in terms of Marechera's own state of mind, what is evident is the suggestion it carries of the self's failure to recover its own identity. Through the notion of a phantom self, Marechera, it seems, is making the point - forcefully yet subtly - that fixed identity is an illusion. This pivotal passage plays an important role both as a referent of the narrator's home and as the metaphor of a disunited nation. If the house is seen as a symbol of the nation, then this episode can be read as undermining the very notion of national identity. It is telling that, in the following paragraph, the memory of the house becomes identified with the pain in the narrator's skull: 'And the picture of my skull has since blended into the memory of that empty but strangely terrifying house which - when I called - merely maintained an indistinct silence' (77). It comes as no surprise that the House is also presented as the cause of the narrator's confused mind: 'It is the House of Hunger that first made me discontented with things' (77).

In an extension of this cameo technique, the House of Hunger broadens its symbolism to encompass the township and to the entire country, for the boundaries of the territory in which the self experiences alienation and lack of freedom do not end with the protagonist's family home. In fact, Marechera's technique in the novella is to indicate an overlapping of the family home with wider conflictual spaces: the township and colonial Rhodesia as a whole. In his interview with Kirsten Holst Petersen, published under the title *An Articulate Anger* (1988), Marechera illuminates this connection when he states that:

> You must remember that when I wrote House of Hunger I had left Zimbabwe without knowing most of Zimbabwe. All I knew was Rusape, St. Augustine's School at Penhalonga and the university here. I had never been somewhere else. But you see, because of the political designs there, enforced on the blacks, it meant that what one black was experiencing in one ghetto was practically the same as what another was experiencing in another ghetto. (16)

So, because of this similarity of the experience of the colonized population which Marechera stresses in his comment, the connection between the violence he describes in the township and in the country as a whole is clear enough: in the same way as life in the house is fraught with violence, life in the township and in Rhodesia as a whole is punctuated with incidents of violence involving all sections of society. The country youth are caught in violence, drugs and drinks to compensate for their thirst for freedom. Not only black youths like the protagonist, but also white youths, yearn for the freedom that their country denies them and so they have to flee the country to avoid the kind of military service John Eppel recounts in *The Great North Road* - (hence the metaphor of the House of Hunger). The narrator gives his reader a sense of that thirst for freedom in the following passage:

> The freedom we craved for - as one craves for dagga or beer or cigarettes or the after-life - this was so alive in our breath and in our fingers that one became intoxicated by it even before one had actually found it. It was like the way a man licks his lips in his dream for a feast; the way a woman dances in her dream of a carnival; the way the old man ran like a gazelle in his yearning for the funeral games in his youth. (3)

Marechera has explained in his interview with Petersen (1988) the underpinnings of the motif of violence in his work in terms that undermine the basis of nation:

> I am not talking about violence as something that one suddenly notices when one grows up a bit, but violence which surrounds you from birth. From the time you are almost a baby and not able to understand anything you already have all those violent visual images around you. As you get to be two or three or four years old you take it to be the normal way of life. (Marechera and Petersen, 27-28)

The relation of nation to violence is also articulated in Marechera's work in terms of his figuration of colonial Rhodesia as a concentration camp and an asylum. Many scenes in *The House of Hunger*, for example, point to the fact that the township, and by extension, the entire place, is not merely a migraine (as already intimated) but also a concentration camp or an asylum. The narrator's comment quoted above about his country's treatment of its youths leaves no doubt about this representation. In the microcosm of the House of Hunger, Peter, the narrator's brother, is a former prisoner who continues to hold a grudge against an establishment that has used police tricks to entrap him:

> And Peter got jailed for accepting a bribe from a police spy. When he came out of jail Peter could not settle down. He kept talking about the bloody whites; that phrase 'bloody whites' seemed to be roasting his mind and he got into fights which terrified everyone so much that no one in their right mind dared cross him. (2)

Elsewhere in the text, the narrator describes himself as having had experience of prison. A clear example occurs when he is detained with other schoolchildren for a few hours for

protesting about discriminatory wage-structures. His comment, that this 'meant fingerprints and photographs and a few slaps on the cheek 'to have more sense' (2), delineates a critical stance towards a society divided between jailers and prisoners.

A glimpse into the police's invasion of people's personal lives is given in the scenes involving Harry. The narrator's former schoolmate, Harry is presented as a police informant who has been reporting on the narrator and other radical students. Behind his 'civilized' appearance Harry hides a hideous agenda that Marechera works to expose: he makes it clear that Harry's line of activities functions against the cause of black liberation. The contradiction between his outwardly friendly disposition towards the narrator and his police surveillance of the latter is highlighted in the episode where the two young men drink in a tavern frequented by Rhodesian soldiers. Harry is confronted by Julia, the protagonist's friend, as a police agent. An involuntary gesture reveals that he is carrying a police revolver. The climax of the episode is when Harry drops a packet of photographs, including the narrator's, and notes intended for the police. For the narrator, the point is clear: there is no hope of building a united nation in a country under surveillance. This surveillance, leading to suffocation, is paradoxically linked with 'the freedom we craved for - as one craves for dagga or beer or cigarettes or the after-life' (3), already quoted. The arrests of students and workers and other social categories attest to the fact that colonial Rhodesia is represented, in Marechera's work, as a prison.

The episode in the novella, in which the narrator tells about the newspaper photographs of a captured guerrilla standing among twenty-two dead guerrillas, reinforces the notion of Rhodesians/Zimbabweans as a nation of captives. Edmund is remembered by the

narrator as the poor schoolmate whose mother was driven to prostitution to support his education after the death of his father. But it is Edmund's savage beating by his schoolmate Stephen that allows Marechera to make Stephen embody the notion of the African violating his own people. Marechera achieves this by describing Stephen not only as a bully but also as an intransigent Africanist: 'He had appropriated for his own specific use such notable figures as Nkrumah, Kaunda, Che, Castro, Stalin, Mao, Kennedy, Nyerere ... he was always taking the geography master to task about his ironic comment about the primitive state of Africa's roads; he was always petitioning for African history to be taught...' (64-65). Yet it is the same young man who boasted of sleeping with Edmund's mother and who subsequently beats him up so violently that 'There was blood on his shirt; a rather large stain which seemed in outline to be a map of Rhodesia' (65). Kevin Foster (1992:60) is probably right to see in the fight between the two youths a symbol of what he calls 'intra- and inter-racial political and cultural relations in Rhodesia'. As he explains, the fight and the demolition of Edmund carries great importance in the narrative because of Edmund's status as the doubly-colonized:

> It not only dramatizes white intolerance of political or social change from the blacks, but by having the school's champion of authentic black identity embody a violent white dictatorship, Marechera demonstrates the tyranny implicit in all expressions of cultural centrality. (60-61)

Edmund's position in these photographs as 'sole survivor' (61) could be considered as an unimportant detail in the narrative. In reality, and somewhat paradoxically, Marechera seems to see in his survival a reason of hope for the nation. Although still a prisoner, Edmund embodies those 'black heroes' that Marechera's narrator suggests are needed to promote the cause of liberation. Edmund, the captive, thus symbolizes a nation in captivity.

The theme of the nation living in captivity resurfaces in 'The Concentration Camp'. Structurally, this narrative consists of eight parts. The structure of the story indicates Marechera's intention of highlighting different facets of the experience of living as a prisoner in one's own land. For the purposes of this discussion, attention will be given to Parts One, Two, Four and Eight. Part One subtitled 'The Camp', stages a world divided between prisoners and their jailers. From the opening paragraph, the prisoners are presented as the survivors of an ordeal in the land brought about by sadistic perpetrators.

> In a narrow winding valley in north-west Zimbabwe, there lived two families: the Makoni family and the Murehwa family. Once there had been a big village there with more than two hundred families; but the Rhodesian soldiers came with guns and bombs and most of the villagers were killed. The rest were taken in trucks to concentration camps miles away. (158)

The narrator's focus on the two families of prisoners signals the way in which Marechera attempts to depict the image of a nation not only physically and mentally crippled but also subjected to forced displacement. One is struck not so much by the historical specificity of the incident described in this passage as by the way it reveals the police brutality which is perpetrated against innocent villagers. The jailers consist of African guards and white officers. These guards are portrayed as totally alienated from their people. Of interest is the way Marechera narrates the scene where the commandant puts it to one of the African soldiers that 'You (Africans) breed like flies' (159). To which the soldier replies: 'Yes, sir. We breed even more than flies' (159). This scene illustrates how the colonial subject is conditioned to internalize and mimic what Homi Bhabha (1994b:72) calls 'those terrifying stereotypes of savagery... which are the signal points of identification and alienation'. Because Marechera is writing here from a position that is sympathetic to the prisoners, not to the black population in general, the purpose of this scene in which he focuses a satiric

eye on the guards is to enlist the reader in a distancing from this category of natives who collaborate with the subjectivization of their own people.

The impression of concentration in this first part of the story is created through the small number of the carceral population and the harsh conditions in the concentration camp, including lack of suitable accommodation and difficult access to water, which further confer on the prisoners the aura of victims. However, it is the constant harassment of women and children and the ceaseless questioning of prisoners by white soldiers, usually followed by their beatings or deaths, that dominate life in this particular camp. The focus in this part of the story on the two children Rudo Makoni and Tonderai Murehwa and their interactions with the soldiers, strategically enables the narrator to explore the destabilization of identity caused by life in the camp.

Tonderai's discovery that his father was beaten up by the white soldiers is presented as an awakening experience of the division within what his child's mind took for granted as the nation.

> His father, Tonderai could see, had been beaten again. One eye was closed and seemed to throb through the fiercely swollen flesh; the other was half open. The right arm was in a rough sling; they had broken it for him the week before. Through the rends in the dirt khaki shirt, Tonderai could see his father's weakening ribcage. How thin, how terribly thin he is, Tonderai thought, watching his father's gaunt bulbous knees perched on the dry maize stalks of his feet. The heels and soles were split in many places. When he looked up at his father's bowed head, he realised in shock that his hair had turned completely white within the last twenty-four hours. Or am I mistaken? Tonderai wondered. Surely only yesterday it was...
>
> A bitter darkness flashed past his eyes - the beginning of a terrible knowledge. But he did not yet understand. He saw again the sergeant turning, and himself turning his gaze away... the sergeant was tall, heavily built, with a very black cruelly

> rectangular face squat on a disciplined neck. The combat uniform made him look like the fearful face of law and order. But whose law and whose order? (159-160)

The awareness Tonderai develops in the narrative is that, because law and order are not the same for all, there is no national unity and that the colour of the skin does not necessarily constitute the dividing line. He grows into this realization when, returning in a group of boys from grazing cattle, he witnesses on his way to the camp the slaughter of four of his companions by a party of Rhodesian soldiers. Another disaster follows this tragedy as Tonderai's mother is killed by one of the guards when, recognizing her bloodstained son among the survivors, she tried to approach him. The narrator's focus on a woman's body through the narration of how Rudo felt as the guards always 'put their hands inside her mother's dress' (158), and the narration of Tonderai's mother's killing, if read in the light of theories of body in relation to nation, may be located within Marechera's attempt to inscribe the female body as the nation. Such an inscription is illustrated in *The House of Hunger* by the scenes of the beatings of Immaculate and Patricia, where Marechera puts themes of marital violence and racial violence to work as symbolic of the sufferings of the Zimbabwean nation under colonial rule.

In reading this episode from 'The Concentration Camp', the experienced Marecheran reader is reminded of the scene in 'The Slow Sound of his Feet' which describes the accidental killing of the narrator's mother by a patrol of white soldiers following his arrest and beatings by one of them.

> I shook my head and it hurt so much I couldn't shake my head any more. There were running feet behind me; my mother's and my sister's voices. There was the sharp report of firing. Mother, struck in mid-stride, her body held rigid by the acrid air, was staring straight through her eyes. A second later, something broke inside

> her and she toppled over. My sister's outstretched hand, coming up to touch my face, flew to her opening mouth and I could feel her straining her vocal muscles to scream through my mouth. (136)

It is possible to read this association of the tragic deaths of mothers and the prison motif as Marechera's way of presenting the mothers as historical objects of violence in his narration of the nation. In many episodes of his work, Marechera establishes the link between the woman and the nation by representing both of them as suffering at the hands of their jailers. Thus the image of the tortured and abused woman suggests that of the colonized and brutalized nation. For example, Patricia in *The House of Hunger* is presented as a martyr of the racist politics of a divided nation. Her story in the novella is that of a young white woman who transcends the racist boundaries of Rhodesian politics and pays a heavy price for this transgression. She not only feels compelled to go into exile but also suffers in her body. She becomes half-blind and loses her voice. What the episode offers is more than the account of an ordeal of a female white person who is sympathetic to a black man. Her status as a white female problematizes the notion of the nation in a way that is historically significant because of the fact that it displaces emphasis on race, thereby undermining and even repudiating the construction of the nation in terms of discourses of blackness that inform, for example, Yvonne Vera's *Nehanda* (see Chapter Three). It may be relevant to add that Patricia is inscribed in *The House of Hunger* not as a mere location of the narrator's sexual desires but as a celebration of a new multiracial identity in the emerging Zimbabwean nation. Certainly, such a sympathetic treatment has something to do with her willingness not to compromise her vision of her society. It is also possible that her beating by the white conservatives may have symbolically stripped her

of her racial identity so that she becomes a symbol of hope for the new nation as indicated above.

Marechera is perhaps unique, among African writers, in inscribing the body of the white woman in the way that he has done. While the reading of this episode in the novella indicates his figuration of Patricia in the terms suggested above, in his other writings, and particularly his famous poems to Amelia in *Cemetery of Mind*, he inscribes the white female body as an object that needs to be dominated. He has asserted in an interview with Veit-Wild (in Marechera, 1992:215) that his objectification of the female white body was necessary to his project:

> Amelia is white, I am black. But I am the one full of digressions and frustrations. Amelia does not have any sense of race. In a very personal sense it does not matter at all what race Amelia is but there are times, especially when I have gone through some shitty incidents or I remember some of the things which were happening here before 1980, that's when I feel very violent towards Amelia. That's when this brutality from the township comes out and even when I am making love to her I find that I am actually with my whole self trying to fool myself that I am revenging myself against the whole white race. Afterwards, of course, one realises that it was simply an illusion that one can revenge oneself on history.

In another part of the interview, he admits that 'I think if she had not existed I would have had to invent her'. These observations point to the important function of the white female body in Marechera's work, simultaneously, as a site of interracial meeting and a site where the self confronts its own identity. The inscription of Amelia as a site where racial boundaries are effaced suggests Marechera's belief in what Bhabha (1994b:251) sees as 'the hybridity of race and sexuality'. Amelia is figured both as an object of love and of hate. Her whiteness, with its association to colonial power, makes her an object of hate. But she

is also the desired female object the poet is in love with. Given the colonial context of these Amelia poems, such a complex inscription of the white woman conveys Marechera's ambivalence about the nature of his relationship with his racial Other. For, as Dirk Klopper (1993:15) rightly states, Amelia 'is described as the other who both undermines and affirms [the colonized writer's] identity.' In this sense, Marechera again demonstrates a treatment of the racial issue that is quite distinct from that of either Eppel or Vera. This very ambivalence is yet another important reason for comparing and contrasting his writing of the nation with that of these other Zimbabwean writers.

There is a parallel between the figuration of Amelia as a metonym for colonial power and that of Mrs Warthog, the wife of the professor of English literature in the short story 'The Writer's Grain', who has an affair with an African student named Marechera. In this context, the black student 'fucks back', as Marechera would put it, the colonizer who has subjected his nation to a history of shame and domination. In a revealing passage in his interview with Petersen alluded to above, Marechera admits that his intention in the section of the story where Mr Warthog teaches Andrew history is 'to destroy the conventional way in which we are taught to interpret history, or events which become history' (Marechera and Petersen, 1988: 29). In this light, the self-reflexive and metafictional aspect of the story, which allows the white subject to make this shameful admission, serves as an astute tactic to suggest the shift of power from the colonizer, and thus the woman becomes a metonym for 'conquered' power.

Even the woman prostitute contributes to the metaphoricity of the nation. The narrator in *The House of Hunger* tells about women he and his friends used to follow in the bush

where they entertained their clients. One of these women, he says, he wanted to use as a symbol of Zimbabwe in a story. But in the text it is Nestar, the young girl who grows up to become the 'queen' of prostitutes, who captures this symbolism. Her career as a prostitute is figured as a lifelong sexual slavery at the hands of her mainly white clientele. The association between the prostitute and the colonial nation is established when Nestar tells the narrator that during her intercourse with one particular client, himself a friend of another client, identified as 'one of the few whites to "promote" black sculpture in the country' (52), 'he would chant a thing about the Congo, the Mau Mau, Algeria, and one of our leaders who shall remain nameless' (52). The association between the woman and the nation is also made clear when Julia, a friend of the narrator's and a revolutionary who operates underground, is introduced to the reader as wearing a T-shirt with the legend Zimbabwe on it. Taking support from Peter's beating of Immaculate, Huma Ibrahim (1990:81) is probably right to suggest that in Marechera 'the doubly-colonised African woman becomes the symbol for the colonised land, and must suffer, usually in brutal silence, the consequences of a double betrayal'.

In Parts Two and Eight of the short story, subtitled 'The City of Anarchists', Marechera attempts to give voice and the upper hand to the victims. These two sections focus on three black men who decide to use the situation of the revolutionary struggle to their own advantage by serving as agents for external forces. Otto, the university drop-out and the idealist in the group who composes revolutionary pamphlets, is a Marechera-like figure. Indeed, Flora Veit-Wild in her introduction to *Scrapiron Blues* notes that in this part of his short story 'Marechera projects his own anarchist inclinations into a small group of bomb-throwing city fighters' (3). The moment of their accommodation to the liberation

struggle occurs when they manage, with the complicity of a prostitute named Cora, to bomb a hotel frequented by Rhodesian soldiers, killing Jim, a soldier who embodies racism and who tortured many blacks in the process. Jim's death at the hands of this woman-victim can be seen, within Marechera's economy of the association between woman and nation, as a punishment meted out to those who fight the nation.

Part Four, 'Tonderai's Father reflects', concentrates on Tonderai's father's experience in his progression to awareness of identity. It registers his attempts to understand the meaning of his predicament as he undergoes torture after being accused of helping the guerrillas. He hangs upside down in a cell at a concentration camp while electrodes are applied to his body and particularly to his genitals. While under torture, he remembers a previous torture which then consisted of eating all the food that he intended to take to the freedom fighters. The two tortures are now blurred in his mind. In a repeat of the tragedy that caused his wife's death, his son is accidentally shot. After hearing that his father has been hanged, Tonderai runs to the scene and arrives as the father's tortured body has been taken off the roof it swung from. The entire traumatic experience only serves to intensify Tonderai's father's hatred for his jailers and the system they represent. However, the white priest who pleads for Mr Murewha's life and the white nuns who save his son's life – all these elements subvert the conventional dialectic in which the white is portrayed as the natural enemy of the black.

In a sense, the narrative implies, Tonderai and his father undergo a liberating experience because, although physically they remain prisoners at the hands of those who have the power to inflict torture upon their bodies, they have stripped off the mantle of colonized

individuals. They both symbolize the seeds of the new spirit that challenges the colonial order, the new spirit of the emerging nation. Thus the concentration camp as described in the episodes discussed above appears as a 'contact zone' in Mary Louise Pratt's (1991:34) definition of this term as a social space where 'cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly assymetrical relations of power'. As already intimated, such relationships are given further significance through the narrator's inscription of the camp as a metaphor for the country and the nation as consisting of jailers/oppressors and prisoners/oppressed.

In *The Black Insider*, the police nature of the colonial nation-state is evoked as being at the source of the narrator's displacement: 'A sudden crackdown on the campus by the secret police had forced me to decamp clear out of the country and I found myself awarded an Oxford scholarship' (29). Significantly, in the dramatic sketch the author includes in the novella, the character Marota, speaking to Bishop (Muzorewa) points out, referring to the situation in Rhodesia during the interim period, that

> The people still live under the old oppressive laws. They are smouldering in the prisons and in the detention camps. They eke out a pitiful living out of the stone of the protected village. The schoolchildren are deserting their schools to join the Patriotic front. And at the university there is a new and hard edge, cutting the quiet of the campus. (39)

This brief catalogue of scenes highlighting violence in Marechera's texts should alert the reader to the fact that the violence that takes place in the country is particularly damaging to the mind. As an earlier reference to Peter in *The House of Hunger* should have suggested, he was clearly troubled by his experience of prison. Perhaps because he is less given to books and culture than some of the characters in the novel, Peter inflicts

violence upon his young wife as a means of assuaging his anger against the establishment. The novella's concentration on his bullying of his young brother, the narrator, appears to be a strategy to throw into relief Peter's difficulty in grappling with the insanity that becomes a way of life in colonial Rhodesia. Unable to intellectualize the situation as the narrator does, he thinks he can find release for his anger in a fight. In the same novella, Patricia's departure to South Africa and her roaming through Africa is premised, as was intimated earlier, on her disillusionment with a national community with which she misidentifies after the racial incident at the university. The description of the incident insists on the physical damage she sustains as a result of her beatings by white conservative elements on the campus, but it can also be seen that her decision to leave has a great deal to do with the mental pain that this experience inflicted upon her. Significantly, the narrator's description of her when they meet for the first time after her return in Doug's studio identifies her as a changed person: her sight was restored but 'she would never be able to talk again' (71). He also noticed, when she handed to him her newly published book, 'a tiny burning in her eyes; a fierce tenderness I had never seen before. No, I had seen it before - in Immaculate' (71). It is clear from this scene that the stress is on her extraordinary mental recovery in a nerve-racking environment like colonial Rhodesia.

Kevin Foster (1992:64) has interpreted Patricia's loss of her speech as

> mark[ing] the completeness of her identification with the black cause in Southern Africa. It is a metonym for the blacks' powerlessness, deprived of a voice in the control of their own affairs. Yet her speechlessness is also a positive statement.... A promising metaphor for impending political liberty, her silence is a powerful statement of personal conviction and cultural optimism.

The comparison in the text between Patricia and Immaculate suggests the author's intention to present both young women as the hope for the future of the nation. The reader is here returned to the narrator's observation about Immaculate which was made earlier in the text: 'It was not possible that a being like her could have been conceived in the grim squalor of our history. She made me want to dream, made me believe in visions, in hope' (12). The comparison between the two women thus seems essential to Marechera's construction of them as symbols of hope in a future Zimbabwe.

Perhaps none of the characters in *The House of Hunger* reveals the degree of damage caused by the type of violence, and the adjacent lack of freedom in the nation, as much as does the narrator himself. His account of the experiences leading to his exile is rendered in a way that suggests impatience with the conditions of existence that his mind objects to, but the experiences he relates are themselves the watershed experiences of alienation. The entire narrative mirrors the liminal state - severe hunger - in which he and the other victims of colonialism find themselves, the severity of which is not unlike that suffered, in a different context, by the oppressed natives in Vera's *Nehanda*. The hungers suffered by the narrator and the other characters in *The House of Hunger* are, of course, metaphorical as well as literal, as Grant Charles Lilford (1996; forthcoming) points out in his study of drought imagery in Marechera's first novella.

Thus far the chapter has concentrated on Marechera's representation of colonial Zimbabwe as a concentration camp and a site of alienation and, tangentially, as a severe headache. In a comment that supports this reading, Derek Cohen (1981:338) observes that Rhodesia comes across in Marechera's first novella as

> a word beyond the family that offers more vice and cruelty in the form of bullying the weak and being beaten by the strong - a word which is secure only for the traitor and the whore who have grasped its terms. Yet the novella is redolent with a deep black rage against the whites who have confined the African spirit into the houses of hunger where the only release is intestinal violence.

Postcolonial Zimbabwe is presented in exactly the same terms as colonial Rhodesia in those of Marechera's texts which are set after the country's independence. In this context, it is pertinent to consider first the poem 'Christmas 1983' from the collection *Cemetery of Mind*.

> No statement but digresses and winds
> Away from the point
> The eyes look anywhere but into your eyes
> And no one seems to know which bandit infested road
> Clint Eastwood should take to track down the hopeless six
>
> On a bar stool, the man on my right
> And the man on my left
> Are both listening to what I have not said
> Which their itching handcuffs would have me say
> I sip my beer, I am thinking of similar scenes
> In London
> In West Berlin
> In this town when Christmas was white.

The poem suggests, through its focus on seeing and avoiding being seen, the poet's entrapment in an environment that denies individual freedom and obliterates truth. This focus has a crucial significance in Marechera's project in this poem: to emphasize the police nature of the postcolonial Zimbabwean nation-state and therefore the continuous use of violence against the Zimbabwean nation by the new ruling class. The world of lies and hypocrisy which the narrator offers is presented as threatening to the citizen. The

reader with a prior knowledge of the police brutality experienced by Marechera in London and in West Berlin realizes that these recollections underscore the poet's scepticism concerning the new order in his country and the ability of the new political class to rule. The poem implies that no real change has occurred since independence, as the nation represented in the text by the artist continues to live under police surveillance.

The poem 'Oracle of the Povo' expresses the narrator's disillusionment with his nation as it dramatizes the plight of the freedom fighters after the country's independence:

Her vision's scrubland
Of out-of-work heroes
Who yesterday a country won
And today poverty tasted

And some to the hills hurried their thirst
And others to arson and blasphemy
Waving down tourists and buses
Unleashing havoc no tongue can tell -

Her vision's Droughtstricken acres
Of lean harried squatters
And fat pompous armed overlords
Touching to torch the makeshift shelters
Heading to magistrate and village court
The most vulnerable and hungry of citizens-
Her vision's Drought Relief graintrucks
Vanished into thin air between departure point
And expectant destination-
In despair, she is found in beerhalls
And shebeens, by the roadside
And in brothels: selling the last
Bits and pieces of her soured vision.

The division of a nation which was supposed to be united by independence is suggested by the contrast between the dominant classes ('fat pompous overlords') and the underclasses ('lean harried squatters', 'The most vulnerable and hungry of citizens'). In this poem, the freedom fighters are figured as sons of the land whose dreams of a better future have been betrayed by those they have helped to occupy positions of power in the country. The betrayal of their dreams, which causes them to resort to criminal acts, and the parallel the poem implies between this betrayal and the woman's degeneration is the thematic concern of the poem. Typically, Marechera uses here the image of the fallen woman to suggest the idea of a nation in a state of moral collapse. The description of the process by which the woman, as embodying a nostalgic vision of an egalitarian national community, loses her integrity inscribes the narrator in the position of an observer and a scribe, who witnesses and records the end of a dream. In her reading of this poem, Veit-Wild (1997:559) draws attention to the way Marechera turns on its head the 'high-flown "vision" of the nationalist rhetoric of plenty for everyone', thus highlighting 'the povo's vision of the nation's welfare, which through experience is opposed to that of the leaders'. It is clear, as Veit-Wild implies, that the contrast between these two visions is emblematic of the division within the nation and thus is essential in Marechera's representation of his nation in the terms presented in this chapter.

The same kind of critical stance towards the nation underlies the poem 'The Coin of Moonshine', which also deals with the social division within the nation:

Hunger in the belly
Rose to the brain.
Its bright eyes clenched
In anger to smite with white-hot steel
The reinforced glass between my want
And your plenty.

The traffic signs on the road
Are your signals of brotherhood;
The blind and the idealists have to be warned-
Children and the sick timely carried across
To safety. The fast expensive imported cars
Leave in their wake mangled workers
Deranged peasants and crazed radical intellectuals

Your nights are luminous with our neon progress
Exhorting the homeless to bank with Beverley
Exhorting the thirsty to have a Coke and a smile
Exhorting the ill-educated to take a correspondence
Course in Self-Confidence. And ever the circling
Moon gleams, a bright distended coin above the dark
decade
Casting beams of greed through my shantyhut door.

Marechera's masterly use of language to offer his view of the Zimbabwean nation is well displayed in this text. The two words 'hunger' and 'anger' are closely linked in the first stanza, and suggest a cause and effect relationship that can be found, for example, in *The House of Hunger* and *The Black Insider* whereas the division within the nation is given expression by the use of two opposites: 'my want' and 'your plenty'. The poet lingers over this division as he notes the contrast in life-style and mindset between the owners of 'fast expensive imported cars' on the one hand and, the marginalized classes, which include not just the underclasses ('mangled workers' and 'deranged peasants'), but also non-conformist artists and intellectuals ('crazed radical intellectuals'), on the other hand. The word 'brotherhood' is especially ironic as the link revealed in the poem is, in reality,

between oppressors and oppressed. The degree of social and moral separation between these two groups is emphasized in the poem by the cynical exhortations that are made to the poorer members of the nation. The essence of these exhortations is to maintain the impoverished nation in a state of economic slavery and mental backwardness as the references to the bank and Coke, suggest, through their association with capitalism and exploitation. Not surprisingly, the narrator identifies with the oppressed through the reference to his 'shanty hut door'.

The poem 'Raid!', which is also concerned with Zimbabwe's transition from a colonial to a postcolonial state, presents the image of a nation that lives under a new form of violence: homelessness.

Fear's single round eye dilates
Bright white corolla, pupil sternly pristine,
Pistil-keen: yet another gunship's honeyed napalm.
From toothless cavern of Night dull engine's throb
Controlled hew and cry baton-wielding gravel cry
As who should say
The war is over
Independence is our fact
But melon gushed skulls frantic feet strike and gong
Tin/plastic shacks shooting up in flames see-through
Polythene dress a searing walking human torch (eerie
Statue of Liberty) all dragged/dashed the steel door
    crashing down
As who should say
Yes it is independence
But your homelessness is a great crime
Yes it is independence
But your homelessness is a great crime
Yes we have Uhuru
Your poverty does not make prostitution legal

I packed away my camera and notebook.
I headed for the nearest bar.
I always said When this kind of Uhuru comes
Thank god for alcohol, any alcohol.

It is worth noting how a vocabulary of war ('fear', 'gunship's honeyed napalm', 'dull engine's throb', 'gushed skulls' , 'flames', 'crashing', 'walking human torch', inter alia) is used to suggest a parallel between the atrocities suffered by the nation during the war for independence and the violence inflicted on the nation's homeless. The repeated refrain 'But your homelessness is a great crime/ Yes it is independence' is vital to the narrator's purpose for it enables the reader to perceive the irony of the situation. This refrain deconstructs itself in light of the atrocities suffered by the nation's homeless. Their sufferings are enhanced by the image of 'a searing walking human torch', its pointed association with the Statue of Liberty referring to the abuse of human rights in Zimbabwe. The poem also reflects the exclusion of those who are homeless. Here again, Marechera proves to be a master in using what the reader is invited to perceive as an official discourse and in distorting it for his own purposes. The cynical tone in this discourse and the implicit othering of the homeless are achieved through the emphatic use of personal pronouns and possessives in a number of key phrases and sentences: 'independence is our fact', 'your homelessness', 'We have Uhuru', 'Your poverty' and so on. In this way, Marechera subverts this official discourse from within. Not surprisingly, Marechera, 'the Steppenwolf who survives on the fringe of society, always poor, homeless, alone, sleeping on park benches, spending on drink what little he occasionally earns with his publications', in Veit-Wild's (1987:113) felicitous formulation, is sympathetic to the homeless as is evident from his disapproving comment in the last stanza.

In *Mindblast*, Harare, the capital, is a place where the narrator feels unsafe because violence is everywhere. The potential for violence and brutality is captured in the passage below:

> And that is one thing I have learned, from coming back home. To sleep with the whole body alert for sudden violence. To sleep aware that any hand, any eye, any boot out there - these people passing by looking at me with quizzical eyes – may mean my death. And this is no melodrama. It is as real as the sheer heat, as the prayed-for rain. Here it seems extreme lassitude and impulsive brutality alternate like day and night. (111)

Marechera makes it plain, as the following extract indicates, that at the heart of the violence that hits the nation is the social violence inflicted upon the have-nots of the Zimbabwean society:

> The *haus des hungers* of Harare. Her, him, me. The rotting minced meat underneath the tablecloth of political slogans. And I thought of all the hundreds of unemployed youths – boys and girls – whose everyday was spent leaning against a wall or a streetlamp, playing pinball or the jukebox in some weird but cheap restaurant, or just sitting out hours in a whorehouse bar hoping something or someone would turn up and maybe the drink would flow. And I wonder what thoughts spark in their heads at such as is their time probably till they die. Is it a wonder that occasionally they freak out in vandalism, hellish hallucinations which they act out on the passer-by. Their lives are a blank; the only model Zimbabwe offers them is that of crude and corrupt capitalism: cars, videos, a suburban house, a telephone, a wife, a mistress, a name in society... (153-154)

The extreme desperation of the nation's underprivileged justifies the increasing rise in criminal violence and, eventually, puts into motion what Marechera refers to as 'the gun-culture that is now a permanent feature in my country' (*Mindblast*, 153). The danger of such a culture materializes in Marechera's unpublished narrative *The Depth of Diamonds* (1985) in the form of a coup that topples a post-independence government. The theme of this 'novel' is an all-too-clear illustration of Marechera's anarchistic view, expressed through one of his characters in *The Black Insider*, that

> It's the way we not only adapted very easily to the materialism of the West but also quite deliberately inherited their kind of social class distinctions hereby a man's worth is measured by his wallet and his educational certificates - and this penny-certificate elite has been ruling Africa since so-called independence was granted, especially where military coups have not happened for the military coup was the response of the uneducated. (84)

It is significant that those who organize and stage the coup are marginalized individuals or/and from the marginalized classes. They are a boxer with his assistant, an alcoholic writer, and a feminist civil servant (Veit-Wild, 1992a:345). This cast is necessary in order to indicate the dissociation of the subaltern groups of the nation from their leaders, who are presented as alienated from the common people. The coup signals the collapse of the humiliating subject-object relationship between these two social categories and enables a turn towards people's liberation. Thus the importance of this unpublished work in Marechera's thematics is that it questions the notion of 'nation' as a political organization but also, by deconstructing the notion of an organized and unified nation, celebrates resistance and anarchism, an important aspect in Marechera's aesthetics, as Veit-Wild (1987) has asserted.

PART TWO

As indicated earlier, the question of the representation of nation in the texts under scrutiny can be addressed most productively by a closer consideration of the ways such a representation in the texts under scrutiny is revealed in terms of marginality, displacement and hybridity. As should be clear by now, Marechera's writing of Rhodesia/Zimbabwe is done at the margins he inhabits both in his home country and in exile. As will now be argued, from these margins, he captures a shattered image of the nation. In *The House*

of Hunger, the autobiographical narrator and the old man live at the margins of the family home. The old man is reminiscent of the figure of Okonkwo's father in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958). He has a creative, poetic side. For this reason, the narrator feels close to him. Not coincidentally, the marginalized community of the narrator and the old man, united as it is in their shared interests in things artistic, has a counterpart at national level in the bohemian milieu of Harare, which is replicated in exile in the community of artists (The Faculty of Arts) of *The Black Insider*. The marginalized artistic community in *The House of Hunger* comprises such characters as Philip, Doug, Citre, Richter, Ada, Patricia, the triplets, the narrator himself and so on. In one of the novella's most significant episodes, all these characters assemble in Philip's office to watch what he refers to as his 'novel'. In fact, it is a film featuring scenes of inter-racial love-making, a black woman nursing a white baby, an old black man cycling, a traffic accident involving the old man, and rugby scenes. Foster (1993:63) has commented that these visual sequences offer 'scenes of a future, better Rhodesia'. This interpretation is confirmed by the passing of a peace-pipe among the members of the multi-racial audience on this occasion, a gesture not only of peace but also of love. One could suggest that this scene emphasizes the disjunction between the camaraderie and peace among this group of artists and the violence that characterizes Rhodesia. In this way, this artistic community appears to be presented as an oasis of sanity in an extremely violent environment but also as a cultural haven.

As indicated earlier, there is an equivalent of this artistic and bohemian community in the Faculty of Arts of *The Black Insider*. Liz, Cicero, Otolith and the narrator form a community that is portrayed as superior to the barbarians involved in the war raging outside. It is at

the margins of the larger world at the Faculty, that 'last desperate ditch of a state of mind bred in the tension of war' (31), that the narrator tells about his autobiographical experiences of exile. It is also from these margins that the narrator is able to narrate his nation, using various strategies for this purpose as will be seen later.

Given that Marechera's work requires his reader to know about his life as well as about the texts, it is relevant to refer to his interviews where he evokes his experiences as a tramp in the slums of Harare and in Britain. In his interview with Petersen (already alluded to) he says of his tramp life in London that 'I was for instance the only black person among the several hundred squatters at Tolmers Square, where I was living in a squatter community which is close to the corner of Euston Road and Gower Street' (Marechera and Petersen, 1988:13). He goes on to explain that the squatter community 'was a very astonishing mixture', which included radical and drug-addicted girls, 'professional doctors... 'junkies... school-drop-outs, university drop-outs, people who for some reason had a total commitment to some cause' (14). In another part of the interview, he speaks of how this community nurtured itself on 'the idea of society being totally abnormal and therefore only functioning precisely because its citizens are the abnormality in a totalist society. So we would see ourselves as the only ones who really knew what was going on, in terms of parents, background, etc' (25). This outlook is prominently projected in *The Black Insider*, as Marechera has acknowledged in the same interview.

His life as a homeless writer living among the tramps in Harare is captured in the journal section of *Mindblast*. As he explains:

> ...that was simply a factual record of what was happening to me each day whilst I was homeless. In it I recorded even anything that walked by as I was typing, how I had slept the night before, etc. I did that precisely because the idea, that someone can actually write a book, while being a tramp, is not accepted here. (Petersen, 37)

Perhaps Marechera also corresponds to Ross Chambers' definition (1991:147) of the flâneur in Baudelaire as

> the loiterer as exile, an exile from his own self but distinguished also from those with whom, on other accounts, he communes in the "bain de multitude". But it is specifically in his role as the man of discourse, the mediator, that the flâneur is simultaneously distinguished from the workers in the streets and isolated from his personal essence. He is rendered eccentric with respect to the "foyer" of his soul but associates him with the community, from which in turn, however, as one who recalls a "foyer" - both a home and a center - and its "ma aim", he remains isolated.

Describing this personage, Chambers reminds us that, in nineteenth century France, the 'flâneur' was identified with street people, notably the beggars, prostitutes, drunkards, tramps, dogs, and so on. He characterizes the 'flâneur-artist' as 'both a man of memory and a mediator of reality, the one because the other' (143). This appears to be an apt description of Marechera, considering his intention of recording what was going on around him, and his outspokenness about social and political issues in his country as he was living at the margins of his society. Also for these reasons, Marechera in his work appears to identify with 'the flâneur as socially marginalised individual (who) is brought into relation, through his loitering, with those characteristics of discourse as a mediated phenomenon that make it similarly suspect in the eyes of social power and cause it to be similarly trivialised' (145). In this regard, the poem 'Identify the Identity Parade' from *Cemetery of Mind* is worth considering.

I am the luggage no one will claim;
The out-of-place turd all deny
Responsibility;
The incredulous sneer all tuck away
beneath bland smiles;
The loud fart all silently agree never
happened;
The sheer bad breath you politely confront
with mouthwashed platitudes: "After all, it's
POETRY."

I am the ra' every cat secretly admires;
The cat every dog secretly fears;
The pervert every honest citizen surprises
in his own mirror: POET.

This poem highlights the way in which Marechera fuses two types of identity – that of a marginalized artist and that of an individual self - into one. It posits that these two identities are inseparable. The poet presents himself not just as someone who represents a threat for those in power, an embarrassment to some of his fellow writers and his friends, but also as the guilty conscience of his nation, as is clear from the last two lines of the poem. The intertextual relation of this poem to Marechera's observations in his interview with Petersen, about people's attitude towards his work, is evident.

In *Mindblast*, Buddy (obviously a fictional representation of Marechera), Dr Grimknife, Tony, Rita and Grace constitute a community that has been marginalized for refusing to accept state censorship. They have accepted hardships rather than conforming to what they perceive as a limitation of their artistic freedom. Such focusing on liberal intellectuals and artists is part of Marechera's effort to fight against the intimidation of artists he personally suffered from on his return to Zimbabwe. The reader experiences a sense of

their plight in the scene in the pub where they gather to socialise in order to try and forget their troubles.

Given that many scenes in Marechera are set in such places as pubs, squares, and so on, it is worth considering the importance of such places in his politics of representation of the Zimbabwean nation. In light of David Chaney's (1994:153) suggestion that there is an interface between culture and place, the question to be asked is what the bohemian lifestyle associated with those places reveals about Marechera's representation of the Zimbabwean nation. In the passage from the journal section of *Mindblast* quoted above, Marechera makes it clear that his intention to write in public places was to prove that a tramp could write a book. There is another dimension to his observation, which is that writing in such places, that is, observing society from such places, gives one a more realistic picture of the society under observation. This is consistent with the point made earlier that Marechera conforms to the figure of Baudelaire's flâneur-artist.

As 'a man of memory and a mediator of reality', Marechera, as his work demonstrates, was able to record images of his society and to organize them so that the society can see itself reflected through his work as in a mirror, thus validating Gerald MacMaster's assertion that '[b]orders hold up 'a reflecting mirror' to the dominant society...'. In the journal section in *Mindblast,* the narrator, that is Marechera, indicates that

> I found my ideal listener and reader in the real drunk, the types who like me, had given up conceding that the world was a particularly sane refuge from nightmares, massacres, violent wives, vicious school kids, sadistic policemen... he did not care too much about religion, or duty, or patriotism... (121)

In this regard, Marechera's intention of plying his trade on the streets of Harare and other public places also appears as an act of claiming territory for the underclass of the nation or, as Dirk Klopper (1993:16) puts it, it is 'a quest for a voice that is sufficiently articulate and strong to speak from the margins in an authoritative manner, displacing the voice of white, middle class, male hegemony'. This is well illustrated in *Mindblast* when a white Zimbabwean woman offers to have sex with the narrator for fifty cents so that she can buy something to eat. She tells a story that the narrator does not believe. But the point is taken. Even her improbable story is a message to the dominant classes, which is captured in the '*haus der hungers'* passage quoted above. While it is true that 'Marechera ... refused ... to be a spokesperson/representative for any group or individual, including the 'lost generation', disavowing any immediate or easy role that we might be tempted to slot him' (Gaylard, in Chennells and Veit-Wild, forthcoming), there is no question that his self-positioning as 'an outcast writer was a way for Marechera to connect himself to his history and the history of Zimbabweans, a connection via rejection, for he admitted his story in the act of repudiating it' (Gaylard, ibid.). Indeed, as Klopper (Chennells and Veit-Wild, forthcoming) points out in his illuminating discussion of marginality in the poem 'Throne of Bayonets', 'Marechera chose to align himself with the social outcasts of prostitutes and indigents, placing his belief in social renewal with these marginal groups'. In this sense, it can also be said that Marechera purposefully locates himself at the 'borderzone', in MacMaster's definition of this term as 'the space between cultures', because of the access it gives him to many discourses from different communities. This is not to suggest that he negotiates his identity between the tramp community and the dominant classes but, rather, that his location at the margins gives him, in Yang's

(1996:233) words, 'distance, geographical and subjective, for diagnosis and cultural critique of the center'.

To speak of borders is to refer to space and displacement. In the imagined space of the nation of *The House of Hunger*, the border as a theoretical construct is a strategy that serves Marechera to demarcate the boundaries between classes, races and cultures. After being abused by his brother and in order not to witness the violence perpetrated by his brother on his young wife, the narrator walks out of the family house only to realize that the threshold of the house of hunger does not constitute a border. He experiences the same violence and alienation both inside and outside the house. Similarly the episode where the narrator as a child returns home and gets beaten up by his mother because he has spoken to her in English and not in Shona illustrates the notion of the colonized as a subject brutalized both within and outside his home environment - the brutality outside the house is presented as mainly the work of the colonial administrative and cultural machinery. At the same time this episode implies that, for the mother, the beating will help her son to become more respectful of the cultural boundaries that exist within the national space. Patricia's border crossing is also worth mentioning. First she crosses the racial barrier by her involvement with the narrator. As a result she is beaten up by right-wing elements who want to teach her a lesson and punish her for the transgression. Second, disgusted by the folly and racism of the demonstrators' demands and possibly aware that there is no future in their divided nation, she urges the narrator to leave the country with her:

> 'It 's easy,' she said. 'We'll just walk off campus and never come back and just keep trying to get out of this wretched country. We'll run to Botswana. And from Gaberones fly to London. I'll paint and you'll write. (72)

The symbolic meaning of her border crossing is to indicate her dis-identification with her nation. To her, leaving the country is an act of liberation from tyranny. In exile in South Africa, she leads a bohemian life, marked by arrests and police harassment, similar to Marechera's own life in England. She was 'living in a shanty town outside Cape Town' (70); a life devoted to artistic work and drugs. Her return to Rhodesia suggests that she has gathered enough strength from her experiences in South Africa and in other parts of Africa to brave the conditions at home, despite the fact that she has lost her sight and voice. The fact that she has recovered a voice and published her first book is presented as evidence of her growth. It is significant that, despite the positive change which the narrator in *The House of Hunger* noticed in Patricia on her return from exile in South Africa, her reappearance in *The Black Insider*, where she expresses her disillusionment with her country, suggests that independence did not bring the freedom and unity which were expected.

In the short story 'Thought-tracks in the Snow' from the collection *The House of Hunger*, crossing the border means escape from violence. In the comfort of his London home the narrator remembers his crossing of the Mediterranean sea in the plane taking him to Britain as the time of the complete dissociation between him and his communities of origin (home, country and continent):

> Who was I leaving behind? My own prematurely grey head still sat stubbornly upon my shoulders; my family did not know where I was or whether I was alive or dead. I do not think they would have cared one way or the other had they known that at that moment I was thousands of feet above the earth, hanging as it were in the emptiness which my dabbling with politics had created for me. I felt sick with everything, sick with the Rhodesian crisis, sick... Would Oxford University be different - was I so sure of myself then? (144)

A further point about the spatialization of the nation in Marechera's work concerns his representation of the nation from an exile's perspective, as indicated earlier. In this respect, too, his approach is distinctive when compared to that of either Eppel or Vera, who write only from within the nation. A glimpse into this representation is first provided in 'Black Skin What Mask', a short story in the collection *The House of Hunger* that recounts his life in England and, as might be expected from the title, illustrates the Fanonian theory of the mental condition of the colonized, focusing on two black Rhodesian students at Oxford University: the narrator himself and a character known as Stephen. (Fanon's concept also underlies the works of other Zimbabwean authors, including Yvonne Vera, of course, and Tsitsi Dangarembga in *Nervous Conditions* (1988), a text which interlinks with *The Black Insider* in its choice of characters' names. The narrator and Stephen are the only students from their country. While the narrator, a non-conformist, leads a bohemian lifestyle, Stephen is the type of African abroad who strives to be accepted and even liked by the whites and to whom success in fostering relationships with white girls amounts to integration into western society. This difference in their personality makes it difficult for them to get along well and to socialise openly. At one point in the story he rebukes the narrator for being friendly to a black tramp who has accosted him. Because he is ashamed of his countryman and in order to preserve his respectability, Stephen lends him a suit and even proposes to lend him money so that he can look clean. Stephen's embarrassment at being identified with his fellow Rhodesian illustrates the Fanonian notion of the psychology of the colonized. He becomes in the context of this story the symbol of the degradation of Africa. This symbolism reflects badly on black Rhodesians as members of a nation ashamed of itself.

It is pertinent to consider the passage below, which encapsulates the narrator's view of his nation as filtered through the minds of the black girls in Oxford:

> The black girls in Oxford - whether African, West Indian or American - despised those of us who came from Rhodesia. After all, we still haven't won our independence. After all, the papers say we are always quarrelling among ourselves. And all the reasons which the black girls choose to believe. It was all quite unflattering. We had become - indeed we are - the Jews of Africa, and nobody wanted us. It's bad enough to have white shits despising us; but it's more maddening when one kettle ups its nose at another kettle. And this he had to learn. (97)

The reason Marechera makes this satirical transposition into the heartland of imperial culture is easy enough to perceive: in order to mock the notion of national identity, the implicit message being that true feelings of national identity should start at a personal level. The narrative projects a negative image of Rhodesian national identity, focusing on the way the two Rhodesian students interact outside their country; an image which is reinforced by the way they are perceived by other black people, as captured in the passage above. The mixed metaphors convey fragmentation and so endorse the dysfunctional sense of nationality and/or brotherhood. At one crucial point in the course of the narrative, the two youths discuss return to their country of origin. The narrator, who has been diagnosed as suffering from mental illness, faces the choice between staying on in England in a psychiatric care unit or being deported to Rhodesia. He decides to stay on. To a pointed question by Stephen who wants to know why he does not return to Rhodesia to join the guerrillas, he has this to say: ' But take a good look anyway, a good look at me and all you know about me and tell me whether you see a dedicated guerrilla' (99).

If it is evident the story does not celebrate nationalism, it is also clear that as a creative artist dedicated to universalism, the narrator sees no point in returning to his native country, not because he feels he has nothing to do with it or that he disapproves of the liberation war, but because he feels at home wherever he is able to ply his trade. At the same time, his failure to maintain a relationship with a fellow Rhodesian scholar has revealed to him the extent of the cultural distance between him and his nation. He has learned through his interaction and conversations with Stephen that his people are often unwilling to accept each other's differences. Thus it is possible to read his decision to stay on in England in terms of Marechera's desire to embrace a universal culture. Stephen, on the contrary, seems to be fleeing his past identity. His strong desire for integration into British society signals the direction he wants to take. In both cases, it is clear to the reader that that the narrator's reminiscences of Rhodesia convey an image of his country as Otherland.

By contrast, *The Black Insider* offers an insightful glimpse into Marechera's other representation of the Rhodesian/Zimbabwean nation. As will be seen, Zimbabwe is sometimes evoked as a distinct nation, at other times as part of what Africa embodies. These constructions are made clear through a number of strategies which involve some of the characters at the Arts Faculty expressing their views on Zimbabwe and Africa as a whole. In one instance, Marechera breaks the narrative to give the reader direct access to a play which his narrator is writing and which exposes the mediocrity of Rhodesian rulers, both whites and blacks, in the years immediately preceding the independence. In the dramatic sketch, Rhodesia is evoked once more as a place of violence, although this time, the stress is on the way the nation is misled by a ruling class which condones

violence. The characters Smith and Bishop (Muzorewa) are shown to be rambling in their arguments to justify their partnership. Marota, who tries to instill some wisdom into the bishop, captures the predicament in which the bishop has put himself and the nation by condoning attacks against the freedom fighters:

> You carry your God too high above the trees. The people cannot see him. All they see is the smoke and shrapnel of their own kind being killed at your orders.... We who are now ruling the country alongside the very man who once reviled and spat upon us are not the end but the beginning of a surge towards what I have so far believed as unimaginable. (39)

Otolith's story of one of Zambia's executioners who, after retiring, 'returned to pastures green in Rhodesia on a fat pension' (55), serves to portray Rhodesia, and the rest of Africa as suggested by the references to Kenya and Nigeria, as a dictatorship where irresponsible rulers butcher their populations. Cicero, another character in the novella, speaks of the blindness, and, indeed, complicity of Africans, and by implication, the Zimbabwean nation, in forging their unflattering history. Here are his words:

> Oh, black insider! We should have turned at that corner where the crucified man pointed the way. At that corner where Chaka washed his hands in blood. At that corner where the road to Kampala leads to Buchenwald. At that corner where black learned men in disgrace sink their differences with the rest. But we will drive through to the independent countries where lucid minds shatter through thick windscreens... . Where promising youths are driven to drink cynical toasts while you and I clap with one hand the praises of the human traffic. We should have gone the other way: ... with Soyinka drawn typewritten portraits of madness rooted in sanity in the Africa hereafter. I should have turned at that corner where history moulders in grimy basement rooms. (74)

Through his character Cicero, Marechera concurs with Ayi Kwei Armah's depiction of Africa in *The Beautyful Ones are Not Yet Born*, a novel that, Cicero believes, 'forced

(Africa) to undergo a baptism of shit' (82). He voices a concern about the African image projected by the Negritude-orientated strand of African literature; an image that has served African ruling elites in gagging the press and in perpetrating countless horrors on the continent. However, even such an image has not been able to erase the following more realistic image of Africa:

> A continent of wounds which no longer knows what it is to be whole and healthy. A country disfigured by scars and broken teeth and smashed testicles can only writhe in nightmare over and over, reliving the horrors that started it all. A village milked of its youth and left to fester on a hill, inhabited only by the old and lame, can only bask in the sun, waiting for death. These new towns crowded with thousands of homeless unemployed whose dreams are rotting in the gutters, are only the new dunghills from which will emerge iron flies in a cloud to scatter all over the hills. (79-80)

Rhodesia fits into this picture as a country, as has been seen, which not only has ruined the hopes of its youth by depriving them of freedom but also has enslaved and executed its citizens. As the last sentence in the passage above suggests, the narrator is convinced that the conditions of life in his country constitute a fertile ground for disturbance and even revolution, particularly through the striking image of 'iron flies', suggesting as it does a resolve that will 'buzz' persistently in an apocalyptic vision.

David Pattison (1990: 231-2) has drawn attention to the fact that these characters locked, in the Arts Faculty, 'represent a facet of the author as they engage in a series of dialogues in which Marechera talks to Marechera about Marechera' and thus 'the Arts Faculty is Dambudzo Marechera'. This use of the author's multiple selves to tell the nation, which in a different context could be seen as polyphony, is merely a way to emphasize his

distancing from the nation. Not surprisingly, at the end of the novella, the narrator questions the very existence of the nation itself:

> The sense of having lost our nation was indivisible from the feeling of the nation having lost us.... Indeed, had there ever been a nation at all? The white pioneers and adventurers who had carved out for themselves farms and estates and had for a time exercised the pirate's right to booty were the sort of origins we had as one nation. The tribal adhesions had unstuck themselves from that experiment and, only united, we cast off the yoke that had left us with the responsibility of continuing the experiment under another brand name. At the same time the schools and colleges had churned out people like Owen and myself who had not the ruthless stamina required to breathe the mighty breath of a united nation. Was this not an expansion of the limits of the imagination rather than a drawn-to-earth nation planning the exercise? (105)

The positioning of this passage late in the text is strategic. It pronounces a final verdict on a nation the narrator feels intellectually distant from, as was indicated earlier in the chapter. The body of the text has served to accumulate damaging eye-witness accounts of the subject, to use legal jargon.

Earlier in the text, through the episode in which the narrator argues with Nyasha, a friend from Rhodesia he had not seen in five years, the reader is made to realize how alienated from his country and his friend the narrator-exile has become. The distance between the friends is encapsulated in their use of English rather than Shona to converse, and that between the narrator and his nation is suggested by the friends' physical and moral distance from the multitudes struggling and toiling in their faraway country:

> Emigrés in a racially colour-conscious country, artificiality came quite easily to both of us. We were talking in English, feeling like hippopotami that have been doped with injections of English culture, and we were quite conscious of how we knew no useful skills besides blasé comments about the book world. Indeed, a new kind of

> decadence had caught up with us. Even the struggle for political independence had become no more than an articulate adze on which we could cut our milk teeth. We had come full circle, at once the circumference and the centre of ourselves, no longer knowing the poverty and degradation which had flung us up like waves from the masses of the sea. As I listened to him and to the inner unspoken discontent inside, I caught myself thinking how can we and the likes of us ever presume to lead the multitudes out there, thousands of miles away who day by day eke out a sordid existence, from the bullets and the toil and the bringing-up of children who will grow up to become just like us, sitting there in that Bloomsbury pub talking about the ennui that was like salt in our brains? (63)

The moment of truth between the two friends arrives when they drink at the Africa Centre, an African microcosm at the heartland of the British empire where African exiles meet to keep up their Africanness: 'Here then was the womb into which one could retreat to nibble at the warm fluids of an Africa that would never be anything than artificial. A test-tube Africa in a brave new world of Bob Marley anguish, Motown soul, reggae disco cool, and the added incentive of reconceiving oneself in a friendly womb' (66). Instead of 'reconceiving' themselves, the two countrymen, like the narrator and Stephen in 'Black Skin What Mask', experience otherness towards each other as Nyasha accuses the narrator of hypocrisy, selfishness of 'hat(ing) being black' (61) and of being alienated from his own people. Far from a self-centred hypocrisy, what is, in fact, illustrated in this episode is an acute self-knowledge on the part of both men.

Another angle of the relationship between Zimbabwean exiles is provided in the novella through the account of the narrator's dealings with Owen and his sister Tsitsi. The narrator identifies with Owen because of the similarities in their conditions and their background but also because of his fighting spirit: 'Owen had been one of those brilliant students whom our country nourishes solely in order to break their spirit on the anvil of crude racial

antagonism' (104). In contrast to many other Zimbabwean youths, he and Owen 'enjoyed the common and sordid freedom of being born in the slums and hacking our way out of them by the skin of scholarships. It gave both of us that inner knowledge of gritty insecurity which cements in some a love of intellectual pleasure and a particular distaste of' mediocre occupations' (104). But Owen's fighting spirit is a plus that the narrator is ready to acknowledge: '... whereas I fled the country, he remained and fought for the survival of his sanity among those whom he knew he could neither love nor trust' (104). In a word, like the narrator, Owen was an insider, and, therefore, different from Nyasha and Stephen.

Svetlana Boym (1998: 499-500) analyzes the notion of diasporic intimacy in relation to diasporic communities and observes that

> diasporic intimacy is dystopian by definition; it is rooted in the suspicion of a single home. It is rooted on unpredictable chance encounters, on hope for human understanding. Yet this hope is not utopian. Diasporic intimacy is not limited to the private sphere but reflects collective frameworks of memory that encapsulate even the most personal of dreams. It is haunted by images of home and homeland, yet it also discloses some of the future pleasures of exile.

In view of the prominence in Marechera's texts of exile of this motif, it is possible that an application of this concept to his texts could offer insights into his attitude towards his country. Many accounts of his relationships in exile seem to hold clues to this link and only some will be examined here.

First, in the short story 'Black Skin What Mask', Marechera tells his reader how strongly Stephen felt about entering a relationship with the black girls at the university. Once he is rejected, he dismisses them as only interested in whites. But the reader knows that such

a rejection has a political meaning which is not lost on the narrator, who, as already noted, comments that Rhodesians were the 'Jews of Africa'. Second, the narrator's relationship with Patricia in exile is illuminating. If it is true, as has been suggested in this chapter, that Patricia in *The House of Hunger* represents for the narrator a link with the racial Other, partly because of his love for her and partly because of 'her commitment to the cause of racial equality (Foster, 1992:64), one could also argue, on the basis of their encounter in England, that the end of their relationship in Aberystwyth marks the rupture of his link with his country. 'This was the tearing cloth of exile, and of the sense of being in a world in which one yearned to leap out of one's mind' (61), he comments as he meditates about the significance of their estrangement. As Stewart Crehan (Chennells and Veit-Wild, forthcoming) notes, 'The feeling of exile is not a longing for home but a painful self-exile, a perpetual yearning. The torn cloth is more honest than the nation-state's hypocritical covering...'. As Boym also reminds her readers,' 'Diasporic intimacy does not promise a comforting recovery of identity through shared nostalgia for the lost home and homeland' (1998:501). This is what the narrator realizes even as he prepares to celebrate with Patricia the signing of a contract for his new book. He is now disillusioned with Patricia. For some reason, she has ceased in his mind to represent the link with their nation and with their past.

Tsitsi in *The Black Insider* is a Patricia-like figure. Like Patricia, she is an artist. She also has two children by the narrator from a marriage contracted on the spur of the moment. In exile, they seem to have a cordial relationship. But she decides to divorce him when she reads a review of his new book which describes it as containing 'stories (that) are damaging to the morale of the world bent on liberation' and not appropriate 'to be shared

by people who want to know what it means to be in Southern Africa today' (109). But the narrator now realises that in marrying Tsitsi he has in fact married 'the African dream'. 'It was a mistake to marry the African Dream' (112). 'And I think in marrying her I was trying to marry a part of Owen, and not anything about her' (113). As in the case of Patricia, the end of this relationship suggests the loss of the narrator's umbilical cord with his country and past. It tells us that the narrator's anarchist tendencies and his embraced universalism are at variance with commitments to nationalistic or regional causes.

This point brings this discussion to the question of mimicry. In an essay discussing syncretism in Southern African literature and arts, Veit-Wild (1995:21) links Marechera to a strand of southern African literature and art which, as she puts it, 'challenges all notions of cultural purity and essence'. According to Veit-Wild, this strand comprises 'artists who have used the third space at the margins of society and of sanity, to denounce the mechanism of power'. She writes of cultural hybridity in Marechera that it 'is reflected particularly in his use of metaphor and myth which is borne from his "cross-cultural imagination"' (21). Marechera's writings bear out this notion as Veit-Wild (1997) has shown in a subsequent article wherein she considers elements of hybridity and carnival in Marechera and Lesego Rampolokeng. In exploring Marechera's representation of his nation, it would seem necessary to consider whether and how he inscribes the Rhodesian/Zimbabwean national as a hybrid subject.

Homi Bhabha (1994b) theorizes colonial hybridity as

> the reevaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and

> displacement of all sites of domination. It unsettles the mimic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze back upon the eye of power. For the colonial hybrid is the articulation of the ambivalent space where the rite of power is enacted on the site of desire, making its objects at once disciplinary and discriminatory - or, in mixed metaphor, a negative transparency. (112)

And again:

> Hybridity is a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other 'denied' knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of authority - its rules of recognition. Again, it must be stressed, it is not simply the content of disavowed knowledges - be they forms of cultural otherness or traditions of colonialist treachery - that return to be acknowledged as counter-authorities.... What is irremediably estranging in the presence of the hybrid - in the revaluation of the symbol of national authority as the sign of colonial difference - is that the difference of cultures can no longer be identified or evaluated as objects of epistemological or moral contemplation: cultural differences are not simply there to be seen or appropriated. (114)

It is an interesting point that colonial hybridity conceals cultural difference . And yet, as Bhabha implies in his observation about the effect of 'disavowed knowledges' on the colonial discourse, this concealment is never complete. This point is interesting because it points to cultural difference as a specificity of the colonial nation, as argued above in relation to Eppel's *The Great North Road* and Vera's *Nehanda*. It is possible that examining the concept of colonial hybridity in these terms could illuminate Marechera's representation of the nation, along the same lines, for he too makes space for a difference between colonizers and colonized. However, as the foregoing discussion demonstrates all too clearly, Marechera's representation of his nation undermines any positivity associated with hybridity, and it is this aspect that this chapter seeks to emphasize in order

to explain Marechera's universalist stance. As Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo (1997:70) argue,

> The concept of hybridity stresses the productive nature of cultural integration as positive contamination. Hybridity offers an effective way of resisting the replication of Manichean binaries and the discourses of cultural purity which underpin colonialist relations.

From the discussion offered above, it appears as though Marechera reinforces the negativity of his representation of the nation not by suggesting the hybridity of the Zimbabwean national culture, but by highlighting mimicry. Thus it is necessary to show how this concept of mimicry articulates the significance of Marechera's project. Bhabha writes that

> colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference... mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry is, thus, the sign of a double articulation; a complete strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which appropriates the 'Other' as it visualizes power. Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate, however, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent threat to both 'normalized' knowledges and disciplinary powers. (1994b:86)

This passage suggests some troubling closeness between the two concepts of hybridity and mimicry in Bhabha's theorization. The main difference between them seems to lie in the fact that the latter concept relies on the subject's propensity to 'produce its slippage, its excess' and on the fact that it is theorized not as difference, but rather as a representation of difference. As 'slippage' and 'excess', it falls under the carnivalesque,

the inappropriate, and the negative. Consequently, the mimicking subject is identified and displayed as a comic, something to be laughed at, to distance oneself from or, as Bhabha (1994b:75) also puts it, 'a misfit'.

A number of episodes in Marechera's texts illustrate the point being made here that Marechera emphasizes mimicry as a strategy to undermine the notion of a culturally stable national subject. Early in *The House of Hunger*, the narrator presents the success of Solomon's township photo studio as a testimony to the black Rhodesians' desire to map and to record their 'cultural hybridity' through this form of visual representation:

> Solomon the township photographer is now a rich man. His studio at the back of the grocer's is papered from floor to ceiling with photographs of Africans in European wigs, Africans in mini-skirts, Africans who pierce the focusing lens with a gaze of paranoia.(11)

The sheer number of photographs displayed - 'from floor to ceiling' - attests to their function as metaphors for cross-culturalism. The above passage emphasizes that, by being photographed in different kinds of European apparel, the photographed subjects locate themselves at the intersection of their Africanness and Western culture, the moment of this location being captured in the 'gaze' on their faces. Corinne A. Kratz (1996:57) describes the gaze in visual images as 'intended to capture viewers' capacity to objectify the subjects through visual scrutiny'. The subjects on the photographs are presented in a way as to invite the viewers-readers to see them not exactly as hybridized cultural objects, but, most probably, as mimicking subjects. This is implicit in the narrator's observation about Solomon's financial situation as a result of the crazy search for such photographs. The number of people who come to the studio also suggests that the type of cultural

phenomenon described through this passage is neither restricted to a small section of the population nor a passing trend. Kevin Foster's (1992:62) perceptive reading of this passage is worth quoting:

> The photos in which the Africans seek confirmation of their authentic experience of life signify not only their estrangement from its benefits but also their loss of the only cultural assets they have. Alienated from his/her own cultural heritage, by ignorance or apostasy the African can purchase a comparable iconic cultural package, ostensibly designed to enhance what Soyinka calls the "process of self-apprehension".

Closely connected to the images on the photographs in the studio is the description the narrator offers of Julia in the scene in the beerhall:

> Now she had straightened out her hair with that damnable hot comb. Her lips were a flaming crimson, like the blood. There were darkened patches around her eyes, and false lashes. The eyebrow pencil seemed to have completed the transformation of my old Julia into a beerhall doll. (20)

As with the description of the photographs, this passage, which implies a criticism of the way Julia decorates her face, can be read very usefully in conjunction with Marechera's reflections, concerning articles in the British press that prescribe an image of the black ladies and the ways they should organize their lives. Marechera's satirical commentary on such prescriptions underscores his disgust with such imposed cultural norms. Nevertheless, this westernised image conforms to that of the national subject his work has consistently constructed.

Harry in *The House of Hunger* also epitomizes the mimicking colonial subject. This is manifest in his infatuation with symbols of European culture and his preference for white

girls over black women. As Foster (1992:63) argues, 'To possess one is to live authentically, to assume a kind of (dis)honorary whiteness.' His refusal to identify with his race is established in contrast with his sister Immaculate's stubborn insistence on staying on in the House of Hunger, despite the violent treatment she receives from her boyfriend Peter. In a nation dominated by the hegemonic culture of the colonizer, Harry's behaviour brings to mind that of the black guard in 'The Concentration Camp' who repeats after his white officer the stereotypes about the Africans.

The way Harry or any other colonized subject is portrayed 'as both victim and perpetrator of violence and meaning, chaos and order, civility and resistance' (Buuck, 1997:225) - a representational discourse emphasizing mimicry - and appears to be pitted against the narrator, himself a replica of the cosmopolitan Marechera, supports a reading which considers that Marechera refuses any identification with his nation. It is this cleavage between his fellow citizens' mimicry and his hybridity that creates an intellectual and emotional distance between him and his nation. For Marechera, unlike Eppel and Vera, home is not a particular geographical location. His 'nation' consisted of those who shared his intellectual and cultural interests, as this argument has striven to show.

Marechera's texts set after independence reveal mimicry as an enduring feature of the Zimbabwean postcolonial culture. The extract below from the poem 'Throne of Bayonets' sheds further light on Marechera's inscription of the postcolonial Zimbabwean national subject:

I will smear my face soft with Lanoline,
With American Girl Hand Body Lotion
With Ambi skin-lightening cream -
With pasteurised and bionised dung.

It's Disco Time at Scamps and Chantelles
You and I in platform boots and imitation Levis
will mimic the hours in twirl and stomp
The like of Gary Glitter;
Icecream hats and Rasta T-shirts the emblems
of our liberation's arrival - Guitars, trombones,
Ukeleles, harps, synthesisers, instruments of wind and air,
I think of Stravinsky (Soldier's Return)
And hibiscus / violets in the shadow of great Zimbabwe.

In his discussion of this extract, Dirk Klopper (in Chennells and Veit-Wild, forthcoming) argues that the extract does not necessarily denounce mimicry:

> By the poem's own dialectical logic, what appears at first to be a legitimate denunciation of disempowering identifications, apparent in the use of skin-lightening creams so as to "whiten" the skin, proves to be untenable, founded as it is on a notion of original plenitude. The poem has demonstrated that there is no essential self to which the subject, including the postcolonial subject, can return. Therefore there can be no African identity conceived in terms of an "African" consciousness. Even the skin-lightening treatment, used to illustrate an attempted assumption of European "whiteness", may point to a value that predates colonialism, when a light skin was a valued property for a traditional African woman as it contributed, without any reference to a European norm, towards a definition of her beauty. Likewise, the mimicry of dress and dance invoked by Marechera in a pejorative manner is not in itself a debilitating practice.

Klopper's suggestion that mimicry, as highlighted in the extract from the poem quoted above, is not in itself a negative experience is not entirely supported by the way the postcolonial subject's identity is constituted and claimed in the quoted extract. As Klopper perceptively observes, the 'I' in this extract 'inscribes her other' and there is a double

dimension to this inscription, for the extract does indeed articulate both 'an avowal and disavowal of identity'. The 'I', here the black Zimbabwean female, disavows her African identity in a movement of identification with her European other through the use of skin-lightening creams and other items. The Western reference is affirmed in the naming of these creams - Lanoline, American Girl Hand Lotion and Ambi. Here Marechera is undeniably engaged with the question of mimicry. The same act, it is true, conceals a threat directed against the Other whom the postcolonial subject wants to resemble. In the same extract, an assertive recognition of an African identity is foregrounded through the use of the pronouns 'You and I' and their possessive equivalent 'our'. The associative meaning in these pronouns and possessive, together with her evocation of the 'emblems of our national liberation' seem to suggest an African identity that is positioned in oppositional relation to its Other. This Other is re-created in the second stanza of the extract through reference to European music, European dress ('platform boots and imitation Levis') and a European composer ('Stravinsky'). As has already been argued in this chapter and as Klopper reminds his reader in his essay, Marechera's work questions the construction of the self in terms of fixed identity. But the focus in the extract is upon a self associated with the kind of grotesquerie Marechera refuses to identify with.

The scene in *Mindblast* in which Marechera describes Buddy's visit to a rich friend's house highlights the taste for a European lifestyle on the part of the post-independence middle class:

> Watching out for the tricks, the sordid games they played on him - making him see at rare intervals what he was missing by giving him a bed in the posh suburb for a few hours of the night and talking about cars, bank accounts, and the fine luxuries of conforming. Buddy would listen but not touch. He would drink nice liqueurs and

take with a smile the string of jokes being made at his expense. He would take a bath, settling back in the warm water, letting himself enjoy the temporary pleasure of it; later washing his underwear in the hand basin, wringing and leaving it to dry by the hot geyser. And then sleep. A defiant sleep that struck to all the corners of his brain, not letting go until the angry alarm clock rang and a gruff hand shook his shoulder saying, "Wake up! It's time for us honest folk to go to work. Wake up! I can't leave you here alone in the house."

Buddy rising suddenly from the cloggy depths of an unreal dream would open a bleary eye, knowing the time was half past five in the morning, and all his life he had hated waking up any earlier than ten o'clock. He would rush to have another bath, a hasty scrub-all-round one, not knowing when he would have the chance for another one.... It was years since he had marmalade and toast, with real coffee, freshly ground. The newspaper right there in his left hand. The other joking, "Back to the rigours of poetry, eh? You would not be able to do that, you know, if some of us did not positively respond to the call of duty. I suppose you are a sort of anarchist?"

"Not at all, I would say I am that conservative of conservatives who is an extreme individualist."

"Don't you ever dream of possessing some of this?" And the hand would indicate the TV, the Hi Fi, the Video, the thick, lush carpet, the bemused wife still in her silk dressing gown asking him to help himself to more of the scrambled eggs and the roasted fish.

"Not at all," Buddy said smiling. He had had enough of "this" for years in Europe. It was a dead end, as far as he was concerned.... And Buddy would look out of the window at the gleaming car hard by the garage, at the crisply mowed lawn, at the large comfortable garden in which the "modern" house was set.

In this sardonic description of a middle-class Zimbabwean family house and its owners' new 'rich' mannerisms, the reader is offered two reverse mirror images of the postcolonial Zimbabwean subject. Buddy is inscribed in the position of the self who confronts his Other in the form of friends who have secured material comfort in the new dispensation. These are the comprador bourgeoisie, the neo-colonialists or sell-outs of the nation. Their urge to accumulate the icons of a western lifestyle corresponds to an unconscious desire to identify with the Western world. Similarly, to his friends the homeless poet represents the Other (although simultaneously the same) they no longer want to identify with, a figure of

the menacing yet familiar reality of living in the margins that they want to suppress from their memories. What underlies this fear is the 'cultural' difference that they perceive between them and Buddy.

The following extract from 'Throne of Bayonets' plainly shows the love of money and the pursuit of it as being at the core of the postcolonial national culture:

> From underneath the ditchwater
> Of my dwelling
> I watch them leisurely passing by
> With their shopping bags, handbags, husbands
> Their bland faces certain
> Of the night and bedroom to come.
> Strident music shrieks from every doorway
> To the gold in the pocket. There are no
> People, but dollars – or the want of dollars;
> No heartwrenching love or feud but the goldthought
> In its dark deep; no handshake or greeting
> Or secret appraisal from dim doorway
> But the goldvein pulsing in every heart.

This extract in which the poet observes his society from a position of marginality ('From underneath the ditchwater / Of my dwelling') underlies the argument that the materialist culture of the post-colonial society is the canker that destroys this society from within. The absence of love and the de-centering of the people in the society that this extract evokes bring to mind the following words from Wole Soyinka in *The Man Died* (1972), which Marechera would certainly agree with:

> (it) is better to believe in people than in nations. In moments of grave doubts it is essential to cling to the reality of peoples; these cannot vanish, they have no questionable a priori - they exist.

By foregrounding the people's inhumanity in the above poem, Marechera not only interrogates the notion of the nation but also precludes any possibility of real identification with it. The instances of mimicry just examined reveal that in Marechera's texts, mimicry is achieved through the narrator's inscription of his Zimbabwean subjects as participants in a 'cultural' spectacle which he invites the reader to witness. The prostitute who bleaches her face, Harry, the spy who indulges in an imitation of the white man, the post-independence elite who show off their western lifestyle - all these characters are portrayed derisively to this effect.

It will be clear from the above discussion that the two representations of colonial and postcolonial Zimbabwe offered in the texts analyzed above are not set in opposition to one another. As has been seen, colonial Zimbabwe is constructed as a world of violence, a nerve-racking environment for those who aspire to freedom and try to make sense of their conditions of existence. Within such a universe, relationships between the colonizers and colonized are constructed as those of jailers to prisoners. Colonial Zimbabwe is also figured in Marechera as a site where the problem of oppression is posed not only in terms of race whereby the white colonial master imprisons and oppresses the Other, but also in terms of where the Other oppresses itself, as Peter's aggression against Immaculate and Harry's police surveillance of his comrades attest. This is a contradiction that causes Marechera to deplore the absence of those 'black heroes' he laments in *The House of Hunger*.

Marechera's texts set after Zimbabwe's independence reveal a representation of a nation divided along binary lines. Only this time the binarism is one that reads: rich/poor,

dominant classes/underclasses. The former perpetrate a subtle form of violence and oppression against the latter, which the narrating self, who observes his society from the margins of the nation, captures so well in the poems and prose texts analyzed above. As this discussion has revealed, Marechera is wary of identifying with a nation like this one. The narrative voice in all these texts mocks the national subject' whom he figures as indecently eager to mimic the former colonial master, to the point of even maintaining his oppressive laws.

As has also been shown, the narrating self stresses his dis-identification with a nation in which the colonized self subjects himself/herself to colonial authority by acts of mimicry. Mimicry in his texts is achieved through his inscription of his characters as participants in a 'cultural' spectacle which he invites his reader to witness. The Zimbabwean prostitute who bleaches her face, Harry who strives to sound, behave and look like a white man, the new 'comprador bourgeoisie' who show off their westernized lifestyle - all these characters are portrayed derisively to suggest the author's sense of estrangement from his people. In any case, Marechera refuses to endorse the idea of a unified national community, split as it is between a dominant, oppressive ruling elite and an oppressed underclass. Indeed, as Abdulrazak Gurnah (1995:104) has pointed out, 'all his writing, from *The House of Hunger* to *The Black Insider*, contests the possibility of community' - be it family or nation. Marechera's claim for a universal identity has as much to do with this kind of contestation as with what Stewart Crehan (in Chennells and Veit-Wild, forthcoming) rightly sees as his 'empathy with those "who have no nationality"'.

This discussion of a complex representation of nation in Marechera's work - undercut, as it is, by his skeptical questioning of the concept of nation - is followed in the next chapter by an exploration of how in his novel *Hatchings* John Eppel articulates the problematics of representation of the nation which are implied in his focusing on a subterranean culture and inclusion of characters who are immigrants.