

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis has been to examine representations of the Rhodesian/Zimbabwean nation in selected texts by Zimbabwean authors John Eppel, Dambudzo Marechera and Yvonne Vera. The idea has been to consider a diversified corpus of narratives of the nation. There are obviously other Zimbabwean literary texts which can provide representations of the Zimbabwean nation, and although choice is always somewhat arbitrary, as pointed out in Chapter One of this study, the chosen authors can be regarded as representatives of their country's literature. The selection of texts was motivated by range - a white male settler writer whose pioneer heritage roots him firmly in and of the country, a black female 'native' Zimbabwean author and a deracinated exiled poet and novelist - and by variety of perspective - from the 'Rhodie' viewpoint to the mythic traditionalist, to the self-confessed alienated cosmopolitan, for example. Thus, as has been argued, the selected texts tell stories of the nation from a variety of thematic perspectives, using various literary techniques that enable their authors to challenge the reader's conception of the nation.

As should become evident, a consistent pattern in these representations has been to imagine a national space occupied by communities usually in oppositional relations to one another. In these spatially articulated representations, the border functions as a marker of division in the imagined national geography and difference. Each of the entities so demarcated is in turn presented as a site where identities are constructed, constituted and, sometimes, negotiated. Thus, as has been seen, in *The Great North Road*, Eppel imagines colonial Rhodesia as a space polarized between a centre occupied by the settler

community and a periphery occupied by the black population. Within the boundaries of this 'national space', a common race and a common (western) culture are conjured up as markers of difference between the colonists and the racialized subjects. The latter's otherness is enunciated in an ambivalent settler discourse that legitimizes their exclusion. Eppel's first novel, in contradistinction to Vera's *Nehanda*, for example, is interesting in its emphasis on the silence and invisibility of the black population, as opposed to the narrative centrality of the settler characters. With this novel, Eppel breaks new ground for Zimbabwean literature in the way he highlights and then subverts the settler discourse of the nation. The poems from *Spoils of War* were shown to contribute to Eppel's deconstruction, in their interrogation of the notion of a Rhodesian identity defined in relation to the racialized Other. The satirical tone in the poems invites the reader to join the poet in his mockery of the negative images of the settler and of the Rhodesian historiography.

In Yvonne Vera's text *Nehanda*, examined in Chapter Three, the imagined space of the nation under colonial rule is a valley hit by drought. Images of birds of prey and scavengers hovering over the valley symbolize colonial invasion and the dimming cultural consciousness which resulted. In this narrative, the land is identified with the ancestors who, the reader is constantly reminded, are its natural owners. The hills on one side of the valley are figured as the ancestors' domain while the hill on the other side is presented as the colonizer's headquarters and, implicitly, as the outpost of Western imperialism in the land. The emphasis in the novel on the link between land, ancestors and the black population is essential in order to overturn the Rhodesian discourse on land ownership and the figurative representation of the African within such a discourse as deservedly

occupying the periphery of the colonial territory. It also serves to highlight cultural and religious differences between the settler and the native, which are prominently displayed in the novel. As was argued in Chapter Three, Vera's canvas for her treatment of difference includes Shona mythology and symbolism. The world depicted by such narrative devices is an African world that excludes the settler. It is through this implied exclusion that the novel also predicts a postcolonial African identity which, it posits, will be articulated in a language that will be comprehensible only to the former colonized.

Thus, a common feature between *The Great North Road* and *Nehanda* is that both novels debunk the myth of a Rhodesian nation by offering representations constructed on the basis of the notion of racial and cultural difference. They differ in terms of the purpose of each text. Whereas Eppel's novel disavows difference and suggests the coming together of all the races, Vera's emphasizes difference as part of her project to remap the national space. Her main strategy to this effect consists in 'empowering' her native characters and in reducing her settler characters to relative silence and invisibility, in contradistinction to *The Great North Road* where the same strategy is used by Eppel to suggest the blacks' marginality. In this way, the positioning of the black people is reversed - from a marginal subject to one which occupies the centre.

As has been seen in Chapter Five, in *Hatchings* Eppel relies on the notion of moral difference to provide his representation of the postcolonial Zimbabwean nation. The boundaries between the two halves of his imagined national community are moral rather than racial. The point is that, in this allegory of the rebirth of the new nation, the racial tension that characterized the colonial state is displaced and even erased in order to

highlight the moral division within the nation. It is not until the end of the narrative, when the underworld dismantles itself and the hatching of a new moral culture is suggested in the episode of the hatching of the Asil Khan egg, that the reader makes sense of the complex representation of post-independence Zimbabwe as both a negative and a positive space. This mode of representation of the nation reflects Eppel's concern with corruption in post-independence Zimbabwe as highlighted in his interview with Richard Saunders and in his essay 'A Serious Business', referred to in Chapter One, in which he describes his use of satire as his way of engaging with issues of corruption in his multicultural nation. It is worth noticing how the narrator is forced to help the reader understand the moral nature of the conflict between the good and bad characters. This help comes in the form of extracts from Mircea Eliade that permeate the text.

Hatchings contributes to Zimbabwean literature by highlighting immigrant characters in a way that destabilizes the notions of cultural hybridity and cosmopolitan identity. On examining Eppel's inscription of those characters in his text and their interaction with the local population, it has been possible to argue that the novel suggests that the kind of immigration depicted in the novel, justified as it is by self-interest or by a discourse of anthropology, does not produce the kind of postmodern hybridity that postcolonial theorists assert takes place within the boundaries of the modern nation, as a result of an encounter between different cultures.

In Marechera the national territory is imagined as consisting of two parts separated by boundaries that are racial and cultural in his works set in the colonial period, and mainly social, in those writings set after the country's independence. In their depiction of colonial

Rhodesia as a space of violence and a prison, texts such as *The House of Hunger* and 'The Concentration Camp' juxtapose the construction of the settler as a perpetrator of colonial violence and jailer with that of the oppressed black as a prisoner in his own land. However, as has also been pointed out in Chapter Four, Marechera complicates his representation of the Rhodesian/Zimbabwean society by debunking, through his focus on his family home and the account of his relationship with his white girlfriend Patricia, the myth of racial group cohesion. This myth of a cohesive black group is further exposed in his texts set after independence, where materialistic obsessions have contributed to widen the division between the new dominant classes and the people at the bottom of the social ladder. Marechera further destabilizes racial boundaries through the many accounts of intimate interracial relationships in his texts.

In both these representations, the narrator/author situates himself at the margins of his society. In general terms, he addresses the social difference between those occupying the centre and the marginalized members of society. As has also been shown through a reading of some of his texts, Marechera's positioning at the periphery is an important strategy for it allows him to claim both difference from his nation and an intellectual space where he can claim a universal identity. As was suggested in Chapter Four, this difference is located within his narrator's inscription of the tension between the national subject's mimicry and his own sophisticated hybridity. Marechera's work invites the reader right into the debate around the question of whether to identify with an environment of blatant social, political, and physical violence, with a community of mimicking subjects, or to distance oneself from it and enjoy the richness of a universal culture.

Zimbabwean literature, the narrative of the liberation war, which borders on nationalism,

In addition to the focus on difference in all the texts analyzed, which can be read as a commentary by all their authors on Rhodesian/Zimbabwean identity, the study has also brought to light the marginality of the characters portrayed as well as of the writers themselves. John Eppel has hinted at his marginality in Zimbabwean literature in his essay referred to in Chapter One, in which he describes himself as 'a White African who belongs and yet does not belong to his country, and has very mixed feelings about his past' (Eppel, 1996:19). Unlike Marechera who writes from the margins of his society to serve as a spokesperson for the marginalized classes, Eppel writes to bridge the gap between two historically opposite cultural communities. In the process, he uses his pen to mock the seriousness with which the 'Rhodies' believed in the idea of an integrated Rhodesian nation. In this respect, by revising the colonial narrative of Rhodesia, Eppel symbolically places himself on the side of the colonized natives, in other words, at the margins. In another respect, the laughter is also self-directed for, as the analysis of selected poems from *Spoils of War* has revealed, he assumes his identity as a member of that settler group. In *Hatchings* and the poems from *Sonata for Matabeleland*, which reveal that the 'Villains are no longer only Whites' (1996:19), he mocks those of his countrymen, both black and white, who indulge in corrupt practices. His work indicates that Eppel seems to have come to terms with his past and has moved a step further from the margins, to denounce in his writing the corruption that plagues his 'beloved' country.

examples of this strategy are those pieces of poetry, such as 'The Coin of Moongine'.

Marechera's representation of the nation can be understood in terms of his decision to avoid *les chemins battus*, the thematic and aesthetic thrusts of much Zimbabwean literature. He rejected the celebration of the nation, through arguably the main genre of Zimbabwean literature, the narrative of the liberation war, which borders on nativism.

Instead, like some writers of his generation, he undertook to deal with the trauma caused by the social and political conditions in colonial Rhodesia, as Veit-Wild's work on Marechera has emphasized. But even in dealing with these concerns, Marechera differs from his contemporaries not only in his idiosyncratic articulation of these concerns – through the use of a hybrid discourse loaded with allusions to classical culture and universal literature (Veit-Wild, 1995) – but also by choosing a lifestyle, that of a full-time bohemian writer, which was then regarded as alien in his land. Writing at the margins of the Zimbabwean society and of his country of exile, Britain, Marechera has offered a representation of his nation that is particular in his country's literature. What Timothy D. Taylor (1997:81) has written in another context appears to apply perfectly to Marechera: '... marginality either as positionality or in representations plays a pivotal role in forming and altering world views and, thus, aesthetic processes among other things'. As was intimated in Chapter Four, Marechera's writing of the nation is engineered to include the voices of those at the fringe of the society (the homeless, the tramps, the drunks, the hungry, the poor, and so on) and, through his mediating artistry, to confront the national community with the realities of being at the periphery. Resulting from this strategy, the reader is made to feel that the representation of the nation offered in Marechera's narratives is not the author's alone. This strategy thus becomes a collective narrative enterprise with which less privileged members of the society are associated. Among fine examples of this strategy are those pieces of poetry, such as 'The Coin of Moonshire', 'The Oracle of the Povo' and the journal section of *Mindblast*, in which the author presents contrasting images of the nation's social classes.

Though not a marginalized writer, Yvonne Vera writes from a position that can be considered as marginal. And, for this reason, a discussion, of her work provides a useful entry into Marechera's. As already indicated, her writing is influenced by her life experiences in the rural area. Such an experience is easily detected in her work, and most particularly in *Nehanda*, a novel in which the nativist world views associated with narratives of the liberation war are clearly foregrounded. The purpose of this text is to reclaim the land that settler discourse has claimed as the white man's. Here, Vera portrays colonial Zimbabwe as a place under siege by a foreign imperial power. In this context, the struggle to resist the foreign invasion is presented not only as an enterprise to recover the occupied territory but, perhaps more importantly, as a determination to preserve cultural purity. In this sense, this novel decentres the settler myth of the nation discussed in relation to Eppel's *The Great North Road*. In *Nehanda* the space occupied by the white colonizer is constructed as Other space or the margins, whereas the native's space becomes the centre.

Thus, as a study about Zimbabwean literature, this thesis represents a departure from previous work on the relationship between literature and nation in its analysis of the varying strategies of representing the nation in each of the texts discussed. It is intended that further research, involving a larger and even more varied corpus, will be undertaken to extend the present study.

Vera, Yvonne.

1993 *Nehanda* -Harare: Baobab Books.

1994 *Without a Name*. Harare: Baobab Books.

1995 *Under the Tongue*. Harare: Baobab Books.