CHAPTER FIVE: 'HATCHING' A NEW NATIONAL CULTURE

In this penultimate chapter, a second novel by John Eppel is examined. Whereas Chapter Two discusses a late colonial novel by this author, the focus now shifts - appropriately - to his post-independence novel in order to present a careful balance of his representation of the Zimbabwean nation. Eppel's *Hatchings* (1995) is remarkable in that, although it depicts postcolonial Zimbabwe as a site of rampant crime and corruption, the focus on a subterranean culture cuts against a narrative of rebirth of the Zimbabwean nation. This chapter is an attempt to explore the representation of nation provided through this double articulation. It focuses on Eppel's construction, through his novel's interlocking narratives, of an imagined community fragmented along a moral divide.

The chapter, then, begins with an analysis of the ways in which Eppel constructs each community's identity. It shows that, once again, the dominant technique in the novel is to focus on groups of characters that are of significance as representatives of the nation although, here, the context is post- rather than pre- independence. Once again, Eppel utilizes a number of symbols to construct each community's identity, but this time the symbolism suggests a bipolarization of the nation along ethical lines. The focus, then, falls on characters presented as migrants (refugees, expatriate aid workers, foreign researchers, and so forth) in order to address the following questions: firstly, what their association with a subculture of crime reveals in terms of Eppel's representation of the nation in this second novel and, secondly, why their border crossings are framed in the text as having a significant, if negative, impact on the life of the nation. In the first part of the chapter, the argument is that, through such a construction of his immigrant characters,

Eppel complicates the assumption of a supposedly positive national culture emerging from the encounter between a community of migration and the indigenous population. (The term 'indigenous' as used here refers to Zimbabweans of all races.)

Through an analysis of selected poems from his second poetry collection *Sonata for Matabeleland*, Part Two of this chapter considers Eppel's inscription of the postcolonial Zimbabwean subjects, as opposed to the Rhodesian subjects seen in his first collection, for, as in the discussion of *The Great North Road*, the poems can be seen as complementary to the novel. The argument is that the images of the Zimbabwean subjects presented in the poems encode Eppel's construction of postcolonial Zimbabwe, where postcolonial signifies post-independence in contradistinction to Ashcroft, Tiffin and Griffith's definition (1989) of 'postcolonial' as embracing the entire history of a nation from the inception of colonial rule. Finally the chapter discusses the significance of such a complex mapping of the national space in terms of Eppel's representation.

PART ONE

In a number of ways, *Hatchings* is unlike Eppel's first novel, discussed in Chapter Two. Although strongly satirical in tone like his first novel, the target of this second novel is not just a fraction of the society, but the entire postcolonial society. Gone are the narrative of the Rhodesian nation and the co-operative mythologies of *D G G Berry's The Great North Road*. Gone too is the distance that separated white 'Rhodies' from the 'natives'. More representative of the nation, the characters in this novel are from all races and walks of life. In this 'delegated stage', to use Graeme Turner's term (1993), the characters are accepted as tokens of the whole. In addition to these newly symbolically empowered

individuals, however, *Hatchings* also appears to retain an important selection of characters from the previous novel, making it deeply important to examine this text. The only overtly recognizable character, and the most prominent, is Brother MacBraggert of the Blood of Jesus Temple. But it is clear from the narrative that, despite the change of names and circumstances, some of the other white characters in the novel are those people whom Moral MacBraggert persuaded to join his church at the end of the first novel. Eppel's narrator simply describes them as 'white Rhodesians, who, after losing the war of liberation, after witnessing their beloved Rhodesia become dreaded Zimbabwe, had turned for solace to the church...' (13). A discussion of the importance of this church in the representation of the nation in the novel is offered later in the chapter.

Hatchings is also different from *The Great North Road* in that, as noted above, Eppel presents to the reader a community divided along ethical lines, and occupying spaces which, for convenience, are referred to here as a positive space and a negative space. The positive space is occupied by what De Kock (1993:180), in his review of the novel, refers to as 'the sacred'. 'The sacred in *Hatchings*,' he writes, 'are the children, the Fawkes family, and Jet Bunion, Elizabeth Fawkes's romantic partner'. The negative space, on the other hand, is occupied by 'venal satyrs and moral hypocrites of the worst kind' (ibid.). Consistent with this cleavage between good and evil characters, Zimbabwe is presented as functioning both as a site of regeneration and as a den of crime. Each of these two communities and spaces is now examined in terms of the symbols associated with them.

In *Hatchings*, the positive space is associated with the Matopos National Park, with the good characters, and particularly with the novel's heroine Elizabeth Fawkes, and with the

Asil Khan egg. Appropriating ennobling mythic properties, these three elements conjoin to create a timeless, classic space, the panoramic dimension of which serves to oust the narrowly historicized spatial 'scenery' of *The Great North Road*. Indeed, the connection of positive space and the Matopos is established early in the narrative of *Hatchings*, which appropriately unfolds with the Fawkes family on a campsite in the Matopos National Park. In the following passage, the narrator describes the camp in terms of the positive influence the Matopos exerts upon the Fawkes and society in general:

> Mtshelele Dam was Elizabeth's favourite spot in the Matopos National Park, especially now during the rainy season when the dam was reasonably full of water and the lilies were in full flower. The white variety prevailed here. Elizabeth called them lotus plants but her mother liked to be more specific. She called them *Ottelia exserta*. Mrs Fawkes was surprised that none of the more common blue variety, *Nymphaea caerulea*, grew on this dam. The lilies reminded Elizabeth of a poem they had studied with their English teacher, Mr. Lipp. How did it go?
>
> > In the afternoon they came unto a land
> > in which it seemed always afternoon.
>
> That's what it is like here. Time seems to stand still. "There is no joy but calm." A calm disturbed by the occasional gusts of wind that rippled across the dam and caused the lily pads to flip limp-wristedly in the direction of Bulawayo: a kind of synchronized farewell to the hustle and bustle of school life. (10-11)

Presented as it is in the above passage, as a place of extraordinary natural beauty, the Matopos National Park offers scenery that is experienced by the Fawkes family, and particularly by Elizabeth, as refreshing both physically and psychologically. The passage suggests indeed that the frequent camping in this setting is important to Elizabeth as a source of renewal. In this way the Matopos becomes a trope for the source of the regenerating national spirit which the narrator sees as necessary for the nation's self-creation. The white lily, a symbol of purity which receives prominent mention in the

passage, extends its symbolism to the whole of the Matopos, and, also, to the land, as the quoted lines from the poem suggest. Such an association of nature with purity is also evident in the final episode of the novel, where the Matopos National Park serves as the scene where the Asil Khan egg hatches and the two lovers, Elizabeth and Jet Bunion, confess their love to each other.

In his essay '"Great Spaces Washed with Sun": The Matopos and Uluru Compared", Terence Ranger (1996) makes observations that illuminate the symbolic significance of this setting. Discussing the significance of the Matopos and Uluru, an Australian landscape, Ranger notes that 'like the Matopos, Uluru is at one and the same time an extraordinary rock formation, an icon of national identity, a major tourist attraction, and the site of struggle between black and white over possession, representation and control' (157). Ranger quite rightly considers the naming and re-naming of the Matopos by successive groups of the population (Ndebele, Shona, Banyubi/Kalanga) and its christening by the whites, as well as its choice by Rhodes as his burial place, as many attempts to appropriate this symbol of national identity. He also points out that under the white colonial government 'there was violent appropriation.... The rocks were appropriated by renaming... the Matopos becoming the Rhodesian Matopos Park' (158). According to Ranger, the politics of conservation of this 'national icon' under both the white colonial state and the black postcolonial government remained largely the same. As he explains:

> The imperatives of international tourism have ensured that the park still presents much the same symbolic face that it did under settler rule. People still visit Rhodes's grave and the other colonial monuments; still camp out and have barbecues; still photograph indiscriminately; and are still ignorant of the African history and cosmology of the hills (161).

Ranger's insights illuminate the fact that the setting of two major episodes of the novel at this locale serves to underscore just in what way Eppel endows them with special symbolic significance. Indeed, in addition to the Matopos offering the scene of the negotiation on New Year's Day between Elizabeth Fawkes and her father for the hatching of the Asil Khan egg, a significant act itself as will become clear later in the discussion, it is also the site for the actual hatching of the egg and the consummation of the romantic love between Elizabeth and Jet Bunion, alluded to earlier. As will also become clear, given the symbolic and historical importance of the site Ranger has outlined, part of Eppel's strategy is to appropriate the holiness, the creativity and the fertility associated with this place and to impart it to the character of Elizabeth in her role of 'hatcher' of a new nation-building ethos.

As an extension of the Matopos in the Fawkes's minds, their garden is also figured as a positive space, thus reinforcing the symbolism of the Matopos:

> The Fawkes' garden in Hillside was one of the few gardens without working boreholes that did not look like a desert. That was because Philippa, her friends called her Gay, planted only indigenous things - not just trees, but bushes, shrubs, flowers, even grasses....
>
> Neighbours complained about the condition of the Fawkes' garden. Their immediate neighbours were the Macimbis who were Ndebele, the Mashitas who were Shona, the Verwoerds who were Afrikaans, and the Pigges who were English. The white neighbours thought that the Fawkes' 'bushveld' lowered the tone of the neighbourhood. Presumably the Pigges' seven foot Instarect wall, and the Verwoerds' six foot breeze-brick wall with inset wagon wheels, raised the tone. The black neighbours who couldn't bear to see a single blade of grass, let alone wild flowers - or even trees, for that matter - anywhere near their houses, accused the Fawkes of infesting the neighbourhood with ticks and snakes and scorpions and centipedes... (30)

In the above passage, the natural purity associated with the garden is contrasted with the potential for conflict suggested by the differing perceptions of the Fawkes's garden held

by their neighbours. These perceptions, in turn, point to the divisions the following passage establishes:

> While the Fawkes' garden was an affront to all their immediate neighbours, they themselves were not unpopular. They never complained about any of them. And when it came to factional fights between the Afrikaners and the English, or between the Ndebele and the Shona, or between the blacks and the whites - the Fawkes remained neutral. Indeed, they negotiated peace. The Verwoerd children weren't allowed to entertain the Macimbi or the Mashita children in their own territory, and it was unthinkable that the Verwoerd children should ever visit the homes of the Macimbi or the Mashita children. (The Pigges don't come into this because they didn't have any children.) So the children gathered in neutral ground where there were trees to climb, snakes to catch; where they could watch the crested barbets nesting in the *Euphorbia ingens*, the sparrow weavers nesting in the *Acacia nilotica*, and the African hoopoes nesting in the eaves of the house. Elizabeth and her father helped them build a tree-house made out of the wooden packing cases which, with the help of ropes, they secured high up in the *Commiphora mollis* - the Elbow tree. When they built a den, deep inside the *Bauhenia galpinii*, Elizabeth provided them with a piece of old carpet and a few scatter cushions that she herself had made. There she brought them tomatoe sandwiches and cups of Mazoe orange. There she read to them, taught them songs about Jesus, and played "I spy with my little eye". (30-31)

It is readily apparent from this passage that the Fawkes's garden, and by extension the space they occupy, is presented as a neutral ground, a meeting place, in a binary world still divided along the lines of race and ethnic groups. While the relations among the adults are strained, the passage underlines the easy camaraderie between the children and suggests that, for the narrator, hope for a harmonious multiracial Zimbabwean society, hinted at both in the multiracial neighbourhood and in Elizabeth's actions, lies essentially in the younger generation. That the children's group symbolizes an ideal Zimbabwe is suggested in the name they choose for their den:

> *Ubungane* is a Zulu word meaning comradeship. The children called their den, the one built with Elizabeth's help, deep in the *Bauhenia galpinii*, *Ubungane*. (32)

Thus, *Hatchings* associates the positive space with children and youthful figures whose innocence becomes the symbol of the new nation, as already stated.

In his essay alluded to earlier, Terence Ranger mentions the religious importance of the Matopos by reference to the fact that the place is also a sacred landscape containing rain-shrines. The *Ubungane* den can, in turn, be considered a shrine where these children from different backgrounds celebrate unity. It is typical of Eppel that he uses this small community of children as a microcosm for the ideal Zimbabwe. It has been seen how in his first novel he focuses on a stratum of Rhodesian society - the white working-class community of Umdidi - to deconstruct the ideology of Rhodesian nationalism. In the episode described here, the narrative appears insistent that the kind of utopian unity that the *Ubungane* group embodies is precisely what Eppel envisions for his imagined community. Indeed, it is not difficult to realize his preference for the type of consultative democracy and the spirit of human brotherhood the small community displays, over the prejudice and lack of communication that characterize relations between the adults. There is no inferior/superior complex (which is a marker of a colonist/colonized, white/black economy) in the relationships between the children and Elizabeth. It thus seems that Eppel's reader is presented with a choice between the intercultural connection and egalitarian ethos which characterizes the children's universe, and a vision of the nation enmeshed in racist and violent culture. It is indeed a choice between what Graeme Turner (1996:124), writing in the context of Australia, refers to as 'a creative, resistant, cultural form of becoming' and 'a conservative, already completed form of exclusion'.

That the image of Elizabeth stands in the narrative as a symbol of the Zimbabwean nation is made evident by the role of peace maker which the text shows her playing in this divided microcosm of the Zimbabwean nation, through the way she helps keep goodwill and friendship between the children. The text makes it clear that this is no unrequited

friendship, as demonstrated by the show of support Elizabeth receives from the children after her family's interrogation by the police (on their return from holiday in the Matopos) over the dead baby found in their garden.

Perhaps more than her role as mediator within the *Ubungane* group, it is the fact that she is constituted as an embodiment of the rebirth of this nation which gives her character the status of a symbolic figure in the novel and one which combines natural and political metaphors, projecting Elizabeth imaginatively as 'creator' of the nation. This is why her sexualization becomes an important motif in the narrative. The opening sentence of the novel - 'Elizabeth Fawkes was turning sixteen (9) - draws attention to her nubility. This strategy of emphasizing her nubility is repeatedly used in the narrative. Thus, the reader learns shortly afterwards that

> Elizabeth Fawkes, who was turning sixteen, was thinking of Jet and only half-concentrating on her father's story about the Asil Khan. (10)

In the above passage Elizabeth's age and the fact that she is in love with Jet Bunion are foregrounded to reinforce the reader's awareness of her sexuality. In the passage below, which records the conversation between Elizabeth and her father in the Matopos, an aura of romance around Elizabeth is created through the sexual insinuations that permeate the conversation. Appropriately, the Matopos National Park serves as the setting for the negotiations between Elizabeth and her father on the hatching of the Asil Khan egg:

"Do you think you could hatch it, Lizzie?"

"Sorry, Dad?"

"My egg. Do you think you could hatch it?"

"Not in my bra, Dad?" Elizabeth was serious. "It's too much of an effort, especially with school coming up soon. I'll put it under Mrs Noodle when we get home. She started sitting yesterday."

"Not this egg, Lizzie, it s too precious. Mrs Noodle may reject it. This is an Asil Khan, Lizzie; it's got to hatch. Your bra is the safest bet. Damn these tiddlers; they've taken my bait again... Will you do it, please?"

Elizabeth closed the book she had been dipping into and placed it carefully on the ground. It was one of her recommended novels: Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*. "Twenty-one days is a long time, Dad. And what about nights when I am asleep? I could crush it."

"You won't, my love. You didn't the last time with Mrs Noodle. It was a perfect delivery. I hope it turns out to be a cock. I wonder what colour it is? I think the Asil Khans are supposed to be a very dark red with pale coloured legs... ."

"I'm not that keen on cocks," said Elizabeth. Mrs Fawkes heard this and wondered, with alarm, what father and daughter have been talking about. She quickened her steps. She was uneasy on the subject of human sex and, hitherto, had avoided it in the company of her daughter. (11-12)

The above extract leaves no doubt about Elizabeth's inscription in the novel as the female body prepared to give birth. Her femaleness is highlighted in the passage through a vocabulary referring to body parts: 'egg', 'breast', 'bra', 'cock', and 'perfect delivery'. In her book *Torrid Zones* (1995), Felicity A. Nussbaum notes that a woman's breast is a symbol of sexuality and maternity, This view helps the reader to see that Eppel's insistence in this passage on this part of Elizabeth's body serves to construct her in the role of the incubator needed to hatch the Asil Khan. In the long term, the strategy prepares the reader to accept her in the role of hatcher of a new ethos that privileges reconciliation and racial harmony. The significance of this role is suggested by the reference to the title of the book Elizabeth reads: *Great Expectations*. It is a fact that *Hatchings* is about the great expectations, for the future of the postcolonial Zimbabwe, that have been dashed by generalized corruption.

Corruption is not foreign to Dickens's novel either, as Ross H. Dabney (1967:128) has noted:

> Moral corruption spreads in two ways in *Great Expectations*: by overt all-dramatically direct influence - and by seepage from a generally corrupt society. The direct line of infection runs from Compeyson, through Miss Havisham and Magwitch, through Estella, to Pip, who is rotted by his expectations. The expectations are at the centre of the novel, and they are centred on Estella.

In Eppel's text, corruption is embodied by Sobantu 'The Butcher' Ikerhothi's crime syndicate and it is on Elizabeth that the expectations are centred. Elizabeth's hatching of the Asil Khan egg is thus rationalized as the crossing over to a new moral order and a new culture. This point is returned to later in the discussion.

It is significant that the scene of the negotiation between father and daughter is the Mtshelele Dam where Elizabeth's father is indulging in his favourite hobby, which is fishing. The setting of the negotiation for the hatching of the egg at the dam invites a consideration of the symbolism of water, for the idea of regeneration symbolized by water in the text is closely allied to that of birth (hatching). It is of further significance that both are associated in turn with the Matopos. As with the hatching of the egg, there seems to be a symbolic dimension to water. In this context, the discussion between Elizabeth and her mother about the spiritual symbolism of water is worth considering, for it enables the reader to associate water and the Matopos in a way that suggests a correspondence between the revitalization implied in the water symbolism and the birth of a new national spirit suggested by the hatching of the Asil Khan. The point here is to suggest that this correspondence is essential for Eppel's construction of Zimbabwe as a place of hope, for

it appears that in this novel Eppel seeks to widen the symbolism of the river by showing that the Matopos, because of its association with water, symbolizes regeneration.

It also does not appear to be a coincidence that the discussion between mother and daughter on water symbolism follows that on the significance of the New Year. The fact that both discussions are informed by the insights of the same thinker (Mircea Eliade) invites the reader to consider them together. Elizabeth and her mother discuss the New Year briefly in the morning of New Year's Day. The previous night Elizabeth had what her mother describes as 'a religious experience' (79). Unable to find sleep, possibly, because of 'the egg inside her bra' (47) she left their encampment and sat on the boulder nearby. Her religious experience consisted in a prayer to God to 'help me to guide [Jet] away from darkness, towards the light' (49). It is an experience that has some religious significance because it leads her to consider the paradoxes in biblical religions pointed out to her by her English teacher Boland Lipp. When Elizabeth is found alone that night by her father, she tells him that she is love with Jet Bunion. To her mother and to the narrator - for at this point in the novel their two voices merge - the experience has symbolic significance because it coincides with the beginning of a New Year:

> "... But to get back to your experience last night: it's the New Year, and the New Year is a very significant time, not only for Christians but for all mankind. Eliade has a lot to say about New Year's rituals, you know." Elizabeth did not speak, so she went on, first disposing of a piece of bread which she had run round her plate in order to soak up the juice. "The New Year is an earthly imitation of the first day of Creation with a big 'C'...". Elizabeth sighed and lay back with a tight mouth... Here we go again."
>
> "... on earth joins sacred time which is eternal ... vestige of those saturnalia which symbolized the moral chaos of the Old Year.... With each New Year man is reborn ...reintegrated with the Dream Time ...sacred and profane...
>
> "Elizabeth, are you listening to me?"

> "Yes, Mom, but I don t understand a word you re saying."
> "What I'm trying to tell you Elizabeth, is that last night you were present at the creation of the world." (79-80)

By this tactic the reader is made to understand the implications of Eliade's views for the novel. The idea that there could be a new beginning for the new nation is suggested through the symbolism associated with the Old Year and the New Year. The dying of the Old Year is a metaphor for the old order, the colonial era. The New Year, in contrast, symbolizes the ushering of the nation into a new phase of its existence, which the novel figures as the moral order. The man who is reborn is the postcolonial man. The Dream Time may be a reference to the moral culture that, the narrator implies, should replace the existing order.

The inscription of the Matopos as a symbol of regeneration is also achieved by reference to the water motif. Water is a symbol of creative life. Out of water comes life. This symbolism is recognized by scientific theories of life which postulate that life comes from water. In the biblical stories of creation, water is presented as the source of creation, the beginning of creation. In the biblical story of Noah, water symbolizes life but also destruction and punishment. It destroys and punishes the unfaithful and the sinner. But at the same time it carries the lives of those on board the ark, the offspring of a new beginning in God's work of creation. In the biblical story of the passage of the Red Sea, waters part to save the lives of those chosen by God and destroy those who pursue them.

The contrast between the Matopos and the rest of the country is figured in terms of the contrast between a place where water is available and where it is not. Repeatedly, in the

novel the importance of water is emphasized. On the morning of the New Year, Mrs Fawkes appeals to Elizabeth to take advantage of the water in the Matopos National Park: 'It might be an idea to take a good shower while we're here, love. Remember, we're going back to stringent water rationing' (80). The text, already quoted, tells the reader that the Fawkes's garden was particular in that it 'was one of the few gardens without working boreholes that did not look like a desert' (30). This comment emphasizes once again the Fawkes's territorialization in the positive space.

Just as Eppel's novel offers a dual representation of Zimbabwe, so, too, it allegorizes water in a dual function: as a symbol of the rebirth of the new nation, but equally as a symbol of corruption. This duality in the symbolism of water emerges in the scene of the New Year's party at the Twots's house. Doef Mackmark, the wife of the Black Rhino High School headmaster, is surprised that water at the Twots's house is used rather unwisely:

> "I must say I'm surprised, Elaine, that you permit the flushing of toilets at a time when Bulawayo is about to run out of water. Do you know that I empty our WC - I do it once a day, usually just before we get to bed, don't I, Dolphie? - with an old soup ladle? Not a pleasant job but it does save water."
>
> "It's Daylene. We don't have to worry about water," she replied with a mixture of irritation and superiority in her voice. "If we exceed our ration, and we do every month, we simply pay the fine. We can afford it. Besides which we have two excellent boreholes in the garden. We got loads of water." (25)

With Daylene Twot's reply - from a character occupying the negative space - the text seems at odds with the thrust of narrative. But it is important to keep in mind that water in this space assumes a different symbolic function. The effectiveness of the negative symbolism of water in this scene is brought home by its association with bodily waste and

corruption. It is water that the Twots can afford out of ill - earned money. Thus the symbolism of water in this scene is the opposite of regeneration and renaissance.

The Twots's garden is viewed by the headmaster as 'a veritable oasis in the Bulawayo desert with something like four months of water left in the supply dams' (26). This is in contrast with 'the gardens of all those Bulawayo residents without boreholes or with boreholes that had run dry, or who had by-passed their metres' (26). Rudolph McMackmack's remark that those Bulawayo residents who could afford water were a 'Bunch of Neros' - a qualification which applies to the Twots and those like them - reveals that water as associated with the likes of Twots, is figured as a commodity that criminals and their associates can afford. As can be seen, by comparing Bulawayo, and by extension, the national space to a desert, the lack of water is converted into a symbol of the spiritual degeneration the country is shown to be in.

The idea that the water at the Twots's house symbolizes degeneration is given confirmation by the smell that pervades their house:

> Rudolph and Doef arrived fifteen minutes before twelve, a most inappropriate time for the Twot household, since Strontium, only half dressed, was only half-way through one of his mighty public holiday shits, a four-pounder which left him drained, slightly clammy to the touch, and mildly euphoric. The smell, much to the embarrassment of his family - for they always seemed to have guests on public holidays - would pervade the entire house for up to an hour after delivery. By one o'clock it would have cleared. (23)

The symbolism of water in this scene is the very opposite of the regeneration and renaissance. The references to smell and faeces in the passage are reminiscent of Ayi

Kwei Armah's depiction, in his novel *The Beautyful ones Are Not Yet Born*, of the smell that accompanies the minister Koomson as he escapes arrest through the latrine at the Man's house. In that episode Armah uses images of smell and shit to suggest that the process of decay in Ghana has reached the point of no return. Similarly the Twots's house is figured as a place of decay.

The conversation between Elizabeth and her mother about the significance of water in religion sheds light on Eppel's reference to water in order to suggest the double image of the nation his text conveys. Once again, it is informed by Mircea Eliade's ideas in his treatise 'The Sacred and the Profane'. Here are some of the most important ones in the context of this discussion:

- Water is a useful religious symbol because it is paradoxical (103).
- It symbolises degeneration as well as regeneration; death as well as life. (103)
- Being immersed in the water symbolises a kind of death; being emersed... means, symbolises a kind of re-birth (103).
- ... there was sacred time and there was profane time. By means of rituals primitive woman or man could move between the two. Sacred time is the beginning of creation ... (104)
- And profane time, of course, is historical time... But Christianity is a historical event which took place in profane time... So it kind of merges the sacred and the profane. Christianity valorises profane by sanctifying it with Christ's historicity... (104)

These statements validate the representation of water at the Matopos Dam as a symbol of regeneration, and that of water at the Twots's house as a symbol of degeneration and death. The notions of historicity and its double relation to sacredness and profanity,

transposed into the context of Eppel's representation of the postcolonial Zimbabwean nation, also underscore his attempt to provide a meeting space for those forces of darkness and light which the novel presents as shaping the two spaces of the postcolonial society represented in the novel. It also becomes obvious in the passages above that the narrator conceives the beginning of the Dream Time or Sacred Time as coinciding with the nation's turning back on the existing immoral order. A discussion of the Asil Khan and the episode of its hatching will, hopefully, allow a better understanding of the relevance, for the novel, of the ideas Mrs Fawkes relays.

The setting of most of the main events of the novel on New Year's Day is also important in that it places Elizabeth in the process of new creation, as is implied by Mrs Fawkes as she explains to her daughter (the fictional author of the nation, as already suggested) and to the reader the meaning of the New Year. In her mother's view, Elizabeth's experience can be interpreted as 'being present at the Creation' (80). This qualifies her for the role she has been assigned as 'hatcher' or 'author' of the new moral ethos Eppel envisions for the country. Thus, with this incident, Eppel succeeds in redirecting the Matopos's national symbolism away from the sectarian political and ideological dimension attached to it by the political and racial groupings which Ranger mentions in the essay referred to above.

As with the Matopos National Park, the Asil Khan egg occupies a central role in the text, as suggested by the association of the egg with the title of the novel. The reader learns that the egg was won in a raffle by Elizabeth's father, who is a senior mechanic by profession and has two interests in life: fishing and poultry. The circumstances of the egg's

arrival in Bulawayo seem far from consistent with the moral character of the space it occupies:

> Originally there had been six eggs, apparently smuggled out of India in somebody's diplomatic bag, but five of them had become cracked in transit and had ended up, scrambled, on lightly buttered toast. The single sound egg was now in Mr Fawkes's proud possession. (11)

Despite these unflattering circumstances, the Asil Khan egg has immense symbolic importance in the novel. It symbolizes a new, moral culture. Its hatching is figured allegorically as the beginning of a new life, a new beginning for the nation. The novel's dual focus on the hatching of the egg and the dumping of the dead babies is intended to highlight the opposition between life or regeneration on the one hand, and degeneration or death, on the other hand.

The hatching of the egg reinforces the narrative centrality of the character of Elizabeth Fawkes and the already noted symbolism of the Matopos and the New Year. Having been invited by Jet Bunion to spend the night with a group at the Matopos to watch the moon rise, Elizabeth is surprised that, instead of the grave of Cecil Rhodes, it is to the Mtshelele Dam that Jet has taken her. For, 'They had chosen World's View for the vigil near the grave of Cecil John Rhodes. Weather permitting, they would spend the night next to his remains. Elizabeth had suggested Mtshelele Dam but the others had out-voted her' (109). It is pertinent that Jet should choose to ignore the grave. As suggested by Ranger, the grave of Cecil John Rhodes has strong ideological associations with imperialism, yet Eppel's appropriation of the Matopos does not include Rhodes's grave. This is entirely appropriate given his attitude towards the founder of colonial Rhodesia, as reflected in his first novel *The Great North Road*, and considering the argument in his second novel that

the hatching of a new nation can only take place in a context that is not associated with the Empire. In contrast, the Mtshelele Dam, as already suggested, points to the possibility of regeneration through its association with the Matopos and water.

It is while Elizabeth and Jet talk about their feelings on a spot in the Mtshelele Dam that the hatching of the egg begins. The narration of the hatching is given in a passage that is powerful in its evocation of the new life:

> "What's that sound?" He lifted his head. He would have cocked his ears if he could.
>
> "What sound?"
>
> "Shh! Listen."
>
> They listened intently, both realising simultaneously how utterly quiet the world had become. As if the diurnal creatures had gone to sleep and the nocturnal creatures were yet to stir. A minute's silence for the earth's abandoned babies. Elizabeth's hand groped for Jet's and held it tightly. Then they heard it: cheep, cheep, cheep... click, click, click... cheep, cheep, cheep.
>
> "I don t believe it," said Elizabeth, "It's the chick."
>
> "The what?"
>
> "The Asil Khan, Jet, it's hatching." She began to unbutton her blouse.
>
> "Are you mad? What are you doing? Elizabeth, I don't expect you to have sex with me. Don't undress. Lizzie, I respect - "
>
> "I'm not undressing, Jet, I'm getting the egg out of my bra. It's beginning to hatch and it's only due on the twenty-first. It must have begun germinating in the cubby hole of the car. It gets pretty warm in there."
>
> "May I get it out?"
>
> 'Yes, if you're ever so gentle." Her breathing picked up. She lowered her hand and submitted herself to his. "That's the wrong side, Jet. Try the left one. Gently now." His exploration went on rather longer than it needed to - they had begun to kiss - but at last he retrieved the egg and offered it to her.
>
> "Look," she said, "Its little beak is poking through the crack. It should be out in half an hour. Isn't it wonderful?"
>
> "Aren't you wonderful?" the boy replied. "Fancy hatching out an egg against your beautiful warm tit."
>
> "Breast!" (116)

Arguably, this extract enacts a simulated act of delivery, with Elizabeth as 'mother' and Jet in the role of both 'midwife' and foster father. The hatching of the egg in this romantic context is clearly intended to symbolize the birth of hope. Through the description of this hatching, Eppel successfully ends his construction of Elizabeth as the bearer or 'hatcher' of a new life and, given her wider role in the novel as a whole, of a utopia for Zimbabwe. One is also struck by the power of evocation of the main theme of the novel. In the passage the time is dusk - a time-frame that invokes the end of colonial rule. With the first sound of the hatching, Nature appears to be at a standstill. The silence is presented as offering the possibility of a new beginning for the opposite forces: the sacred ones - referred to as diurnal creatures; and the 'evil ones' - referred to as nocturnal creatures. With this episode the reader receives a clear sense of what is meant by a time of sacredness in the novel. For the hatching is evoked as a time which offers to the profane - 'the nocturnal creatures' - 'the possibility of being sanctified'. It is figured as a 'sacred time', that is 'the beginning of creation'. The narration of Elizabeth 'giving birth' is thus pivotal in the text as it suggests the dawning of a new era in the history of the imagined Zimbabwean nation of this novel.

While the space occupied by Elizabeth, Jet Bunion, and the children is figured as positive, the 'nocturnal forces' occupy a space dominated by the underworld which,as stated above, is presented as a negative space. Within the narrative discourse this latter space is inscribed as Other in the sense that it disrupts the postcolonial economy of nation building. As one reads the novel, there is an inevitable impression that Eppel sides with the 'sacred' and invites the reader to witness the pollution emanating from the negative space and invading the positive space. The first manifestation of this invasion occurs when

Nightingale Macimbi, one of the *Ubungane* group, discovers a parcel containing the dead body of a baby, already alluded to. In the passage describing Nightingale's discovery, there is a sense that the discovery is equated with the loss of innocence:

> Inside this hollow Nightingale was surprised to see a parcel wrapped in newspaper and tied up in a plastic bag. She heard her brother shout "Coming!". The marula - sorry - the *Sclerocaria birrea*, was dense with foliage at that time of the year so Nightingale felt well hidden from her brother. She decided to help pass the timer by opening the strange parcel in the hollow of the tree. It was with some difficulty that she undid the knot in the handles of the plastic bag. She had to use her teeth. She was surprised at how heavy it was. Treasure, she thought with a skipping heart; stolen goods, more likely. Carefully she took the parcel out of the plastic bag and then proceeded to unwrap it.
>
> By the time Washington and the others had found her, she had screamed herself into silence. (36)

Eppel's inscription of this invasion into the children's universe, as captured in the above passage, underscores the corruption that invades the national space, striking as it does in this instance the most vulnerable members of the society. In this context, the final part of the story of Tom Thumb, withheld by Elizabeth, is of significance. 'Tom is killed by the poisonous breath of a spider' (36). The parallel of this conclusion of the story with the invasion of pollution can be seen in the death which the discovery of the parcel both embodies and brings into the world. The story of Isaac's sacrifice, which Elizabeth tells the children in the same scene, offers a different perspective on the narrative as it suggests that an alternative to death is possible.

Two other incidents concerning the dumping of dead bodies emphasize the shock that accompanies the discoveries and reveal the extent to which corruption has eroded the fabric of society. When another dead baby is discovered in a dustbin outside the Prince

Charming High School girls' toilets, police investigations reveal that fourteen other girls 'were either pregnant or had recently given birth' (20). As in the case of the incident involving Nightingale Macimbi, with the discovery of the dead baby's body in the school premises, the narrator locates the invasion of death at the heart of what should be regarded as a citadel of learning and culture, as well as of innocence. In this way the presence of dead bodies on the school premises also becomes a metaphor for the moral corruption that plagues the postcolonial nation.

In this regard, it can be argued that the schools are used as cameos of negativity which undermine the regeneration motif. All four schools referred to in the novel serve to illustrate that there is something 'rotten' in the nation-state of Zimbabwe. While Prince Charming is notorious for the high number of pregnant girls, another school, Kipling Primary, is depicted as a den of corruption. The reader learns that one of the teachers, Comrade Iyapipi, 'regarded fornication with his pupils as a perk and not as rape' (33). The headmaster too is found wanting; he is presented as incompetent and too politically oriented for the good of the school: 'The headmaster, Comrade Clever Ruforwokuda-Jones BA, was too busy with a Marxist-Leninist inspired project to convert the decadent colonial cricket, rugby, and hockey fields to maize... . Most of the labour was performed by the children. The headmaster called it Education with Production. The first few seasons were good' (34). But beneath the political face the headmaster wears is a corrupt individual, as indicated in the following passage which highlights his propensity to appropriate school property and pupils:

> Kipling Primary had bumper crops of maize. One or two ears went to the kitchen, one or two were stolen by boarders; the rest were appropriated by the headmaster and the school bursar who had been appointed on the recommendation of the headmaster and who was his cousin's aunt's nephew's sister. She was also his mistress during school hours. With the sale of these mealies combined with the school's General Purpose fees and the salaries of three non-existent teachers, Comrade Ruforwokuda-Jones was able to purchase a small farm on the outskirts of Bulawayo where he raised cattle, goats, pigs, and chickens. So you see, the headmaster of Kipling Primary was much too busy to bother himself with piffling rumours about teachers 'doing it' with pupils on the school premises. In any case, the conditions of service for teachers were so abysmal, why shouldn't they be allowed the odd perk? (34 - 35)

Cast in this light, the school appears to be the institution that corrupts or pollutes the innocence of youths instead of relaying the new moral ethos that, the novel posits, is so needed by the nation for its survival.

Black Rhino High, the school attended by Elizabeth and Jet, two of the 'sacred' ones in the novel, is depicted as a metaphor for retrograde conservatism. The narrator describes it as 'a school which would ensure that the high standards of Rhodesian education - the highest in Africa, if not in the entire world - would be maintained' (9). This aim appears inconsistent with the general thrust of the novel. The conservatism of the school is also evident in the way Matilda Bauls, the wife of a school Board member, designed the school badge to reflect an association with Christianity and the Boer republic of the Orange Free State:

> Matilda gave out publicly that the colours had no symbolic value, but privately - only to her closest friends, mind you - would she confess that the red was the Blood of Christ, and that the orange, her favourite colour and her favourite fruit, was her homage to the place of her birth: Bethlehem in the Orange Free State of South Africa (10).

Perhaps more than these symbols, it is the way Black Rhino functions as a site where outward righteousness contrasts with inner corruption that is most significant. The description of the activities of the school's sponsors - some of them are identified in the novel as 'sleeping partners' of Sobantu 'The Butcher' Ikherothi's crime syndicate - and the close link the school maintains with the notorious Blood of Jesus Temple - provide another window for the reader to glance at the corruption the school embodies. Thus, through Black Rhino, education *per se* is exposed in Eppel's text as an evil legacy of the past.

A negative portrayal of a fourth school, Imfukumfuku School, is provided through the depiction of the parents of the pupils attending that school. Through the following extract, in which the mothers of the pupils discuss their domestic servants, the reader is made aware that it is not only the school that fails its youths but that parents, too, perpetuate a mindset that militates against a sound future for all. Although there is no suggestion of a racial divide in the narrative as a whole - for the satirical thrust indicts both black and white - it is of interest that the authorial stance in the discussion of servants implicitly evokes the settler motif seen in *The Great North Road*.

> "You simply can't trust them anymore."
> "They're all thieves."
> "Can't resist my sugar."
> "Neglect their children."
> "Thinks I don t know she uses the phone when I'm out of the house."
> "I won't have her bringing boy friends onto my property."
> "Breed like flies."
> "No wonder there's so much AIDS around." (94)

Some of these stereotypes of the African were discussed in Chapters Two and Three, in the discussions of *The Great North Road* and *Nehanda*. It was noted then that they

constitute part of the settler discourse that inscribes the native as the dirty and animal-like Other. It suffices to add that the AIDS stereotype is a fairly new addition. Judith Laurence Pastore (1993), in an essay on the representations of AIDS in literary and non-literary discourse, observes that in America both discourses reinforce existing stereotypes about the blacks. Her view that such 'reductive characterizations only reinforce existing stereotypes which dominate our racist society' (1993:29), is also relevant in the context of *Hatchings*. For Eppel, the evil that characterizes the Zimbabwean postcolonial society of the novel also lies in the perpetuation of these racist prejudices and stereotypes. This evil is foregrounded here by contrast with Elizabeth's positive capability to establish contacts with the other groups.

Through a description of the fathers of the children attending the school, Eppel offers an evocative portrayal of Zimbabwe as a den of corruption:

> ...the husbands of these young women who had far too much money to spend on their children and themselves, were.... talking about money-related matters like their latest vehicles, house-boats, and farms. Not only were these young men Company Secretaries, Finance Managers, and Chief Accountants - they were also farmers, safari-owners, and stock-brokers. Now in their middle and late twenties, despite the fact that they were enthusiastic joggers ... they were showing signs of going to seed. Bellies were beginning to bulge over the top of their Ted Lapidus trousers, hair was thinning on the crowns of their heads, dewlaps were slowly swinging after receding chins. It's not only your sperm that suffers when you make lots of money. (95)

These characters are depicted as figures who move rather fast toward decrepitude (physical and sexual) despite their relatively young age. The paradox implicit in this description points to their association with a space of destruction. Consider also the following passage:

> These chaps are not in the same league as the Boxer Cocks of this world, you understand, and absolute peanuts compared to multi-millionaires like Craig Wick, Strontium Twot, and Sudbury Bauls; but the time is on their side, and if you are that desperate to make a lot of money, you'll make it. And they are, so they will'. (95-96).

Snobbish and empty-headed, these 'young nouveau riche of Bulawayo' (96), predisposed as they are to do anything to make a quick fortune, constitute part of the clientele of Sobantu 'The Butcher' Ikherothi's syndicate. The irony is not lost on the reader that they are guests at the Old Year's party thrown by the Cocks, which suggests an association with the old and obsolete order that the narrative attempts to erase. What the text also seems to point to is that with such members there is sadly a future for corruption, greed and violence in the national space.

Thus there is a clear relation between dead bodies, the physical locality of the school, predatory teachers, dishonest mothers, corrupt fathers and the imagining the nation in *Hatchings*. Dead bodies symbolize the corruption at the heart of the Zimbabwean society. An explanation of why schools are chosen as dumping places is contained in Sobantu 'The Butcher' Ikherothi's threatening reminder to Gimnogene Pigge, at the New Year's party at Ingeborg Ficker's house, after the operative had failed to deliver properly:

> "It's too bloody late for you to do anything about that one. Just be more careful in future. You know, I've got a lot of shareholders to satisfy; I can't afford to close this business down. I've told you before, if you can't get rid of them entirely, dump them in public places - school dustbins, municipal lavatories, factory sites, not, for shit's sake, private gardens, especially when the owner turns out to be some fucking do-gooder." (46)

So the school is chosen as a dumping ground because it is a public place and institution. But, as has also been seen, this is not the only reason. It represents the corruption that pervades all aspects of life in Zimbabwe. The promiscuity, inhumanity, the teachers' predation, the mothers' dishonesty and the fathers' corruption conjoin to reinforce the image of Zimbabwe as a nation in need of moral salvation, so much so that its very foundations (the family and the school) are presented as reeking of decadence.

There is clearly a satirical parallel between Eppel's deconstruction of education in post-independence Zimbabwe, as revealed by the foregoing discussion, and the pre-independence Rhodesian working-class of *The Great North Road*. Just as The Umdidi working-class community with its entrenched racist practices is the epitome of the Rhodesian settler society, so the school (with its corrupt headmaster and teachers) is shown in *Hatchings* as a symbol of a corrupt postcolonial society. Both Umdidi and the school thus function as sites of moral degradation. In both cases, Eppel has focused on these two sections of the Zimbabwean society to explore factors in national culture that destroy the fabric of national life.

Thus far the negative space has been discussed in relation to its main activity, namely the dumping of dead babies in places of national importance. In a sense, the novel is dominated by the account of this deplorable business. The chapter now turns its attention to the characters associated with this space, before it explores how the crucial link between the diasporic community and the syndicate enables Eppel to destabilize the notion of the 'borderzone' as a site of cultural encounters which leads to the emergence of a new national culture. To this end, it is appropriate to start with the most prominent

occupant of this space and member of the diasporic community. The following passage, which introduces Sobantu 'The Butcher' Ikherothi and reveals both the man and the nature of the activities of his syndicate, is quoted in full :

> Ingeborg's current lover was a black South African refugee called Sobantu 'The Butcher' Ikherothi. He was a supporter of the Jogskyites, and he claimed to have coined the slogan (which the PAC appropriated): "One settler, one bullet". He made a good living smuggling mandrax into Zimbabwe, and smuggling emeralds out of Zimbabwe. But his most lucrative venture, avidly supported by Ms Ficker because of its high moral content, was the disposing of unwanted babies for thousands upon thousands of mothers in southern Africa. He'd started off modestly enough, operating in one or two of the smaller Zimbabwean towns like Gwanda and Chegutu but demand for his services grew like wildfire and he expanded rapidly. He now controlled a network of operations that was vast and that earned very good money for a number of people in very different walks of life. He'd even considered forming a company, as a front, and then floating it on the Zimbabwean stock exchange, but one of his 'sleeping' partners, a man called Sudbury Bauls, had dissuaded him. Too risky, he'd said.
>
> It had been through his smuggling ventures that Sobantu had discovered this inexhaustible demand for the disposing, dumping, it was sometimes called, of unwanted babies. Most of the girls and young women involved were poor but they were prepared to pay almost anything - in cash and in kind - for the service which Sobantu offered: to relieve them of the responsibility of having to abandon their babies. He had what he called scouts posted near schools, colleges, universities, markets, nunneries... wherever girls and young women were to be found in large numbers, all over Southern Africa, but concentrated in Zimbabwe. These scouts found out which of the girls had unwanted pregnancies, when they were due to give birth, where they would be giving birth, how much they could afford to pay, and then arranged to dispose of their babies, discreetly and efficiently. Although this venture made a lot of money for Sobantu and his partners, sleeping or awake, they liked to think of it as a service and not as a business. Unfortunately, the larger the venture grew, the less discreet and efficient became the disposals, and babies were being discovered in dustbins, in river beds, and in hollow trees. Luckily for the mothers, however, police men and women tended to be most reluctant to pursue cases of baby-dumping for fear that they might uncover their own or their superiors' babies! (38-39)

This passage raises a number of issues which converge, directing attention to the decaying character of Zimbabwe's post-colonial society. It reveals that there is a political dimension to Sobantu Ikherothi's activities, as suggested by his membership of an anarchistic ('Jogskyite') movement and his supposed coining of the slogan 'One settler, one bullet'. It is ironical that his syndicate enjoys the service of prominent members of the settler group, ranging from radical leftists like his girlfriend Ingeborg Ficker to bourgeois capitalists like the 'sleeping' partner who advised him against floating one of his companies on the stock exchange. The passage also points to drug smuggling as one of the syndicate's main activities, thus suggesting the extent of the physical and mental pains it inflicts on the Zimbabwean people. On the question of dumping sites, the above passage reinforces the view expressed earlier that the location of the sites is meant to underscore the national dimension of corruption which is symbolized by the syndicate's baby dumping business.

Sobantu 'The Butcher' Ikherothi's warning to Gimmogene Pigge, considered earlier, reveals the strategies of his crime syndicate and the extent to which corruption is widespread in the national space. First, dumping what he calls consignments in the public places, he claims, will make it difficult for the police to trace those who are responsible and, therefore, in his view, will hamper any pursuits, although the police force, which includes many of his clients, would turn a blind eye to such discoveries. Also implicit in his reminder is the assurance that dumping at those sites would not cause exaggerated reactions, as most sectors of the society use his services. There is in his words a suggestion that certain members of the society, the 'some fucking do-gooders', are not

dependent on his syndicate. This is another indication that the society is divided between 'the sacred' and 'the profane'.

Perhaps most significant in this passage is the suggestion that the syndicate's activities are facilitated by the willingness of the larger population to use its services, which, in turn, reinforces the view that the nation is rotten from the inside. Another significant element in this passage concerns the complicity of police officers, suggesting official sanction of corruption, and influential members of society, referred to as 'sleeping partners. Precisely, on the question of partners of the crime syndicate, it is clear that they coexist with the inner circle (consisting mainly of operatives) as the main force behind the syndicate's activities. What can be seen in the underworld ruled by Sobantu 'The Butcher' Ikherothi is its power to wreak havoc on the nation. Indeed, one can evaluate the power of this mafia-style underworld through the way he controls political and economic power. He holds in his power most of the influential members of the community. These people are his 'sleeping partners'. They appear loyal in their submission to his crime syndicate. So do the operatives who must show loyalty, must constantly be on the alert and must deliver, as the warning given to Gimnogene Pigge and referred to above shows. The alternative is to incur Sobantu's displeasure and to risk death. For he has the power to slaughter those who are ineffective.

The syndicate's most important 'sleeping partners' have gathered at Strontium Twot's New Year's party, already alluded to a number of times. At the Twot's house gather the rich and the famous in the city: The guests include

> city's businessmen, commercial farmers, successful criminals, and senior civil servants. At least one of the guests, a token black, Strontium's response to the President's call for reconciliation, was not only a businessman but a commercial farmer, a successful criminal, and a civil servant as well. (22-23)

Sudbury Bauls and Craig Wick, for example, two of the richest men in this gathering, are identified as two of the syndicate's prominent shareholders. But a consideration of how they made their wealth is telling, in terms of Eppel's pointed satire which portrays those men as the 'big pricks' of society (to use Eppel's own less than subtle choice of terminology):

> Mr Bauls's second biggest money spinner had nothing to do with farming. It was more of a charitable pursuit, Sudbury liked to think. He never talked about it with anyone except those who were directly involved with him. Even with these people he forbade the term "baby dumping". For fuck's sake, he had three children of his own. He doted on them, young Lace in particular. No, he liked to call it "helping out unmarried mothers," even though more than half the mothers he and his colleagues "helped" were actually married.
>
> Hard to tell with these people, who's married and who isn't. Deep down Sudbury knew that this was a dirty business he was involved in, so he kept his distance from it, invested in it as a "sleeping" partner. In any case the profits that poured in were used mainly in philanthropic pursuits like the creation of Black Rhino High, the commissioning of the twice life-size statue of Moral McBraggert outside the Blood of Jesus Temple, and the building of a new rugby stadium for the edification of all true Matabeles. So, what the hell!
>
> Both Craig Wick and Sudbury Bauls had had, and were still having extensive dealings with Sobantu 'The Butcher' Ikherothi; each knew something of the other's involvement - Craig with emeralds, Sudbury with unwanted babies - but as they were both Pawpaw Old Boys (both had excelled in rugby, water polo, bullying, and the sciences), they felt bound by a code of honour, a kind of latter-day virtue, to pretend that they knew nothing of each other's involvement; so there was a tacit understanding between them not to mention their mutual partner. (67-68)

As clearly indicated in the above extract, through its associates' involvement in philanthropic activities, the crime syndicate reaches all sectors of society, including the church. Moreover, the reader is also made aware of the pervasive nature of the corruption embodied by the crime syndicate as, in addition to the baby dumping activities, various other corrupt practices are reported to be at the origins of other wealthy Bulawayo residents' fortunes. The passage below focuses on the way another group of guests at the Twots party made their fortune:

> Boxer Cock and all the younger businessmen at the party, had become rich, and thereby Bulawayo's cultural elite... as a direct result of Zimbabwe's Independence.... In ten years they had grown from travelling salesmen... apprentice plumbers, primary school teachers and post office clerks to Managing Directors who owned businesses, farms, and pretty but unintelligent wives. How did they achieve this, these (in normal circumstances) oafs? Simple: they had stayed on in Zimbabwe while the majority of their white comrades had fled, taken the gap, to other countries where people talked English, played rugby, and enjoyed barbecues. This mass exodus of people with established skills and years of experience, provided wonderful opportunities for unskilled inexperienced men who could be trusted with the petty cash (this ruled out the "blacks"), if not their bosses' womenfolk, to rise rapidly in the worlds of commerce and industry. (63)

The reader gains further insights into the corrupt practices of this group of erstwhile 'Rhodies' in the story of how Boxer Cock rose from being a representative for a furniture company to a wealthy man. By buying furniture at low prices from his fleeing compatriots and the widows, the sick and the poor who stayed in the country, he built himself a considerable fortune. Two of his victims are a coloured couple, the Reebocks, who now live at Cornwall Crescent, an undesirable, multicultural suburban address.

The portrayal of Moral MacBraggert as equally corrupt, despite being a church leader, and his Blood of Jesus Temple as a site of corruption and a bastion of conservatism in Zimbabwe, is a further instrument in Eppel's construction of the corrupt community of the nation. Under the facade of religion, the church operates as a business venture. In *The Great North Road*, where Moral MacBraggert and his church are introduced for the first time to Eppel's readers, he is seen as using tricks, blackmail and his eloquence to persuade disillusioned 'Rhodies' to join his church. In *Hatchings*, the church is described as having conservative political as well as capitalist leanings. It is right-wing, with an exclusively white congregation, materialistic, and modelled on the most conservative American churches. The congregation consisted of

> white Rhodesians who, after losing the war of liberation, after witnessing their beloved Rhodesia become dreaded Zimbabwe, had turned for solace to the church - not those commie bastards like the Catholics or the Methodists who had supported the fuckin' terrs, and the poor, and the humble, and all that shit - but the right-wing, violently anti-communist, pro-capitalist, American churches like the Brotherhood of Christ, and holy Roller Rhapsody, and the Blood of Jesus, who preached the doctrine of material prosperity, and reminded their frothing congregations that it was Jesus himself who said: "The poor will always be with us". The preachers at these churches weren't over-educated nerds, f'ck'n homos, kaffir *boeties* ... they were men; they held their heads high. (12- 13)

It therefore comes as no surprise to the reader that at Strontium Twot's party 'the adornment of the party was Brother Moral MacBraggert of the Blood of Jesus Temple where most of these people worshipped, threw fits, spoke in tongues and publicly confessed their sins. Brother MacBraggert's Gospel of Prosperity was of great comfort to them' (23). It is also no surprise that on serious theological issues Brother MacBraggert should prove incompetent and unhelpful, as when Elizabeth asked him about contradictions in Jesus's Word that her teacher Boland Lipp and her friend Jet Bunion had

pointed out to her, such as his call to his disciples to leave their parents and follow him, which contradicts his commandment that one must honour and obey one's parents. Characteristically, Brother MacBraggert's response was to say that 'the Truth of God would not reveal itself to over-educated homosexuals with communist leanings like our friend Mr Lipp, nor to upstarts too clever for their own good like our young friend Jet Bunion' (51). In a subtle innuendo, the text reveals that Elizabeth was only partly convinced, wondering 'Surely the Bible must speak to the unconverted?' (51). There is a parallel between Moral MacBraggert and Sobantu Ikherothi in regard to the hold they have on their followers. Eppel portrays MacBraggert's congregation as loyal if naive. These followers would do anything to please their spiritual leader for, in their eyes, he stands as go-between between God and material possessions. Their religion (' a Gospel of Prosperity' (33)) is more akin to a materialist and supremacist culture than to faith for, as the above passage clearly indicates, they worship a God who provides them with wealth, not One who expects them to love their brothers. Thus, by casting The Blood of Jesus Temple in the role of spiritual refuge for the rich and corrupt, Eppel has created another symbol that allows him to highlight the tension between the two halves of the nation.

The social representation of the nation replicated in the crime syndicate's inner circle is interesting in the way it represents racial and ethnic groups which come from all walks of life in the Zimbabwean society. Ingeborg Ficker, Sobantu 'The Butcher' Ikherothi's current lover and closest ally, is, as already said, a leftist and a white artist. Her leftist tendency is evident in the choice of her guests at the party at her farm: 'Ex-pat aid workers, South African refugees, ex-dissidents, rogue politicians, homosexuals, dope addicts, actors, serial killers, and writers' (23). The narrator reveals, somewhat satirically, that Ingeborg 'was one of the few, the very few, native born Zimbabweans who had not been corrupted

by colonialism... she despised everything Rhodesian. Her parents, by Rhodesian standards, had been liberal' (38). She pushes her sense of radicalism to the point that she even allows her labourers to have sexual intercourse with her, just to show that they are equal to her. Like the two Prince Charming High expatriate teachers, Simon and Nicholas, she believes that involvement in the baby dumping business is both a moral and a political statement. Ravi Chunder, another member of this inner circle, 'was a Zimbabwean of Indian descent', 'a full time poet' and 'dependent on his friends for dagga, food and shelter' (41). Jealous Umbankwa, another operative, is described in a passage that is chilling in its suggestion of the analogy between his previous occupations and the business of the syndicate: 'The line he used to sell his carvings - and it was the truth - was that this same knife he now used to carve his Mother and Child studies... he had also used to kill a number of real mothers and real children' (41).

It is telling that the crime syndicate is presented as the offspring of a South African refugee and that some of its main operatives and sympathizers are immigrants who have joined forces with a section of the local population from the public and business sectors as well as from the Church. Indeed, in addition to Sobantu 'The Butcher' Ikherothi, the immigrant community also includes the two Prince Charming High expatriate teachers, Nicholas and Simon, mentioned earlier, and a host of researchers: the two researchers attached to the University of Zimbabwe, the Canadian Fark Ruckles and his Dutch girlfriend Doss; an Irish drama teacher and PhD student from Trinity College, Dublin, called Kathleen O'Toole-bag; Scottish researcher Litotes; and Afghan, an Australian PhD student. With the inclusion in the text of these immigrant intellectuals, Eppel seems to have constructed Zimbabwe in the image of the modern nation expounded on by such celebrated postcolonial theorists

as Homi Bhabha, Salman Rushdie, Edward Said and Stuart Hall, to name a few, without necessarily subscribing to all its characteristics. For the migration inscribed in the novel is from the so-called First World countries to the Third World, from the former imperial centre and other postcolonial societies to the postcolonial African nation-state of Zimbabwe. (The emphasis is important because, as implied in the narrative, there is a racial dimension to the migration.) Although the border zone the novel depicts is certainly a space of encounter between different cultures, it is clear from the text that the characters involved in this encounter represent the worst of their communities of origin so that the end result of this confluence of 'cultures', sanctioned as it is in this text by the apparent blurring of boundaries between the immigrant and the local community which is involved in the crime syndicate's activities, becomes the antithesis of the cultural hybridity which, as Bhabha and others posit, takes life at 'the borderline community of migration'. If, as Gerald R MacMaster (1995:80) states, 'the border zone spatializes cultural possibilities,' then it becomes clear that in this novel Eppel implies that no such possibilities exist or, if they do, then they are not of the positive type.

The novel can be read as suggesting that Eppel disrupts Bhabha's optimistic theorizing of the positive contribution of the immigrant community to the creation of a modern nation; this can be seen via a consideration of the ways in which some of the immigrant characters, to the exclusion of Ikherothi already discussed, are described and their credentials reported. The two Prince Charming High School expatriate teachers, Simon and Nicolas, make it a duty to convert such subjects such as history and English into leftist propaganda instead of teaching the subject that each of them was supposed to teach - that is, English for Simon, and History for Nicholas. As the narrator puts it, 'they both saw this

compartmentalizing of subjects as a load of bourgeois crap, as part of an overall strategy to keep a corrupt establishment of Anglican sodomites in power. So they taught politics. They were both paid up members of an ultra-left wing breakaway group called Gallopskytes. They had broken up from the Trotskytes who, they claimed, were not moving quickly enough in the direction of world revolution' (19-20).

Tellingly, their contribution to world revolution consists in serving Sobantu 'The Butcher' Ikherothi's crime syndicate in 'get(ing) rid of unwanted babies' (54). The reader is given access to the two men's thinking through the narrator's comment that:

> It was part of their contribution towards the rehabilitation of a country that had been corrupted and almost destroyed by colonialism, racialism, and imperialism. They wanted no money for their assistance. The occasional screw, perhaps - yes - but for Chris' sake no money. It was Sobantu 'The Butcher' Ikherothi who wanted money. He had shareholders to satisfy. Simon and Nicholas were just middle men, motivated by morality not filthy lucre'. (54)

The sarcasm of the above passage, captured in the words 'motivated by morality', forces the reader to take stock of the nature of the corruption that the two men's vision of the world revolution implies. By foregrounding the implication of this leftist politics for the country, Eppel deliberately undermines the idea that all imports from abroad are good for the nation.

Much as Simon and Nicholas's usefulness in promoting progress and development in Zimbabwe is questioned, so the research conducted by the foreign researchers is sarcastically reported. Fark's and Doss's research topics, in Sociology and Psychology, are '*The Ramifications of Steatopygia in Unmarried Women Aged between Thirteen and*

Seventeen along the Confluence of the Nuanetsi and Save Rivers' and *'The Psychological Ramifications of Steatopygia in Unmarried Women Aged between Thirteen and Seventeen along the Confluence of the Nuanetsi and Save Rivers*' (42), respectively. The narrator goes on to inform the reader that many institutions, including the University of Zimbabwe, were interested in the research but in particular that the researchers 'were sponsored by no less than seventeen aid organizations throughout the world: fifteen from Canada, one from Holland, and one from Sweden' (43). Similarly, Kathleen O'Toole-bag (a name resonant with negative connotations), 'who was making a study of 'township' drama in Bulawayo's high density suburbs' (43), is said to have 'gained a good deal of credibility from the local people because of her vociferous stand against the corrupting influence on African culture of decadent, reactionary, colonial art' (43). The sarcasm of the quoted passage is not wasted on the reader who knows about her plagiarism of Irish plays as well as her intimate relationship with Skies Izindebe, the corrupt chairman of the Bulawayo's Writers' Union. Litotes's and Afghan's studies, on 'the role of the nostrils in the transition from puberty to adulthood in left-handed Zimbabweans' (73) and 'the correlation between intelligence and penis-size in bilharzia infected men who lived within a ten kilometre radius of the Mzinguane Dam' (74), respectively, also serve to illustrate the point made in this chapter that Eppel pokes fun at the contribution of immigrant intellectuals to the re-vitalization of the Zimbabwean national culture.

Mayfair Met-Hui Yang (1996:231), in an essay that touches on the distinction between exile, immigrant and anthropologist/scholar, writes:

> Both exile and immigrant are in turn differentiated from the colonialist and anthropologist who "apprehend the new culture, not as a field of subjectivity, but rather as an object of/for their gaze".... Whereas the exile and immigrant must confront the issue of "a rupture between and re-suturing of individual and collective subjectivities", the colonialist and anthropologist are not troubled with a profound realignment or threat to subjectivity.... The anthropologist must seek to become not only like the exile who gains a certain perspective on his or her own culture while residing in another culture... , but especially like an immigrant who starts to absorb a new subjectivity, interprets the world from its standpoints, and acts upon its historical concerns as if she were a member of that culture.

What is instructive from Yang's analysis is the insight that the migrant characters in this text act from subject positions which cannot lead to the development of a refined national culture and which have ambivalent connections with Zimbabwe. That these characters can be identified with anthropologists is clear from their obsession with the native. As has been seen, Simon and Nicolas are physically attracted to female natives. Kathleen O'Toole-bag has a native boyfriend. All the thesis titles mentioned above reflect a preoccupation with natives' sexuality so that it is not just the case of 'the native in the non-Western world [being] used by the West to promote and develop its own intellectual contours' (Rey Chow, 1994:132) which Eppel exposes through his inscription of this migrant community. His focusing on the relationship between these intellectual migrants and the natives also provides a useful illustration of how 'the "pornographic" image of the native' (Chow, 1994:132), is constructed in Western discourse. In Chow's analysis, this image is closely linked to the issue of displacement and is co-terminous with what he calls 'more *general* questions of exploitation, resistance, and survival by using the historical experience of the "native" as its shifting ground' (143). The mention in the text of the generous financial assistance allocated to these projects indicates that Eppel considers as problematic the willingness of Western governments and aid organizations to fund such projects, which at

the end not only perpetuates an obsolete image of the African and encourages the exploitation of the African continent but also guarantees the survival of those doing 'research' in the field. In an aside in the text, the narrator informs the reader that he had heard that Fark Ruckles transfers research money to his private bank account. Thus the passages examined above emerge as critical of the discourses of assistance to development which are vehicled by developed countries and aid institutions from those countries. The alert reader would also see in the above passages the terms of Eppel's subversion of the so-called Third-Worldism of leftist political and educational institutions from the West. It is of significance that the novel does not inscribe the foreign contingent as a positive community. Instead, it establishes its members as belonging to a subterranean culture.

In *Hatchings* border crossing has a dual function. While the initial border crossing is evoked as detrimental to the nation because it has brought into the country the seeds of corruption, the re-crossing is figured as deliverance. When, at the close, the situation gets out of hand, Eppel voices his critique of those earlier immigrants who later leave Zimbabwe after it becomes clear that they cannot prosper further under the new dispensation. Corrupt church leader Moral MacBraggert and Sobantu 'The Butcher' Ikherothi are among the first to leave. Sensing that things are turning to the disadvantage of people of his kind, the church leader decides to leave his congregation and the country, not before an emotional church service is organized during which the congregation 'prayed for the families of businessmen, commercial farmers, successful criminals, and senior civil servants...in short they prayed for themselves. Well why not? Wouldn't you if you felt that your world was falling apart, for the second time in a little over ten years? I mean, be

reasonable!' (111). This is a further indication of the coming of a new, moral order, which is the central message of the novel.

The passage describing the re-crossing of the border for these characters is sinister in its suggestion that their criminal activities are now exported to other countries. 'Sobantu has returned to his homeland to take his rightful place in the negotiations for a new political order in South Africa' (108). Gymogene Pigge crosses the border into Zambia. Such displacements, the text implies, are painlessly made, thus further stressing the rootlessness of those involved, as revealed by the following passage that tells - in biting satire - about the destinations of other members of the immigrant community:

> Simon and Nicolas are on their way to Namibia, someone told me, there to vilify the boers, screw the hottentots, and bolster the fledgling Gallopskyte party which has opened an office in downtown Swakopmund. Apparently, Fark and Doss and Afghan and Litotes have found research posts at the University of Bophutatswana where they could spend the next decades writing their PhD theses. Aid money from Canada and Sweden is still available to them. As long as your research is relevant - and theirs is - and in the interest of human welfare - and theirs is, by God - the precious foreign money will keep pouring in. (108)

In the sense suggested in the passage above, the novel explores the role of both academic institutions and Western aid agencies in the displacement of people, and also the nature of the moral, political and academic aspirations which take the immigrant academics and aid workers to Third World nations. Behind them the immigrants leave a country where they were able to amass wealth or to experiment with their ideological political views. It is perhaps not too much to say that Eppel critiques the kind of immigration discussed above. It may seem ironical that these characters are portrayed exactly in the way immigrants were figured in last century's Argentine anthropological

discourse, studied by Julio Ramos. In such a discourse, Ramos (1994:37) writes, 'immigrants were figuratively a virus which infected the body of the nation...'. This is precisely the image that Eppel appears to have conveyed in this text that links immigration with criminality, in a comparable manner with the texts analyzed by Ramos.

Thus, the first part of this chapter has brought to light the tension between two halves of the nation: one that is thoroughly corrupt and strives to spread its tentacles over the whole; and another, that the narrator encourages his reader to see as holding the hopes of regeneration. The second part, below, focuses on two poems from *Sonata for Matabeleland* two poems to examine how they complement *Hatchings*.

PART TWO

In his poem 'Waiting for the bus', Eppel returns to the theme of displacement by employing the image of commuters waiting for the bus and travellers in a jet to symbolize the division of the nation between unscrupulous rich people and the underclasses. The poem's overt message is the lamenting of the decline in living standards through the recounting of what might appear as an ordinary incident: the waiting for the bus. Beyond the recounting of the incident it is the collective experience of a nation that the poet exposes to the reader. Stanza 1 stresses the nature of the men's ordeal in temporal and geographical terms:

> All along the road from Bulawayo
> to Gwanda or Matopos or Vic Falls;
> at bus-stops, lay-bys, under shadeless trees,
> the people wait beside their bundled things.
> All day long they wait, and sometimes all night
> too, and the next day - anxiously waiting.

Geographically, the waiting is presented as involving people in different parts of the country. In other words, it is presented as a national experience. The repetition of the term 'people' throughout the poem reinforces this notion. The waiting is also presented as an endless experience, as the temporal signpost words 'all day long', 'sometimes all night', 'and the next day', indicate. The emotive thrust is underlined in the waiting which is compounded as both physical and psychological burden, as can be seen in the following extract.

> Waiting for the public transport to stop
> and let them in and take them home. Waiting
> with babies to nurse, children to comfort
> and feed, chickens, the occasional goat.
> they have learned to come prepared, with blankets,
> izinduku, pots for cooking sadza.

So Stanza 2 dramatizes the human side of the men's experience. It is not just the adults who undergo the ordeal. Babies and children are also involved. The reader is made to feel shocked at learning about their predicament. Bus stops are transformed into permanent dwelling places for the multitudes - and also for animals - who wait desperately for the buses to take them to various destinations.

> Waiting for ZUPCO or SHU-SHINE, AJAY,
> to get them to their Uncle's funeral,
> their cousin's wedding, their baby brother's
> baptism. Watching the new Camper Vans
> cruising by. Anxious not to lose their jobs. Waiting.
>
> They take their time now not by wrist-watches
> but by the sun and the stars and the moon;
> by the appearance of mopani worms;
> by the ripening of marula fruit;
> by the coming of the rains. Not by bus
> timetables but by birth, marriage, and death.

The motives for travelling, mentioned in Stanza 4, reinforce the anxiety associated with the waiting. The sheer inhumanity of waiting has caused the people to relapse into traditional modes of telling the time. In Stanzas 5 and 6 the hardship of the commuters is contrasted with the more luxurious and modern mode of existence and means of transport of those travelling in the jets.

> And while they wait they count the jets that fly
> to Harare and Johannesburg.
> Liverish businessmen sucking whiskies
> are in these jets. And Chefs with mistresses
> wearing the latest digital watches.
> Digital dolly-birds. All carry brief-
>
> cases with combination locks, and next
> to nothing inside: dark glasses, perhaps;
> and a newspaper to study the Stock
> Exchange; something digital, perhaps, for
> calculating profit and ... more profit.
> It's something for the people to do while
>
> they wait - counting the jets high overhead.
> Often the vapour trails are the only
> clouds in the sky. No Forex for buses,
> they tell us, but the five-star hotels go
> up, and another Boeing is purchased.
> All day they wait; all night; long-suffering.

The strategy of the speaker in the above stanzas is to show how, metaphorically and socially, jet travellers are above the commuters.

> And when, at last, a bus does stop, its tyres
> are likely to be bald, its brakes likely
> to be held together with wire, its body
> battered, belching clouds of brain-tightening,
> lung-collapsing smoke. Who's responsible?
> Not me, says the Chef dipping his fingers

in his girl-friend's cocktail, shifting his vast
belly, vast enough to accommodate
at least seven baby goats. Don't look at
me, says the Managing Director, my
bottom line is profit. I owe it to
the shareholders. Another whisky, please

And don't think it's going to be any
different tomorrow or the next day
or the next. The time of sweet-becoming
is over. For those millions who depend
on buses, nothing has changed; only their
expectations have once again been dashed.

The time of bitter arrival is here:
not safe new buses, but the amassing
of personal wealth, the cultivation
of another crop of heroes. Street
names change, statues change; hotels go up, jets
go up, and the people go on waiting.

It is clear that in this poem the speaker situates himself on the side of the commuters waiting for the bus, presented as the marginalized, and against the travellers in the jet, cast as uncaring and too much concerned with profit. The poet is virulent in his attack against the hypocrisy and irresponsibility of the 'comprador bourgeoisie' as he analyzes the politics behind management of public institutions in his country. Such politics is depicted as careless towards the general population in its insistence on profit. The poem concludes with statements about the difficulties that lie ahead, as a result of the unjust social system that prevails in the country. Thus, In 'Waiting for the bus', Eppel brings to the fore the theme of disillusionment with the postcolonial situation in Zimbabwe while, at the same time, offers an eminently plausible representation of the postcolonial nation.

In terms of Benedict Anderson's concept of the nation as an imagined community, this poem identifies the nation as travellers. Two groups of travellers representing two sections of the nation are highlighted in the poem: the common people who suffer the vicissitudes of the postcolonial situation and the scandalously rich. The contrast in social fortunes between the two groups is inscribed not only through an evocation of the means of transport they use but also through an imagined geography, in which those in the jet are represented as occupying a space above that of the commuters waiting for the bus. The space occupied by the jet travellers is figured as a dream world that the commuters can never reach. But at the same time, the text seems to suggest that, because of the association with profit, the jet travellers occupy the position of exploiters of the nation, comparable to the disposers of babies in *Hatchings*. Their journey to financial centres outside the country, where they pursue profit and enjoy themselves, underlies their dis-identification with the rest of the nation.

The poem 'Laws that lie with folded claws'provides a further indication of the poet's polarized representation of the postcolonial Zimbabwean nation.

> "To live outside the law you must be honest."
> BOB DYLAN
> Those who live inside the law
> decide the law, providing
> for themselves. Those who keep
> the status quo sleep late,
> and sow and reap, and so
>
> reward themselves. Those who
> can't afford to be aboard
> to see cupidity;
> the bored aboard a ship
> of fools, a slip of stools,

a school of lips like clips
that clench, a bench of laws,
a cause, no cause: they can't
rely on lies that lie
like laws with folded claws.

With a clear reference to the Zimbabwean situation, the speaker ascribes a meaning to the Dylan song. Thus, the reference to 'those who live under the law' comes to refer to those in the high spheres of power. The image of the ship connects with that of the law to emphasize the division between the rich and powerful, on the one hand, and the common people, on the other hand. For the narrator, the world of those 'who live inside the law' and 'those who keep the status quo' is one governed by cupidity, corruption and lack of concern for others. Eppel' s revolt against this world is conveyed through his use of the words 'fools', 'stools', 'bored', 'lips'.

The predatory connotation of the phrase 'folded claws' in the title and in the last line of the poem hints that those in positions of power will not surrender their privileges and serve the interest of the people. As the use of the word 'lies' also suggests, this poem is a statement of the poet's distrust of the ruling class and points to his attachment with 'those who can't afford to be aboard', a clear allusion to the 'gravy-train' of African independence.

As has been seen, the three texts - the novel *Hatchings* and the two poems - are concerned with crime. In the novel the author highlights the danger to the nation of a culture of crime and proposes to the reader a choice between the moral dimension of a national vision and its opposite. Although clearly concerned with the corruption that characterizes modern Zimbabwe, the novel is ultimately optimistic. It is significant in its

suggestion that, after years of racial injustice (such as depicted in *The Great North Road*), a real conversion to moral national politics is possible and that, despite the rampant corruption, the new society bears in itself the seeds of its own regeneration. It is the way this novel articulates this duality and reconciles this contradiction that the first part of this chapter has explored. Another significant aspect of this novel is that, in contrast to *The Great North Road*, *Hatchings* makes it clear that the culture of corruption is not a racial phenomenon. The poem 'Waiting for the bus' is concerned with the crimes perpetrated by an oligarchic ruling elite, that has reneged on the promises made during the war of liberation. 'Laws that lie with folded claws' exposes a criminal oligarchy that perpetrates social injustice against the other half of the nation. Unlike some Zimbabwean writers, Eppel does not lay the blame on one particular racial group of the population. In essence, it is as though, through the dual representation this novel offers, he places his fellow Zimbabweans in front of a mirror in order to question their actions. As he puts it in his interview with Richard Saunders, already alluded to, and as this chapter has shown, '*Hatchings* is just the reflection of the whole social scene in the new Zimbabwe, where all races and social groups exist and engage in unseemly practices' (Eppel and Saunders, 1995:15-16).