RECASTING HISTORY: IMAGINING AND MAPPING OUT IDENTITIES IN SOME ZIMBABWEAN POETRY

by

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all the sources used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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Abstract

This study investigates how selected Zimbabwean poets use their poetry to re-imagine and rewrite Zimbabwean history to create new identities. It seeks to achieve this by analyzing the poetry of Musaemura Zimunya, Chenjerai Hove, Dambudzo Marechera, Philip Zhuwao, Freedom Nyamubaya and some other women poets from the anthology *A Woman's Plea* and John Eppel's poetry. The study argues that history and identity are unstable concepts whose meanings and usages are influenced by a variety of factors. It further contends that while the significations of history are generally split between how it is regarded in the academic discipline of history and its meanings outside the academic discipline, the controversies surrounding history are about the ways of representing the past. The study builds its central arguments around this existence of multiple ways of ordering the past, and asserts that poetry is also a form of representing history which utilizes its own rhetoric to authorize its versions of the past and construct identities in its own unique ways. These arguments are raised in Chapter One.

The analysis of the selected poets' texts in Chapters Two, Three, Four, Five and Six links them to the arguments raised in Chapter One. It critiques the versions of histories and the nature of identities that are represented differently by different poets. The study in these chapters reveals that poetic narratives are unstable accounts of both the past and identity, but it is this instability that allows poetry to interrogate narrow concepts of what is 'real' in history. There are both similar and dissimilar trends that abound in the selected poets' texts which reveal that even within the poetic mode of representation, there are layers of understanding of the metaphorical symbols which we use to fix the meanings of Zimbabwean history and identities. The study applies different theoretical approaches to the work of each poet in order to show how each has different contribution to make towards the recovery of Zimbabwe's past and how it speaks to our present.

Key terms: Zimbabwean history, poetry, identity, representation, narratives, vision(s), Musaemura Zimunya, Chenjerai Hove, Dambudzo Marechera, Philip Zhuwao, Freedom Nyamubaya, women poets, John Eppel.

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Chapter One

Introduction: Rethinking History and Identity in Zimbabwe

The concepts of history and identity occupy central positions in current African literary representations and in theoretical debates that focus on their discussions. The vitality of the debate can be attributed to the very history of Africa itself which, as Chidi Amuta (1989:81) observes, is a turbulent one, characterized by different forms of exploitation, such as slavery and colonialism, apartheid, cultural emasculation and more recently political corruption and the development of an indigenous and often amoral bourgeosie. Amuta lists the aberrations of history from which African literature derives material for its symbolical narratives. Compounding the troubled experiential context from which Africans emerge are the questions of what constitutes history and who has authority over narratives that capture that history. To put it differently, in a context of inequalities outlined above by Amuta, discursive power is wielded by the dominant classes who authorize certain self-serving discourses and versions of history which dominate and even silence the narratives of the powerless social groups. However, the oppressed people existing in the "zone of occult instability" (Frantz Fanon, 2006:173) can also appropriate cultural resources made available by the dominant, if only to use them to oppose the elites. Such an understanding of subaltern classes seen in real life and their symbolical representations reminds us of the popular classes' ability to make their positive historical agency felt on the stage of history. However, the same ordinary people who can challenge dominant views can also in other circumstances take advantage of the cultural resources made available by the systems they oppose if only to make that re-appropriation work for the ordinary people. Furthermore, the 'extraordinary' capacity of the lower classes to fight oppressive social systems is

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qualified by the fact that in real life and also as can be depicted in symbolical narratives, there is no total guarantee that when and where the ordinary people speak or write their own history, their voices are not lured or determined by the subjective that they occupy as the oppressed within the discursive space of the unequal relations in both the colonial and post-colonial periods. In other words, both dominant and subaltern narratives are unstable and can be redirected and manipulated to achieve conflicting ends such as confirming dominant aspirations, struggles against oppression, incorporations into the dominant systems to take advantage of some available empowering space or opening within the cracks of authoritarian narratives. As this study will demonstrate, cultural and symbolical narratives confirm the variety of African identities.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how the selected Zimbabwean poets re-imagine and rewrite Zimbabwean history to map out and construct new identities through their poetic verse. In order to understand how poetry is implicated in identity formations and re-formations, we need, first to explore the concepts of history and historicity in the Zimbabwe context. Therefore, this chapter introduces the study by exploring some theoretical perspectives on history and identity to highlight their polemical nature and instability as well as to establish how the two concepts are related to each other.

Rethinking History and Historicity

History is a very broad and uneven concept that carries multiple meanings in different disciplines and contexts. For this reason, a useful starting point into looking at the controversial nature of the concept of history is to observe and emphasize that definitions and usages of the term history are polarized between how it is conceived in the academic discipline of history and how history is more popularly conceived. To introduce the nature of the controversy that surrounds what history is and what history is not we can cite Hayden White's observation that:

> History remains in the state of conceptual anarchy in which the natural sciences existed during the sixteenth century, when there were as many different conceptions of "the scientific enterprise" as there were metaphysical positions. In the sixteenth century, the different conceptions of what "science" ought to be ultimately reflected different conceptions of "reality" and the different epistemologies generated by them. So, too, disputes over what "history" ought to be reflect similarly varied conceptions of what a proper historical explanation ought to consist of and different conceptions, therefore, of the historian's task. (1975:13)

For academic historians, a 'proper' historical explanation and a historian's task can only be defined within the context of the conventions governing history as an academic discipline. Historian John Tosh (2000:viii) informed by such conceptual awareness, suggests two meanings of the term history: 'It refers both to what actually happened in the past and to the representations of that past in the work of historians'. Significant in Tosh's definition is that he distinguishes between the actuality of events and their representation by historians. Actuality suggests that the events that the historian orders must be assumed to have occurred so that history cannot be viewed merely as an invention. On the other hand, the notion of 'representation' suggests an appreciation of history as artifice, a socially constructed text whose meanings exist inside and not outside the process of re-presentation which is itself a mode of interpreting reality. Thus

representing history is a conscious and sometimes an unconscious act; it implies selecting and ordering of facts, processes which Hayden White (1978:51) suggests, are based on the recognition of certain facts and not others as truth. Representing history then suggests suppression of facts considered "other" and yet these suppressed facts might necessitate a preliminary critique of the narratives we create. Furthermore, readers whose experiences are marginalized in dominant and even in subaltern narratives can derive their principal interest in the past in 'leftout' facts.

Pierre Macherey (1990:217) suggested that a work of art says more in what it does not say than in what it is authorized to say. In exploring Zimbabwean poetry, we pay attention to the poets' intentions as well as to the ideological silences which as Terry Eagleton (1990:214) reminds us, reveal the extent to which in the composition of works of art, they are prevented from saying certain things by, among other factors, the discursive positions that authors occupy in the discursive economy in which they write.

J.H. Plump (2004) complicates the above argument when he links history to science, implying that the laws that govern science can be applied and used to construct and interpret history. He (2004:12) declares that:

> History, like science, is an intellectual process. Like science, too, it requires imagination, creativity and empathy as well as observation as accurate as a scholar can make it and that 'true' history, is an attempt to see things as they really were, irrespective of what conflict this might create ….

The purpose of the historian, according to Plump, is not only to look at things as they really were, but from that study, to attempt to formulate processes of social change which are acceptable on historical grounds and none other. This assumes that there are

certain qualities that are valued in academic history that might not be present in some forms of history. While qualities such as imagination, creativity and observation are indeed shared by science and are crucial for objectivity and accuracy, the complexity of the discursive sphere in which history operates does not always allow it to 'see things as they really were'. Plumb's definition of history has its roots in what Alun Munslow (2000:1) calls the modernist view which sees 'proper' history as the 'discovering of the meaning to the pattern of past reality: a meaning that is enduring and that can be described faithfully by the suitably distanced historian.' In this definition of history, 'the historian is therefore equipped to faithfully recover that which is gone' (Munslow, 2000:1). The problem with attempting to recover the past through the description of 'the suitably distanced historian' is that it assumes the historian – the ordering subject of the past – is autonomous from the past that he represents. There is a contradiction here, which is that historians are expected to be engaged with the object of their study in the past and yet be distant from it. Ato Quayson (2002:50) identifies a similar paradox in academic history's engagement with the past when he observes that 'historical analysis is ultimately responsible to a notion of the real world of events which is thought to have existed independently of the process of writing it'. The point that emerges from these observations, is that despite academic history's claims to objectivity and accuracy, the knowing subject status which the historian occupies as he orders the past reduces history to subjectivity.

Munslow (2000 citing Nietzsche) gives further explanation of the historian's position vis-à-vis the past. He (2000:11) observes that, the position of the historian 'is not natural or universal, is not a given, but is a construction of time, place, discourse and ideology'.

From this understanding, the historian, whose consciousness is manifested as an inevitable product of varied external forces, emerges as incapable of impartiality when addressing the past. This highlights that he and the product of his study are 'a creation of a particular ideology and/or set of cultural practices' (Munslow, 2000:11). The problem seems unavoidable because the mandate to see 'things as they really were' gives the historian a false control of the past. The past is not static; it interacts with the historian in a fragmented and fractured form whose instability even unsettles the historian's approach by often requiring that the historian creates meaning of the past rather than discover the meaning of it. This shows that both history and the past do not have inherent meanings because the act of reordering the past suggests that meaning exists as social constructs that can be contested by newer and firmer constructions.

Owing to 'the implicatedness of the historian's subject position'(Quayson, 2002:51) in ordering the past, scholars such as Bjoorn Lindgren (2001), who are opposed to academic history's attempts to separate itself from other representations of the past, have defined history as both ideology and methodology. For Lindgren, history is ideological because it is written in a selective way from a specific perspective. Quoting Jonathan Friedman, he (2001:121) asserts that history is positional and it is dependent upon where one is located in social reality, within society, and within global processes. The term ideology, it should be remembered, may refer to an 'incoherent' set of socially produced ideas that lend or create a personal or group consciousness that is time specific (Alun Munslow, 1997:184). As values that are structured by experience and which in turn are impacted by this structuring, social ideologies are not always aware of their potential workings and often end up authorizing meanings that had not been

anticipated. That is why Lindgren argues that historical truth and its significance are relative and that the cultural past[s] from which history is constructed draw contesting meanings that are inflected by the values and circumstances of the subjects that interpret historical narratives. His definition of history as methodology is tied to that of professional historians because it springs from the observation that 'it [history] follows internal logical rules about sources, causality and linearity which are presented in a specific narrative form' (2001:121). In the idiom of academic historians, 'narrative' refers to 'a structure of explanation used to account for the occurrence of events and human actions' (Munslow, 1997:86) and, this can be simplified to mean the conventions that govern the sometimes conflicting representations of the pasts in the works of historians.

The thrust of Lindgren's definition of history as both ideology and methodology is linked to Nietzsche's thesis already discussed because Lindgren sees an inextricable interconnectedness that exists between ideology and methodology in history. He (2001:121) underscores that it is the values (ideology) that form rules (methodology). Lindgren is insisting that there is no way that historical representations even those by professional historians, can be free from ideological inflections, even if professional historians claim to refuse to allow ideological intrusions to inflect on their works.

While professional historians' understanding of the relations between histories and pasts carry a residual element of narrative as stable text, this position is subverted by post-modernists who dispute the claim that 'real' and 'objective' history can only be found in the work of professional historians. Their arguments are based on their rejection of the possibility of representing reality in any form and therefore, for them,

there can be no solid foundations on which professional historians predicate their empirical judgements. Tosh (2000:16) captures the postmodernists' stance as follows:

> Postmodernism holds that there is no difference between history and social memory.To them [postmodernists] aspiration to recreate the past is an illusion and all historical writing bears the indelible impression of the present – indeed tells us more about present than past.

Social memory is one of a variety of examples of ideological constructions of the past. In the use of social memory as a site of remembering, it is not how the past is known to have happened that matters, but how the memory is applied to present need that is significant. Thus, understanding social memory as products of cultural selections of elements of usable pasts disorders the assumed 'neatness' of conventional history and tosses it back into the tangle of 'unordered' approaches to the past that it seeks to escape from. To illustrate this point, I use the aberrant socio-political contexts such as Rhodesia and current Zimbabwe – both of which are the focus of this study. In these contexts some of the historians whose approaches to history, seek to establish the 'truth'about the past attempt to maintain a 'suitable distance' from their object of study. The unfortunate result is that their historical narratives were and are still visibly informed by the ideologies that stem from the polarization of the political terrain in which they order the past. With regards to this, two examples spring to mind (1)the current Zimbabwean government's demand that academic historians at universities teach patriotic history (Terence Ranger, 2005) and (2) the colonial historians' assumption of an 'objective' and 'scholarly' representation of Great Zimbabwe – a site whose ruined state was used to justify the colonial project in Rhodesia. Colonial historians based their ordering of the past on the authority of colonial forms of knowledge seen as a valid way of understanding. What is however worth further explanation in the point raised by

Ranger is that he himself is an academic historian who perceives academic history as more realistic and reliable than other versions of the past in Zimbabwe, especially those he classifies as patriotic history and nationalist history. These histories also compete with academic history to tell the history of the nation. Despite their claims, none of these three categories of history (see the discussion in Chapter Three) are objective nor stable because these concepts are not only relative since they depend on the subject who is ordering the pasts, but also because each of these formations of history contain sub/versions of narratives in themselves which are not always reconcilable.

Claims by academic historians such as Ranger (2005) that academic history is more realistic and reliable than other interpretations of the past are also challenged at the level of representation. The narrative form in which professional history is presented, argue Hayden White (1978) and Alun Munslow (1997), does not permit it to be as accurate and reliable as it claims to be; nor allow it to claim a place among physical sciences. White's thesis uses as the launch pad of its attack the theory of tropics, which claims that all discourse is 'more tropical than logical' (1978:1). 'Tropical' is the adjectival form of 'tropic', whose provenance White identifies as 'tropikos', 'tropos' which in classical Greek meant "turn". The word comes into modern English as "metaphor" or "figure of speech" (1978:2). In language and representation tropes are:

> Deviations from literal, conventional, or 'proper' language use, swerves in locution sanctioned neither by custom nor logic. Tropes generate figures of speech or thought by their variation from what is "normally" expected and by the associations they establish between concepts normally felt not to be related or to be related in ways different from that suggested in the trope used (1978:2).

Following what is suggested in White's argument, it is pertinent to note that troping – the creation of new associative meanings – is inadvertent and inescapable, and as the

intrinsic nature of any discourse, it deflects conventional history's aim to unsullied objectivity. If White is correct, conventional history's assertion to being a discourse that sees things as 'they really were' to use Plump's words, becomes an ideal that is unattainable. White takes his argument further and even figures what he considers an apparent contradiction in conventional history's claim when he notes that 'conventional history's flight is futile, for tropics is the process by which all discourse constitutes the objects which it pretends only to describe realistically and to analyze objectively' (1978:2). He defends his position by observing that:

> [A trope/metaphor] is always not only a deviation *from* possible, proper meaning, but also a deviation *towards* another meaning, conception or ideal of what is right and proper *and true* "in reality". Thus considered, troping is both a movement from one notion of the way things are related *to* another notion and a connection between things so that they can be expressed in a language that takes account of the possibility of their being expressed otherwise (1978:2).

This analysis of the concept of history suggests that it is the way the past is actively narrated that is highly problematic and contested. Alun Munslow (1997:159) supports this view when he says 'historical disputes are less about what did or did not actually happen, and more about how we emplot or invoke 'laws'/ social theories to explain the past'. The concept of emplotment raised here is the process through which the historian discovers the meaning of events or imposes meaning on events. Or alternatively as White (1978:105) suggests, what history says is inextricably bound up with how it says it. While this study recognizes these different ways of emploting the past, I also argue that Zimbabwean poetry does not imagine a single past; there are multiple usable pasts (Appiah, 2007:245) that poets can manipulate as sources of their creativity. As Zegeye and Vambe (2009) note, the return to the pasts is problematic because there is no

single 'return' to a single 'source.' Zimbabwean poetry derives its vitality from a multiplicity of sources that the poetry affirms, modifies, and sometimes rejects.

When White's insights on the semantic indeterminacy of past, history and historicity are used to explore Zimbabwean poetry, an uneven picture emerges because the mode of interpreting and representing the pasts shows identities and their representations to be differentiated. Peter Onwudinjo (1991:63) helps one to comprehend the distinctiveness of a poet's imaginations when representing the past when he writes that

> Both poet and historian are concerned with presenting human experience. Whereas the historian is concerned with factual and systematic presentation of past events, the poet represents these experiences through phenomenistic construal in myth, symbol, legend, imagery, metaphor, music and other figures of poetry. By so doing he gives the experience a deeper, more profound, and memorable dimension.

The significance of Onwudinjo's thesis lies in how it highlights that the past that both poetry and history order is an unstable one of human experiences, although history seeks to stabilize it through its claims to a systematic investigation and representation of it. In other words, in poetry the question of facticity or factualness is produced during rendition and through interpretation of the metaphors and images that the poet uses to represent versions of realities that are no less 'truthful' because the truths of poetic narratives do not have to grow in stature when compared to the facts in conventional history. Thus, the poetic imagination can authorize its own uneven truths that nevertheless pass as facts. Therefore, the assumption that there is something that can be called factual implies instability, if only we concede that facts are ways of seeing, reading and interpreting reality that have been ordered but are contested with new facts in the light of new developments in society.

Thus poetry as a form of representation transcends the boundaries of conventional history's claim of echoing and mirroring reality or representing human experiences. The distinction between poetry and conventional history therefore, is not so much in arguing that both narratives are social constructs; rather, through metaphor and imagery poetry produces its own narratives, and the images that it utilizes are also history. However, these histories produced through polyvalence of metaphor do not have to confirm the truths in academic history. Polyvalence in poetic metaphors can encourage readings that interrogate narrow concepts of what is 'real' in history. Wolfgang Iser (1993:3) notes that, 'because poetry does not hide the nature of its discourse by laying bare its rhetorical status it cannot be accused of inaccuracy'. The point that Iser makes is that, the fact that poetry actively makes use of tropics and 'owns up' does not mean that its rhetorical status makes it invalid history. According to Gillian Beer (1989:5), there seems to be a general misconception that to 'imagine is to misinterpret', whereas imagining is liberating, through metaphor and image 'new ways at looking at systems and knowledges are developed' (Callum G Brown, 2005:113). Poetic narratives are fragmented histories containing not just events, but notions of the pasts as an unknowable, 'unordered and chaotic thing, sometimes referred to as a 'sublime'' (Brown, 2005:113). Poetry, as the subsequent chapters of this study demonstrate, re-interprets meanings accorded to the pasts, and offers its own versions of those pasts via signs and symbols which inscribe instability of meaning as the conditions of possibility for new values.

Interrogating the uncertainty of Identity

If history as an overarching theme of human life is fraught with contradictions, it must be expected that identities born out of human interactions (history) should be much more complicated because they too are constructed on the notion of what could have been included or excluded. In any narrative, notions of inclusion and exclusion suggest that identities are social constructs and reflect a complication that stems from the incapability of narrative to represent reality in full, outside re-presentation (White, 1987). This, in turn, underscores the centrality of identities to the theories of narrativity. Kwame Anthony Appiah (2005:21) proposes that in constructing an identity, one draws among other things on the kinds of person available in one's society for it is that society which provides loose models on how one structures one's identity. Appiah terms these models scripts; narratives that people can use in shaping their projects and telling their stories. The models and scripts mentioned in Appiah's proposition implicitly introduce the concept of the grand narrative and its role in identity construction. Appiah's argument is also shared by Fitzgerald (1993:5), quoting Weiget *et al*. (1990), who argues that definitions of the self are works of mediated experiences as well as culturally and socially constructed beliefs and values.

Stefan Jonsson (2000:163) sees in the process of mediation, a degree of repression because each construction of identity is constrained by an already existing identity. This is so because what society has already established may determine the path of divergence or confirm the existing construction of one's identity. The repressiveness encouraged by grand narratives, however, is not total because its dominance as Callum G. Brown (2005:184) argues, only occurs when there is no viable opposition. In fact,

Jonsson's (2000:163) assertion that the human subject can be 'represented only by a narrative that gradually constructs and reconstructs its identity implies that the grand narrative is not absolute in its authority to monopolize societies' power to represent identities. Oppositional identities are ironically born out of a desire to stabilize their values in the process of disrupting dominant narratives with the uncanny result that these oppositional narratives of identities also enact a preliminary critique of their own views that they seek to propagate.

Paul Gilbert (2000:48) also expresses the link between history and identity by observing that 'to have a sense of who one is requires being able to tell a story about oneself, and, furthermore, a story which relates one to others by connecting with the stories they tell about themselves'. It is however, not only individual or personal identities that depend on narratives, but also group identities because as Tosh (2000:1) notes, all societies have a collective memory, a storehouse of experience which is drawn upon for a sense of identity and direction. However, the recognition that identity is unstable and disputed suggests that struggles fought over control of historical discourses can be described also as contests over identity.

The multiplicity of human experiences and contesting narratives of history give existence to multiple identities at multiple levels. For example, the individual's or a group's location in history and their experiences in it are key to how the story of the self or the group is told vis-à-vis the models available through history. The instability of historical truth therefore results in contestations of any given identity. This implies that history is often appealed to, to establish or justify the authenticity of a certain identity or

to falsify and reject a particular identity. This complexity of the history-identity dialectic is cogently expressed by Gilbert (2000:49) who asserts that the truth of an historical narration is often considered irrelevant if the story succeeds in constructing an identity to which people can give allegiance and in which they can find fulfillment. This is the story that often creates public identities such as national identities; the histories in which they are steeped are often re-constructions that are designed to provide a context for certain sentiments.

Given the need to construct and locate identities in the context of a usable past, and the plasticity of narrative, we can argue that to some extent people are the stories that they tell about themselves, and that identities are relative as well as positional. The paradox of identity formation or re-formation is that people can also be the stories told about them by others, a situation that implies cultural infiltration of identities by other intrusive and powerful ideologies. This demonstrates that identities are ever-shifting, contested and malleable, or manipulable by different people for different ends. Put differently, identities are subject to power dynamics which cannot simplistically be plotted on a continuum of power and powerlessness, rich and poor, black and white as well as right and wrong.

These categories serve not only to exhaust, include or exclude all known or knowable identities but they also highlight the existence of multiple identities at multiple levels. There are individual, group, political, national, class identities and many others whose formation is influenced by a variety of factors as becomes evident later in this study. Fitzgerald (1993:6) among other theorists highlights the broad-based nature of identity

as a concept when he declares that 'identity always comprises a subset of different parts and it is considered in its various dimensions including social, cultural and personal identity.' The plurality of elements that constitutes identity as a concept reaffirms that it operates at different planes and also suggests that the significance attached to any identity depends on the level and sensibility from which it is perceived. The caveat here is that there are other identities that are sidelined in any given context because of the monologue of dominant narratives of culture that attach importance to certain identities, such as national or other group identities. As this study demonstrates, the main reason why the selected Zimbabwean poets recast history through their poetic narratives is to make visible the marginal identities as well as to map out new ones. The question that the study seeks to suggest answers to is whether or not the poets have not elevated the previously marginal identities in the poetry to a position of unassailed narrative status quo, because no subaltern, once 'liberated' wants to stay in the condition of 'subalternity'.

Zimbabwean Literary Representations of History and Identity

The historical context that informs the consciousness evident in current Zimbabwean literary narratives can be seen generally in three phases: the pre-colonial, the colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe. These are in the main, the periods which form the historical bank on which Zimbabwean writers draw to provide the past context of their works. Therefore, an outline of Zimbabwean history is crucial for this study and I shall identify some landmark events in the history of Zimbabwe and show their significance to identity formation and contestations in Zimbabwe's modern history.

Colonial history often made the claim that history began with the colonizers' arrival, and when the land that later on became known as Rhodesia and Zimbabwe became a British colony in 1890 some of the narratives from which different Blacks drew their notions of identity were significantly altered and also the discursive contexts became problematic. The colonial subjects invented centre-margin relations which they sustained by self-serving historical narratives that placed the African as the racial other at the margins of the colonial settlers' history. The unevenness of the discursive space in the colony accords the colonizers a position where they are able to assume power and control over historical discourses. Frantz Fanon (1968:39-40) explains that in the colonized territory, the settler makes history; his life is an epoch, an Odyssey. He is the absolute beginning: 'This land was created by us', he is the unceasing cause: 'if we leave all is lost, and the country will go back to the Middle Ages.' It is axiomatic in the colonizer's representation of himself vis-à-vis the colonial space that he has absolute and total control over all facets of the dominated.

However, as an integral part of the colonizer's master narrative of the colony this representation significantly reveals the workings of identity dynamics and how they are affected by the subject that is ordering the past. According to Frantz Fanon (1968:169), the purpose of such one-sided narratives is to culturally estrange the colonial victims by convincing them that colonialism came to lighten their darkness, and that if the colonialists were to leave, the colonized would at once fall back into barbarism, degradation and bestiality. The effect of such cultural negations is, according to Abdul JanMohamed (1985:80) the production of pathological societies that exist in a state of

perpetual crisis. The predicament of the colonial society that JanMohamed points to manifests itself in various aspects of the colonial space, and its general ambience should be summed up as a 'nervous condition', to use the term popularized by Jean-Paul Sartre when he described the condition of the colonized in his introduction to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of The Earth* (1968).

The crisis outlined above stems from another aspect of colonial discourses and narratives of history whose ways of ordering attempt to present as stable, the unstable concept of identity that is based on an ideology of colonial Manichaeism. In the colonial space, this Manichaeism depends on race as an identity category whereby some human beings are considered to be superior and others inferior because of the races they are born into. By stabilizing identity in this way, the colonial narratives deal in convenient generalizations and the cumulative effect as Abdul JanMohamed (1985:83) argues, is that they commodify the native by negating his/her individuality and subjectivity so that he/she is now perceived as the generic being that can be exchanged for any other native (they look alike, act alike, and so on). This kind of ordering manifests the framework of the binary oppositions in which the colonial mindset operates. The assumption is that within this framework, nothing should be de-centred or deconstructed so as to avoid the emergence of disrupting alternatives. However, it is also important to note that one of the unintended consequences of this construction of the 'other' is that it also often resulted in the colonized generalizing the white settlers as is currently evident in ZANU PF discourses in Zimbabwe which dismiss all Whites as not being loyal to Zimbabwe, simply because their views of how the country should

develop may happen to be different from that of the ruling party. The important point here is that the creation of a generic being is a two way process.

Appiah (2005:23) explains that the creation of such essentializing collective identities tends to suggest that there is no element in the racial category on which the identity is conferred which is independent of the practices suggested by the label given. Despite its apparent limitations, this generalization was crucial in the context of the politics of Rhodesian identity, and to grasp its full import it is essential to consider JanMohamed's (1985:80) assertion that 'we can better understand colonialist discourse through an analysis that maps its ideological function in relation to actual imperialist practices.' The Rhodesian discourses' constructions, representation and eventual fixing of Blacks' identity on negative signifiers such as 'backward', 'barbaric' and 'uncivilized' among others, were dialectically related to political and economic needs. For example, political developments such as the UDI [Unilateral Declaration of Independence] in 1965 sought to indefinitely delay black rule and were based on these essentializations (see Ian Smith,1997).

The discussion above gives insight into the structure of the grand narratives the colonizers used to explain the Rhodesian space for the purpose of constructing and framing the identities of both the dominant group and of the subaltern. An awareness of this structure, paves the way to an understanding of the imperatives behind narratives that disputed colonial discourse. In response to colonial constructions and representations of the racial other's identity, Blacks appropriated a number of strategies. For example, black Zimbabwean literature of the 1960s and 1970s

consciously attempted to wrest the Blacks' expropriated image and identity back and re-appropriate them for Blacks. Literary representations by writers such as Stanlake Samkange (1975), Solomon Mutswairo(1956) and Ndabaningi Sithole(1972) to an extent, reveal what Henry Louis Gates (Jr) (1985:11) terms the 'recording of an authentic black voice - a voice of deliverance from the deafening discursive silence which an enlightened Europe cited to prove the absence of African humanity'. This writing, expounds a cultural nationalism that asserts a history of difference, not in the Manichean sense, but of uniqueness in identity, world-view and culture.

 In post-colonial discourses this amounts to 'writing back' de-centering the metropolis represented by the colonizer as a site of civilization. However, what has been called into question about the writing that attempts to reject colonial constructions of African identities by reactivating the past of pre-colonial societies is their effectiveness. Bill Ashcroft (2002:4) for example, exposes the weakness of this writing by arguing that the uniqueness with the world which marked the writers' forms of consciousness is irrecoverable because it was never really presented as there anywhere in the fiction, as an uncontested assumption in the first place. Ashcroft (2002:4) defends his argument by stressing that one of the cataclysmic consequences of colonization at the level of knowing is that there is no opposition that is not already bounded by its opposite and that there is no alternative not caught in the self/other binary of western consciousness. The point that Ashcroft makes is that the contours of post-colonial writers' re-presentation of their past are mediated upon by colonial narratives that they seek to reject and as a corollary their reconstructions and re-orderings cannot be termed authentic as Henry Louis Gates (Jr) suggests.

The main thesis of V.Y Mudimbe's seminal book *The invention of Africa* (1988) provides additional insights into the problem Ashcroft raises above. Mudimbe claims that Africa is an invention of Europe; he bases his argument on the understanding that 'most of the discourse in Africa has been an extension of Western epistemology, and as a result Africa has always been a victim of European epistemological ethnocentrism' (Philip Higgs & Jane Smith, 2002:101). Thus, Mudimbe sees a failure in Africans' understanding or knowing of themselves because of a crippling immersion, conscious or unconscious in an European order of knowledge, and for him, '[m]ost attempts at presenting African alternatives are still within the framework of external models they try to subvert'.

At the level of literary practice, representations by some black Zimbabwean writers which seek alternatives by re-presenting the pre-colonial past so as to recast the black subaltern's identity are caught up in the bind that both Ashcroft and Mudimbe outline above. For example, Geoffrey Ndhlala in his novel *Jikinya* (1979), anxious to refute colonial discourses of pre-colonial savagery and brutality, ends up romanticizing the African past in a naïve reconstruction of the pre-colonial past. Revealed in the foregoing discussion is the notion that the power of the grand narrative to percolate, infiltrate and influence discourses that undermine it should not be underestimated although it has its limitations as already discussed. This in turn discloses the inadequacy of the perspectives of some post-colonial theories that misleadingly absolutize the subaltern's ability to resist colonial influence.

For example, Amilcar Cabral (2008:190) contests that for the ordinary people, there is no need to return to the source because at their locations, remote from colonial influence, African culture was never destroyed. This is deceptive because the colonized are given extraordinary power to resist all forms of oppressions which, unfortunately, the poor do not always have. Therefore, in absolutizing narratives of emancipation, critics also inadvertently create new grand narratives because they seem to be premised on the assumption that 'reality is a static system into which we can "feed" deterministic input in order to "get out" predetermined output' (Philip Higgs & Smith, 2002:138). However, and as shall be demonstrated in this study, the responses of ordinary people to their experiences are far more complicated than the notion of a single mode of resistance can accommodate.

For instance, the Zimbabwean discursive space after independence in 1980 saw increased plurivocality in the country's literature; new voices emerged to narrate the new nation's history and in the process they question nationalism's grand narrative. There is an interrogation of the popular anti-colonial discourses on which the post-independence leadership bases the new national identity. After 1980, national identity becomes a contested concept, as was before, and to use Homi Bhabha's (1995:2) words, there 'is a particular ambivalence that haunts the idea of the nation, the language of those who write of it and the lives of those who live it'. Shifts in the locus of political power after independence do not always signify stability in narrative; but rather they demonstrate the 'instability of knowledge'(Bhabha, 1990:2) as the narratives that were co-opted in the nationalist discourse moved out to shatter the unison of the nationalist narrative and its narrow notion of single historical truth for the nation.

The multiple perspectives evident in the Zimbabwean poetic voices, contest ideological enforcement in which uniformity is celebrated. The significance and interpretation accorded to historical events is questioned and debated, and the poetic narratives also interrogate each other and in the process ironically suggest the possibility of critiquing assumptions contained in the poetic voice of a single author. In short, Zimbabwean poetry as meta-histories constantly shifts its visions because the poetic imaginations embed elements of self-revision.

Also complicating the discursive space in which public identities such as national identities are contested are private identities such as women's identities. Women writers visibly injected on the discursive space after 1980 discourses of identities based on revising gender expectations, a fact that made possible the emergence of narratives that were silenced by *Chimurenga* discourses. Discourses informed by feminism complicate national history and identity by contesting male narratives and challenging dominant and male-authored discourses. They re-interpret landmarks such as *Chimurenga* history which they inscribe as a partial failure because it did not bring gender equality. Their works critique mainstream nationalist history and the identities it forges by revisiting them in terms of the present condition of women. Even the pre-colonial past and African culture – suspended on the African patriarchal forms of knowledge – that are venerated by male writers in anti-colonialist writing are brought under scrutiny.

Because of this, female writers become caught up in a dialogue with male writers that is equivalent to the anti-colonial dialect which has been foregrounded in the work of those (male) writers (Lyn Innes & Caroline Rooney, 1997:199). Theirs are narratives that engage in a search for new ways of defining themselves and interpreting their history; they utilize innovative methods and symbolism and in the process, they confer a new identity on themselves as poets and their world (Susana Onega, 1995:15). The process authorizes them to alter what has been considered as reality or the truth about women. Their versions of history destabilize established narratives on women and challenge society to both rethink women's identities and to revisit myths and histories that have served to subjugate women on which the Zimbabwean society predicates its own identities.

Some Critical Perspectives on Zimbabwean Poetry

Zimbabwean poetry has been critiqued from many perspectives and multiple insights on different aspects of that poetry have emerged. The centrality of history and identity to Zimbabwean poetic narratives has also been observed by numerous critics. As early as 1978, Kizito Muchemwa in an introduction to his compilation of some poems by Blacks in Rhodesia *Zimbabwean Poetry in English: An Anthology* (1978), underlines the pervasive search for identity in that poetry as follows:

> These poets are continually striving to affirm their traditional culture as a positive and central part of their imaginations. This need can perhaps be paradoxically explained by their alienation from their culture. ... The cultural impact of Europe on Africa – that old cliché – is felt through this poetry. That is why the search for tradition, identity and home is important in their poetry; a lost generation is trying to find its roots. The changing circumstances, the journey into the unknown, requires an establishment of bearings. (xix-xx)

Most of the poems in Muchemwa's anthology were written in the 1960s and 1970s, an environment considered by some scholars to be socially and culturally beleaguering for both Blacks and Whites in the country. This emanated from the announcement of the UDI which isolated the country from the international community (Rino Zhuwarara, 2001:23). Muchemwa attributes the preoccupation with identity in his anthology to both the immediate environment of the UDI and the general cultural dislocations (some of which I have already noted) suffered by Blacks because of the colonial presence and in particular the dominance of British cultural productions. For Muchemwa (1978:xviii), most of the poems in his anthology seek to establish rootedness through the land (from much of which Blacks were dispossessed after the colonial conquest) because of the cultural significance attached to it as a place of belonging and site of religious consciousness in the African worldview. Zhuwarara (2001:14) echoes Muchemwa's observation when he argues that the land not only stands for the whole country which Blacks had lost, 'but also for the pre-colonial era which contained the life [they] had lost' (2001:4). Zhuwarara further contends that the general marginalization endured by Africans and various forms of humiliation accompanying it are 'crystallised into a deep sense of exile from the land which, according to tradition, has the capacity to renew life and nourish growth both physically and spiritually' (2001:4). He refers to how the land has been represented in some of the poems of Dambudzo Marechera and the fictional narratives of Charles Mungoshi to elaborate his observation. Muchemwa (1978: xviii) makes this point differently when he notes that the poets' feeling for the land informs the consciousness with which they explore other themes in their works such as the conflict between city and country. While both Muchemwa's and Zhuwarara's critiques are not primarily studies on how history and identity have been explored in Zimbabwean

poetry, they usefully offer insight on how the land features as a metaphor of identity in that poetry.

Robert Muponde (2000) also identifies a direct relationship between preoccupations of Zimbabwean poetry with history and identity, and the land dispossession that followed the colonial conquest. In his study Muponde (2000:3) argues that:

> The issue of the land finds artistic expression in most of our literature, although it is treated in various ways and for different purposes from poet to poet. ... We want to view the land itself as the determinant of our historical sensibility as a people, a central sensibility in that it united us in the past and still unites us in the present in our ongoing anti-neocolonial, socio-economic struggles. Because the land is a priceless heritage, questions of belonging and identity are ultimately about the repossession of our hist-(sic).

Although Muponde correctly notes that Zimbabwean literature imagines the land from different perspectives, he contradicts himself by claiming that the land accords a uniform historical and identity consciousness ('determinant of our historical sensibility as a people, a central sensibility in that it united us in the past and still unites us in the present'). By attaching to the land a fixed significance in the Zimbabwean psyche, he homogenizes Zimbabwean identities in a way that is similar to a later and current ZANU PF discourses which parochially demand that the nation ignores other active sites of identities and defines itself only in terms of the chaotic land redistribution. Amanda Hammar and Brian Raftopoulos (2003:19) point to this limitation in ZANU PF narratives that accord primacy to the land as the 'singular' and 'authentic signifier of national identity' when they argue that they obscure '[t]he complexity and multiplicity of colonial and postcolonial social, political and economic struggles in varied locations and among differentiated groups'. Furthermore, Muponde's (2000) work has been largely overtaken by events because the land reform processes manifestly failed to return the land to the

majority of black people by privileging only a small elite which has now turned its attention to businesses owned by foreigners and non-indigenous Zimbabweans.

Muponde's *Zimbabwean Literature Poetry* (2000) is, of course, only a study guide to undergraduate students. A different and more elaborately argued study on the land and how it features in Zimbabwean poetry was written by Dan Wylie (2005). Wylie makes a comparative analysis of inscriptions of the land in the poetry of some early white settlers whose verse is compiled in John Snelling's anthology *Rhodesian Verse1888-1938* (1938) and that of native black poet Musaemura Zimunya from an ecocritical perspective. Ecocriticism according to Wylie (2005:148), examines the contribution of imaginative literature to the general awareness of its environment as a reflection of pragmatic exercises such as land-use, racial attitudes, or conservation of wildlife. This assertion implies that an ecocritical appreciation of poetry gives insight into how humans perceive and relate to their natural environment. Wylie (2005:149) argues that the value of ecocriticism lies in its ability to unearth beneath the omissions and rifts of the poetic work itself evidence of unspoken or unrecognized ecological dynamics, not in merely historicist or scientific mode, but as a means of explaining the cultural values and effects of the work's aesthetic self. Significant here is the notion that ecocriticism does not merely critique what is represented in a poetry text, but also makes 'visible' the creative impetus(es) behind that work's vision(s), or as he (2005:149) observes (quoting Adorno), '[t]here is no landscape that is not also a culturescape' and that both landscape and its inhabitants can be scripted only with aesthetic or iconic import. The caveat here is that narratives of the landscape are only extensions of the cultural values of its inhabitants and as such 'there is no natural language within the terrain … [but]

only more or less socially coherent, accepted or historically localized descriptive languages, none intrinsically more authentic to the terrain than another, but each authentic to the psychic landscape that they express' (Wylie, 2005:149). This suggests that the landscape does not determine the thrust of the artistic visions that represent it, but rather how it is narrated stems from or at the least is influenced by forces external to it. This is another critical difference from Muponde's study which simply sees the land as a determiner of social and cultural awareness. When Wylie applies this theory to the selected texts he is able to capture both differences and overlaps in Zimunya's and early Rhodesian poets' aesthetics of inscribing ecology. He observes that the aesthetics of some poets in Snelling's anthology were driven by an attempt to create a sense of emergent nationhood by glamorizing colonial violence and conquest, while Zimunya's own representation, although it generally expresses knowledge of local ecology by finding a relatively untrammelled beauty in the landscapes, includes modern references that create dissonances with a pristine landscape. He concludes that Zimunya is 'no more capable of finding that authentic language of ecological integration than the white interloper' (2005:154).

Another important aspect of Zimbabwean poetry raised in Wylie's study is the shortcomings of white-authored poetry in representing the colonized territory. Its weaknesses are also noted by critics such as Adrian Roscoe and Mpalive-Hangson Msiska (1992) and Zhuwarara (2001). Roscoe and Msiska (1992:95) remark that most white poetry conformed to an external national aesthetics because there was little attempt among Whites to fashion a literature that was different in sensibility from the sensibility of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century metropolitan Britain.

This was due to the fact that the settlers identified more with Britain than with the colonized territory. Roscoe and Msiska (1992:95-6) maintain that it was not until the mid 1960s, that a more localized form of writing emerged because it became imperative for the 'independent' nation to forge an identity that was different from that of the metropolitan power. Roscoe's and Msiska's assertion is confirmed by the developments in Rhodesian political discourses, such as the desperate search for a national anthem that captured the spirit of Rhodesian nationalism and identity. Anthony Chennells (2008:66) both confirms and contradicts Roscoe and Msiska by arguing that the increased interest in white writing towards Rhodesia as place cannot only be attributed to the UDI in general, but to specific events such as the liberation war and an increase in white emigration, both of which made the Whites less and less confident of their identity in the country. Chennells observes that the war was a staple theme for both Blacks and Whites' writing during this time. However, it is important to note that the Whites' intensified preoccupation with the immediate developments in the colony did not necessarily translate to a change in racial attitudes or to a uniform poetic vision. Chennells (2008:60) notes that for some poets such as Phillipa Berlyn, the war is imagined as unwarranted violence intruding without justification into the seasonal harmonies of a peaceful and enlightened land and for others such as John Eppel (whose work is discussed in Chapter Six of this study) it invited a critical re-interrogation of settler history, identity and place in the colony. In fact, Eppel's collection *Sonata for Matabeleland* (1995) contains poems that are deeply devoted to the landscape which celebrate the 'resilient bush of Southern Matabeleland which is literal setting as well as a symbol of Zimbabwe's power to renew itself' (Flora Veit-Wild & Chennells, 2004:463). Whatever differences that might have existed in white narratives of the war; the fact that

Chennells (2008) emphasizes is that it affected the ways in which they defined themselves in relation to the colony.

Emmanuel Ngara's (1990) study examines the impact of the liberation war on black Zimbabwean poetry. Ngara uses a Marxist theoretical approach in which he argues that poetic narratives of the liberation war are ideological constructs, products of both a 'common' consciousness that has been historically produced and an individual poet's interpretation of the dominant narratives around him or her. He (1990:11) observes that:

> although, much African [Zimbabwean] poetry derived its sustenance and energy from a tension that was a result of the conflict between the interests of colonial rule and capitalist exploitation on the one hand and the pressures and ideological imperatives of nationalism on the other hand, the ideological stance of each writer will in part depend on his/her level of political consciousness – whatever consciousness the writer displays amounts to authorial ideology – which in turn determines the poet's perception of reality.

Ngara's observation is premised on Marxist literary criticism's proposition that literature must be understood in relation to historical and social reality as interpreted from a Marxist point of view (K.M. Newton, 1997:158) and that literature has a utilitarian value – 'good literature helps us to see more vividly the struggle between the forces of oppression and those of liberation and progress' (Ngara, 1990:3). Also in Marxist aesthetics, literature is regarded as an ideology situated in the superstructure of society. The arrangement of the superstructure is considered to be determined by the economic base. But within a more sophisticated Marxist literary theory, criticism which sees a 'straightforward deterministic relationship between base and superstructure' (Newton, 1997:158) is criticized for being 'vulgar' because it oversimplifies literary texts by reducing them to products 'casually determined by the economic base' (Newton, 1997:158). While Ngara's study is not about history and identity, what is

important is that it outlines one of the ways in which the poet interacts with the object of representation. I explored the same principle of ideology in my attempts to qualify the historian's position vis-à-vis the past earlier in this study. The same factor is raised in the work of another African Marxist critic Chidi Amuta (1989), who notes that the account of the literary event that emerges is a product of the narrating subject's imagination. In his study, Ngara (1990) concludes that there is no ideological uniformity in Zimbabwean war poetry, because Zimbabwean poets wrote principally as individuals recording their own experiences and reactions to the war of liberation.

Ngara's concept of ideology is comparable to Flora Wild's approach in an earlier study *Patterns of Poetry in Zimbabwe* (1988). While in her book, Wild does not appear to employ any particular school of critical theory, she (1988:23) emphasizes that a shared source of creative inspiration does not translate to a common poetic vision. She argues that although recurrent themes (such as the injustices of colonialism, the *Chimurenga* struggle and developments in early post-independence Zimbabwe) in black Zimbabwean poetry of the 1970s and 1980s, highlight the role of a common historical context in inspiring poetic consciousness, there are trends which poets are clearly aware of and they may register in similar or divergent ways which call to question the existence of a 'common' history. Wild analyzes the poetry of prominent black poets such as Musaemura Zimunya, Dambudzo Marechera, Kristina Rungano and Charles Mungoshi to demonstrate her argument.

Zhuwarara (2001:10) also offers insight into the relationship between national historical experiences and artistic consciousness in Zimbabwe when he writes:

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In general, one finds that Zimbabwean fiction is responsive to and reflective of the historical processes which were affecting society as a whole. There is a parallel movement ... which points to the existence of a strong umbilical cord between history and fiction as well as poetry and drama. This organic tie in itself is not a new or original Zimbabwean phenomenon; it has existed in the history and literature of other societies.... In the Zimbabwean case, the historical experience sheds considerable light on the tone, form and thematic preoccupation of the fiction.

Zhuwarara echoes Homi Bhabha's (1990) concept of nation and narration which ties narratives that emerge from a particular nation to socio-political developments in that nation. Although Zhuwarara correctly indicates that Zimbabwean literature takes its particular character from the nation's history, he also oversimplifies this connection by seeing the latter as simply determining the former. Often literature, as I have already indicated is a revisitation of the past and such a revisitation can result in different insights and responses. As Roscoe (2008:50) observes with regards to Zimbabwean poetry, events such as the liberation war continue to be a powerful catalyst of poetic creativity as poets wrest with the disappointing aftermath of the armed struggle.

The critical approaches that I have outlined here are not exhaustive but they reflect some of the important studies made about Zimbabwean poetry to date. They cover some of the general and yet essential aspects of Zimbabwean poetry which cannot be ignored in the current study. But the difference between these studies and my own is that they are not primary investigations of how history and identity are represented in Zimbabwean poetry. Where these concepts are raised, they are merely mentioned as themes: they are neither qualified nor subjected to an intense critique themselves. My study attempts to uncover their problematic meanings and to wrestle with the conceptual controversies that surround their construction and deconstruction in

narratives. Thus this study fills this gap by exploring history and identity in their totality as already signalled by my multifaceted engagement with these concepts at the beginning.

Outline of Chapters

Each of the poets selected for the study re-evaluates historical narratives and interrogates and creates identities in their own particular way and what emerges in Zimbabwean poetry is a pattern of both continuity and disjunction. The subsequent chapters explore the strategies that the selected Zimbabwean poets adopt in re-writing the past and the nature of the identities they forge.

In Chapter Two, Musaemura Zimunya's selected texts – *Thought Tracks* (1982), *Kingfisher, Jikinya and other Poems* (1982) and *Country Dawns and City Lights* (1985) are discussed as poetry that attempts to reconnect black people who have been denigrated by colonialism to their pre-colonial past. The chapter argues that Zimunya's aim is to give them a sense of belonging in the face of colonial debasement. Cultural symbols of black people such as the Great Zimbabwe Ruins are read as counter narratives of history that reject colonial representations of a dark pre-colonial past. The trope of the city, which is rendered as a symbol of colonial culture, features as a melting pot of black people's culture, a place where they adopt new identities, which, in Zimunya's poetry manifests and express as a loss of identity because Zimunya locates authentic African identities in the rural areas. The chapter will argue that Zimunya's nostalgic reconfiguration of the past often romanticizes it and conveniently subverts its unpleasant details so as to strengthen his cause against the colonizers' space and the

discourses that it reproduced. Notwithstanding this, the chapter considers these strategies of Zimunya as part of the postcolonial poet's participation in the subversion of the hegemony of colonial images to foreground the underdog's notions of identification. Furthermore, Zimunya's poetry is analyzed in Chapter Two as verse that 'writes back', to use Bill Ashcroft *et al.*'s (1989) term, to the metropolis rejecting colonial narratives of history, definitions and identities they create. The theoretical approach to this chapter is post-colonial in nature; steeped in the theorizations of Ashcroft *et al.* (1989), Franz Fanon (1968), Edward Said (1993), Abdul JanMohamed (1985) and Henry Louis Gates Jr (1985) among others.

Chapter Three engages with Chenjerai Hove's four collections of poetry: *Up in Arms* (1982), *Red Hills of Home* (1985) *Rainbows in the Dust* (1998) and *Blind Moon* (2003). In this chapter it is argued that Hove re-visits and re-tells the history of the second *Chimurenga* in order to make sense of identities in Zimbabwe after independence. The chapter further argues that his versions of Zimbabwe after 1980 in *Rainbows in the Dust* and *Blind Moon* disrupt the nationalist government's official accounts of both the past and present that the poet one time shared with the liberation movement and articulates what he perceives to be silenced versions. The chapter also reveals that Hove employs symbolical minimalism – simple ideas and images – and silence in his poetry as alternative vehicles to communicate the subverted narratives of history which are condemned to the periphery by 'patriotic' narratives of Zimbabwean history. The aim in this chapter is to explore the tug-of-war between the two versions as they vie to re-present the present and the past to forge both private and national identities.

Chapter Four is informed by the controversy surrounding Marechera's writing. Marechera is a writer who declines to share the literary perspectives that have become conventional for most African writers. For example, he rejects the label African writer and insists on being called simply a writer. In his poetry, as in his prose, Marechera destabilizes the existing reality and unsettles certitudes contained in cultural narratives and social ideologies. As a result, Marechera's vision of his society and its history is often considered as both complex and anarchic. Through an analysis of his collection of poetry *Cemetery of Mind* (1992), this chapter examines the nature of Marechera's poetic imagining of history which gives rise to the instability that is characteristic of the ever-shifting and changing identities that he creates. The chapter ends by considering Marechera's influence on younger poets, particularly Philip Zhuwao, whose collection *Sunrise Poison* (unpublished) explicitly acknowledges a debt to the older poet.

In Chapter Five, the focus of the study shifts to some of the women poets in Zimbabwe. The chapter analyzes a volume by former freedom fighter Freedom Nyamubaya, *On the Road Again: Poems During and After the National Liberation of Zimbabwe* (1986), and the poems in *Dusk of Dawn* (1994) and some poets in *A Woman's Plea* (1998), an anthology of poems by various Zimbabwean women. The aim in this chapter is to explore women's voices to find out how women rewrite their society's history and inscribe themselves into that history. This chapter is predicated on two hypotheses: that African women are excluded from major critical discourses and analysis of poetry, and where they feature, they are misrepresented; and that black women's identity is a

construct of the interactions between colonial and their indigenous cultures. These hypotheses are tested in this chapter vis-à-vis the selected texts. The main theoretical standpoint from which this chapter is approached is feminism, particularly as it is viewed by African feminists such as Obioma Nnaemeka (2007), Mary Kolawole (1998) and Molara Ogundipe-Leslei (1994). The assumption is that the African feminist vision(s) is/are more immediate and relevant to the African scene than those charted by Western feminists. Where appropriate, these feminist discourses are coupled with postcolonial debates that underpin the study.

John Eppel's collections of poetry – Spoils *of War* (1989), *Sonata for Matabeleland* (1995), *John Eppel: Selected Poems 1965-1995* (2001) and *Songs my Country Taught me: Selected Poems 1965-2005* (2005) – are examined in Chapter Six, as verse that re-articulates the problems which Whites in post-independence Zimbabwe face in forging a new identity as the new dispensation necessitates. This chapter argues that Eppel's revisiting of the Whites' culture of privilege in colonial Rhodesia and juxtaposing it with their reluctance to identify with post-independence Zimbabwe, potentially justifies the binaries of black and white which are being resuscitated in the official narratives of history in present day Zimbabwe. The aim in this chapter is to explore, and hopefully find, through Eppel's verse, the identity that the Whites create for themselves in post-independence Zimbabwe, bearing in mind their history in colonial Rhodesia. To achieve this, both Eppel's pre-independence and post-independence poetry is considered.

In the conclusion, a comparative approach is adopted to find out the convergences and differences in how the selected poets rewrite Zimbabwean history in order to construct new post-independence identities. Through a comparative approach, this section of the study aims to show the complexities that exist in the discourses on Zimbabwean poetry, history and identity. The significance of the findings are pointed out and areas for further research are suggested.

Chapter Two

Musaemura Zimunya: Recovering the Pre-colonial Past

This chapter examines the strategies that Musaemura Zimunya uses to re-inscribe the pre-colonial past and the cultural spaces it represents in order to construct alternative identities for Blacks than those that they were accorded in colonial Rhodesia and Zimbabwe. Zimunya is probably the most prolific black Zimbabwean poet. He was born in 1949 in the scenic Eastern Highlands in the then Rhodesia and much of his poetry draws its inspiration from the beautiful landscape of this region. His sense of history and identity that shapes his poetic imagination is grounded in the spaces of the pre-colonial African past and their interface with spaces opened up by colonial modernity. He rewrites and re-presents the pre-colonial African past, the natural environment, the country and other symbols and cultural sites of black people in order to provide them with alternatives to colonial constructions of the nation and give them identities located in these re-worked histories.

The significance of Zimunya's re-inscription of the pre-colonial African pasts has to be understood in the light of European colonizers' justification of their presence on the African continent with self-serving myths about the continent which represented its putative backwardness, savagery, barbarism and the plight of the primeval beings that inhabited it as justification for conquest and for the noble cause of spreading civilization and righting the legacy of its past. The 'benighted' inhabitants of Africa were consequently supposed to be indebted to colonial presence, and the colonizers themselves sought to inculcate this attitude in the colonized. Owing to this, the arguments in this chapter are informed by various post-colonial perspectives. For

example, Frantz Fanon (1968:169) summarizes the self-serving thrust of colonial narratives as follows:

> … the total result looked for by colonial domination was indeed to convince the natives that colonialism came to lighten their darkness. The effect consciously sought by colonialism was to drive into the natives' heads the idea that if the settlers were to leave, they would at once fall back into barbarism, degradation and depravity.

Fanon's thesis outlines the centre-margin politics – a model discourse of power in the colony that structured colonial narratives in Africa and the identities they constructed. Zimunya's project of recovering the pre-colonial past centres on disrupting the centre-margin binaries of the colonial narratives, accounts that place the colonizer at the centre of the colony's history – the place of the privileged subject – while situating the colonized subaltern at the periphery – the position of the racially 'inferior' other.

A different way of understanding the thrust of Zimunya's poetic narratives of history can also be found in Edward Said's (1993:119) observation that colonial versions about the colonized territory are uniquely built around a single dominating attitude: they are accounts of people who looked at Africa within the cramping limits of their own stereotypes and they were under no obligation to please or persuade a 'native' African because they were premised on the silence of the native. As becomes evident in this chapter, Zimunya's main strategy for recovering the pre-colonial past depends on collapsing colonial centres of power and knowledge through subversion and foregrounding the subaltern's pre-colonial past and notions of identification as superior. Interwoven with the subversion of colonialism's grand narratives is Zimunya's reinterpretation of the land and geography – spaces which he uses to

include and exclude African and western identities respectively. He presents the subaltern's land as the site of their history and authentic pre-colonial identity by re-imagining both land and geography from a complex multi-perspective that disrupts the colonizers' romanticization of their role in a space that they represented in terms of darkness. Even the modern city, the centre in the colony is deconstructed and civilization is located in the rural area, the periphery in the colonial narrative.

These strategies amount to a practice similar to what Deirdre Lashgari (1995:2-3) call decentering, 'a process essential to postcolonial literary practice' through which both the colonial subject and object are redefined. When those who occupy the margin of history re-place the centre, making the margin the new centre of their own subjectivity, different historical perspectives of the African past and the colony emerge, and in the process new identities are created. Therefore, this chapter also considers Zimunya's poetic representations as a process of 'decentering' and it argues that his 'doubling back' (especially in *Thought-Tracks)* to the pre-colonial past, the same past that is denigrated by the hegemony of monologic colonial historiography is not so much a yearning for a return to the 'golden age' of that era, but an assertion of black subjectivity that emphasizes difference from the imperial centre (Bill Ashcroft *et. al*, 1989:2) to support the desirability and necessity of change.

In Part One of this chapter, Zimunya's poetry in *Thought-Tracks* (1982b) is analyzed as verse that 'decenters' by 'writing back', to use Bill Ashcroft (1989) *et al's* term, to the metropolis, rejecting colonial theories and representations of pre-colonial savagery and barbarism. Most of his poems in this collection subvert colonial values and spaces, and

foreground the hidden pre-colonial world and its cultural sites to reconnect Blacks to their past. If history is to confer some kind of definition on a people and an understanding of themselves, then it should bestow a sense of rootedness. These strategies are considered as part of the post-colonial poet's participation in the subversion of the hegemony of colonial images while foregrounding how the colonized imagine their own identities. The argument in Part One also centres on myths and stereotypes held by white colonizers towards Africans, and White people's quest to understand Africa by embedding and interpreting it in European categories. In Part Two, the focus shifts to Zimunya's use of the country/city trope in *Country Dawns and City Lights* (1985) and *Kingfisher, Jikinya and other Poems* (1982a) as a signifier of two discursive spaces which stand for diametrically opposed values and meanings: the country is presented as the source of pre-colonial ethos while the city is the negation of these values. The culture and identities developed in rural areas are celebrated as 'authentic' while those located in urban spaces are criticized as lacking rootedness. Zimunya is also the author of *Perfect Poise and Other Poems* (1993). This collection differs from his poems discussed in this chapter in that he is no longer concerned to search for lost histories and identities but now provides a vibrant commentary on specific developments in post-independence Zimbabwe (especially in the early 1990s, the beginning of the country's second decade of independence) and the problems afflicting the African continent in general. Some of the poems on post-independent Zimbabwe: 'JR' (29-30), 'Benzocrats' (30), 'To K' (31) and 'I swear' (31-32) foreground and criticize vices such as corruption and anomalies such as the economic marginalization of large sections of the population. Those that focus on the larger African continent (see for example 'For Moza' [35], 'Algiers: Nightflight' [36] and 'Africa'

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[36]) denounce dictatorial governments and the strife caused by civil wars. Other poems, such as 'Bellinda' (14) echo some of the themes explored in *Country Dawns and City Lights*. As a result, a detailed analysis of *Perfect Poise and Other Poems'* risks the danger of becoming repetitive or wandering from the objective of this study. The quality of the poetry deserves to be examined in more detail in another paper.

Part One

One of the strategies that Zimunya implements in *Thought-Tracks*, as part of the process of recovering the pre-colonial African past is to deny colonial settlers literary space. By refusing them literary space, Zimunya rejects colonial representations and the privilege they afford the colonizers as sole makers and subjects of history. He criticizes white colonial artists in Rhodesia for adopting stereotypes about the colony in lieu of critical evaluations of the new space. In the process, his poetry provides an oppositional discourse to opinionated western narratives of Africa that subscribe to the larger colonial representations which refuse to pluralize their way of perceiving the colony. As Alan Sinfield (1983:6) has noted, literary practices are not ideologically neutral: they are part of the apparatus through which people demarcate their identities within society. White writing in Rhodesia was tailored to available opinions about the colony and it employed a narrative organization based on racial oppositions. Zimunya's invocation of these discourses reveals how they misrepresent the Africans' identities and their spaces by framing them in calcified stereotypes of backwardness. The poem 'White poetess' for example, seeks to define Africans' identities in opposition to such literary practices. The first stanza of the poem reads:

> She saw Africa as a continent
> with festering sores
> bleeding and clotting
> in defiance of western therapy. (1982b:66)

This stanza introduces the colonizers' stereotypical conception of Africa as a dark continent through its utilization of images of festering sores and clotting blood. Mary Louise Pratt (1985:139) calls these negative representations colonialism's normalizing discourse, whose function is to codify difference, the gulf that is supposed to exist between the colonizer and the colonized. This difference is foregrounded in the third stanza through the contrast created by the juxtaposition of 'something ghoulish' to the 'civilized' white poetess.

> Something ghoulish from the north
> of the Zambezi river offended
> those who, like her, were civilized
> although there was no end to the prospect
> of titillating tattle about Africans.

However, the poem significantly undercuts the binaries of darkness and light/ civilized and uncivilized by presenting the suppressed attraction that the white poetess has of the colonial space. This is evident in the fourth stanza:

> Close to tears,
> she clutched them close to her heart
> and surrendered to the intoxication
> of endless safari dreaming.

Despite this, this attraction towards Africa is presented as inadequate and precludes the white poetess from imagining Africa in realistic terms. This is apparent in the last two stanzas:

> But she couldn't see that beneath
> the mountain, a shadow with living eyes
> and witching black lips, beard, body and legs

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her own servant, were thrusting roots around her.

She had no dreams that night,
merely sat on the typewriter
and composed a romantic piece
about the Rhodesian veld in which
the shadow of the servant had no place,
save for a grudging vernacular word, wrongly spelt,
making wild reference (1982b:66).

The persona's presentation of the white poetess as unable to represent Africa in its diversity, denies her both literary space and authority to narrate Africa. Part of the incapability is a product of the colonial mentality's ready appropriation of limiting or blinding stereotypes suggested by the white poetess' composition of a romantic verse in which the African has no place. However, some of the gaps and omissions in the white poetess' representations as exemplified in distorted indicated through 'a grudging vernacular word, wrongly spelt,/ making wild reference' can also be interpreted in terms of what Ashcroft *et al.*, (1989:140) call the 'problem of imported language and the 'alien' native landscape' that created a conflict between settler writing and place in the colony. Ashcroft *et al.* (1995) view the concept of place in broad terms; they argue that place should not only be conceived as landscape, but as a complex interaction of language, history and environment. In as much as the white poetess is driven by colonial stereotypes, she neither has an available language or history to describe the new African space. So in search for authenticity in their writing as Ashcroft *et al.* (1989:141) quoting Lee observe, all that the settlers could afford was inauthenticity. However, for Turner (1989:9), this is an existential void that settlers inevitably feel when they try to write too quickly in a locality to which they have no strong historical connection. Turner insists that it takes time for there to be enough of human history accumulated in a given place to make literature out of it.

In contrast, in poems where Zimunya presents Africa through the African's gaze, a different picture of the place emerges. The poem 'My Home' reflects this:

> I live in the highlands
> encompassed by great green ridges
> where is my home,
> in the heart of the storms of the world?
> is this my home?
> brother, it is;
> also beats with
> the whole of Africa's pulse
> conveying day into darkness
> and darkness into sunshine.
>
> Upon those storms and billows of mountains
> capped with the surf of transient mists,
> whale-like woolly objects slumber,
> crowns of bulky trees sway
> and tilt, tilt
> and sway
> in the grace of breathing breezes.
>
> And now I can see
> the silver glare and glisten
> of the full sliding sun
> in a huge serpent
> like a river clear of muddy flood
> flowing and leaping swift and free
> gurgling and giggling
> like those rude young girls from the city
> gurgling and giggling
> swayed by mini-morals
> clothing the old chaste tradition
> with everlasting defilement. (13)

Here, the persona's identification with the natural environment carves for him an identity that is outside the colonial space. Also, his use of the first person pronoun 'I' and the possessive 'my' endears him to the place and authorizes him to narrate and describe it in a way the distancing and alienating second person pronoun 'she' in the poem 'White

poetess' does not. This strategy, coupled with the persona's location of his home in the highlands, express and is confirmed in Ashcroft *et al.'s* (1995:392) notion of history and identity as embedded in place. Furthermore, that the persona portrays his home as a place that 'beats with the whole of Africa's pulse' gives him a dynamic identity that is capable of relating to and harmonizing itself with the surroundings in a rhythmic way that is characterized by constant change and revision. This is also affirmed in the lines: 'conveying day into darkness/and darkness into sunshine'. The movement and change that are evident in this poem inscribe the persona's place as 'a palimpsest, a kind of parchment on which successive generations have inscribed and re-inscribed the process of history' (Ashcroft *et al*., 1995:392). This conception of history is also reinforced by the images of movement in the second stanza; 'storms and billows of mountains', 'surf of transient mists', trees that 'sway and tilt' and 'in the grace of breathing breezes'. These lines are also linked to the movement of 'the whole of Africa's pulse' disclosed in the first stanza. The reference to the whole of Africa generalizes the persona's identity so that a rudimentary pan-African consciousness is implied, and marked out in opposition to the dry imagination and Eurocentric identity of the English poetess. Through this movement, which is also extended to the last stanza of the poem, the flora is marshaled to describe the mood of the persona's home and his identity. It ceases to be an amorphous wilderness that needs to be conquered, but rather it becomes part of the African's unique cultural and historical heritage; it is capable of embodying identity in its variety as well as to mediate it in its formation.

If in the poem 'My Home', Zimunya mainly uses the flora to create a sense of place that captures the essence of the subaltern's notions of identity, in the poem 'I like them', he recovers for the Africans their own notions of interpreting the physical world around them by describing the local landscape and fauna in terms of each other. The first stanza of the poem reads:

> I like the northern mountain of my home
> crouching like a monstrous lion –
> with a brown bald head
> that shines with summer's water patches
> and upon whose muzzle
> stands a huge rhino-horn of stone –
> always ready to pounce upon the western. (4)

The image of 'rhino-horn of stone' in particular, merges local landscape and fauna. This gives the impression that a purely local identity can be recovered. Here, national geography, as Edward Said (1993:215) notes, becomes a site for national resistance to imperial culture as the persona gives the details of the texture of his place's topography through an imagery that is local and aboriginal to the physical environment that he captures.

However, in the last stanza of the poem, the persona disrupts this view by using western images to describe the feelings that he has for his home:

> how I enjoy their encompassing pretence!
> always when I give them a poet's glance,
> they are on a merry-go-round
> whose pivot is my soul.

A merry-go-round is an alien image of a funfair, and the persona's use of it problematizes the view that there exists a language that is specifically designed to describe a particular place. This compels one to agree with Ashcroft's (1995:300)

observation that, if the word is brought to a site of meaning which stands at the intersection between two separate cultures, it demonstrates the total dependence of that meaning upon its 'situated-ness'. This suggests that there is no language that is restricted to reflecting a specific cultural truth. In the poem, this view is further strengthened by the mood of romanticism that pervades the persona's invocation of the mountains of the Eastern Highlands. Romanticizing is normally viewed as a western form of representation, and in Africa it carries negative connotations – it is associated with the colonizers' shallow gaze at Africa.

However, Zimunya's romanticism of his place and use of western images to describe it is not entirely 'attracted by the wild and picturesque in nature and by the supernatural …' (Rumboll *et al.,* 1989:25) which are usually attributed to western romantic representation. Rather, it amounts to subversion; he appropriates a romantic representation to deconstruct colonial stereotypes that Blacks only appreciated nature if it was useful for food and medicine. By appropriating Western romantic language, Zimunya does not only show that Blacks are capable of celebrating their natural environment for its beauty, but also demonstrates that there is an African aesthetic that can employ western nature poetry.

In the poem, 'Children's Rain Song', natural conditions, such as rain are presented in ways that give alternative interpretations to the African's life that in colonial scholarship is described in fixity.

> I see little children
> fling their small clothes away
> like merry flying termites
> after their rainy wedding flights
> skipping, hopping and screaming in the rain

Rain fall fall
we will eat berries
rain fall for all
we will eat cucumbers
rain fall fall

Little brown bodies
shrieking in the rain
laughing and playing
splattering in the puddles
loving all the rain

…
Children in the rain
they don't feel the pain
of longing all the time
to streak through my years
and dance in the rain again. (3)

The meaning of the poem is couched in its oral structure that imitates the rain song taken from the Shona language as the persona nostalgically recalls his childhood days. The song itself appears to be a ditty, but it is a metaphor that celebrates a form of human consciousness that evolves from a long history of interaction with the elements of a particular habitat. The African's identity is coded in this interaction as suggested by the image of children splattering in the puddles. This is a powerful image that is used to underline a strong sense of belonging. The children are delighting in the rain because they have a deep knowledge of seasonal cycles: they are aware that rain brings them food. Their celebration of rain is also mirrored in the activities of other creatures of nature ('merry flying termites/ after their rainy wedding flights'). This further indicates that the children are in harmony with the natural environment of their place. Also, the persona's use of orature as the main means through which the poem conveys its message asserts a sidelined dimension of the African's identity – the silenced discourse of oral story telling valued in the pre-colonial past. Orature preserved memory and the

core structures of the communities of the past via means such as the song in the poem. However, every attempt at preserving orality creates or intimates the birth of a new language and consciousness that can ironically question the initial romantic vision of the poet. In other words, although the revisiting of such ancient songs seeks a reconnection with the cultural spaces of the old and the awareness they represent, but it is impossible to retrieve the past as intact.

This point is conveyed differently in the poem 'Ask Grandpa' where Grandpa symbolizes sources of indigenous knowledge, its preservation and its transmission. The first stanza of the poem reads:

> Ask Grandpa
> He will tell you
> He will educate you
> Ask him
> Ask him (26)

The persona deliberately subverts written history by shifting attention from the written word as the overarching source of awareness to the spoken word. It is through the spoken word that the colonized's songs, folklores, proverbs and myths are conveyed. The third stanza which is based on one of the many myths from the Shona society's pre-colonial past illustrates this:

> who knows
> how the last lion
> hid in a woman's womb
> and came out
> in the form of a man
> he knows
> ask him
> ask him

Through the figure of Grandpa, a symbol of the pre-colonial depository of history and knowledge preservation, the poem searches for new departures in looking at the pre-colonial history of the Africans. These are the departures that are denied by the one-sided colonial discourse.

There is a persistent mood in Zimunya's poetry that underlines the frustrations of a society whose traditional patterns have been destroyed by foreign influence, but which at the same time does not have the means to regenerate itself. This mood emanates from Zimunya's awareness of his own moment in history. The 1970s, when most of the poems in this collection were written, was a period of cultural isolation for Blacks in Rhodesia. Ian Smith, the then prime minister had declared a Unilateral Declaration of Independence [UDI] from Britain in 1965, and the country was isolated internationally. Kizito Muchemwa (1978:xiii), Zimbabwean poet and critic writes of this period in the following terms:

> We felt left out, culturally and politically, from the main stream of beliefs and thoughts current in free independent black Africa. The isolation from the rest of Africa, the lack of any fruitful contact, has had adverse effects…

This cultural malaise was compounded by the absence of cultural sites through which Blacks could re-establish links with their past. In the threnody 'No songs' for example, the persona bemoans the plight of a people who can neither relate to their past nor to the world around them because their core cultural values have been destroyed. The long poem is quoted in full because it will be discussed in detail:

> No songs of cicadas –
> Only a sighing silence
> Where, once,
> As I walked below the yellow leaves
> Of fresh foliage,

A spray of urine moistened my face
And a shrill symphony
Waned into my ears.

We have no ancestors
No shrine to pester with our prayers
No sacred cave where to drum our drums
And no svikiro to evoke the gods of rain
So we live on
Without rain, without harvest.

No whistle of a bird,
No flutter nor flap
Amid the brown fingers of trees
Without leaves
When spring's lushness
Should be wiping my tired eyes
And dipping gleams of sunshine
Into the young leaves.

Where shall we find the way back?
Opaque darkness guards our exit
We have groped and groped until
Our eyes were almost blind and
It was hard to rediscover.

So we live outside the burning flames of our thirst
We live the lives of locust-hunting rooks,
But even then where are the rooks
For I have neither heard a caw

Nor seen a black patch in the sky;
The day we shall know the way back
To the caves of the ancestors,
The lion tongue of death will be licking
The last gush of blood from our souls. (10-11)

The persona searches for familiar signs from nature and ritual rites which signify his

community's harmony and communion with itself. Their absence manifests the

disjuncture of a society that cannot define itself on its own terms. For example, the

absence of ancestors, shrines and 'svikiro' mourned in the second stanza suggests a

community that has lost its spiritual basis. 'Svikiro' is a Shona term for spirit medium;

its function is to fulfill the spiritual needs of the living community by communicating their

prayers to the ancestors and relaying to the people the ancestors' wishes. As the dead of the community, ancestors express themselves through spirit mediums and their main function is to protect the land and bring rains (David Lan, 1985: xvi). While the ancestors are unceasingly generous and concerned with the welfare of the living, their protection is not to be assumed; it must be won by performing certain rituals (Lan, 1985:32). Failure to perform the required rituals leaves the society vulnerable because ancestors withdraw their protection. The persona's lament in the poem stems from an awareness of the significance of the rituals that his community fails to perform – they bring spiritual succour, a sense of identity, direction and belonging to their existence. This is why the persona imagines this spiritual crisis in terms of metaphors of drought (in the second stanza) and also likens the hollowness and worthlessness of their living without ancestral protection and spiritual anchor to that of 'locust hunting rooks' in the penultimate stanza.

The community depicted here is a humiliated and vulnerable one that has 'lost' its spiritual identity and transformed into something new that it has not yet fashioned a new idiom with which to describe and contain it. It is a society for which 'things have fallen apart' that exists listlessly in the grip of a 'nervous condition' from which it does not know how to extricate itself. This is the paradox captured in the second stanza where the absence of shrines, spirit medium and ancestors makes it impossible for the community to perform any ritual. It also symbolizes the contradictions that abound in attempting to recover the pre-colonial African past.

Also significant is the persona's use of the first person plural 'we' to emphasize the extent to which the collective consciousness and identity of the pre-colonial society have been fragmented. Because of the absence of spiritual pillars, there is a feeling of being trapped that pervades the mood of the poem; this feeling captures the stifling and restricting atmosphere in which Blacks existed in Rhodesia during the UDI. There is also a note of despair in the persona's voice; he realizes that the possibility of recovering the identities that have been distorted is difficult because the damage to the community's sense of self is enormous. This is suggested in the lines: 'Where shall we find our way back? /Opaque darkness guards our exit/We have groped and groped/Our eyes were almost blinded and/It was hard to rediscover'. Of course in reality, there is a romanticism here because Zimunya imagines a collective way as if Blacks experienced colonialism in a similar way. There is no simple and single way or source to which one can return to. In a sense then the frustrations of the persona partly arise from the fact that he does not possess adequate spiritual resources to transcend the new dispensation besides a wish to find a 'way'; and not ways, 'back' and not forge ahead in different but potentially liberating ideological directions.

In addition to the despair that the quoted lines conjure and foreground, there is also expressed, a nostalgic hankering evident in the persona's search for the 'way back' to the unattainable 'golden world' of the ancestors and the identity it accorded. This could be interpreted as a sign of the persona's failure to creatively engage with the reality of his circumstances. Historian John Tosh (2000:12) describes nostalgia as follows:

> … nostalgia is backward looking, but instead of denying the fact of historical change, it interprets it in one direction only – as change for the worst. …. It works most strongly as a reaction to a sense of loss in the recent past, and it is therefore characteristic of societies undergoing change.

A nostalgic yearning in search of reconnection with the past, is also apparent in Zimunya's other poem 'Valley of Mawewe' (not discussed in this chapter) where the world of pre-colonial Mawewe is presented as the Garden of Eden. While a longing for the past offers some kind of consolation from the harsh reality of the present because it enables the persona to partially escape by reconstructing the past in the imagination, it also reflects that Zimunya locates change as a movement backwards (the revisiting of sites, such as caves and revival of ancestral memory). However, the shortcomings of nostalgia as a way of reconstructing the past is that it essentializes, and as Tosh (2000:11) further argues, almost everything in the past that contradicts the desired image is suppressed. But for Zimunya, a poet writing with the objective of reversing the cultural dislocation meted out by colonialism, nostalgia conveniently serves the purpose. If as Fanon (1968:169) notes, colonialism is not merely satisfied with emptying the native's brain of all content, but 'by a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it', then for Zimunya, nostalgia serves to remind the Africans that they are participants in a present they did not construct and consequently that present is devoid of nourishing meanings.

Since the African past was not written, in the colonial setting the only elements that contested colonial myths were physical artifacts, such as the monumental Great Zimbabwe, relics that African nationalists, artists and historians turned to as evidence of a solid African past. In his introduction to *Thought-Tracks,* Zimunya describes the Great Zimbabwe as follows:

> At the height of the war of liberation, Great Zimbabwe seemed to speak eloquently and timelessly to all who sought and fought for the freedom of this

land. It was a living myth. … It became to me the archaeological sign of the Alpha: the beginning, the residual evidence of a people who found rock, took the message from it and proceeded to make a grand form with it – dzimbahwe, Great Zimbabwe, Giantrockhouse. It became obvious … one had been moving towards a discovery, or rediscovery, of one's roots and identity, and a discovery of myth. For in Rhodesia, as this land was called then, our old myths had been systematically denigrated, disrupted, and even destroyed. Generations and generations were reared on European myths and heroes and sucked into the vortex of European culture and behaviour where all identity with the past was threatened with extinction (x).

As a historical site, the Great Zimbabwe also fell victim to colonialists' historical prejudices. European explorers who came across the remains could not credit them to Blacks; they ascribed them to Phoenicians. De Waal (1990:19) quotes Sauer who argued that "The idea that they [Great Zimbabwe ruins] were built by the African Negroid or Bantu races is preposterous, as these races never build anything but huts of straw and sticks." De Waal (1990:19) maintains that this view was still taught in Rhodesian schools right up to independence despite the massive archaeological evidence to the contrary. During colonialism, Great Zimbabwe was mainly valued as a tourist attraction and not as a cultural and identity site which symbolized the long history of Blacks' civilization. By situating nationalist discourses in the Great Zimbabwe and inscribing it as the cradle of black culture and identity, Zimunya searches for a national identity in sites that have a potential to unify.

The stone structures' cultural significance suggests that there is no black person independent of the identity couched in the meanings they symbolize. Zimunya's representation of the ruins gives the impression that the nation of Zimbabwe was in existence before colonialism, and here he draws from popular memory of history in search of a rallying point. This makes his nationalism an act of forgetting as well,

because as Ernest Renan (1990:11) claims, 'forgetting or historical error is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for [the principle of] nationality'. When making constructs, especially a nation, which did not exist before colonialism, there should be a collective memory of history and a spiritual dimension to pull people's attachment and identification with that nation. This view is complicated by Michael Billig (1995:38) who contends that this collective remembering is simultaneously a collective forgetting because sometimes nations forget the ugly of history especially such as the violence that brought them into existence.

Notwithstanding this contradictory aspect of nationalism, Great Zimbabwe legitimizes claims to political and cultural autonomy, and through it, Zimunya also builds a consciousness that nationalist ideology should be constructed around symbols of the pre-colonial past rather than 'isms' such as Socialism or Marxism – western imports. Barbara Harlow (1987:34) notes that the role of poetry in liberation struggle is a crucial one in that it is a force for mobilizing a collective response to occupation and also a repository for popular memory and consciousness. This vision is encapsulated in the poem 'Climbers' part of which reads:

> We crave for flesh and feet made of earth
> and skin made of finest black clay;
> we shall praise the porter
> with brew of the best grain ferment
> a word of the worthiest prayer
> and a cracking stamp of the foot
> dust, indeed, is our eternal shroud.
>
> …
>
> Give us the feet that can climb the giddiest mountain
> and hands that will clasp the tenderest tufts

and heads that will level the dizziest heights
so that we can bring the rock down to Zimbabwe.
For there is the shell of our soul.

…

Give us the heart that transcends greed
give us the heads that rise beyond our burrows
and be ours the eyes that shoot unto the stars
on the darkest, cloudiest night.

One hand to another,
one rock to another,
one rock over the other
one wall inside another
outside another until
the city towers above trees
and we all look up at the dream
taller than pot-bellies, higher than collars,
whisks, uniforms, and accents,
higher still than sky-scrapers

To remind us, down trodden and ignorant,
remind us, you who have the wisdom,
to climb even higher than Mambo
and put an enduring roof upon this House (89-90).

The poem, which like some already discussed, significantly uses the collective pronoun 'we', is a prayer for a return to those values represented by the ancient city of Great Zimbabwe. This city is also imagined here as a symbolic destination of the liberation movement. The rulers under whom the structure was built (revealed by the word 'Mambo' in the last stanza) were both political and spiritual leaders whose authority was believed to come directly from the ancestors.

In the first stanza, the persona fuses black nationalists and freedom fighters with the soil when '[he] crave[s] for flesh and feet made of earth/and skin made of finest black clay'. This fusion creates an autochthonous identity for the nationalists as 'sons/daughters of the soil' – true owners of the land – because they can identify with it.

By looking upon the black person as part of the soil, the persona also constructs an anchor for his nationalist discourse that is capable of creating a spiritual balance between the inner-self and the surroundings. The negative effects of the absence of this harmony are foregrounded in the dispossessed characters of Zimbabwean literature, for example, the Old Man and his grandson Lucifer Mandengu in Charles Mungoshi's novel *Waiting For the Rain* (1975) and the Old Man in Yvonne Vera's short story 'Crossing Boundaries' in the collection *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals* (1992).

Also important is how some of the lines in the penultimate stanza: 'One hand to another/ one rock to another,/ one rock over the other/ one wall inside another' imitate the art used in building the Great Zimbabwe. These lines deliberately foreground and celebrate the loftiness of the pre-colonial imagination that constructed the Great Zimbabwe so as to disrupt the myth of the Blacks' inability to transform their surroundings into habitable places. They also significantly reflect that the achievement of building such a structure transcends secular and material needs: 'pot-bellies', 'uniforms', 'whisks' and 'sky-scrapers' – symbols of colonial modernity. The persona thus uses the Great Zimbabwe to establish a solid and ethical spiritual identity.

In the poem 'Rock of Zimbabwe', the persona also maps out both individual and national identities through the stone that was used to build the Great Zimbabwe. He uses the stone as a model whose qualities his son should emulate so as to build an enduring identity. The poem reads:

> Son,
> approach time like the stone
> capturing time – dead
> telescoping the Zero, the Alpha and the Z
> of time

before the hands of the clock do so;
watch the sky tire the sun
and the night weary the star
and do not move
but be a ruin of stones – eternal unto yourself

hold iron, sand, and gold,
air and water
with the dumb silence of confidence
and the bird
that read the language of time and space
of man and nature
and war and peace

saying nothing to the fingers
quivering with the fire of the ego
thirsting after discovery;
speaking dumb suggestions only
to the carbon instrument
and the time-cuffed probing mind (101).

The stone is a metaphor for Great Zimbabwe. The enduring qualities of the stone that are celebrated throughout the poem are symbolic of the resilience of this ancient city (built of rock) which survived beyond its time and serves as an embodiment of the values of the ancient generations that built it. Great Zimbabwe's ability to endure time elevates it above time and enables it to order time instead of itself being the object of time. Consistent with the above, Great Zimbabwe witnesses the beginning and end of time. This is evocatively revealed in such lines as 'telescoping the Zero, the Alpha and the Z/ of time' and 'hold iron, sand and gold, / air and water'. These lines suggest that although the city of Great Zimbabwe is ancient, it continues to mediate between past, present and future black identities. From this perspective, it is also possible to regard the addressee (the son) in this poem, as a metaphor for the modern Zimbabwean nation which the persona urges to adopt the qualities represented by its predecessor – Great Zimbabwe. This is encoded in the line 'but be a ruin of stones – eternal unto

yourself'; whose inscription of the ancient city endows it with a vitality that transforms its remains from being merely a sign of dereliction – 'a ruin of stones' – into an entity that embodies and communicates its own complete and everlasting meanings. Great Zimbabwe is therefore imaged as a site of memories, of creativity and above all, a site of rebellion against constructions of it in colonial discourses as 'ruins'. Its 'greatness' or modernity as cultural iconography is also its capacity to be recalled as a rallying point for the nationalist cause, even when its building must have caused pain and death to those whose labour it exacted.

Part Two

As already mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the purpose of this section is to establish how Zimunya deploys the country/city metaphor in *Kingfisher, Jikinya and other Poems* (1982a) and *Country Dawns and City Lights* (1985) as a signifier of two spaces that represent and contain different values. In these two collections, the country is presented as the source of pre-colonial and 'authentic' African identities, and the city as a threat to these identities. Zimunya's ordering of the country and city in these collections is also echoed by some Zimbabwean writers of his generation, such as Charles Mungoshi, some of whose short stories in the collection *The Setting sun and the Rolling world*: *Selected Stories* (1989) present the city as an unpredictable colonial location that erodes the stability of traditional African identities.

To put Zimunya's vision into perspective, it is necessary to note that the contemporary city in Africa is not only a symbol of modernity, but an epoch in which, to use Bill

Ashcroft's (2002:2) exact words, 'reality came to be formulated and regulated by Europe'. Ashcroft's observation can be best understood if one considered that the modern city in Africa was the centre in the colony and the country was the margin. The city is thus an embodiment of both physical and psychological spaces where colonial values are concentrated in the colony and the country represents a sphere that is distant from colonial values and influences. The ways in which the city and its margin – the country – interact are complex, but one such way with regards to Rhodesia is outlined by Ruth Weiss (1986:43) who observes that the towns and cities were places where Africans mainly entered as labourers and servants to service industries and white households. At once, Weiss' observation reveals the agency of the colony's economic organization in determining how the centre and the margin related to each other. The role of Blacks as labourers and servants in the city also mirrors the country's (the African space) perceived 'inferiority' to the urban centre, the heart of colonial power. From this perspective, both the country and city spaces in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe were not only a reflection of colonialism's re-ordering of the African space, but also symbols of colonialism's categorizations of civilized and primitive. As a result, the city/country spaces can be regarded as perhaps some of the most obvious physical manifestations of the centre-margin politics in the colony.

The purpose of the brief discussion above is to outline the context which informs Zimunya's use of the city/country trope in the poems discussed below. In fact, the arguments provided above, enable us to realize that in the poems selected for analysis in this section, Zimunya's deracination of the city as a cultural wasteland for Blacks on one hand and his inscription on the other hand of the country as a source of cultural

stability for Blacks is a continuation of the vision that he establishes in *Thought-Tracks*.

To find out the different ways in which Zimunya utilizes the country/city trope seven

poems are analyzed in this section. These poems are: 'Buns, Sweets and Biscuits',

'Bougainvillaea', 'I Like the City', 'You Haven't Met Her', 'Neighbours', 'Rain and Fire'

and 'Be Warned'.

One of the strategies that Zimunya adopts is to construct the city as a source of corrupt

values that invades and contaminates the purity of the country. The poem 'Buns,

Sweets and Biscuits' illustrates this as follows:

> The city has long arms and fingers
> that reach the furthest bush – lights,
> buns, sweets and biscuits that turned
> children of peasants restless.
> Thus, in the days of Empire
> she entered the city
> on a policeman's half-crown.
>
> In the city there were scones, pies,
> cream-buns, cream-biscuits
> cream doughnuts, coca-fizzle –
> and ice-cream and cream-cake.
>
> The city and the half-crown
> thrust demon roots down a village soul
> and like a fig-tree
> split the original in turgid growth (1985:33).

The persona laments the city's pervasive power that penetrates even the remotest

spaces of the country and alters the central tenets of country consciousness. The

influence of the city is embodied by western food and the country's awareness that it

disrupts is symbolized by the 'children of peasants [that it turns] restless.' The

expression 'children of peasants' and the word 'restless' are of particular importance in

this line because they express the persona's vision that identifies peasants as symbols

of noble savages only corrupted by the vicious savage that is the empire. While 'Children of peasants', on the one hand, alludes to the stability and innocence of the country, 'restless', on the other hand, points to the instability brought to the country by the corrupting city influence. Even more significant is the fact that throughout the poem, the persona consistently captures the city's corruptive power through symbols of momentary pleasure – western food. These images are used to deliberately trivialize identities and consciousnesses that emerge from the city space. This is because such images are structured around the ephemeral. This ephemerality underpins the claim that the city is an unstable identity base that gives rise to temporary identities (this argument is discussed in detail in poems 'I Like the City' and 'You Haven't Met Her' analyzed later which openly represent the city as a site of ever-shifting identities). Notwithstanding this aspect of the city's influence, the persona does not downplay its power to 'pollute' the country. This is revealed in the final stanza of the poem which although it uses different metaphors from those in the first and second stanzas, repeats the theme that the city destabilizes the base on which country identities are built. The lines: 'The city and half-crown/ thrust demon roots down a village soul' illustrate this point. They effectively sum up the persona's vision of the city as a corruptor of the country's innocence. This one-sided depiction of the city as corruptive underestimates how the same city space was to become the centre of nationalist political parties that challenged colonialism.

The poem 'Bougainvillaea' analyzed below corroborates the vision of 'Buns, Sweets and Biscuits' in a different way in that it compellingly captures the country-city

interaction and the city's resultant influence on the country's consciousness through images of exotic and indigenous vegetation. The poem reads:

> In rapid seasons
> bougainvillaea thrust gripping spiky stems
> and crushed many a branch and tender frond
> of the gentle rooted musasa native,
> and now content with the sunny top,
> entwining, simulates the canopy
> and makes unending spring of the usurped
> habitation with a plastic florescence – bracts pink (1982a:12).

The two plants, 'bougainvillaea' and 'musasa' are exotic and indigenous species respectively. The dominance of the 'bougainvillaea' over the 'musasa native' alludes to the city's disruption of country 'innocence' captured through images of western food in 'Buns, Sweets and Biscuits' in as much as it also symbolizes the physical re-ordering of the African space that ensued when modern cities were established. This rearrangement is not only manifested ideologically through shifts in consciousness, but in concrete buildings as well as exotic plants that line the city streets. Although these points are not foregrounded in the poem, they allow the poem to be read as an allegory of the city's general dominance and control of the country foregrounded in the poem 'Buns, Sweets and Biscuits'. In fact, the language employed to express the bougainvillaea's overshadowing of the native musasa tree, corresponds to that utilized in 'Buns, Sweets and Biscuits' to describe the city domination of the country. For example, the images used in lines such as 'bougainvillaea thrust gripping spiky stems/ and crushed many a branch and tender frond of the gentle rooted musasa native' parallel the metaphors deployed to describe the city's corruption of country innocence. These lines echo the meaning of 'the city and half-crown thrust demon roots down a village soul' in the poem 'Buns, Sweets and Biscuits'. The all-encompassing power of

the city space to alter country values as represented differently by these two poems affirms Ashcroft's argument already discussed, that the contemporary city in Africa signifies a period and context in which reality came to be formulated and regulated by Europe.

However, if Zimunya's strength in both poems lies in his ability to show how the urban space 'contaminates' the country from different perspectives, the problem with his vision is that it gives the city too much power to control the country as if there were no contradictions in how Blacks interacted with the influences of modernity. He misleadingly represents the country as being passively shaped by the city and does not interrogate the complexities that arise from the contact of these two spaces. For example, the country side that is invested with values representing authenticity was just like the city, a product of colonial ordering so that the appellation 'reserve' means reservoir of labour more than the space of serenity implied in the poems. The subject/object relationship between city and country that he sketches is unreliable because it implies that the city is capable of completely conquering all facets of traditional consciousness.

The next two poems to be discussed, 'I Like the City' and 'You Haven't Met Her' differ from the two analyzed above because they ridicule the consciousness of Africans who are attracted to the city and criticize the ever-shifting identities of Africans who occupy the city space respectively. The poem 'I Like the City' reads:

> I like the city, said Loveness
>   – why do you like it?
> I just love it, she repeated.

        – Do you like it like sadza?
No!
        – Do you like it like meat?
No.
…
        – Like sweets then?
Not quite.
        – Like ice-cream?
Try again.
…
        – Like sex, like a man?
You!
        – Like sex, disco, the jackpot, whisky?

I bet you would never get it right:
like all these combined and more,
she laughed, stirring the words up
with her tongue-spoon (1985:42).

What is striking in the poem is that Loveness does not love the city in certain terms – she just loves it as pointed out in the third line! Her love for the city is 'neither here nor there' and it suggests that the city is a fuzzy space constituted by fragments that are difficult to arrange into a coherent narrative that gives a stable meaning. Consequently, the uncertainty that Loveness displays in her response can be interpreted as an attempt to crystallize the labyrinths of meanings from the conflicting resonances of the city into a coherent statement. Her response reflects what Pike (1981:9) calls the need to 'reduce a cacophony of impressions to some kind of harmony'.

To the persona, the myriad of impressions that the city makes in Loveness's mind is evidence of the urban space's failure to nurture a solid consciousness and also a reflection of how it undermines the steady awareness that ensues from the enduring meanings the country has on the psyche of the Africans. Thus both Loveness and the city are objects of the persona's ridicule. This is apparent in the generally derisory tone of the poem (whose climax is reached in lines: 'she laughed, stirring the words up/ with

her tongue-spoon') and the images of food and sex which the persona avails to Loveness to equate her love for the city.

As an identity space, the city is mocked for being unable to authorize a coherent narrative of itself and Loveness is criticized for failing to meaningfully order the identity space that she is attached to. This argument can be fully understood if this poem is contrasted to 'Rock of Zimbabwe' discussed in Part One. Both Loveness and the modern city lack the assuring relationship that exists between the persona in 'Rock of Zimbabwe' and the meanings that resonate from the ancient city of Great Zimbabwe that he identifies with. The meanings that Great Zimbabwe communicates to the persona are 'stable' as symbolized by the rock that is used as the main metaphor for this ancient city, while in 'I Like the City' the persona deliberately avails limited images that also suggest instability to Loveness to describe the modern city. Consequently, one of Zimunya's ways of undermining the city is to deny city identities narrative power to describe their identity space. However in the process, he inadvertently reveals the weaknesses of his own vision. Loveness's refusal to define the city according to the limited metaphors availed to her transcends the persona's preset categories of conceptualizing the city in as much as it reveals the shortcomings of a vision that seeks to define the urban space in terms of fixed categories that express the so-called fixed reality. In Rhodesia, some Africans appropriated the new language of colonial education in the city and send their children to colonial schools from which these children gained political consciousness to question the values of colonialism. Other Africans started some small but flourishing businesses indicating that the economic locus had shifted from communal agriculture to industrialization.

In the poem 'You Haven't Met Her', Zimunya's technique of condemning the city is to present the identities of Africans who occupy the urban space as lacking a solid moral foundation. He inscribes their lives as ever-shifting in an unstructured and haphazard way. The first stanza of the poem articulates this thematic concern as follows:

> Of course, you have not met her,
> Loveness, the sunshine of the city,
> Once the honey-pie of the ghetto,
> The sugar-loaf of the township
> And now the ice-cream cone itself (1985:38).

The fleeting identity of Loveness can be ascribed to the multiple and uncertain resonances that the city has on her consciousness revealed in the discussion of the poem 'I Like the City' above. To express this point differently, Loveness's ambivalent ordering and conceptualization of the city in 'I Like the City' is mirrored in her multiple identities in 'You Haven't Met Her'. Viewed from this perspective, the flux in Loveness's identities implies that the city is a space where recognizable identities and solid ways of identification literally melt. This is suggested once again by the images that signify impermanency which are used to capture Loveness's ever-changing identities. These images imply that the shifts in Loveness's identity are not informed by a regeneration that invigorates identity to suit changing contexts, but a product of confusion and the absence of an anchor to relate to in defining the self.

That the changes in city identities can be interpreted as a manifestation of the non-existence of a model of enduring morality ethos that acts as a disciplining force for the African urbanites can be fully grasped if the poem 'You Haven't Met Her' is contrasted to the poem 'Neighbours' discussed below. In 'Neighbours,' the persona looks at his

identity in the context of superstitions and taboos of his rural society. The first two stanzas of the poem read:

> Don't eat old Swine-tooth's porridge,
> says the voice of your mother,
> rubbing on your heart like a salted whip
> on your bare back
>
> if you touch that Stink-nose's okra,
> warns the creak of your mother's voice
> slamming you out like a sudden winter sunset (1985:7).

Although the taboos communicated by the mother can be restricting at times, they point to the existence of a shared cultural heritage that 'disciplines' the consciousness of country identities. The warning voice of the mother maps out the parameters within which the country self has to operate in as much as it provides a model on which the rural self has to structure its identity. The voice of the mother socializes country identities into their society so that they can view and interpret it through a lens that is acceptable and meaningful to their community. The presence of such a voice stabilizes country identities and anchors them in ways that are absent from the fleeting city identities and their ambivalent understanding of the urban space to which they are attached. The taboos emanating from the country describe more the fears that those who believe in them have than any scientific theory can prove. Thus the country can be interpreted in different ways that reveal unexpected contradictions and instabilities. Indeed, during the liberation struggle most of which was waged in the rural background, the myths of the country as the repository of values of serenity were exploded as sometimes guerrillas killed peasants, or when Rhodesian soldiers killed peasants and peasants betrayed each other to either the Rhodesian forces or the guerrilla forces with disastrous consequences to communal ties that used to bind people together.

This point is demonstrated differently in the poem 'Rain and Fire', where the persona observes and interprets the meanings of changes in the natural seasons according to how they structure the consciousness and existence of his rural community. The poem reflects this vision as follows:

> Rain is in the cloud
> The moon is in November
> The farmer is in the field
> To hold his plough
>
> Rain suckles the earth
> Where seedlings grow and grow green
> And the mealies and groundnuts and millet
> Will soon be ready
>
> Fire fire is on the hearth
> Corn-corn-corncobs roastburst
> And pumpkins steam with yellow hearts
> And the pestle will augur the dry season
> For the maheu and mhamba cornthrasher
> At the village threshold.
>
> For life (1982a: 6).

The cyclical patterns of the seasons (wet seasons following dry seasons) represent a context in which country identities form and change. This is reflected in how community activities are structured according to the movement of these seasons. The following three lines from the opening stanza illustrate the point: 'The moon is in November/ The farmer is in the field/To hold his plough.' The harmonious relationship between the natural seasons and the country activities captured through these lines projects country identities as rhythmically synchronized with their identity space. This agreement is completed by the adequate and appropriate images (pumpkins, groundnuts and millet) that are availed to the persona. Pumpkins, groundnuts and millet are seasonal crops

whose growth is in accordance with natural cycles of the seasons. Unlike the metaphors at Loveness's disposal in 'I Like the City', these indigenous seasonal crops enable the persona to describe his identity space authoritatively. This is demonstrated in the closure of the two poems. 'Rain and Fire' is ended by a curt and yet confident line: 'For Life' which highlights that the aspects of the country identity space that the persona discloses are for vitality and continuation of his community. This ending contrasts the vagueness of the line 'like all these combined and more' with which Loveness qualifies her love for the city in the concluding stanza of 'I Like the City'. Overall, the poem 'Rain and Fire' implies that enduring and meaningful identities are formed in an environment of rhythmic rather than haphazard change and flux witnessed in cities.

While the creative context that Zimunya works in allows him to order the country and city as he does, he is not always critical in his representation of the two identity spaces. In subverting the modern city, as already noted, he often resorts to generalizations – he presents a clichéd image of the city. He builds a general impression of the city, through a series of images (sex, city woman, and western food) a stereotyped image of the urban space. Such a representation shies from critically examining the city in the context of new developments that arose in Zimbabwe after independence. In this era, the modern city ceases to be solely a place that symbolizes colonialism's dislocation of African consciousness, but a space that caters for the practical needs of a modernizing society. His consistent use of city women as embodiments of the city's dissoluteness, for example, recalls the colonizers' restriction of African women's movement into the urban space because they regarded their presence as distractive of African males'

labour input into the colonial industry. Consequently, the image of the city that he presents is problematic because it seems to be structured around the colonial myths that he seeks to deconstruct. These myths represented the country as the idyllic place for Africans because the city was considered too sophisticated for the 'naïve' African.

To further problematize Zimunya's general representation of the city and his use of city women as symbols of the urban area's corruption of country's innocence in particular, it is important to refer to Rudo Gaidzanwa's commentary on early black Zimbabwean fictive narratives. Gaidzanwa (1985:70) observes that there are two categories of urban women in the literature of Zimbabwe: professional or waged women, on one hand, and unwaged women, on the other. The second category Gaidzanwa (1985:70) further notes, normally includes women who are housewives, petty traders, women who cohabit with men in casual liaisons, mistresses and prostitutes. From the images that Zimunya uses to describe his city women, it is justifiable to argue that he places them in the second category and sees them as prostitutes in particular. This may be interpreted as a sexist representation of women who, in the logic of traditional patriarchs, should never be allowed in the urban space.

Zimunya's *Country Dawns and City Lights* was published two years after the 1983 Operation Clean Up in which women who walked alone at night in urban centres were arrested for being prostitutes. His vilification of the city woman can be an expression of his support for the post-independence government's objective of domesticating women. After all, Loveness's consciousness, for instance, as reflected in her 'open' ordering of the city in 'I Like the City' and her shifting identities displayed in 'You Haven't Met Her'

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could be interpreted as manifesting what such scholars as Stephen David Ross (1991:29) have come to call 'a personality that is open to transformations that the 'conservative' rural ethos would forbid.' Perhaps another way of critiquing Zimunya's representation of black women in the city is to consider Michael Heller's (1991:101) observation that there is often a difference between how the city is perceived by male and women writers because of different social positioning. In fact, Zimunya's city poems often assume a restrictive moralistic tone in their systematic devaluation of the city space and city women. This situates the poems' vision in the larger cultural retrieval project of the conservative Shona patriarchy.

To justify this argument, I refer to a Zimbabwean woman writer, Barbara Makhalisa, whose representation of the city and African women's identities within the city itself is in contrast to that of Zimunya. Her collection of short stories, *The Underdog and other Stories* (1984), although published at around the same time as Zimunya's texts discussed in this section, is not averse to the modern city and black women's presence in it. Rather it explores women's trials and tribulations in an urban environment that has more opportunities and potential to liberate them than their traditional cultural spaces. Yet throughout *Country Dawns and City Lights,* there is only one poem, 'Be Warned' that highlights that there are many ways in which urban women can be viewed:

> Not every woman plies a trade
> Of lipstick and shaven eye-brow penciled
> Or eye-lashes wetted to the point of spikes
> Not every woman wants your drink
> For the love of the warmth of a hotel suite
> Not every woman shouts her price in corridors
> Not every woman flogs herself for rent
> Or food for famished children (1985:56).

Even though women are presented positively, their images are preceded by negatives. These negatives suggest that most women are prostitutes. 'Not every' implies an exception. This could be interpreted as evidence of the persona's reluctance to move away from his society's informing stereotypes because he represents the positive images of the urban woman in opposition to the negative images. Zimbabwean women writers have reacted to some male misrepresentation of women and their identities in their writing, and as becomes apparent in Chapter Five, they offer new ways in which women's identities can be perceived.

To conclude, Zimunya's representations of the country and city *Country Dawns and City Lights* and *Kingfisher, Jikinya and other Poems* are a continuation of his onslaught against colonialism that began in *Thought-Tracks*. His denunciation of the modern city, as a destabilizing and alien colonial construct is an implicit imploration to Africans to 'return to the source' so as to recover and reconnect with the basis of their identity. This is necessary in Zimunya's view because, as suggested by poems such as 'No songs' in *Thought-Tracks*, he believes that the Africans' history, identity and culture were badly destroyed by colonial presence. If in *Thought-Tracks*, Zimunya is in search of a pre-colonial past, in *Country Dawns and City Lights* and *Kingfisher, Jikinya and other Poems*, he is in search of the country – all that remains of what is closest to the pre-colonial past. His is a pan-Africanist vision which supposes that sustaining identities for Africans can only emerge in spaces and histories controlled by a pre-colonial African worldview, hence his privileging of African spaces as sites for recovery and authenticity. In reality, as Ranger (1985) noted, peasants in the rural areas appropriated the skills and opportunities made available in the rural context, grew crops for subsistence and for sale through the phenomenon of the peasant option that subsidized and subverted

the authority accorded to the city. The rural areas are therefore not only the spaces where the discourses of armed resistance where elaborated. To oppose the city to the rural space in very stark contrasts also underplays the constant trafficking of cultural, economic resources and political exchanges that took place between the city people and the rural people which in many cases were the same people who constantly crossing the artificial boundaries that colonialism had imposed. The next chapter discusses some of Chenjerai Hove's poetry to find out how he Hove re-visits and re-tells the history of the second Chimurenga in order to re-interpret identities in Zimbabwe.

Chapter Three

Chenjerai Hove: Making Sense of Post-independence

This chapter analyzes some of the poems in Chenjerai Hove's four collections of poetry:
Up in Arms (1982), Red Hills of Home (1985), Rainbows in the Dust (1998) and Blind
Moon (2003). If in Chapter Two, Zimunya re-inscribes the pre-colonial past and the
cultural spaces it represents in order to construct alternative identities for Blacks than
those that they were accorded in colonial Rhodesia and Zimbabwe, Hove's oeuvre
focuses on contested aspects of Zimbabwean history such as nationalism and
patriotism, and their implications for both national and private identities. To show how
Hove's poetic narratives of history depict these ideologies, the theoretical approach to
this chapter is heavily dependent on historian Terence Ranger's (2005:217) seminal
classification of the active public historical versions in contemporary Zimbabwe into
three categories: nationalist, patriotic, and academic histories. For the purpose of this
chapter, only nationalist and patriotic histories are discussed because they are of
immediate relevance to the aspects of Zimbabwean history that Hove raises in his
poetry. While Ranger's designation of the polarized discursive spaces in which public
histories in Zimbabwe are told and interpreted is valuable, nationalists and patriots are
not the only voices that compete to represent the history of the nation. As I have
already shown in Chapter One, these different histories are unstable; they are fraught
with inconsistencies that plague the concept 'history' in general, and in particular their
unevenness stems from the contradictions that inhere in the very ideologies
(nationalism and patriotism) that inform their ordering of the nation's past.

Nationalist history, according to Ranger (2005:217) is history in the service of nationalism that 'celebrated aspiration and modernization as well as resistance' (220). As that definition implies, the concept of nationalism that underlies nationalist history's ordering of the Zimbabwean past is an ambiguous one, underpinned by diverse and potentially contradictory phenomena – resistance may look to a past which modernization rejects by definition and one can aspire to recover the past in a totally different future. While it is not the aim of this chapter to discuss nationalism and the inconsistencies around it in depth, it is necessary to indicate briefly some of the issues that constitute the debate in order to understand how the nationalist narrative has constructed the Zimbabwean nation's past. Anthony D. Smith (2001:9) observes that although nationalism has been defined in many ways, most of the definitions overlap and reveal a common theme that portrays nationalism as an ideology that places the nation at the centre of its concerns and aims to promote its well-being. According to Smith (2001:9), nationalism seeks to maintain the nation's well-being through the attainment of three particular goals: national autonomy, national unity, and national identity. The centrality of these three aspects to the goals of nationalism, leads Smith (2001:9) to define nationalism as 'an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity for a population which either in part or as a whole constitute an actual or potential 'nation'.' Smith's definition foregrounds nationalism's concern with a people's political, social, economic and cultural emancipation while accommodating those forces that opposed the various forces of liberation (Peter Alter, 1989:4-5). Competing nationalisms are evident in colonial contexts, such as Rhodesia, where nationalism informed both the ideologies behind

settler hegemony and those that opposed it. The collision between the colonizer's nationalism and the aspirant nationalism of the colonized at once reveals that in a colonial setting, nationalist consciousness is structured around the racism that divides the colonial space and that the sense of nationhood that these nationalisms seek to establish and protect is dissimilar.

In colonial Rhodesia, the national consciousness propagated by black nationalist discourses imagined a Zimbabwean nation emerging from a transformed Rhodesia had to exist together alongside the nationalist awareness fostered by white Rhodesian nationalism. This latter authorized a break with Britain and a sovereign nation state dominated by whites. This nationalism is largely ignored by Ranger and the nationalist history that he focuses on is that which served the colonized blacks' nationalism and the effects of its continued use in Zimbabwe after independence. In fact, Ranger observes that nationalist history's narratives of the past in Zimbabwe centre on the injustices of western colonialism and the black people's attempts to resist it. This explains why the events of both the first and the second *Chimurenga* underpin nationalist narratives in Zimbabwe. However, the major shortcoming of nationalist history is that in its service of nationalism, it became woefully biased and created a narrow account that excluded certain events of the past and sections of the society from the nation.

For example, as Ranger (2005:218) observes, nationalist history fails to show the various and often contradictory levels on which Rhodesian colonialism operated, while ignoring the contradictions in the black nationalist movement itself. The discourse is

further complicated in contemporary Zimbabwe where ZANUPF uses nationalist history to legitimize its hegemony over the nation because it inscribes itself as a party that ended the injustices of colonialism. Nationalist history is important in the analysis of *Up in Arms,* in Part One*,* a text which while published in 1982, was written during the 1977/78 period at the height of Zimbabwean nationalist war as Hove recalls in an interview with Flora Wild (1988:35). Not surprisingly, the poems in this collection were influenced by the liberation war. Hove's poetic voice in these poems affirms the vision of conventional nationalist narratives. By ordering the colonized space according to mainstream nationalist history, his aim is to destabilize colonial narratives so as to support the Blacks' goal of attaining self-rule. But he interrogates mainstream nationalist narratives not to subvert them but to unpack the grand voice of the nationalist narrative so as to trace the various micro-narratives within it.

Patriotic history according to Ranger (2005:220) emerged recently in twenty-first century Zimbabwe and it is indefensibly narrow (even narrower than nationalist historiography). Its rise accompanied the Third *Chimurenga* – the so-called struggle which began at the turn of the twenty-first century in Zimbabwe finally to direct material resources, such as land to Blacks. The seizure and re-allocation of land is justified by ZANUPF as a means of safeguarding the gains of nationalist struggle. By using the name Third *Chimurenga* for the land grabs the discourse proclaims present practices as continuing the Zimbabwean revolutionary tradition. Part of its strategy is to appeal to the youth over the heads of their parents and teachers whom it claims have forgotten or betrayed revolutionary values. However, the main problem with patriotic history as Ranger (2005:220) notes, emanates from its regarding as irrelevant any history that is

not political, its resentment of 'disloyal' questions raised by academic history which attempts to question and complicate historical events, and its division of the nation into simplistic oppositions of sell-outs and patriots. Needless to complicate Ranger's argument by suggesting that there is no history, whether nationalist or patriotic that is apolitical, and that does not stem from posing loyal questions. Brian Raftopoulos (2004:165) sees patriotic history as an attempt by ZANU PF to revitalize its political fortunes by placing a strong emphasis on the narrative of the liberation struggle and the heroics of ZANU PF in that struggle. The limiting ambit within which patriotic history operates also appears to be occasioned by the need to legitimate the disorder and violence that accompanied the Third *Chimurenga* and to silence the voices that decry this lawlessness. This reductive, oversimplified and one-sided conception of history that is fostered by ZANU PF simultaneously denies and then does not deny completely difference and seeks a unitary and cohesive identity for the Zimbabwean nation. This paradox in the use of history by ZANU PF must be understood clearly, for it can help account for the sophisticated ideological positions that its ideologues occupy in response to attacks to its narrative. It can also help explain why Hove's poetry is determined by some aspects of this patriotic history that his later poetry seeks to overcome.

In its search for unity and a binding national identity, patriotic history appropriates for itself the dual authority to define both the perspective from which identities (especially national identity) in Zimbabwe should be perceived and the axis on which they should be fixed. This view is also expressed in another way by Lene Bull Christiansen (2005:203) who argues that since patriotic history claims to control the narrative that

creates national identity, it can accordingly be utilized in political discourses of inclusion and exclusion. However, although in Zimbabwe patriotic history developed to justify the Third *Chimurenga* by representing it as an inevitable and therefore necessary phase in the emancipation of formerly colonized Blacks, it has failed to identify a unifying rallying point as nationalist history has done with the second *Chimurenga*. As is shown in Part Three of this Chapter, which focuses on *Rainbows in the Dust* and *Blind Moon*, Hove not only outrightly rejects and criticizes the ruling class' version of patriotic history as self-serving, but he also shows that the problems in Zimbabwe are more about democracy and good governance rather than patriotism. Stylistically, in these collections, Hove assumes a minimalism which possesses an engaging urgency. In addition to *Rainbows in the Dust* and *Blind Moon*, the discussion will also address *Palaver Finish* (2002), Hove's collection of essays that is as radically critical of the ruling class's narrow notion of national identity as is his later poetry. The essays offer an illuminating insight into Hove's views about Zimbabwe using a medium other than imaginative literature. The four collections studied in this Chapter show that his vision moves from a poetry that confirms the mainstream nationalist histories and the identities they constructed, to a poetry that questions and subverts official histories and the identities they sort to promote. Part Two discusses some of the poems in *Red Hills of Home*. In terms of vision and outlook, *Red Hills of Home*, published in 1985, falls in the cusp of *Up in Arms* on one side and *Rainbows in the Dust* (1998) and *Blind Moon* (2003) on the other. *Red Hills of Home*'s vision and tone mark the beginning of Hove's disillusionment with the new Zimbabwean nation state and in some of the poems there is a tentative and often critical questioning of the achievements of *Chimurenga.* Thus,

this chapter also traces Hove's growth in a sophisticated political understanding which is marked by a corresponding growth in his sophisticated poetry.

In order to explore and problematize the ideological shifts in Hove's poetry, the analysis in Part One of this chapter focuses on four poems in *Up in Arms.* The visions of these poems are steeped in the conventional *Chimurenga* narratives of the 1970s. However, as already mentioned, although embedded in the 1970s nationalist historical representations of resistance to colonial historiography and oppression, some of the poems in *Up in Arms* transcend the nationalist project and speak at various levels – see for example the analysis of poems 'A War-time wife' and 'A War-torn wife'. In these poems, Hove moves beyond the expression of often-homogenizing nationalist discourses to articulate the varied private and personal experiences and the sensibilities that were possible within the same context of colonialism in which nationalist discourses are formed. He revisits the colonial experience and the liberation struggle from a perspective that captures the broad nationalist aspirations of both black nationalists and white Rhodesian nationalists and the obscured and often disregarded experiences of the private space where private identities have to negotiate between the demands of the domestic sphere and those of the public space represented by the visible nationalist narratives. His poetic vision is conscious that accounts of *Chimurenga* and the experience(s) of colonial subjugation for the black subaltern have been told at a limiting national platform. The 'national voice' that narrates the history of *Chimurenga* is controlled by the ZANU PF party elite who often manipulate the events of the liberation struggle to project the desired unifying national identity and to give their party an identity and image that it desires.

Part One

I shall analyze 'A Masquerade', 'A Boy', 'A War-torn wife' and 'A War-time Wife' from *Up in Arms* because they best capture the shifts in Hove's nationalist vision. The liberation war which informs Hove's poetic vision in *Up in Arms* was itself a manifestation of the varieties of acts of nationalism that were active in Rhodesia. Although an act of nationalism, the liberation war was a radical act that required solidarity from the oppressed Blacks and the poet contributed to this solidarity. Hove's poems in this collection can be read as historical artefacts, that is, as poems whose vision was shaped by specific moments in history. But when considering poems as historical artefacts, Stephen Matterson and Darryl Jones (2000:127 quoting John Barrel) argue, questions arise such as when they were written, whom they were addressed to and the function of poetry in that period should be considered. When Hove wrote the poems in *Up in Arms*, poetry by Blacks in Rhodesia was generally addressed to black people's nationalism and their efforts to gain freedom through the liberation struggle. This preoccupation of the work by black poets can be seen in the collection *And Now the Poets Speak* (1981), which anthologizes poems by various black Zimbabwean poets, most these poems written after the liberation struggle, but about the struggle. Even some poems by the widely considered non-conformist Dambudzo Marechera (see the analysis in chapter Four) speak with the voices of the dominant nationalist ideologies of the time.

'A Masquerade' can be read in terms of Harlow's resistance poetry because of its problematization of historical narratives that justified the colonial presence on the

Zimbabwean space. While the poem does not explicitly assert any polemical history, the poem's vision primarily deconstructs the civilizing motif at the centre of the colonial narratives of history so as to disclose to the colonized the self-serving purpose of the colonial historical narratives and the fraudulent processes that construct Blacks' identities in the colonial setting. The poem reads:

> A masquerade in turmoil
> tossing heaven-bound darkness
> on peppered tongues, they came.
> They came bound to pretence, to malice,
> with home-made head-loads of histories
> Distilled in huge stately palaces
> of heroes felt in the head.
> Tramps, blessed by archbishops
> they came, to spread blessed leprosy
> through soiled habits, afterment
>
> Heralded, chronicled, they came
> as heroes, venturing through guidance
> on unreserved faith and unheroic know-how
> Shunned through edited history
> and taken as parcels to imperial heroes;
> only carriers of white heroes' success.
> Editing said: Nehanda…. witch
>   Chaka…man-eater
>   Native…savage
>   Black…evil
> So they said when they came,
> Swollen with heroic pus
> vomitted by their societies
> Like the Pizzaros, they came
> to gnaw, to nibble and be heralded
> Through censored history chapters.
>
> So now a medicine man comes,
> Forces bitter roots
> Down all cancerous throats. (1982:24)

That colonialism as a form of nationalism needed legitimating discourses which justified its high moral intentions has been noted by various historians and critics. Historian Victor De Waal (1990:17) for example, observes that colonialism justified itself as a

civilizing mission battling ignorance, superstition and savagery. De Waal's observation provides useful insight into the signification of the poem's title and the overall meaning of the poem. The title of the poem – repeated in the first line – is a metaphor that evocatively captures and deconstructs the pretence that directed the discourses and processes behind the colonial moment in Africa. It is through this metaphor, on which the poem's central motif of deception and the associated leitmotifs are structured, that the persona asserts his nationalist vision which subverts colonial history's ordering of the colonized space. What is also significant is that at the time when Hove wrote this poem, the theme that he explores in it was not new to either African literature or Zimbabwean literature, but he raises it as an ideological tool of resistance to colonial authority alongside the active armed confrontation of the liberation struggle.

That the persona reveals colonial history's ordering of the colonial space to be a contrived exercise ('... home-made head-loads of histories/distilled in huge stately palaces') is important; it allows him to interrogate colonial identities as well. This is so because if identity, as already discussed in Chapter One, is to an extent conferred by narrative, the persona's condemnation of the colonial narrative as fraudulent disrupts the centre/margin spaces that identities are made to occupy in a colonial setting. The three last lines of the first stanza (probably the climax of the persona's criticism of the deceit behind colonial presence) further reveal the inter-link between narrative and identity by suggesting that it is the colonial narrative that 'dignified' the colonizer's stature when they came to Africa. This is expressed through the imagery that implies that even the marginal identities of the metropolis ('tramps blessed by archbishops')

were venerated by the centre's narratives which disguised them as harbingers of civilization when they were packaged for Africa.

Indeed, as Patrick Brantlinger (1985:200) has observed, some Whites who came to Africa had their subordinate status at home reversed; they became great leaders and teachers in Africa pioneering and blazing the trail for civilization. The oxymoronic expression 'blessed leprosy' further points to the disguise of the civilizing mission, in as much as it reveals the contradictions of the effects of the West's view of the benefits it was conferring which to the colonized would seem like fatal infection.

But the expressions: 'blessed leprosy' and 'tramps blessed by archbishops' also have a deeper signification which specifically alludes to the deceiving role that Christianity played in authorizing the colonizer's domination of the colonial space. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (1997:10) observed that colonial misrepresentations were reinforced by religion, Christianity mostly, in which God and purity were seen in terms of whiteness, while sin and Satan were characteristics of blackness. The following lines from the third stanza illustrate this point further: 'Editing said: Nehanda….Witch/Chaka…man-eater/ Native…savage/ Black…evil'. The persona's tone is derisive; it mocks the arbitrariness of the binary of civilization and darkness along which colonial forms of knowledge ordered the colonized space. The lines also significantly highlight the unevenness of the colonial discursive space where prevailing images and identities are created by those who have authority and control over narratives of history. The figure of Nehanda as the object of colonial narratives' denigration illustrates the point.

Nehanda, who participated actively in the first *Chimurenga* of 1896 and was hanged by the white settlers for her role in it, is regarded in the then suppressed mainstream black nationalist discourses as a spiritual figure who laid the foundations for the *Chimurenga* war of the 1970s. Her demotion in the colonial narrative to a witch discloses the unbalanced organization of the discursive space. The roots of this unevenness is well captured by Brantlinger (1985:198) who argues that, in their writings about the 'dark' continent, Victorians relegate all African kings to chiefs and all African priests to witchdoctors. But the difference with the identity that colonial narratives construct for Nehanda is that this identity was designed to conveniently shift her role from a figure of political resistance to a figure playing on the fears of a superstitious people.

In this context, the persona's re-evaluation of the colonial narrative's marginalization of such an important figure in Blacks' construction of history forms part of nationalist history's search for a rallying point of resistance. His memory of the colonial narrative's construction of Nehanda also reminds the reader that Blacks in Rhodesia could see the 1970s struggle as a continuation and fulfilment of that of 1896, and the violence with which the colonizers established themselves in the colony. Through the figure of Nehanda, the past and the present are linked through black memory which served to counteract official Rhodesian history and the latter's narrative practice that even as late as the late 1970s usually referred to the arrival of the Pioneer Column as creating a new and legal authority over colonial space. Furthermore, the Rhodesian Front government still insisted that the Whites' domination of the colonial space and the war they were fighting against black nationalists were to preserve civilization. By foregrounding the 'othering' of Nehanda, a figure from which the second *Chimurenga*

also derives its identity, the persona creates a pro-nationalist consciousness because he provides a specific way of remembering the past for Blacks which implies that they should salvage and revere the denigrated identities of their histories.

The extremities of the deracination of the African identity within the colonial narrative seem to be reason enough for the liberation struggle. This is why the persona closes the poem with the lines: 'So now a medicine man comes, /Forces bitter roots/Down all cancerous throats.' The metaphor of the medicine man figures anti-colonialist consciousness and the liberation struggle of the 1970s as cleansing exercises that redeem both the identity and history of the other. The way the persona ends the poem also amounts to what Ngugi (1997) and Harlow (1987:87) term the 'taking of sides'. This is the unequivocal stance against colonialism that resistance poems adopt because of the historical processes from which they emerge. In fact, as Harlow (1987:38) curtly observes, to tackle the problem of ideological apparatuses of imperialism is already to take sides. The fact that the poem identifies the colonial narrative as the source of black identities' denigration corroborates Harlow's perspective because it implies that black nationalist discourses formed within the Rhodesian space and the *Chimurenga* war are a struggle between usurpers of black identity and dignity, and the Blacks who sought to regain them. This inscribes the liberation war as a necessary interventionist act that saves the colonized Blacks from further humiliation.

In this regard, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (1997:19 quoting Amilcar Cabral), is probably right to observe that if the colonial process is a negation of the historical processes of the

dominated people, then national liberation is a negation of a negation because it deconstructs the deconstruction wrought by the colonial narrative. Although significant in analyzing the closure of the poem, Ngugi's argument shows that anti-colonialist nationalism is an ideology that also operates on binaries as the discourses of domination that it rejects. Nevertheless, while the overall tone of the poem is bitter, contemptuous and radical in posture in its interrogation of identities embedded in colonial history, Hove is not merely reacting to the colonialist theory of pre-colonial barbarism; the objective of his nationalist vision in this poem is also to reveal the negative impact of the colonial narrative on the racial other so that they understand the need to take part in the liberation struggle and other acts of nationalism.

In contrast to 'A Masquerade', in the poem 'A Boy', Hove's nationalist vision shifts focus from histories that legitimized colonial conquest to processes that maintain grossly unequal power relations in the colony. The poem identifies and criticizes the practice of naming as one such process which the colonial subject uses to devalue and dominate the racial other. Underlying the persona's nationalist discourse in this poem is the conception that certain rights and privileges have been denied to the Blacks in the practice of naming. Thus the persona's concern in this poem is not primarily to criticize the histories behind the colonial presence, but with the moment in history and the means through which the black subaltern who has been infantilized by colonial discourses of control rediscovers his history and identity. In 'A Masquerade', the persona is not addressing the colonial subject; he is speaking directly to the subaltern. The poem reads:

> When brother will you be?
> How will you be?

For you are not yet
A 'boy' you are called
by milk-plastered lips
and you undo your hat
to bare that musty dome,
Yet a 'boy' you remain.
Your unpensioned thirty-year job
(unpensioned even in kind)
You have faithfully groomed,
While bosses go and come,
Renewing that boyishness,
Inheriting you and the garden,
But ever 'boy', never 'man'.
Maybe a bigger garden will
Turn you to a field man.
Did you tell your boss
You have fathered, husbanded like him!
Or does he know your son
Lectures to professors in exile?

Booted on ancient buttocks
By weak-boned madames
who rob your humility
Implanting slavery and hate,
Even yoking you
With manufactured allegiances,
Yet your blood-felt rhythm speaks
When history chapters allow. (1982:23)

The rhetorical questions in the first and second lines have a tone of impatience; they bring a sense of urgency to the need for decolonization because of the directness with which they ask the colonized man, to reconsider his identity in the colonial space. The third and fourth lines which remind the 'boy' of his degraded condition in the colonial order intensify the urgency to regain his humanity (brother). One of the structural components of nationalism as Peter Alter (1989:7) observes, is consciousness of the uniqueness or peculiarity of a group of people particularly with respect to their past subordination. In this poem, in as much as the term 'boy' universalizes the racial other's 'inferior' identity, its antithesis 'brother' universalizes the racial other's humanity.

'Brother' seeks to establish a sense of community among the oppressed so as to promote a collective consciousness against colonial domination. It is apparent here that the persona sets two opposing ideologies against each other ('boy' and 'brother') to create a tension that reveals to the other the importance of control over discourse in identity construction and the liberating potential of nationalist constructions of identity. By representing the politics of discourse in the colonial space in this way to conscientize the 'boy' of his plight, the persona places responsibility for self-discovery in the hands of the racial other. This echoes Fanon's concept of decolonization described as a creation of a new man; and this creation owes nothing to any supernatural power because 'the 'thing' which has been colonized becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself'(1968:33). The connection between process (active participation) and humanization that Fanon speaks of here becomes even more evident in the poem if one considers that the sense of urgency and the probing tone of the opening lines also seem to imply that the subaltern has accepted his inferiority a fact to which he has to be alerted so that he takes full responsibility for his emancipation and realization of a fulfilling identity.

More explicitly than in 'A Masquerade', in this poem the persona's nationalist vision seems to endorse the rediscovery of neglected historical narratives as one way of rehabilitating the dislocated identities. This is suggested in the lines which read: 'Did you tell your boss/ You have fathered, husbanded like him!/ Or does he know/ Your son lectures to professors in exile?'. The parenting metaphor suggests that the black man in the poem deserves respect, which however, in colonial parenting metaphors the respect that should go with it is diminished and the man derisively described as and

reduced to a mere 'boy'. The lines render visible the obscured narratives of the other by suggesting the 'boy' (the subaltern) has silenced histories and suppressed identities worth revealing. The 'boy' cannot be equal to the master because he neither has political power nor authority over narrative to construct himself as an equal. This suggests that the boy's 'inferior' identity is not natural; it is just that the dominant narratives construct him ever as a boy and never as a man. Here, Hove's vision refuses to define resistance in visible military terms; rather it describes resistance by the way it gives the colonizer and the colonized a common identity as human beings. It appeals to basic biological identities to enable the racial other in Rhodesia to imagine themselves as people capable of moving beyond the restrictions of identities imposed on them.

Because of this aspect, the identities and histories that the poem discloses and seeks to assert for the subaltern are not of epic and heroic proportions; they reveal what Njabulo Ndebele (1991:55) terms the ordinary lives of people, which should be the 'direct focus of political interest because they constitute the *very content* of the struggle, for the struggle involves people and not abstractions'. But what complicates or rather contradicts the persona's vision is his celebration of the 'boy's son who lectures in exile. Although the status of lecturing in exile invalidates the fixed inferiority of the African which the colonizer assumes, exile during the colonial years was normally in the metropolis – the centre of the colonizing power (usually Britain for Blacks from Rhodesia). This conflicts the general thrust of Hove's nationalist vision for two reasons. First, the identity of the 'boy's son that he celebrates is located in the centre that Hove disparages as the originator of discourses that subjugate the other in 'A Masquerade'. Second, the apparent success of the 'boy's son emanates from the same restrictive

discursive space that is occupied by the 'boy'. This suggests the existence of inner spaces within the larger limiting space that can be appropriated at an individual level to subvert colonialism's restrictions. In fact, it is those Blacks who had appropriated tools of colonialism such as some positive aspects colonial education, who were behind the emergence of most nationalist movements in Africa. This demonstrates the limitations of some anti-colonialist nationalist discourses that homogenize both oppression and resistance. This racial essentialization makes it impossible for them to celebrate the breaching of openings within oppressive systems without contradicting themselves.

The persona's celebration of the boy's personal success as a successful academic subverts his own anger that no space has been provided for the 'boy' to realize his fulfilling self. This incongruity also discloses the disharmony that often exists between private and public histories as well as between private and public identities. Ndebele (1991) captures this problem when he argues that it is not possible to have a personal history that is not political because the personal is influenced by the political in as much as the political is influenced by the personal. The caveat here is that although the two are often at odds their full significance can only be understood in terms of each other.

It is important to underline that the essential difference between 'A Masquerade' and 'A Boy' is that in the former Hove's nationalism is located in the regeneration of the disfigured pre-colonial past and the identities it represented (suggested by the historical figures of Chaka and Nehanda), while in the latter, African identities are presented as subject to continuous and unavoidable change. In 'A Boy', notwithstanding the tensions between private histories and public histories, Hove's vision is more about the opening

up of the discursive space to allow the expression of suppressed historical discourses and the rediscovery of lost histories and identities. This is suggested in the closure of the poem: 'Yet your blood-felt rhythm speaks/ When history chapters allow.' As these lines suggest, Hove is not only concerned with restoring past identities but also with creating new identities that in as much as they are rooted in the past, are also realized and re-realized in an ever-changing context. A local embodiment of this context is the private and personal identity of the 'son who lectures to professors in exile.' Consequently, Hove's use of poetic narratives to rehabilitate the misrepresented histories and identities of the colonized as part of the broad nationalist project can be best understood in terms of Harlow's (1987:33) observation that 'poets like the guerrilla leaders of the resistance movements, consider it necessary to wrest that expropriated historicity back, re-appropriate it for themselves in order to reconstruct a new-world historical order.' But to re-appropriate what has been expropriated, Njabulo Ndebele argues, requires a radical rearrangement of dialectical poles – where, while in the past, the thesis was the oppressor, it is now the oppressed confidently introducing new definitions of the future to which the oppressor will have of necessity to respond. Hove's interrogation of the forms of knowledge behind colonial domination in 'A Masquerade' and his 'humanization' of the subaltern in 'A Boy' implicitly calls for the centre to respond and rethink its presence and role in the colonized space.

In contrast to the two poems already analyzed, in 'A War-time Wife' and 'A War-torn Wife', Hove's vision moves out of the discourses that do not problematize black's anti-colonial nationalism and looks at it with a more critical eye. If in the poems already discussed, Hove's ideological stance seems conveniently (although implicitly) to justify

developments such as the liberation war, in 'A War-time Wife' and 'A War-torn Wife' he reveals and traces contradictions that are present within the discourses of nationalism and the liberation struggle. For example, in both poems he uses the domain of the private space to highlight the contradictions in both black's anti-colonial nationalism and Rhodesian nationalism which are suppressed when the narratives of these opposing nationalisms are told from the public and popular domains that serve political expediency.

'A War-time Wife''s narrative account of Black's experiences of nationalism and *Chimurenga* war for instance, draws from various strands of personal and public historical consciousness and thought, that free Hove's nationalist discourse from the linearity and oversimplifications of popular nationalist narratives. The persona in this poem recalls the experiences of the *Chimurenga* struggle in terms of contradictions, ambivalences and paradoxes. The thrust of his narrative invites new and critical ways of looking at nationalist history and the liberation war. This is made possible by the poem's use of the figure of a pregnant woman as its metaphor for *Chimurenga* war and how it was experienced by Blacks who supported it. This metaphor also brings into the *Chimurenga* narrative the private experiences of ordinary people's that are written out of the official war discourses which polarize experience through broad generalizations such as colonizer and colonized. The poem reads:

> Full with child
> a long parallel waiting: an anxiety;
> Together living, dying
> with nine-month torrents,
> Torpedoed with bulging wars
> and swelling with fragrant hope
> knotted to pain, pleasure and resentment;
> Living, dragging on weary muscles

Till one day, maybe one night,
raids rupture hope in expectancy:
Fertility perishing in thatched graves
to drive lead-like tears
Down slippery times
and swallowed by history's gorgons. (1982:10)

The significance of using pregnancy as a metaphor to capture the experiences of nationalism and the liberation struggle lies in that the contradictions of pain and hope felt during both processes are comparable. This is suggested in the lines 'Torpedoed with bulging wars/and swelling with fragrant hope' where, the physical pain of the growing pregnancy is counterbalanced by hope, which is aware that every day that passes gives anticipation of delivery. The experience of it is a 'bitter-sweet', an ambivalence that encompasses multiple feelings: 'pain, pleasure and resentment.' These contradictions are well captured in Alter's (1989:5) observation that, while nationalism can mean emancipation and opportunities, it is also a repository of dangers. The conflicting feelings and experiences felt during the state of pregnancy enact the contradictory experiences of the liberation war, with hope on one side, and pain and hazards on the other and possibly some other feelings and experiences whose depths cannot be grasped.

It is also possible to read the poem as a text made up of two metaphors that sustain each other: pregnancy involves painful growth of a new birth. These two metaphors maintain the paradox which gives the poem its compelling power to re-imagine the *Chimurenga* war. Charles Mungoshi in his introduction to *Up in Arms*, writes that Hove is a poet 'who concedes that life (peacetime/wartime) is essentially painfully; yet he has seen enough to know that without pain there is no pleasure, and vice versa. This

awareness makes him a virtuoso of paradoxical expression.' (2) Hove's masterly use of paradox in this poem, and the various possibilities of communication and imagination it unleashes, implicitly warns against the dangers of unquestioningly subscribing to what have become the acceptable and standard representations of the *Chimurenga* war. Paradoxes, ambiguities and contradictions that are part of Hove's nationalist narrative, coupled with the different narrative voices that he uses which are often located in private domestic spaces (see the analysis of 'A War-torn Wife' below), emanate from an awareness that individual consciousnesses of nationalism and *Chimurenga* is never going to be the same in all individuals who make up a nation and that there is need to rescue from generalization how both are imagined and represented. The nature of this consciousness varies from uneducated peasants such as Marita in Hove's seminal novel *Bones* (1988) to guerrilla fighters in the bush, and from the factory worker to the exiled. These different responses depend on an individual's location in history and as a result, different individuals' memory and recollection of *Chimurenga* are bound to vary.

In the poem 'A War-torn Wife' Hove's nationalist discourse broadens as it imagines and narrates the war in Rhodesia from the perspective(s) of Whites against whose domination black nationalists waged the war. This portrays the war itself as a culmination of two contesting nationalisms. As already noted, while for the black nationalists, the war was to end the injustices of colonialism, for the Rhodesians, the war was necessary to protect a racially exclusive Rhodesian national identity from black nationalists whom the Rhodesians identified as terrorists. However, as already mentioned, the poem represents the war from a private Rhodesian perspective.

> This war!
> I am tired

of a husband who never sleeps
guarding the home or on call-up,
Never sleeping!

Maybe inside him he says
'I am tired of a wife
who never dies
so I could stop guarding'. (1982:9)

That the poem represents the war from the white Rhodesian perspective comes out in the term 'call-up' in the fourth line of the first stanza. In this war, conscription applied only to young white, coloured and Asian males who were ordered by the Rhodesian Front government of Ian Smith to defend Rhodesian nationalism. The poem imagines and questions the whole idea of the war from within the domestic space of a white Rhodesian family. The purpose of imagining the war from such a perspective is to represent the experiences of a white Rhodesian who is compelled to defend a Rhodesian nationalism that he does not believe in. This comes out through the tension presented in the thoughts of the wife and her husband, a white Rhodesian soldier. These thoughts are revealed via the parallelism on which the structure of the entire poem rests. The persona utilizes this stylistic device to reflect that the experiences and perceptions of the 1970s war, (a product of two contesting nationalisms) were different and that it is misleading to speak of its history through one common narrative even within the framework of the broad ideological visions represented by Rhodesians and black nationalist forces. Both wife and husband express weariness with Rhodesian nationalism whose ideological discourses portrayed Whites as united against Blacks.

Even in their weariness with the war, both husband and wife are not allowed a homogenized stance. While it is true, as Anthony Chennells (2002:xiii) notes in his

preface to Dan Wylie's book, *Dead Leaves: Two Years in the Rhodesian War* (2002), constant call-ups interrupted the lives of many white families, the wife and husband in this poem interpret this interruption from different perspectives. For example, if in the first stanza, it is the wife's thoughts that are used to critique the war through an examination of her husband's role in it, in the second stanza the husband's perspective is accommodated through the shift initiated by the use of the adverb 'Maybe'. 'Maybe' as it is used here connotes the possibility of other forms of consciousness that do not subscribe to the grand Rhodesian ideological narrative about the war because it allows the wife to widen her viewpoint of the war by trying to imagine what could possibly be the husband's point of view. In this way, the persona does not allow the wife's thoughts about the war to dominate, but rather he shows contesting micro-narratives within the Rhodesian nationalism that challenge its visible narratives of uniform patriotism.

The significance of using the domestic sphere as narrative space is that it subjects Rhodesian nationalism to scrutiny through another lens. This lens is formed out of the subjectivities and intricacies of private identities whose usually undisclosed narratives are not always in harmony with those of public identities and histories. In this poem, the narrative of the internal voices of wife and husband manifests the latent cracks within the official Rhodesian discourses which presented Whites as united in defending a racist nation state. Even black nationalists' narratives, as already noted, are implicated in the omission of private experiences and aspirations which could have contradicted the nationalist meta-narrative.

Part Two

The primary focus of Hove's poetic vision in *Red Hills of Home* (1985) is Zimbabwe in early years of independence. As already mentioned, the vision and tone of *Red Hills of Home* signal the onset of Hove's disenchantment with the way the ruling party has chosen to manipulate the nation to serve the selfish ends of a small elite. In some of the poems he tentatively and often critically questions the accomplishments of *Chimurenga* and the nationalism of the 1970s which he had endorsed in some poems in *Up in Arms.* The tone of most of the poems is reflective, brooding and contemplative as they scrutinize what happened in the past and its significance to the present. However, the voice of criticism in *Red Hills of Home* is not as pronounced and strident as the voices that can be heard in *Rainbows in the Dust* and *Blind Moon* analyzed in Part Three.

If as already observed, a salient feature of poems in *Red Hills of Home* is their expression of feelings of weariness and pain, it is also pertinent to note that the source of these feelings is generally imprecise. A possible explanation for this attribute of Hove's collection is to be found in Flora Wild's (1988:29) observation that:

> Before Independence, under colonialism, Africans in this country [Zimbabwe] were confronted with a clear and outspoken situation of oppression and warfare. Their experiences could directly and spontaneously be transformed into poetry. … Once independence had been achieved, things were no longer clear. New questions arose and the writers having been supporters of the liberation struggle had to readjust and to start thinking about further perspectives and the new problems arising from the situation of an independent country.

Wild's observation recalls Amuta's (1989) argument that writers are producers within a specific socio-political context and that literary texts are in part products of the material reality that they mediate. Zimbabwe after 1980 called for a major shift in writers'

orientation; the context from which they drew raw materials for literature had altered, and there was need for new ways of imagining and inscribing the new nation state. The milieu had new challenges and contradictions exacerbated by the disillusionment that was gradually setting in, but was not yet clearly focussed. Some of Hove's poems in *Red Hills of Home,* for example 'Delirium in the Street' and 'Sagged Hope', have to be looked at in this context of grappling to make sense of the early years of independence.

Before analyzing the selected poems from the collection, it is crucial briefly to highlight Wild's generalization which suggests that all Blacks writing before independence were completely sympathetic to nationalist aspirations and the liberation struggle. Zimbabwean literature, especially that produced by Hove's generation during the liberation war years cannot be simplified as being totally uncritical of the way in which the liberation struggle was conducted and justified; there are writers who reveal pessimism and scepticism towards the *Chimurenga* struggle (see for example, Marechera (1978) and Nyamfukudza [1980]). In fact, in her later work, Wild (now Veit-Wild, 1992:263) acknowledges this when she asserts that: 'The outstanding works of Zimbabwean literature express a highly critical, even cynical view of the liberation struggle.' This, as Veit-Wild (1992:265) goes on to observe 'anticipated issues and tendencies typical of post-colonial societies even before Zimbabwe attained that stage.'

Two poems 'Delirium in the Streets' and 'Sagged Hope' illustrate the sombreness in Hove's voice. The source is indistinct, although it can be inferred that it originates from developments in recent Zimbabwean history. In the poem 'Sagged Hope', this comes out through the voice of the persona which is reflective and self evaluating.

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My soul leaks,
I refrain from containing hope.
It does not pay,
for all will leak
and children will pick
whatever they salvage of it.
Even the little thin cheery voices
pour scorn on me
for I have lost
and I walk like a skinned ghost
with hope sagged, all gone. (1985:26)

The persona's direct acknowledgement that it 'does not pay' to have hope signals disillusionment which in turn suggests the yawning gap between the reality in Zimbabwe and the idealism of nationalism. Thus the poem, suggests that the emancipatory potential of Zimbabwean nationalism has not been fully realized. Implicitly through its tone which also borders on resignation, the poem urges an honest and sober assessment of history for the sake of both present and the future. 'Lost', 'leak' and 'sagged' – central images on which the vision of the poem rests – suggest a depleted fullness and a collapsing structure. If the early independence context in Zimbabwe is considered, these images refer to the pessimism which was beginning to replace the enthusiasm and hope of independence. This is tellingly suggested in the persona's resolve not to entertain hope because it will end in disillusionment.

This is the subject that runs throughout 'Delirium in the Streets' where the persona fuses images of wounds – 'bruised soles' and 'bruised hearts' – with metaphors of 'sagging hearts' and 'unfinished journeys' to render pathos in the disillusionment and loss that he feels. The tone that the persona adopts is wistful and melancholic as he expresses a feeling of hollowness emanating from unfulfilled aspirations. The following excerpt from the poem manifests this:

I bare my back
While the raindrops roll with their moist lick:
These openings,
are they the promise of tomorrow in today?
Blending yesterday and tomorrow
through me of bruised soles and hearts?
I belt my trousers and start again
for the journey is long and feet bruised:
What shall my children inherit?
Could it be bruised soles married to sagging hearts
all in unfinished journeys?
Fragments of conversations
Pavements littered with broken engagements
Empty bits of wrapping paper
An owl above my head,
Flying home with a ruinous chorus behind.
Delirium in the street,
Why did I come here? (8)

The persona perceives future identities as inextricably linked to current historical experiences and for him the future does not hold much hope. This is captured in the line which reads 'for the journey is long and feet bruised' which outlines the depth of the immediate crisis that the persona faces. This crisis is also reflected in the line '… could it be bruised soles married to sagging hearts' where physical pain and mental pain are harnessed together. At a different level, the persona's plight also characterizes that of the newly independent Zimbabwean nation which glimpses an unexpected disillusionment as a result of some of the problems that it encountered in its early years. The metaphors of 'broken engagements' 'fragments of conversations' and 'unfinished journeys', indicate abandoned commitments and suggest that there is still a desirable destination that could be sought if the wholeness/completeness of commitment had been kept. In this way, the persona also implicitly questions the Zimbabwean ruling elite's political rhetoric which emphasizes self-rule as the ultimate objective of nationalism because he suggests that independence has not been pushed to a level

where it can realize the aspirations of various Zimbabweans. This portrays *Chimurenga* and the nationalist discourses that underpinned it as some of various processes in both national and self realization and not an end in themselves.

Part Three

Rainbows in the Dust (1998) and *Blind Moon* (2003) owe their visions to the turbulent historical context of the late 1990s and early twenty-first century Zimbabwe. As already noted, it is during this period that the then ruling ZANU PF party sought to maintain its grip on power by vigorously (and often violently) calling for a uniform 'patriotic' historical narrative that did not criticize their aberrant governance of repression, intolerance and general misrule. This is the political context that immediately informs Hove's subversion of the ruling elite's ordering of the past in his poetry texts discussed in this section. His personae adopt vociferous and confrontational tones which challenge discourses that represent patriotism as conformity to a ZANUPF-authored narrative and the elision of any aspects of that history that might reflect negatively on the then ruling party. Stylistically, the poems in both texts are minimalist; they directly challenge the assumptions of the centres of power in Zimbabwe through simple language and images. For this reason, both *Rainbows in the Dust* and *Blind Moon* represent a radical shift in structure, tone and vision from the other texts that form Hove's poetic oeuvre.

Perhaps a useful starting point in the analysis of *Rainbows in the Dust* and *Blind Moon* is to consider Hove's collection of essays *Palaver Finish* which as already noted, resembles the two poetry volumes in that it problematizes the homogenous identity that ZANU PF's 'patriotic' historical narrative accords to the nation. The essay 'Freedom and

Knowledge' particularly sets the tone for reading the selected poems in these two collections because it expresses the multiplicity and heterogeneity of identities that constitute the Zimbabwe nation:

> We all have multiple identities. We are poly-cultural. We became cultural coloureds as soon as we met others from other lands, and they did too. We found different yardsticks to judge ourselves and others. … The rainbows of our hearts should not be clouded by the dust of wilful ignorance. No nation deserves that.
> There are those who think that they own the truth, the only truth; and others who believe that truth is a mirage. I tend to side with the latter. There is no absolute truth in the world. (Hove, 2002:15)

The poly-structure of identity, truth and the nation stressed in this essay opposes the call of patriotic history for a uniform memory of the past, so as to create a uniform national identity. This standardized memory is evident in ZANU PF's discourses on national identity, which as Ranger (2005:221) observes, insist that only one historical event in the nation's history; the liberation struggle of the 1970s, should serve as the guiding spirit of the nation. By relativizing truth, as suggested by its denial of the existence of 'absolute truth', Hove's essay also relativizes forms of knowledge and problematizes the absolute usage of terms of inclusion and exclusion, such as patriots and sell-outs, which are arbitrarily used in the rhetoric and discourses of patriotic history to signify those who share the rulers' historical memory and those who reject it respectively.

In another essay, 'Zimbabwe's lost Vision', Hove argues that the significance attached to history derives in part from the multiple identities within the Zimbabwe nation which in turn creates multiple memories:

> The free-born are a special people. They detest being dosed with historical rhetoric. They want to live for the present and the future. They are not

responsible for the past and they don't want it forced down their throats. Give them the future and their hands will be full. (2002:22)

The essay is not subverting the importance of history in the formation of both private and national identities, but suggesting instead that identities can be formed in narratives that may well exist in competition to the dominant narrative. The 'free-born' of the essay (new generations of Zimbabweans born after the country's independence in 1980), who demand an identity that is not shaped entirely within the past, 'live for the present and the future' and know their lives are shaped by much more than the event of *Chimurenga* the favoured ideological tool of ZANU PF to which government accords a limitless power to unify. The peripheral position of *Chimurenga* to current generations' constructions of their identities stems from the fact that the Zimbabwean population is now structured into complex units which cannot be defined or unified by an event that unified many of the previous generations. In the current Zimbabwean society for example, factors such as, class, age, race, gender and region provide other sites of identity construction.

Fay Chung (2004:246) who was identified with ZANLA during the liberation war and only recently has broken with ZANUPF (she supported Simba Makoni in the March 2008 elections), argues that the ZANU PF party's use of nationalist and liberation struggle consciousness as a filter through which present day Zimbabwe should perceive itself contradicts the patriotic values that they (ZANU PF) purport to promote. She sees the continued reference to *Chimurenga* as an indication of discourses that have become irrelevant because they failed to renew themselves and adjust to the demands of an ever-changing socio-political milieu. She contends that:

> The unity, which was essential during the liberation struggle, is now no longer relevant. The colonial/settler regime has been removed. Political parties now need to represent the interests of their constituencies, and these are the peasantry, the agricultural workers, the commercial farmers, the urban workers, the business class, the intellectuals, etc. regardless of race.

It is however important to point out that the theses of Hove and Chung discussed above, do not refute the idea that Zimbabwe has been created out of its past especially its colonial past. Their criticism is directed against the manipulation of the past to the serve the interests of the present ruling elite. While some of the experiences of the colonial past as Tim Woods (2007:7) reminds us were so traumatic that they left indelible and distressing memories – memories to which the nation and its citizens continue to return, one of the dangers of localizing the construction of the nation's identity on these experiences unevenly constructs its identity. This results because national identity, which is supposed to be a subset/embodiment of various micro-identities and memories of history, is reduced to one attitudinal narrative. Focusing on the Zimbabwean context, Ranger (2005:219) explains this unevenness differently when he argues that in Zimbabwe, there are instances when people have had too little history and too much history. For Ranger, a condition of too much history develops when one aspect of history is evoked and repeated incessantly, and too little history arises when other aspects of history considered divisive and unpleasant are ignored. Official discourses' elision of embarrassing episodes, such as the Matabeleland atrocities of the 1980s from their narratives and their incessant foregrounding of the liberation struggle and the evils of colonialism illustrate conditions of too little history and too much history respectively.

The purpose of the discussion so far in this section of the chapter is to help us recognize in *Rainbows in the Dust* and *Blind Moon* Hove's disruption of the ZANU PF government's official accounts of both the past and present. Hove explores in his poems national problems such as censorship, violence, political intolerance and violent land seizures and sees in these ZANU PF's quest for a single historical narrative and a homogeneous identity for the nation. In the poem 'history' for example, Hove criticizes the historical narrative that is used to construct the nation's identity. He denounces this history as a product of ZANU PF's practice of vetting whatever has to be included or excluded from the narratives of the nation. This thematic preoccupation is reflected as follows:

> Crooks and criminals
> Sat near a deciphering machine
> Dictating the pace of the power game.
>
> Crooks and criminals
> Sat near the erasing machine
> Dictating what memory will hold. (1998:40)

There is an intertextual relationship between this poem and a 'Masquerade' in *Up in Arms* because both are openly critical of self-serving constructions of history by those in power. However, the difference between the two is that a 'A Masquerade', deconstructs the colonial subjects' identities in the colony by relegating them to tramps who misrepresented history to justify their presence in the conquered space, while 'history' writes the current ZANU PF leadership as crooks and criminals because their selective national memory, built on omissions and erasures constructs a totalitarian history that maintains and legitimizes their positions of power.

In the Zimbabwean context that this poem discusses, there is no possibility that history can act as a guide to developing a sense of right and wrong because the country's rulers have appropriated the nation's history and what is circulated as national memory experience is the memory of the ruling class (crooks and criminals). The line 'Dictating what memory holds' suggests the various ways through which self-serving historical discourses are force-fed to Zimbabweans by the ZANU PF elite to promote their narrow notion of patriotism. These ways range from violence to propaganda. The ZANU PF party established forced education camps in which youths are drilled on patriotism as Ranger (2005:) observes, and what Sarah Chiumbu (2004:34) terms the government's creation of 'new history' and silencing all alternative versions of history through the distribution of new books in schools written from a 'patriotic' viewpoint. Chiumbu (2004:33) notes that:

> While the government has chosen to define Zimbabwean identity around the issues of land and the liberation struggle, it is significant to note that millions of Zimbabweans born in the 1970s and after independence do not identify with the liberation struggle or land for that matter.

Chiumbu's argument suggests that historical and identity discourses structured around the event of the liberation struggle and the land have run their full course because they have lost their appeal to the majority of Zimbabweans. While memory of *Chimurenga* is important to national identity, it is no longer a source of inspiration and the attempt to construct identity from the memory of *Chimurenga* is not only anachronistic, but also irrelevant in a country where colonialism ended thirty years ago. The use of the land as a primary source of identity for the nation ignores the economic diversity and sophistication of Zimbabwe so that the land invasions and seizures committed in the name of restoring the nation's heritage are seen by critics such as Brian Raftopoulos (2004:49) as a smokescreen that conceals political repression and intolerance.

The poem 'the soil' reflects this vision by imagining the land that is being seized under

the Third *Chimurenga* using images of violence and death. The poem reads:

> i will cry for you
> i will weep for you
> i mourn for you before death.
>
> i dig the potato I planted –
> it is red with blood.
> i dig a well for the children's thirst –
> i meet a sky with a bullet hole.
>
> earth of my mothers
> earth of my fathers
>
> i cry for you
> as I see old men of power
> wielding blood-plastered fists,
> as I see old women of power
> wielding grinding stones made of skulls.
>
> land, I cry for you
> as you lose your voice
> to the echoes of the sky,
> your beauty sinking,
> your breath turning into mist,
> your vision blurred in the mist. (2003:53)

Although the persona identifies with the land as reflected in the third stanza, he laments

that the land no longer nourishes identity (this is reflected in the lines: 'I dig the potato I

planted – /it is red with blood') because the rulers of the nation 'old men' and 'women of

power' have reduced it to a wasteland where the violence of Zimbabwean politics plays

itself out. The land is imagined as a victim of Third *Chimurenga*; it is being scarred

physically in as much as its capacity to relate to different identities is being subverted.

Thus the Third *Chimurenga* is revealed here not as a search for identities in the land,

but as a disruption of those identities so as to create discourses that can be used for

political expedience. This is so because the plight of the land (the land is personified in the poem), also metaphorically figures the Zimbabwean nation which seems to be losing its identity as a nation (suggested in lines such as 'your beauty sinking, / your breath turning into mist) because historical discourses have conflated current centres of political power with the nation itself.

The speciousness of these discourses is what the persona calls the 'footpath of illegitimacy' that the whole nation is made to follow in the poem 'ahead' discussed below.

> From now on
> We tread the road,
> The footpath of illegitimacy
> To the tune
> Of praise singers
> Flatterers
> Charlatans. (2003:57)

The poem captures the self-serving purpose of patriotic history by using a language and tone that demote its historians to 'praise singers', 'flatterers' and 'charlatans' whose function is to serve the ruling elite through flattering historical narratives. This recalls Ranger's (2005:219) observation that while history is enormously important for Zimbabwe, the question at issue is which history for what Zimbabwe. Ranger's observation is vital because it suggests that it is necessary to transmit an 'honest' national history because the propagation of false, self-serving history only leads to a false sense of who Zimbabweans are in the present. The notion of illegitimacy that underpins the poem's vision also lies in how the suppression of other narratives on landmark events in Zimbabwean history seeks to create and canonize a tradition ('path of illegitimacy') of how Zimbabweans know themselves from their past. This distracts us

from knowing the nation if the nation is as Ernest Renan argued it was, a 'large scale solidarity constituted by the feeling of the sacrifices that one has made in the past and those one is prepared to make in the future' (Renan, 1990:19). In this way, any nation has a multi-dimensional identity constituted by different experiences which cannot be adequately represented through narratives that ignore its diversity.

Perhaps what is even more important is that the narrative structure of patriotic history, whose obeisance to the centre of power is denounced in this poem, is the structure that the rulers of the country seek to impose on the discursive space of national politics and the discourses that discuss national politics so as to create a homogeneous political consciousness. This is reflected in the following poem 'on being asked for a ruling party membership card'

> you asked me, party cadre
> for a membership card
> of the ruining party.
> what an insult
> to the flowers and the birds
> of my country
> in my heart. (1998:35)

The party card that the persona is asked for is a symbol of political solidarity between individual and a particular party, but in this context where the ruling party, (the 'ruining party' in this poem) demands that everyone possesses the card regardless of their political loyalties, the card offers what Igor Primoratz and Aleksander Pavkovic (2006:2) term an 'ascriptive' identity, that is also an 'unchosen' identity. The card is no longer a signification of voluntary camaraderie or an intended political identity, but a metonym of intolerance reflecting that Zimbabwean rulers do not accommodate different forms of political consciousness even at the symbolic level of card ownership. In Zimbabwe this

intolerance is masked in the binary opposites of patriots and sell-outs that are used to construct political identities: those who wield the ruling party symbols are called patriots and those who do not are reviled as sell-outs. This intolerance undermines the modern understanding of the nature and aims of politics in a democratic polity, which as Primoratz and Pavkovic (2006:1) note, 'is about articulating and accommodating interests of different groups'.

Owing to this, part of Hove's purpose in disrupting the 'patriotic' voice of official narratives in *Rainbows in the Dust* and *Blind Moon* is to reveal that the homogeneous political and national identity advocated for by the monovocality of patriotic history serves to suppress democracy and good governance. Patriotism used in this way, reminds one of Johnson's famous apothegm (quoted in Dustin Griffin, 2002:1) that 'patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel'. Johnson's remark applies to socio-political contexts where patriotism is invoked by the rulers as a cloak for self-interest.

Johnson's cynical remark is captured in the poem 'i will not speak' which suggests a people violently repressed and whose voices are silenced by the rulers in the name of patriotism. An excerpt of the poem illustrates the point as follows:

> they say mouths are caves
> in which to hide defiled words.
> they say my words are tattered rags,
> so they send the police to kill my words.
>
> as from now
> i will not speak.
>
> i will not speak
> when I see things sore to my eyes.
> when I hear bitter words
> i will not speak.

i will not speak
when the presidential speech spills blood
on the streets where I walk.
when women ululate at the sight of blood –
the blood of their own children,
i will not speak.

the minister's words declare a nipple homeless
the minister's words declare a gum dead
the governor's words cripple the republic
the policeman's cuffs itch with jail. (1998:9)

Although the silence that pervades the poem suggests an absence of agency, the persona adopts it as his central strategy of protesting against the repression meted out against those whose political consciousness operates outside the discursive spaces that official discourses have and validated. This has an ironic effect because it inverts silence into a powerful communicative tool. By speaking through silence, the persona not only defies the censorship imposed upon him, but he reveals ZANU PF's practice of sanctioning violence against those voices it labels unpatriotic because they criticize its misrule.

In other words, the violence that ZANU PF commits against divergent voices in the name of the nation reduces patriotism to uniformity and inscribes ZANU PF as the only political organization that is capable of knowing and defending the nation. The violence, hatred and repression at the centre of the patriotism of the voices that are authorized to speak (governors, ministers, president and other functionaries of the government), deny any widening of discursive space and refuse freedom of conscience. This is a contradiction not unique to the discourses of ZANU PF but rather a manifestation of one of the general pitfalls of patriotism as a sentiment. Patriotism is often irrational and contradictory, and as Billig (1995:57) notes, in its name perversions such as violence

and hatred are justified in the name of love. In fact, in the context of Zimbabwe, Ranger (2005:222) observes that patriotic history criticizes voices that cry for freedom as merely promising prosperity while prepared to 'reverse' Zimbabwe's history. The voices that cry for freedom are further criticized as being obsessed with achieving prosperity at the expense of turning Zimbabwe into a British and American overseas territory. The Zimbabwe past that patriotic history purports to defend is that of the liberation struggle, which as already mentioned, is seen by the rulers as the guiding thrust of the nation.

However, as the vision of this poem demonstrates, the voices of the marginalized in Zimbabwe contest patriotic history's account. They refuse to hold external forces responsible for their marginalization and instead point accusatory fingers at their leaders. This is clearly demonstrated in the poem 'to a dictator' discussed below, which in contrast to the persona's strategy used in 'I will not speak', directly confronts the dictator, (a figure who disfigures the nation's history by using it to defend his tyranny) about the injustices he committed during his rule.

> In your time
> You took away
> The flowers of our freedom.
>
> In your time
> The weak defended
> Your weakness,
> And the land cried;
> The moon too
> Was dark in your time. (2003:10)

In addition to fingering the rulers of the Zimbabwean nation as responsible for its plight ('You took away/The flowers of our freedom'), the poem once again makes an implicit reference to how the nation's history is reduced to a 'plaything' of the political leaders which they shape to suit their own purposes. This is suggested by the reference to 'The

weak [who] defended/ Your [the dictator's] weakness'. 'The weak' in this poem serve the same function as the 'flatterers' and 'charlatans' who, in the poem 'ahead' (already discussed) are denounced for constructing narratives that serve the centre of power. However, 'the weak' could also denote those who uphold the repressive state apparatus whose violence is used to crash those who are opposed to the dictator's reign. Also important in the poem is the phrase 'in your time' which continues the argument that I raised earlier on this chapter that the past has been appropriated by those in power to serve their purposes. The phrase suggests that the dictator has made both the past and present 'his time' and that the voices of the oppressed know only his time as a period when their freedom was suppressed: 'You took away/ The flowers of our freedom' and 'The moon too/ Was dark in your time'.

If in the poems already analyzed, Hove criticizes a solipsistic patriotic history, in the poem 'tributes' he celebrates other discourses which have alternatively imagined and represented Zimbabwe's histories. In the poem 'tributes', he turns to imaginative fiction, what Ato Quayson, (2000:50) terms 'unconventional sources of history', because official history has been contaminated by the perspectives of the elite in whose interests the nation's history is written. The 'tributes' of the poem's title celebrate the dynamism of this alternative source of history which captures something of Zimbabwe's diverse memories. The poem celebrates imaginative fiction as follows:

> effortless tears,
> shadow of life
> in the bones of my mind.
> i have been waiting in the rain
> in this dry season:
> a house of hunger.
> no more country dawns
> no more city lights:

it is a non-believer's journey
where they harvest only thorns
and nervous conditions. (1998:29)

For its text, the poem draws on different titles of fictional and poetic writing by Zimbabwean writers which the persona conflates and yokes together with his own wording to express the plurality with which the experiences in both national and private histories have been registered in imaginative fiction. In the process of celebrating imaginative fiction's narratives of history through the multiple voices of the conjoined titles, the persona also creates a composite narrative of the nation that subverts and unsettles the certainty and universalisms of the single truth of ZANU PF's patriotic narrative. The poetic narrative formed by the conjoined titles is fragmented; it reveals an unstable Zimbabwean consciousness of history which is attributable to a Zimbabwe fragmented socially, politically and economically among other divisions. This further suggests that absolute categories of sell-out and patriot foregrounded in patriotic history's versions of inclusion and exclusion cannot be applied to the Zimbabwean context without being endlessly complicated. Notwithstanding the fragmented narrative of the poem, the titles have been effectively combined to suggest a past full of anxiety and unfulfilled hopes that affect both rural and urban men and women and a present that sees little to ameliorate its sufferings in the future. The poem has a minimalist effect which concentrates on disillusionment and eliminates distractive detail. The new combinations in which the titles are used give an intensity to the Zimbabwean experience that requires a committed response from the reader.

The analysis of Hove's poetry in this chapter mainly revealed that identity and history in Zimbabwe are shifting concepts that defy the attempt by public usage to give them

stable and single meanings. Their developing meanings are mirrored in the shifts in Hove's poetic vision, which gradually moves from affirming black nationalist discourses aimed at establishing an independent Zimbabwean nation state in *Up in Arms*. Such a gradual move leads to a tentative questioning of early independence achievements in his *Red Hills of Home* to a critical and radical subversion of the ZANU PF government's calls for a patriotic representation of both the nation's past and present in *Rainbows in the Dust* and *Blind Moon*. The next Chapter discusses Dambudzo Marechera and Philip Zhuwao's poetry in *Cemetery of Mind* (1992) and *Sunrise Poison* (unpublished) respectively. While the visions of these two poets have similarities with those of other poets discussed in this study in as far as they discuss general post-colonial themes, they are also at times radically different in their re-construction of history and re-imagination of Zimbabwean identities. The voice of these two poets is often 'dissident' in its vision, structure and language use. As I shall show how, anarchism seems to be the most useful theoretical perspective with which to analyze their poetry.

Chapter Four

Dambudzo Marechera: An Anarchic Vision?

This chapter is informed by the controversy surrounding Dambudzo Marechera's writing. Marechera is a writer who declined to share the literary perspectives that had become conventional for many African writers in the late 1970s and 1980s. As already noted, he rejected the label African writer and insisted on being called simply a writer. In his poetry, as in his prose Marechera destabilized what narrative conventions claimed to be the objective reality of African nations and produced unexpected narratives that refuse single meaning to Zimbabwe or indeed to any nation. Because of this, Marechera's vision of his society and its history is often considered as anarchic although it would be more accurate to insist on its complexity.

Through an analysis of his collection of poetry *Cemetery of Mind* (1992), this chapter seeks to explore how Marechera imagines history and inscribes the Zimbabwean socio-political identity. The chapter ends by considering Marechera's influence on younger Zimbabwean poets, particularly Phillip Zhuwao, whose collection *Sunrise Poison* (unpublished) explicitly acknowledges a debt to the older poet. The theoretical approach to this chapter, as already mentioned in Chapter One, reads Marechera's poetry against the basic tenets of anarchism as a social and political ideology, to find out the extent to which his poetic vision subscribes to and reflects anarchism's core values.

As an ideology, anarchism is difficult to define with precision. Michael Ossar (1980:22) observes that the difficulty of arriving at a satisfactory definition of anarchism has been recognized by critics who have written on the subject. Part of the reasons why according anarchism a straightforward definition is problematic ensues from the reality that anarchism is perceived from both a popular standpoint and that of the anarchists who believe in its efficacy as a social, political and economic system that rids society of violence, poverty and oppression. The popular image of anarchism is that of an irrational ideology that advocates destruction, violence, disorder and lawlessness. Similarly, the popular conception of anarchy, the order that anarchism seeks to establish is that of 'chaos, social breakdown, loss of the usual amenities of life' (Miller, 1984:2). This commonly held view of anarchism has to be situated in the etymology of the term 'anarchy', which Colin Ward among other theorists (2004:1) identifies as the Greek word *anarkhia,* which means contrary to authority or without ruler. Ward's perspective is also shared by Robert Hoffman (1970:4) whose observation that the Greek origins of the word anarchy show that anarchism denotes a condition where "no one prevails", that is, no one stands in a position of power and authority over others, further indicates the origins of the commonplace definitions of the theory of anarchism. Common sense definitions and criticisms of anarchism are rationalized by the deductive argument that because anarchy means the absence of a controlling authority, it is logical to interpret anarchism as a theory that advocates an absence of order.

When anarchists advocate anarchy, they envision a society that is devoid of supervision and controlling authority, but not a society that is lawless, chaotic, violent and disorderly. Anarchists themselves agree on few concepts of anarchism, but the

hallmark of their ideology that has over the years served as the common denominator of anarchist thought and collected them together under a common label is their rejection of government. This point is clearly captured by George Crowder (1991:1) who observes that 'anarchy in the sense in which it is the goal of anarchists, means the absence of a ruler or government', and this should be distinguished from the more 'common sense' definition of 'anarchy' as the absence of order. The anarchists' vision of an anarchic society is based on a perception that imputes societal ills on government; they contend that 'a society ruled by government cannot be orderly, that government creates and perpetuates both disorder and violence' (Hoffman, 1970:1-2). The reasons for the anarchists' rejection of government are many, but most of these as Hoffman (1970:8) observes, are embedded in their belief that elements of irremediable corruption are inherent in any system of authority. Government, no matter how it is constituted, cannot embody the desires of the mass of the people but is essentially an institution that soon becomes an end in itself with needs, views, and goals that serve to ensure its continuing existence. One of the leading anarchist thinkers of the nineteenth century, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's (1970:15-16) vivid tirade against government lists the evils that anarchists believed to inhere in all institutions of power and authority:

> To be GOVERNED is to be kept under surveillance, inspected, spied upon bossed, law-ridden, regulated, penned in, indoctrinated, preached at, registered, evaluated, appraised, censured, ordered about, by creatures who have neither the right, nor the knowledge, nor the virtue to do so. To be GOVERNED is to be at each operation, at each transaction, at each movement, marked down, recorded, inventoried, priced, stamped, measured, numbered, assessed, licensed, authorized, sanctioned, endorsed, reprimanded, obstructed, reformed, rebuked, chastised. It is, under the pretense of public benefit and in the name of the general interest to be requisitioned, drilled, fleeced, exploited, monopolized, extorted, squeezed, hoaxed, robbed; then at the slightest resistance, the first word of complaint, to be squelched, corrected, vilified, bullied, hounded, tormented, bludgeoned, disarmed, strangled, imprisoned, shot down …. That's government, that's its justice, that's its morality!

Central to the above quotation is the conception that the government is an institution of oppression which imposes its will on people for its own self-preservation. Because government is here presented as a source of omnipresent excessive and irrational control, concerned with its own survival through compulsion, there is also an implicit rejection of the social contract theory whereby people came together to put in place the institution of government for the common good. The anarchists' denunciation of government as evident in the above quotation from Proudhon stems from what anarchists consider as the government's denial of the individual space for self-assertion and self-realization, and the right to free and full development. Consequently, as Derry Novak (1970:23) suggests, the essence of anarchist thought is the emphasis on the freedom of the individual leading to the denial and condemnation of any authority particularly the government which hinders his or her free and full development.

The individualism which forms the basis of anarchism is founded on the view that men can be really social and society truly directed to the humanity of its members only when individuals are really free – and this means ordering society not through the dictates of power, but through voluntary cooperation and self-imposed restraints. The prominent and ardent advocates of individualism in the history of anarchism include William Godwin and Proudhon. The fundamental principle of Godwin's political philosophy: 'There is but one power to which I can yield a heart-felt obedience, the decision of my own understanding, the dictate of my own conscience' (quoted in Ossar, 1980:26) for example, de-centres the larger society as the site of liberty and inscribes the individual and his/ or her subjectivity as the new centre of his/ or her liberty and identity.

Ossar (1980:26-27) traces Godwin's individualism to elements of Kant's thinking. Kant had confidence in the effectiveness of an individualist ethical system, where the individual must choose how to behave and if he chooses correctly, human reason will lead him to affirm by and large those values which most societies mistakenly try to enforce by coercive means. It becomes apparent here that the scope of anarchist individualism transcends the limited scope of focusing on the freedom of the individual and becomes a rebellion that is generally directed against those conditions in society that anarchists consider repressive.

Therefore, the individualism that anarchists are concerned with has to be distinguished from individualism used in a looser sense, which as Miller (1984:30) observes, 'is the view that people should follow their own inclinations, flouting social conventions when it suits them to do so.' What anarchists object to is the idea that individuals transfer their autonomy from themselves to some individual or institution that then has power over themselves. Despite this difference, it cannot be disputed that anarchists defy accepted views of the familiar and the acceptable codes of conduct in society which preserve the necessity of institutionalized authority. Thus they collide with the society at large because institutions, such as government and the concept of collectivism were and are still widely considered to be practically necessary. Anarchism's repudiation of what is considered appropriate and essential for human flourishing has resulted in the controversy surrounding anarchism as an ideology. The anarchists' insistence on individual liberty has been called selfish and anti-social despite their assertion that they are concerned with the establishment of a just and orderly society. It could be averred that anarchists' disavowal of social ordering is in fact a kind of ordering with implications

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on social arrangement of power and powerlessness. Hoffman (1970:3) for example, contests this assertion when he maintains that there can be no way that any philosophy which rejects society can be responsible. Thus Hoffman's argument highlights the contradiction within anarchism as an ideology and also its problems when it comes to social and political acceptability.

It is not my intention to discuss the varieties of anarchism which apart from sharing the trademark features discussed above, differ irreconcilably on many aspects. These include philosophical, communist and individualist anarchism among others. However, the brief discussion of anarchism above, which reflects the key aspects of anarchist thought – its anti-authority and pro-individualism stances – is important in as far as it provides an analytical framework to consider Marechera's poetic vision in this chapter. It is also vital to broaden this analytical framework by bringing in Nawal El Saadawi's (1996) theory of dissidence which offers another perspective of looking at anarchism's rebellion against those values that society considers necessary and acceptable. El Saadawi (1996:153) argues that dissidence should not just be perceived negatively and therefore dismissed as merely subversive because dissidence can also be creative. El Saadawi (1996:153) maintains that there is no way that we can be creative when we obey others and follow the rules imposed upon us by different collectives or for different ends – family, nation, race, tradition stability, etc. El Saadawi's thesis at once captures the defiance that informs anarchist thought. Furthermore the concept of creativity that she associates with dissidence necessitates the need to look also at anarchism in Marechera's poetry at the level of form – the extent to which the structural aspects of his poetry comply with or subvert acceptable conventions of poetic form. As becomes

evident in this chapter, in articulating his vision, Marechera often deviates from the accepted language forms. This returns the argument back to the problem set out at the beginning of the chapter: the extent to which Marechera's poetic vision in *Cemetery of Mind* is understood as being anti-authority and pro-individualist. I shall do this by analyzing both the content and form of the selected poems in *Cemetery of Mind* against the fundamental principles of anarchism explored in the opening section of this chapter and El Saadawi's theory which perceives creativity in dissidence.

Marechera's private and literary lives were characterized by controversy and it is a commonplace to describe both as anarchic. This qualification emanates from the common-sense definition of anarchy which is applied by some to describe what they consider as the disorderliness that characterized both the private and public aspects of Marechera's short life. However, it is perhaps on the literary front, that the debate on whether the tag anarchist befits Marechera can be seriously considered. What I shall discuss is whether Marechera's artistic vision was made possible because he refused to situate himself within conventional political or aesthetic categories. While in the later years of his writing, what stands out of Marechera's work is its uncompromising assertion of individualism and a radical refusal to accept what Zimbabwean society considered and possibly still considers vital to art, some of his early poetry affirms dominant ideologies of his time such as the nationalist discourses of the 1960s and 1970s. Even alongside the radical poems of the later part of his career (the 1980s), Marechera still wrote poems that embody a vision that is not markedly different from that prevalent in mainstream Zimbabwean writing of his time. Some critics, have often, without sufficient qualification, misleadingly rushed to classify Marechera as a poet who

does not speak with a communal voice (see Kizito Muchemwa [2004]). As the analysis of some of Marechera's poems in this study reveals, such critics fail to acknowledge the depth of the diversity and often conflicting and ever-shifting poetic voices that Marechera speaks with, and the eclecticism that characterizes his poetic vision. To show the diversity in Marechera's artistic vision, I first analyze the poems that affirm popular ideologies of his time and then later on I focus on the anarchic and dissident poems – those that deconstruct the values on which the dominant authorities in his society claimed that society should derive its sense of identity.

Although published in 1992, five years after his death, *Cemetery of Mind* anthologizes poems that Marechera wrote from the beginning of his literary career in the late 1960s up to his death. In his early poems, such as 'My Skin is the Map' and 'Pledging my Soul', there is a clear reflection of the poet's affirmation of and commitment to the dominant nationalist ideologies of the 1960s and 1970s. These poems were written when Marechera was still a schoolboy; he had not yet developed the unpredictable and unique voice that is part of his later poetry. His affirmation of black identity and search for a sense of belonging in the face of the deracination of colonial dispossession is consistent with the nationalist discourses that championed the liberation struggle. The following stanza from 'Pledging my Soul' exemplifies this:

> Now a man
> in exile from the warmth of your arms
> and the milk of your teeth
> the breath of your secret whispers in my ears
> shall I not stride back to you with haste
> rout all my enemies and the wicked husbandmen
> Shall I not kneel to kiss the grains of your sand
> to rise naked before you – a bowl of incense?
> and the smoke of my nakedness shall be
> an offering to you

pledging my soul. (1992:6)

The poem's nationalism is expressed in the title 'Pledging my Soul', which is also repeated in its closure, to assert the persona's profound spiritual identification with the land and his commitment to the nationalist cause to reclaim that land. The persona's inscription of the lost land as a site of identity and his endorsement of the nationalist war to repossess that land as suggested in the lines: 'shall I not stride back to you with haste/rout all my enemies and wicked husbandmen' signify a direct dedication to the nationalist cause. Also, the poet's personification of the land as a woman, and the mother-child relationship that exists between himself and it as stressed in the first stanza, explicates the pathos of not belonging because he has been severed from his roots. This early poem employs the 'mother Africa' trope of the negritude movement, a movement that will be regarded contemptuously in a later poem 'In Jail the Only Telephone Is the Washbasin Hole: Blow and We'll Hear!' which is analyzed later in the chapter. Implicit in 'Pledging my Soul' is a search for the pre-colonial identity of the African believed to have been anchored in the land of the ancestors because the nature of the exile the poem preoccupies itself with is not only physical but also spiritual. In his exiled condition, the persona reflects the aching sense of loss of the Old Man in Charles Mungoshi's novel *Waiting for the Rain* (1975) and the spiritual loss explored in Zimunya's poem 'No Songs' already discussed in Chapter Two of this study.

In some of his poems written after independence, such as 'Oracle of the Povo' and 'The Trees of this City', Marechera's identification with the marginalized and how he speaks with and for them, places him alongside Zimbabwean poets, such as Freedom Nyamubaya whose poetry has been termed popular. In the first stanza of his 'Oracle of

the Povo', the milieu of Zimbabwe after independence is metaphored as a 'scrubland', a dry land populated by marginalized ex-combatants

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

Marechera's technique here is to personify independence through the use of the pronoun 'Her' to inscribe the extent to which it has been bastardized that its ideals and vision can only be described in metaphors of barrenness. To this end, this stanza uses irony to foreground this gap as evident in the persona's juxtaposition of two historical epochs. This is apparent in the last two lines of the stanza, where 'yesterday' and 'today' are time frames signifying the heroic past of the liberation struggle and the abject, contemporary betrayal of the ideals that informed the struggle. While alluding to two different and yet consecutive periods of Zimbabwean history, 'yesterday' and 'today' seem to hint at history as a linear progression so that memory can recall the past with some precision. The value of such a memory is questioned in 'In Jail the Only Telephone Is the Washbasin Hole: Blow and We'll Hear!'. In the earlier poem only a recollection of the liberation struggle ('yesterday') gives ex-combatants – 'the out of work heroes' – in Zimbabwe ('today'), the historical context in which their marginalization has to be understood.

Perhaps what is striking in this stanza is the persona's use of the word 'hero' to describe the ex-combatants; this suggests that he is participating in the popular and official discourses about the ex-combatants and the nationalist movement, discourses that all 'patriotic' Zimbabweans were expected to endorse during the early years of

Zimbabwe's independence. If one considered twentieth-century critic and philosopher Michael Foucault's definition of discourse as any means by which human meanings, beliefs, and values are communicated and replicated with public signs and systems particularly language, Marechera's identification with the liberation struggle becomes evident through his use of the term 'hero'. When this is considered together with the tone that sympathizes and empathizes with the ex-combatants, and the direct language that unpacks their condition, there is a strong indication that the persona believed in the rationale of the liberation struggle, and as will become apparent, such a stance distances him from anarchists who would not commit themselves to any regimentalized movement or allow themselves to be bound by it.

The ex-combatants that the persona identifies with here are products of a regimentalized revolution which differs from the popular uprising in which people are empowered by deed envisioned by anarchists. Their plight in Zimbabwe is a result of a revolution that was controlled through hierarchy, and this hierarchical configuration continued at independence, and hence their exclusion from the wealth of the country that is enjoyed by the leaders of the revolution. However, that the persona speaks from a position to which he is bound by his belief in the liberation struggle is also significant; it entails that he does not enjoy the freedom of the anarchist persona to give a purely subjective account of the struggle outside of its structured command system. The thoughts of the persona are somehow regimented because they are bound by commitment to a cause and in a way this links him to the persona in Nyamubaya's poem 'Dog and Hunter' in *On the Road Again: Poems Before and After the Liberation of*

Zimbabwe where the persona's close identification with the ex-combatants' marginality in independent Zimbabwe is directed by her own status as one of them.

In the second stanza of 'Oracle of the Povo', economic marginalization is overtly inscribed as inevitably subversive to both national unity and identity:

> And some to the hills hurried their thirst
> And others to arson and blasphemy
> Waving down tourists and buses
> Unleashing havoc no tongue can tell –
> Her vision's Droughtstricken acres
> Of leaf lean harried squatters
> And fat pompous armed overlords
> Touching to torch the makeshift shelters
> Heading to magistrate and village court
> The most vulnerable and hungry of citizens –
> Her vision's Drought Relief graintrucks
> Vanished into thin air between departure point
> And expectant destination –
> In despair, she is found in beerhalls
> And shebeens, by the roadside
> And in brothels: selling the last
> Bits and pieces of her soured vision. (67)

This stanza is a re-visitation of the early years after Zimbabwe's independence when some disgruntled ex-combatants especially those who had fought with ZIPRA organized military resistance against the ZANUPF-dominated state. Mugabe responded by sending in the elite Fifth Brigade whose murderous attacks against civilians in Matabeleland and parts of the Midlands is sometimes referred to as genocide. In this stanza, the violence is situated against a background of drought and foreign aid suggested by compound words 'droughtstricken' and 'graintrucks'. However in this poem, the drought has both literal and metaphorical significances; it refers to the real 1982-3 drought in independent Zimbabwe, and how it adversely affected the marginalized in as much as it figuratively characterizes the general deficiencies of the

new dispensation and the context of deprivation in which those exploited by the new elite of 'fat pompous armed overlords' were forced to exist. The poem's use of drought and hunger as its central metaphors (recurring images in Zimbabwean literature after 1980) thematically links it to works such as Shimmer Chinodya's novel *Harvest of Thorns* (1989) in particular, and others such as Stanley Nyamfukudza's *Aftermaths* (1983), and Freedom Nyamubaya's *Dusk of Dawn* (1995) in general, which mourn the betrayal of the ideals of independence. However, what is significant in this poem is its tone that outlines Marechera's sense of justice which clearly empathizes with the 'vulnerable and hungry of citizens' and his voice is thus a communal voice.

In the poems, 'The Trees of This City' and 'Sunday Service' he employs a conventional post-colonial voice to catalogue the anomalies in the early years of Zimbabwe's independence that generate disillusionment.

> Trees too tired to carry the burden
> Of leaf and bud, of bird and bough
> Too harassed by the rigours of unemployment
> The drought-glare of high rents
> And the spiraling cost of water and mealie meal
> Trees shriveled into abortion by the forest fires
> Of dumped political policies
> Trees whose Kachasu-veined twig-fingers
> Can no longer clench into the people's fist
> But wearily wipe dripping noses, wearily wave away
> The fly-ridden promises issuing out of the public
> Lavatory
> Trees under which, hungry and homeless,
> I emerge from seed to drill a single root into the
> Salt stone soil
> The effort of a scream of despair. (91)

There is an absence in this poem of the individualist's egotistical tone (present in poems such as 'The Bar-Stool Edible Worm' and 'He is sick Doctor' analyzed later) that

distances the persona from the marginalization that he speaks about. Here, the condition of marginality (hunger, unemployment) and the despair that it causes among those who experience it, are identified by an insider whose consciousness of the urgency of the plight of his society enables him to speak with an individual voice that reflects communal concerns. His voice is once again direct and lucid in its indictment of the dissoluteness of Zimbabwean leadership and how it betrayed the liberation struggle as evident in the lines such as '… dumped political policies' and '… fly ridden promises issuing from the public/ Lavatory'. Such a position of total immersion and identification with the marginal identities of his society is also evident in the couplet that closes 'Sunday Service', where the persona exhorts: '"Lynch those who hoard our national dream/ Lining their pockets with coins from the povo's hymn" (79).

The possessive 'our' not only acknowledges the existence of a shared national identity and the responsibility it demands from its citizens, but also an acceptance of authority that emanates from national institutions – something that anarchists would refuse to do. The vision couched in the couplet actually resembles a socialist-realist mode which perceives a proletarian uprising as the means through which the exploited classes can overturn the domination by the new ruling elite. Marechera's position here is shared by fellow Zimbabwean novelist George Mujajati in his novel *Victory* (1993) and Kenyan novelist Ngugi wa Thiong'o in his novel *Petals of Blood* (1977) among other African writers. However, whereas Marxists believed that only the proletariat could make a revolution, anarchists like Michael Bakunin argued that it was the marginalized in society who would be revolutionaries. Bakunin outlines the reasons for his objection to Marx's theory of a revolution as follows:

> We have already expressed several times our deep aversion to the theory of Lassalle and Marx, which recommends to the workers, if not as a final ideal at least as the next immediate goal, the founding of a people's state which according to their interpretation will be nothing ''but the proletariat elevated to the status of the governing class.''
>
>   Let us ask, if the proletariat is to be ruling class, over whom is it to rule? In short, there will remain another proletariat which will be subdued to this new rule, to this new state. For instance, the peasant "rabble" who, as it is known, does not enjoy the sympathy of the Marxists who consider it to represent a lower level of culture, will probably be ruled by the factory proletariat of the cities. (1971:330)

Evident in the above quotation is Bakunin's opposition to a revolution that exclusively involves the working class created by the new industries since in time this class would dominate other groups of workers such as the peasantry. April Carter (1971:3) argues that Bakunin also opposed Marx's theory because it ignored the possibility of revolt by other groups. Outlining some of the leading anarchists' idea of a revolution serves to anticipate the shifts in Marechera's voice which are evidenced by the analysis of poems discussed below where he interrogates and subverts the values that he affirms in his earlier poems.

Marechera's later poems no longer show the same assurance in a communal identity of his earlier work. There is a realization that the complexity of the problems of his society cannot be articulated and addressed creatively using the conventional voice that an African artist is required to speak with. This is why alongside the 'acceptable' voice that he speaks with in the poems discussed above, he also adopts a dissident radical anarchist voice which deliberately shocks in order to invite new ways of registering the social complexity that has produced it. In poems, such as 'In Jail the Only Telephone Is the Washbasin Hole: Blow and We'll Hear!', 'He is sick doctor' and 'Identify the Identity Parade' poetry becomes an assertion of individual liberation and independence. In the

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poem 'In Jail the Only Telephone Is the Washbasin Hole: Blow and We'll Hear!', for example, the persona outlines the need for artists to assert their individuality by working outside the boundaries and prescriptions that are imposed on African artists:

> Write the poem not from classroom lectures
> But from the barricade's shrieking defiance
> From the mortuary's brightly frozen monocle
> From day's gunburst to night's screaming human torch
> From bleeding teeth that informed to underground
> Perception of black fire
>
> Write the poem not from the rhyme & reason of England
> Nor the Israeli chant that stutters bullets against
> Palestinians
> Nor (for fuck's sake) from the negritude that negroed us
> Write the poem, the song, the anthem, from what within
>   you
> Fused goals with guns & created citizens instead of slaves
>
> Do not scream quietly
> We want to hear, to know
> And forge the breastplate a poet needs against THEM! (195)

The call for new imaginative ways of inscribing Africa that directly reflect the individuality of the author as the mediating subject not only transcends the scope of conventional and codified representations signified here by the literary traditions of England or movements such as negritude, but it also outlines the persona's notions of artistic freedom and commitment. The persona locates both artistic freedom and commitment in the originality and innovativeness with which the African artist responds to and inscribes the experiences of violence on the continent – this is why the persona warns that the creative stimuli should not be dictated by rigid manifestos and ideologies which might be remote from or no longer relevant to the experiences the artist wishes to capture. Thus the poem is also about dynamism and creativity; it highlights the need constantly to re-examine discourses of African liberation. For example, the persona's

subversion of both the identity and the literary tradition negritude has carved for the black African is a realization of a paralyzing stagnancy that exists in the 'given' constructions of blackness even if these are pro-black liberation. For an artist writing at the time when Marechera wrote, to imagine discourses of black liberation in terms of the negritude movement could only denote a lack of originality and creativity in a context where the identities of Blacks are ever changing. Besides its homogenizing and essentializing effect on black identities, negritude's 'black is beautiful' manifesto functions within the polarities of race that it seeks to dismantle. Furthermore, an uncritical regurgitation of such movements' manifestos entails foregoing one's identity as a creative and original poet – the individual's poetic voice is lost in these grand discourses of black liberation whose manifestoes have become clichés.

Thus groupings in this poem, signified by 'negritude' and 'Israeli chant' are metaphors of mindsets which fetter poetic expression. Annie Gagiano (2000:202) writes that, Marechera came to see *mind-sets* as the worst danger to that human individualism that he thought of as the very principle of freedom that he so cherished in himself, and others. The use of paradox and oxymoron 'Do not scream quietly/We want to hear, to know' in the closing stanza articulates the persona's search for a lucid and unmediated poetic voice, that speaks above and outside the boundaries of both oppressive authority and populist ideologies because it has refused to yield to their hegemony. This is vocalized in the line that insists 'write the poem…from what within you' which further connotes the need for an original and individually authentic poetic voice.

The meaning of this line is linked to the signification of the word 'hole' in the title; although the primary meaning is to the outlet in a sink, it also suggests something anal and implies that the persona is speaking to his own objected excrement. The line also figures Marechera's own definition of poetry which outlines that 'Poetry is an attempt to put into words what is inside a person emotionally, intellectually, imaginatively. The poet's job is to find the equivalent [or] the verbal correlative of a particular feeling' (1992:209). This definition emanates from Marechera's anarchist way of looking at poetry in particular and literature in general, which shuns the objective approach full of footnotes while treasuring the personal response (Marechera cited in Veit-Wild, 1992:24). This is inscribed in the opening line of the poem and the line that reads 'Write the poem not from the rhyme & reason of England', which although at first looks like a conventional post-colonial line, also indicates the persona's refusal to allow the opinions of others to dominate his own.

Consequently, creativity for Marechera as is also evident in his prose is a series of negations which refuse to be fixed to things such as plot structure, character development or the notion of a well-made story. This vision of the poet and poetry, and their place in society is explicitly explored in the poem 'Identify the Identity Parade' where the persona forges an identity for the poet that inscribes and confirms himself as an iconoclast.

The persona's engagement with the identity of the artist in this poem is closely linked to the concept of artistic freedom discussed briefly above. If 'In Jail the Only Telephone Is the Washbasin Hole: Blow and We'll Hear!', the persona warns artists to shirk

themselves and their literary works from the stultifications of literary traditions and ideologies, in 'Identify the identity Parade' he searches for an intrinsic/authentic identity for the poet. This identity, the persona locates within the depth of the individual's self and not exterior to it within an inherited tradition – an unsullied subjective identity rather than an identity or self imposed from outside and which one has to mould oneself into. It is the same identity that the persona who identifies himself as a poet in this poem forges for himself:

> I am the luggage no one will claim;
> The out-of-place turd all deny
> Responsibility;
> The incredulous sneer all tuck away
>   Beneath bland smiles;
> The loud fart all silently agree never
>   Happened;
> The sheer bad breath you politely confront
>   With mouthwashed platitudes: "After all, it's
>   POETRY."
> I am that rat every cat secretly admires;
> The cat every dog secretly fears;
> The pervert every honest citizen surprises
>   in his own mirror: POET. (199)

The true self for Marechera, as for other anarchists is not the empirical one that is mediated upon by outside forces such as society's laws and accepted conventions. The true self for anarchists emanates from the unmediated conviction of the individual to think beyond boundaries prescribed by authority and to act outside the authorizations of societal norms such as religion. It is significant to note that in his defiance, the persona has embraced the alienation and ostracization that accompanies what society perceives as his radicalism to smash its hypocrisy. An acceptance of the position of an outside other reinforces the persona's uncompromising posture and the unmediated sincerity

with which he speaks of a vitalizing and authentic poetic identity which does not necessarily pander to society's definition of a writer.

The persona's steadfast commitment to an original poetic identity and the poet's role is underpinned in the poem by a satire that subtly, but ruthlessly ridicules society at large for its hypocrisy and pretence. Society, because of the way it is ordered, is presented in this particular poem as complacent at its agreed self rather than its authentic self. This is the reality, which although undesirable, Marechera's anarchism unpacks, as can be sensed in the lines: 'The loud fart all silently agree never/ happened;/The sheer bad breath you politely confront with mouthwashed platitudes.' What Marechera writes of here are a series of unacknowledged presences; it is those that his persona gives a presence to. This comes out more clearly if the identity parade of the title that one is urged to identify is interpreted as a conscious, public and artificial experience imposed on the real self. As an artificial presentation, a parade insists on uniformity despite the many presences and identities that constitute it.

Consequently, the anarchist poet's incompatibility with the conventional society lies in his insistence on subjective rather than the so-called objective reasoning that is acceptable in his society. The lines: 'The pervert every honest citizen surprises/ in his own mirror: POET' underscore the 'irrationality' of anarchist behaviour as opposed to the 'rational' conduct of an 'honest citizen'. 'Rational' conduct ensues from the spaces exterior to the self and is authorized by various 'accepted' sources of authority and morality in society. So the word 'surprises' also refers to those unacceptable presences that the consciousness of the 'honest citizen' strives to suppress and yet they keep on

surfacing unexpectedly and uncontrollably in his subconscious mind – the mirror. In other words, the so-called rational attitudes mechanize individuals by demanding that they act and think within the fold of the acceptable and as such, they stifle divergence and deny creativity. Also, by accepting the identity of the pervert, who by definition has moved away from normative behaviour the persona accords himself the autonomy of a critical outsider whose subjectivity refuses to descend to the baseness of an insider's 'objective' evaluation of his own society. The vision espoused in this poem, as in many others in the collection is subversive; it radically questions the sincerity of the habit of compliance and conformity that holds society together. Related to this is the anarchists' general appropriation of individualism as a foil to restrictive authority's homogenizations and essentializations. In Marechera's poetry as already noted, this is confirmed by his discarding of an 'objective' and 'stable' identity in favour of a 'subjective' and 'unstable' one.

For Marechera, individualism is a matter of necessity that he forcefully foregrounds and defends in some of his poetry. Appiah (2005:4) argues that,

> … if it were felt that the free development of individuality is one of the leading essentials of well-being; that it is not only a coordinate element with all that is designated by the terms civilization, instruction, education, culture, but is itself a necessary part and condition of all those things; there would be no danger that liberty should be undervalued, and the adjustment of the boundaries between it and social control would present no extraordinary difficulty.

Marechera's awareness of this is evident in his forceful assertion of his individuality as highlighted in the first stanza of the poem 'The Bar-Stool Edible Worm':

> I am against everything
> Against war and those against
> War. Against whatever diminishes
> Th' individual's blind impulse.

Shake the peaches down from
The summer poem, Rake in ripe
Luminosity; dust; taste. Lunchtime
News – pass the Castor Oil, Alice. (59)

The strength of the message derives from the persona's masterly use of paradox to express his individualistic vision. At first glance, the opening stanza of the poem appears to be self-contradictory and almost meaningless, and yet it cogently inscribes Marechera's individualism – he is a poet and individual who refuse to identify himself with any form of ideology or movement that seeks a definitive compartmentalization of individuals (Nhamo Mhiripiri, 1999:159). Here, Marechera's 'blind impulse' transcends Appiah's call for tolerance which advocates that difference should be accepted and that the development of individuality should be central to culture. Also hinted in the first stanza is the paradox inherent in identity as a concept; to possess an identity is necessary and indispensable but it also acts as a tool for social and political control.

The war that is referred to here may be the Zimbabwean liberation struggle which although it emerged in dialectical opposition to colonial oppression to redefine the black other, was fought along rigid party structures mainly predicated on Marxist-Leninist doctrines (David Moore, 1995:75) and therefore did not cater for the individual's personal freedom. Also, when this idea is considered together with the lines: 'Against whatever diminishes/Th' individual's blind impulse'; they echo one of the leading anarchist thinkers of the twentieth century Herbert Read's idea of a spontaneous uprising which he 'sees as a way of escaping from the revolutionary trap – overthrowing one power structure in order to replace it with another'. In addition, the war, as it is referred to in this poem, carries a metaphorical significance that further underlines the

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anarchists' refusal to commit themselves to populist causes which homogenize and label people.

'Th' individual's blind impulse' that is defended and accorded paramountcy in the poem underpins the persona's rejection of the rigid frame of a coded life – the norm – and it reflects that for the egoistical anarchist, there is no need for consistency; instead, the egoist should act on momentary caprice (Miller, 1984:23). Consequently, the thrust of the individualism asserted in this poem suggests that the individual's instincts are destroyed and inhibited by being defined, and as Herbert Read (1940:14) contends, the individual's life in a group ceases to be life in any real sense and only functions as convention, conformity and discipline. The potential of individualism to accord personal independence and to facilitate the discovery of a personal and intrinsic identity is also realized by Appiah (2005:4) whose thesis asserts that, 'individuality means, among other things, choosing for myself instead of merely being shaped by the constraint of political or social sanction.'

These three poems I have discussed, recall what Susana Onega (1995:13) calls the existentialists' denunciation of objective thought as reductionist and indifferent towards the thinking individual. Marechera's writing, as reflected in these poems, signifies a loss of faith in the truth-telling capacity of official narratives of history, and as such, it deconstructs the visible discourses of power that seek to provide general formulae in which reality can be interpreted by asserting difference through individualism. This motif also resonates in the poem 'There's a Dissident in the Election Soup!' where the persona explicitly declares that he has 'no ear for slogans' (183). Such a vision tells the

history of Zimbabwe from an individualist's perspective because it fractures the universalisms of group identities by reducing them to multiple and diverse perspectives. By implication, the subjective individualist's narrative of history displayed in these poems allows for a complex and diverse narrative that is more reliable than the history implied slogans, which give the illusion of superficial cohesion. To this extent, the individualism in Marechera's poetry goes beyond both the individualism where individuals have to follow their own inclinations and narcissism; it reflects a well-ordered and well-meaning critique of the dynamics in Zimbabwe, whose socio-political identities are debilitated by the now irrelevant sloganeering and essentializing group identities affirmed by government since independence.

In the poem 'He is sick, Doctor', for example, conformity to the essentialisms of group identities is characterized as play-acting, a hypocritical existence that results in neurosis because it subverts the real self. The persona utilizes paradox (see the line that reads: 'Sick of himself') to trace the depth of the inward tension and contradiction caused by the neurosis. In the process, the persona highlights the dangers for the self when submitting to the government of an extrinsic force and the shattered identity it generates.

> He is sick, Doctor,
> Sick of himself. An Actor
> Aggrieved of his lot:
> The undying endurance
> Of magnificent impermanence. (150)

The lines 'Sick of himself. An Actor/Aggrieved of his lot' are loaded with tension that brings out the nature of the persona's struggle to break away from the inauthentic self that blights him psychologically. The inauthentic self is suggested through the figure of

an actor who complains that he is sick of his present state and the pretentious role that he has to play. If the lines just quoted highlight the persona's desire to discard the inauthentic self, their presentation of the conflicting and neurotic self also implicitly hints at the futility of such an attempt, because both the paradox and the contradiction that are embedded in them doubt the possibility of escaping from the self. The sick self suggests a state of self alienation, a self othering that leaves the conscious mind confused. Marechera's individualism here becomes reflective of the egotism of anarchists, such as Stirner who uphold that 'nothing is real except the human self' (Miller, 1984:23). But the poem has taken one step beyond a self perpetually locked in the roles and identities that society expects it to play and assume respectively. Instead the self recognizes not only its own falseness but also other possibilities of who says, and what it is and can be.

In the Zimbabwean context, when most of the poems in *Cemetery of Mind* were written, the use of an egoistical perspective to interrogate identities as in the poem just analyzed, coupled with the subjective and radically deconstructive vision of anarchism's individualism which is vigorously and uncompromisingly asserted in some of the poems already discussed, contradict both the publicly promoted national image and identity. The newly independent nation was still groping and searching for a national identity and symbols that would unify different groups. The liberation struggle was not only considered a group effort, but also a rallying point for a new national identity. By insisting on the authority of his own subjective perceptions at a time when the measure for political 'responsibility' was an 'unambiguous' identification with the liberation struggle that had just ended, Marechera was affirming the need for perpetual struggle. Anarchists do not see the renaissance that is normally associated with revolutions, such

as the one that ended colonial rule in Zimbabwe, as capable of redeeming society from oppression. To them, revolution as a process of becoming is merely a procedure that replaces one group of oppressors with another – a re-branding of the same product – to use Marechera's term. Also, as a movement, revolution's tendency to aim for the establishment of a certain order – to achieve a particular objective – is regarded as being at odds with anarchism. It is probably because of revolution's propensity to 'order' that Marechera, while acknowledging a debt to his reading of intellectual anarchism argues, has reinforced his hatred for politicians and how they organize human lives. In fact, Marechera (quoted in Veit-Wild, 1992:33) professes that he does not have anything to do with politics and politicians because of the betrayal of independence in African countries. To grasp the full import of Marechera's denunciation of African governments that were formed from revolutions, it is again essential to refer to Russian anarchist Michael Bakunin's break away from Marxism because of his fear of Marxist dictatorship. In his polemic with Karl Marx, Bakunin, as April Carter (1971:4) observes, pertinently questioned the role and function of the state after a socialist revolution.

While the misgovernance that has plagued Africa's post-active colonial rule as testified to by its post-independence histories have so far vindicated Marechera and anarchists' scepticism towards revolutions, this does not dismiss the reality that politically, anarchism and its individualism undermine the very premises on which modern nations and their identities are built, and in this respect it has to be asked as culture critic Thomas Fitzgerald (1993:17) does: 'How can we retain a strong national identity while recognizing a variety of interest groups?' In the milieu of Zimbabwe early after independence, the anarchists' argument that 'no man can ever rightfully exercise

political authority over another, that is have a right to issue directions which the other has an obligation to obey' (Miller, 1984:15) would have undermined the 'discipline' that underpinned nationalist conduct and on which the new nation had built its foundations. In addition to deconstructing sites of national identity, anarchism is easily dismissed as utopian, confused, divisive, self-centred. Conversely, anarchists defend themselves against such charges by insisting as Derek Novak (1970:25) does, that:

> Individual and social interests are not contradictory but complementary and would attain their natural harmony if authoritarian social institutions, particularly the State, established to create and perpetuate the privileges of some at the expense of others, did not interfere.

Individualism is here not perceived as anti-society, but a necessary aspect of it in as far as its ability to accord the individual freedom is the purpose of society. However, for his efforts, Marechera was accused of working outside a context and also being socially uncommitted. Mainstream Zimbabwean literature assumed a stable reality with which all authors should engage themselves and indeed engage themselves they did. In this regard Rino Zhuwarara (2001:210) argues that:

> … the difference between Marechera and other African writers arises from the fact that he does not rush to affirm any African values and or identities. If one is looking for any affirmations from which to soothe the wounded African psyche and restore a sense of African humanity or dignity, he or she is bound to be disappointed.

Although Zhuwarara's thesis does not read Marechera's writing in an anarchist critical context, it correctly highlights that Marechera's work begs for its own unique place in African literature. For this reason, it becomes crucial to view the instabilities and uncertainties explored in poems, such as 'In Jail the only Telephone is the Washbasin Hole: Blow and We'll Hear' and 'The Bar-stool Edible Worm' in the framework of Miller's observation. Miller (1984:13) observes that, it is because of the anarchists' reluctance

to bring about the changes they want to see using conventional means that they find themselves at odds with the popular views of society.

Once we have identified the ever-shifting voices with which Marechera narrates the complexities and contradictions existent in Zimbabwean history, we can recognize that he is a poet who speaks with both depth and diversity, and often conflicting voices. The strength of his vision stems from the insightfulness and percipience with which it captures the fractures of the Zimbabwean society; it endorses instability as enriching because of the power of doubt that it instills. Building on Miller's argument, the implication is that anarchists do not advocate outlandish ideas, and in the context of Marechera's poetry, the difference perceivable between poems 'Pledging my Soul' and 'Trees of this City' on one hand, and 'In Jail the only Telephone is the Washbasin Hole: Blow and We'll Hear' and 'The Bar-stool Edible Worm' is to be located in the conventionality or unconventionality of the ways through which they articulate socio-political concerns and how they want them addressed. However, while Marechera's poetic inscription of history is complex because it adopts various perspectives and often transcends them; the irony is that he, more often than not, liked to be identified as an anarchist.

Part Two

This section of the chapter considers the legacy of Marechera's complex artistic vision and its influence on a younger Zimbabwean poet, Phillip Zhuwao whose unpublished collection of poetry *Sunrise Poison* as already indicated, acknowledges a debt to the

older poet. Thus the focus of this segment is to find out the extent to which Zhuwao's poetry reflects core traits of Marechera's writing.

Zhuwao's identification with Marechera dates back to his formative years as a writer when he had 'written bits and pieces … of poetry. It was something like copying. I copied Japanese haikus, James Joyce, Gabriel Okara, but mostly Dambudzo Marechera.' But when he started writing seriously in 1990, Zhuwao's admiration for Marechera was based on something more profound, what he terms the 'truth' that characterizes Marechera's writing. In an interview with Alan Finlay, Zhuwao concedes that: 'He [Marechera] says the truth about everything – the way we see life, those near us, our society – the truth that comes from the heart. But now I know more about life than to copy from Dambudzo.' (2003:93) Probably because of his marginalized existence as a child of migrant labourers (his father was a Lozi from Zambia and his mother was a Mozambican), born on a commercial farm, Marechera's ability to articulate marginality from both the perspectives of a conventional 'committed' African writer and that of the anarchist who speaks with the radical individualism availed to him by anarchism's subversiveness, expressed Zhuwao's own immediate condition and his place within the contradictions of Zimbabwe's history. The plight of Zhuwao's community of migrant labourers is well conveyed by Chennells (2005) who observes that this group was always marginal to the national preoccupation of Blacks and Whites although it was central to the economic life of the country. Chennells's observation suggests that the migrant labourers were victims of a condition whereby they serviced the capitalist systems of both colonial Rhodesia and independent Zimbabwe while they remained outsiders to the social, political and economic culture of the country.

Their marginalization and neglect in both colonial Rhodesia and Zimbabwe effectively othered and denied voice to this community. During the colonial dispensation for example, in their subaltern status, migrant labourers were more marginal in their obscurity than native Blacks because they were excluded from the nationalist discourses which were often structured along local ethnic lines. This possibly explains Zhuwao's egoistical approach to writing poetry; he confesses that his poetry has more to do with himself than with other people's needs and suffering:

> My poetry's something to do with me. Not with the ordinary man in the street. Not with my friends… I'm much more interested in myself, in my pain and my sufferings have been much more greater than the man in the street. So I'm no longer interested in other people's pain (2003:96).

There is a clear expression in the quotation that Zhuwao is a poet who is concerned with the peculiarities of his own marginalization and the internal agony that this generates. The artistic vision expressed in this utterance also digresses from the tradition of commitment in African literature, where the artist's duty is supposed to be communal. While the above assertion's radical individualism immerses Zhuwao's poetry in the tradition of anarchism's individualism to an extent; its affirmation of inwardness and its concern with the author's own 'pain' and 'suffering' which is 'greater than the man in the street' contradicts the magnanimous individualism of anarchism that is discernible in some of Marechera's poems, where the individual's independence is conceived as the starting point to the emancipation of the society at large. The 'self-interest' couched in the above utterance is even apparent when Zhuwao speaks of the all-too familiar public themes, such as disillusionment with the newly independent nation

state, which he describes with a private and personal voice as will become evident later in this section of the chapter.

In some of Zhuwao's poems, for example, in the autobiographical 'this morning nigger', the persona's agony at being marginalized owing to the inconsistencies of the society he lives in is expressed with an immediate personal profundity. Part of the poem reads:

> I've been trying to sell
> my 2 copies of New Coin for few coins
> Veldfire ravage evicts
> mice, hares locusts and her beauty to the hunter
> to believe
> I've walked to town and back
> to try and secure that university scholarship

The persona's condition of marginality and the feelings of vulnerability it generates within him are expressed through his personal experiences of trying to sell copies of *New Coin* and his attempts to secure a university scholarship. Reference to '*New Coin*' brings out the personal and the autobiographical thrust of the poem because it seems to allude to the South African journal in which some of Zhuwao's poems are published (Chennells, 2005) in as much as it emphasizes the persona's marginalization heightened by his need for a 'few coins'. Also significant is how the persona renders his own deprivation through the first person pronoun 'I', and juxtapose it to the wealth around him suggested here by the beauty of the natural environment foregrounded in the stanza that reads:

> It's vain and vulnerable
> achille's heel my roofs crush me
> over the hills the beautiful Vumba mountains
> the grassy drakensberg the sand-particled Kalahari
> my biological homeland Barotseland
> Lewanika's eye and my true identity

The hopelessness and vulnerability of the persona's position inscribed through adjectives 'vain' and 'vulnerable' is set in opposition to the 'beautiful Vumba mountains', 'grassy drakensberg' and 'sand-particled Kalahari' to magnify the persona's sense of being excluded. These geographical landmarks from different African countries (Zimbabwe, South Africa and Botswana) suggest that the persona yearns to be part of the African collective from which he is excluded. The persona's exclusion can also be explained in the context of the historical reality that his identity does not ensue from his country of residence as implied by references to Barotseland as his biological home and Lewanika as the source of his true identity. The bathos of being an outsider and the internal rage and pain it generates is expressed with a more telling intensity in the following stanza:

> My heart is now a bomb
> the dish of water that pilate washed hands

The force of the message derives from the simile that equates the persona's heart to a bomb and the metaphor 'the dish of water that pilate washed hands'. The metaphor suggests that the persona's society is responsible for his suffering and marginalization, but it wishes to absolve itself in a way similar to how Pilate in the bible washes his hands to deny responsibility for Christ's suffering. However, the persona's inscription of his heart as a bomb, suggests that while society denies liability for his marginality, his feelings will try to destroy society. The image of the bomb implies that his heart is fuming as a result of the injustices that he experiences, and it is ready to 'explode' against society.

In the poem 'always, i've loved big cars (6 july 1993)', the persona resorts to the use of pathetic fallacy to foreground the immensity of his marginal status:

> This skin touches glow
> coaches stop and collect
> I
> Castaway to nowhere
> Stand in God's drizzle,
>
> Stopping is also paradox
> I write, and the fingers crack
>
> over tyre onslaught – gone

Through the image of a castaway and the use of paradox 'castaway to nowhere', the persona renders both his feelings of alienation and the hopelessness of his outsider status. The phrase 'God's drizzle', to which the persona is exposed while others ride in coaches, expresses the disparity between his condition of need and the context of wealth around him in as much as it also offers a glimpse of his feelings of vulnerability. Paradoxically, it also seems his only contact with God is through discomfort.

Zhuwao's resolution to write poetry that is preoccupied with his own personal encounters allows him to work outside the stultifications of the tradition of the so-called committed literature; it enables him to experiment with radicalism and the possibilities of dynamics within radical change. This authorizes him to be subversive in a dynamic, refreshing and enriching manner. For example, Zhuwao's poetry renews poetic clichés about alienation in Zimbabwe by using language in fresh, highly personal and unpredictable ways to capture the pathos of his own disoriented and fragmented personality. In the poems, 'from nowhere suddenly dew' and 'why should those big eyes

not see?' there is a subversion of conventional language structure evidenced by the persona's deviation from the lexical, grammatical and orthographical norms among other linguistic standards. 'from nowhere suddenly dew' reads:

> Names of whispers thru names
> broken walls
> deathly pale
> No drums beat again.
> rainbullet + scandal =
> Doldrums
> and hooks and falcon sharp beaks
> over and round
> her breath hissed coolly on my breast
> to Scotchroast deep
> it was morning already

In the first line, the persona deviates orthographically through deliberate misspelling. This fractures language structure because spelling itself represents agreed conventions of language, such as pronunciation and meaning. The effect of orthographical deviation is that the strangeness it brings to familiar word forms highlights the expressive possibilities of the language. In the poem, these possibilities are also widened by the persona's lexical deviation evident in the use of compound words, such as 'rainbullet' and 'Scotchroast', and symbols instead of words in the lines: 'rainbullet + scandal = /Doldrums'. Neologism, as the violation of lexical rules is known in linguistics, appears to be the most direct and immediate way through which the persona can express his thoughts and feelings in this poem. As Geoffrey N. Leech (1973:44) observes, the usefulness of neologisms rests in their ability to bring a degree of compression and economy. This is especially the case when compound words are used; there is maintenance of poetic vigour which averts prosaic flatness. In 'from nowhere suddenly dew' it also appears that the persona's compounding of words results in new coinages,

which effectively 'encapsulate a newly formulated idea' (Leech, 1973:44). To this end, such coinages manifest the poet's awareness of the limitations of ordinary language to capture certain experiences and feelings.   Also in the lines from the poem just quoted, which combine words and symbols to communicate, there is unconventional punctuation whereby the capitalization of 'Doldrums' becomes an expressive vehicle at a semantic level rather than merely a transgression of typographical convention.

However, in contrast, as Leech (1973:61) notes: 'A linguistic deviation is a disruption of the normal processes of communication: it leaves a gap, as it were in one's comprehension of a text.' To put it across differently, if as Dinah Livingstone (1993:96) observes, 'language is the main way in which a society expresses itself and coheres through understanding', for Zhuwao, an occupier of marginal spaces, language is employed to articulate both the subjectivity of his own novel experiences within such positions and the unstable identities that ensue from those locations. This is confirmed by his poetic vision, which like Marechera's, does not rush to affirm any set of alterative values. In the light of Leech's thesis, some of Zhuwao's poems reveal Marechera's anarchist view and definition of poetry in that their destabilization of language forms challenges cognitive or 'logical' meaning to accomplish what Marechera (quoted in Veit-Wild, 1992:31) calls intellectual anarchism's objective of achieving no goal, of putting one in a state of perpetual change without holding on to any certainties.

From the perspective of the anarchist poet, the purpose of linguistic deviation could be to achieve nothing in terms of meaning. The lacuna that is left in the comprehension of a text as Leech (1973:66) further contends, can be filled through the reader's imagination if he or she perceives some deeper connection which compensates for the

superficial oddity. An example is the following stanza from Zhuwao's poem 'for once, look the other way' where the persona flouts both syntactic and grammatical rules:

> darling
> darling
> I'm trying to understand you this
> the dates do not matter
> I'm trying not to make you cry
> My situation is just another judgement

The line that reads 'I'm trying to understand you this' is ungrammatical; the use of the pronoun 'you' in combination with 'this' violates the rules of conventional syntax, and in the stanza just quoted, this amounts to jumbling. For Leech (1973:45), violations of a grammatical and syntactic nature affect the surface structure of a sentence, and consequently, as already noted, they have no fundamental effect on the meaning of the sentence. In the above stanza, while the oddity in the structure of the line indicated muddles meaning in a way; the semantic significance of the poem is largely retained. The message that the persona is yearning for a mutual understanding between himself and his lover is not lost on the reader.

Perhaps the crucial similarity between Zhuwao and Marechera is a tendency to privilege the 'disruptive' subjectivity of individualism rather than the 'unifying' objectivity of collectivism. This vision seems to emanate from the experience of occupying marginal spaces where often the individual grapples to make meaning of the world. In some of Zhuwao's poems for example, there is a movement from one image to another, a spontaneity that is characterized by impulsiveness and fragmentation which to an extent appear to dramatize both the identity of the poet and how she or he should write as suggested by Marechera in poems 'Identify the Identity Parade' and 'In Jail the Only Telephone Is the Washbasin Hole: Blow and We'll Hear!' that I have already discussed.

The following stanza from the poem 'new generation poet' illustrates this spur-of-the-moment trait in some of Zhuwao's poems:

> pieces of love
>   Nonsense
>   Bohlinger
>   Guiness
>   ejaculation   Marechera hang-over
> Cannabis
> LSD
>   methylated spirits
> Faces smeared with the madman's semen and saliva

Other than being reflective of the fluidity of the subjectivity of the persona's feelings which the audience struggles to comprehend, this stanza, unordered and disjointed as it seems in terms of thought, captures the original and unsullied meaning the persona makes of the disorder of the world around him. This, together with the images of death and violence prevalent in poems, such as 'watching the funeral thru a cracked door', where violence is metaphorized as the township aphrodisiac, combine to highlight the mangled and unstable marginal world that the persona occupies.

What is key here is that in the assessment of his society's history, the persona maintains the subjective judgment that emanates from his own personal pains to which his poetry is committed. Zhuwao is aware such perspectives may accurately assess society, and this constitutes his notion of truth, the truth about society that he perceives as central to Marechera's writing. In the lines: 'In their short lives/Poets live longer', from the poem 'my blue resignation conclude', Zhuwao emphasizes the power of poetic subjectivity that enables poets to see things with a depth and intensity that is absent from popular and 'objective' discourses such as nationalisms and negritude both of which Marechera dismisses as mindsets that make original insights impossible.

Alternatively, these lines celebrate the power of imaginative thinking; both in the poetic and historical spheres, and the ability of alternatives availed by such imaginative perspectives to endure history by transcending the banalities and baseness of official and accepted discourses. The paradox created through the use of 'short' and 'longer' in the quoted lines highlights this. But the obvious meaning is that poets leave work that lives after they die; this implies a collective readership and also contradicts the conception that poetry is a private medium not intended to be read by any one other than its author as the poem 'new generation poet' seems to affirm.

However, in the light of Zhuwao's poetry, the view that poetry is a private medium that communicates only to the poet has to be located in the poet's own egotistical profession: that he is interested in writing about himself. Zhuwao's poetry, like Marechera's, is not entirely private or individualistic and as such, it is misleading to analyze the former's poems using his claim that he is only interested in his own suffering. Such an approach would tie analysis of Zhuwao's poetry to his personal life and background. This poses a danger of restricting interpretation and denies the social relevance of the poems. As Stephen Matterson and Darryl Jones (2000:100) caution, the idea that a poem might mean different things to different people at different times would be denied if everything were referred back to the author and experiences of the author. The warning here is that locating poetry in a poet's life straitjackets analysis. This is apparent in some of Zhuwao's poems, where the personal experience cannot be completely separated from the broader political context, because these poems also connect and reach beyond the personal. The poem 'the rotten fruit' which renders the dilemma of existing in the uneven and contradictory world of unfairness through the generic term for human beings 'man' makes the point:

When was it?
 When hunger's question pleaded,
 "Can I?"

 When was it?
 When profit's smile drove the nail
 "Times have changed please pay."

 Is something dead?
 Somewhere something is smelling
 I hope it's not the fruit.

 When man prays to God
 And gets nothing
 He gives nothing to his fellow man
 For he will feel betrayed.

In as much as the poem expresses the problematic condition of living in a world of gross inequality and the conflicting realities engendered by such imbalances, the persona assumes a tone that is both critical and philosophical. Through paradox, evinced via the tension between hunger and profit – metonymies for need and greedy respectively – the persona traces with depth the extent of the dilemma of conflicting forces in which people who occupy capitalist spaces are caught. The resolution reached in the closure of the poem, whereby man gives nothing away when God gives him nothing, is the philosophical response that results from the polemic that has been building throughout the poem which endorses the 'nothing for nothing' truism that is a fact of the capitalist economic system. It is a matter-of-fact ending that makes sense of the gap between pragmatism and idealism by inscribing humans as victims of a life that they cannot control, while simultaneously it implicitly invites society to re-look and rethink itself through realistic perspectives as is suggested in its presentation of God as detached and indifferent to human needs. The approach adopted here as already indicated, is a typical Marecheran response to post-colonial problems in Zimbabwe

where he uses dissident views alongside anarchism to destabilize controlling discourses and institutions of power and authority, and their notions of objectivity.

Zhuwao's strength, like Marechera's, emanates from how he freshly articulates experiences that society accepts as routine. He rethinks marginality and re-examines the significance of marginal identities and their place in history, in his own probing and personal way that detaches itself from the strictures of established popular voices. His assumption of a private personal voice and a subjective lens in writing and evaluating history, and expressing the experiences of marginal identities in that history, are testimony to the new dimension that Zhuwao brings to the Zimbabwean literary scene. For this reason, *Sunrise Poison* offers a fresh evaluation of Zimbabwean history.

The next chapter investigates identities that are constructed and deconstructed through the selected Zimbabwean women's poetic narratives of history. Their conceptualizations of histories and identities on the Zimbabwean space differ from the two male poets discussed in this chapter. The women poets complicate the discursive space in which identities are contested in Zimbabwe in their own way, by among other things discussing women's private and personal identities in the middle of public identities such as national identity.

Chapter Five: A Woman's Poetic Voice

In the previous Chapter Four, I analyzed Marechera's poetic imagination in which, what is celebrated are unstable and fractured identities that are depicted as the condition of possibility of lived experiences in post-colonial Zimbabwe. This chapter focuses on the work of Zimbabwean women poets. It analyzes a volume by former freedom fighter Freedom Nyamubaya, *On the Road Again: Poems During and After the National Liberation of Zimbabwe* (1986), and her poems in *Dusk of Dawn* (1995) and some poets in *A Woman's Plea* (1998), an anthology of poems by various Zimbabwean women. The aim in this chapter is to explore the poetic imagination embedded in the women's voices to establish how women rewrite their society's history and inscribe themselves into that history.

Before analyzing the texts of the women poets that I have selected, it is necessary to note that criticism of black African women's literary works is surrounded by critical controversies about both the theoretical approaches that should be implemented and the socio-cultural contexts in which these works should be read. For example, it is a commonplace in the criticism of African women's literary work to categorize it as feminist in perspective even though it may not articulate feminist aspirations. The hazards of such essentialization are warned against by Naomi Nkealah (2006:133), who argues that classifying every literary work by a woman as having a feminist agenda is a generalization that undermines the very foundations of feminism. Feminism, as Nkealah (2006:135) further observes, 'has as its ultimate goal the triumphal emancipation of the woman as a unique, distinct individual with a mind uncluttered by patriarchal beliefs and abusive submission to tradition'. Nkealah's claim is shared by

Maggie Humm (1986:x), who defines feminism as 'an analysis of women's subordination for the purpose of figuring how to change it.' These definitions of feminism are not new but they direct us to the basic tenets of feminism, as numerous other feminists perceive it.

The controversy that surrounds feminism as a concept in literary criticism is not so much about its definition, however, as whether it can be made to constitute a literary theory that can adequately account for the literary texts by African women. As a movement, it is common to question whether feminism can explain and suggest solutions to women's subordination. It is argued in some circles that feminism is a western discourse that privileges the concerns and modalities of western women (Florence Stratton, 1994:12) while subverting the needs of their African counterparts. Mary Kolawole (1997:13) argues that, 'in spite of certain strengths and weaknesses in diverse shades of feminism, they address western realities and not African women's peculiar situation.' Kolawole's thesis is embedded in the dialectical tie that exists between any ideology and its social context which makes impossible the uniform application of that ideology to other different contexts without a universalizing that having destroyed its informing dialectic is reduced to thin generalizations. Kolawole (1997:12-13) cites as her example radical feminism, which 'suggests a neutralization of reproductive role in line with lesbian calls for *in vacuo* reproduction' and 'a utopia in which male and female have an option of "agendered" child-bearing.' This kind of feminist consciousness is culturally unacceptable to most African women and it obviously brings into perspective the crucial question of cultural relevance, for as Kolawole (1997:13) further observes, many African and other Third World women

regard lesbianism as an unacceptable sexual option. Most African cultures valorize child-bearing and nurturing as a central defining act for women and their consciousness of themselves is necessarily different to Western women who may not place the same emphasis on their roles as mothers (Kolawole, 1997:10). In Deirdre Lashgari's (1995:8) terms, the specificities of cultural difference reveal varying forms of resistance to oppression. Apart from cultural differences, other realities such as unequal relations between sexes within the post colony mediate African women's consciousness and their literary voices testify to this fundamental difference from their western counterparts. Molara Ogundipe-Leslie (1994:223) further underscores this when she posits that the problematization of feminism in Africa emerges when the idiosyncratic demands of race, class; culture and geographical location are brought into consideration. The strategies that women adopt to cope with their oppression can correlate to the specificities of their oppression.

The foregrounding of the existence of contextual idiosyncrasies that define the dissimilarities between African women and Western women is a rejection of both the hegemony and homogenization of feminism as a discourse that purports to address the subordination of women everywhere. Some African women writers and critics have expressed reservations at the use of the term feminism to justify and define their efforts for mobilization and self-definition. Consequently, there is a conscious movement away from what some African women perceive as the hegemony of Western feminism, to other discourses that embody cultural and contextual differences, and are more specific in their advocacy of new ways of categorizing African women's needs. Ogundipe-Leslie (1994:229-230) for example, coins the term 'Stiwa' (Social Transformation Including

Women in Africa) which 'describes [her]... agenda for women in Africa without having to answer charges of imitativeness or having to constantly define our agenda on the African continent in relation to other feminisms, in particular, white Euro-American feminisms which are unfortunately under siege by everyone.' Stiwanism, according to Ogundipe-Leslie's (1994:230) claims, allows for discussion of the needs of African women in the tradition of the spaces and strategies provided in their indigenous cultures for the social being of women.

Mary Kolawole (1997:24) advocates the use of Alice Walker's term 'womanism', which she defines as 'the totality of feminine self-expression, self-retrieval in positive cultural ways' as a substitute for feminism. The new terminologies reflect the uneasiness among African women emanating from the usage of feminism as a single category for women's aspirations. Using it glibly universalizes experience and blurs difference, and dissolves the immediate needs of black African women in the swirl of the mainstream voices of western women. The subversion of feminism undoes the reductive and simplistic notion of common voices as it gives way to a multiplicity of voices. Furthermore, breaking away from feminism displaces the West as the centre of African women's mobilization and locates the power of self-definition, within African women's various experiences. As Kolawole (1997:10) pertinently observes: 'for too long, the African woman's reality has been inscribed from the West or by men.' Creating alternative terminologies for African women's oppositional discourses is an assertive way of self inscription and simultaneously subverts homogenizing voices of various African patriarchies and western centres of power. Initiating counter-discourse to the hegemony of feminism's definitions of African womanhood is, according to Kolawole

(1997:5 quoting Obioma Nnaemeka), 'a healthy approach in African women's search for acceptable feminine aesthetics' which reveals a 'centrality of dualities, paradoxes, and simultaneous existence of values in African thoughts ....' To elaborate on Kolawole's assertions, African women adopt strategies that specifically seek to cope with the nuances of their particular oppression and that the concept of womanhood itself and the qualities ascribed to it are culturally, socially and politically constructed.

If the utilization of the feminist movement as a discourse that represents the needs of women in Africa is problematized by some African women, criticism of literary works by African women writers that seek the mobilization of African women should also take cognizance of the limitations of feminism in Africa. Literary criticism should not glibly subsume African women's writing in the tradition of western feminist literary texts. Such categorization ignores the nuances of culture and other unique experiences encoded in African women's literature. Also, it renders 'invisible' the inimitable inner textual strategies adopted by African women writers that are marshalled to promote certain consciousnesses in the face of marginality that ensues from occupying certain socio-historical spaces.

To sum up how African women should be perceived in theoretical debates on their art; women's art must be evaluated in its own right (Aidoo 2007), mainstreamed for critical study and evaluated at Africa's universities (Nnaemeka 2007), in order to challenge 'stereotypes of African women as instruments of evil, seducers, who 'represent danger and an ancient fear, both related to sex' (El Saadawi, 2007: 520-525). This will then validate 'stories that affirm the woman, thus challenging the male writers and making

them aware of women's inherent vitality, independence of views, courage, self-confidence, and of course, her desire for gain and high social status' (Nwapa, 2007: 529).

The debates outlined in the discussion above are useful in understanding the nuances of the artistic voices of Zimbabwean women that seek to inscribe women's identities at the centre of that country's complex history. The grand narratives of women's oppression in Zimbabwe generally situate women's marginalization at the intersection of two forms of oppression: colonial subordination and indigenous patriarchal oppression. Historian Elizabeth Schmidt's (1992) hypotheses about black Zimbabwean women's oppression provide the thrust of these discourses and a useful socio-historical context in which to situate Zimbabwean women's voices of self-assertion, as well as a frame of reference for the criticism of their works. According to Schmidt (1992:14), when the white colonizers came to Zimbabwe in 1890, two patriarchal societies combined as a single oppressive system. In this formulation, the origins of black women's subordination are not to be solely situated in the policies implemented by foreign capital, but within a hybridized system of oppression that formed from the interface of the two patriarchal systems. Schmidt (1992:14) further observes that, European men found a society in which chiefs, headmen and other male elders were in control, and in formulating laws regarding the status of black women, the white male administrators consulted black men. Schmidt (1992:107) cites the customary law, where colonial authorities sought versions of Shona and Ndebele customs that promoted their own political and economic agenda. Native commissioners consulted an array of 'legal experts', invariably chiefs, headmen and male elders (Schmidt,

1992:107). This was the law which relegated women to the status of perpetual minors whereby they could not legally do anything without the consent of their husbands or male relatives. For example, they could not own property in their name. What became codified or inscribed in Rhodesian law as African customary law or tradition was an invention of indigenous patriarchs who desperately needed to maintain their control and authority over women who ran the 'risk' of becoming empowered within the colonial economy.

To add to this exclusion and silencing of African women, the Rhodesian government had its own stereotypical views of African women: they were fickle, irresponsible and sexually manipulative, and as the self-appointed trustees of African advancement, colonial officials saw it as their duty to punish the moral laxity of African women as is evidenced in laws, such as the Native Adultery Punishment Ordinance (Schmidt, 1992:103&106). Schmidt (1992:2) concludes that, antagonistic as they may have been to colonial rule, African chiefs and headmen welcomed the new ways the colonial state subordinated African women, for example their restriction to rural areas because this allowed African men to have some control on black female sexuality

The artistic narratives of Zimbabwean women both affirm and transcend Schmidt's hypotheses. Tsitsi Dangarembga's award-winning novel *Nervous Conditions* (1988) captures both differences and points of intersection in traditional and colonial spaces' interactions with black women. The narrative demonstrates that these spaces are locked in a dual and yet ambiguous relationship in which they complement and negate each other. They both cause 'nervous conditions' in women, but there are also sites

within either systems that hold the potential for women's liberation. As a result, Dangarembga's narrative inscribes women's independence as a balancing act, which is realized from delicately negotiating their way through the tensions and ambivalences of a social, cultural and political context that is dominated by the two forces. By contrast, in some of the novels of Yvonne Vera, another award-winning Zimbabwean woman writer, although the hegemonic power of the colonizer and traditional patriarchy over women is addressed, these works locate the possibility of women's freedom and self-assertion outside the spaces controlled by these forces. The potential for women's freedom in Vera's works lies in their inner psychological spaces which they use as subversive sites of oppressive authority. Their mental strengths enable them to commit 'shocking acts of taboo' that upset the boundaries of the accepted and unaccepted. To this effect, Ranka Primorac (2002:107) notes that although Vera's women are physically imprisoned as in the novel *Nehanda* (1993) and violated in *Without a Name* (1994) and *Under the Tongue* (1996), the only space where they are safe and which they control is in their heads. Barbara Makhalisa's collection of short stories, *The Underdog and Other Stories* (1984), explores women's subordination in the context of early post-independence Zimbabwe. Most of the stories foreground the anxiety of the new black patriarchal government at women's presence in the urban spaces. As I have already shown in my discussion of Zimunya's poetry in Chapter Two, some of the short stories criticize the new government's official efforts to exclude women from the city, a space which the women themselves consider a site of opportunities and emancipation. Thus while the multifaceted dynamics of the colonial context are largely absent in Makhalisa's stories, it is apparent that she locates women's freedom in the spaces that colonialism and

particularly Christianity opened and their subordination in traditional cultural spaces where the new government seeks to restrict women.

Like Makhalisa's short stories, Lilian Masitera's collection of poems *Militant Shadow* (1996) is set in post-independence Zimbabwe. However, while most of the poems foreground the dominance of the patriarchy and condemn the structures that it puts in place for oppressing women, the texts are not simply a search for solutions to women's problems. They are also a critical examination of their identities and the spaces in which those identities are created and shaped. Masitera adopts a shifting voice which not only allows her a flexibility to capture and explore different women's experiences of marginalization, but also to interrogate and problematize locations that are often idealized as sites of women's emancipation. The changes in her voice are best evidenced by poems such as 'Irony' (1996:31-33), 'Place-Holder' (18-19) and 'Free Thyself' (44-45). In the poem 'Irony', the persona presents women's situation as desperate. She foregrounds the traumatic experience of a woman who 'escapes' to the country, a place that she considers a site of reprieve from the tumultuous city only to get raped after bathing in a stream. This poem suggests that both country and city are equally hostile towards women and there are therefore no spaces in which they can experience freedom. The poem 'Place-Holder' employs a similar motif but from a different perspective. The poem juxtaposes the experiences of a married woman against those of an unmarried professional woman in order to reveal the contradictions that affect women's identities in Zimbabwe and the locations in which their identities are developed. The contradiction is revealed in the different ways the two women are perceived in their society. The married woman is considered culturally acceptable but

some feminist discourses see all marriage as a type of entrapment to women. Her society's cultural ethos regards the unmarried professional woman as estranged but some feminist discourses also see her as an embodiment of women's independence. However, the persona transcends the boundaries set by these discourses of oppression and independence when the poem shows that each woman is unhappy with her identity and yearns to be in the space occupied by the other. What is even more significant is that while the persona's voice is undeniably a feminist one, Masitera does not simplify women's problems by imagining that liberation is an easily accessible state. There are challenges to woman's sense of the self that come from both her professional and married status. Masitera is, however, capable of contradicting the relative complexity of these two poems and can produce a simplistic feminism in a poem like 'Free Thyself' where she seems to suggest that unity among women, an 'unthinking' sisterhood, is an easily accessible vehicle to women's emancipation and will be a solution to all their problems.

If the visions of the women writers discussed above can be understood in terms of Schmidt's hypothesis, the poetic voices that I explore in this chapter situate women's subordination and struggles to reverse their marginality in other sites. For example, female ex-combatant Freedom Nyamubaya's poetry discussed in Part One, disturbs the 'clear' opposition between the agencies of colonialism and traditional patriarchies agency by discussing the plights and identities of women in the context of the new and unpredictable spaces created by the liberation struggle of the 1970s. As an identity space, the liberation war provides a new context which shapes and interacts with identities in different ways from those spaces controlled by the African patriarchy and

colonial authority whose influence informs the theories of the grand narratives of women's oppression. In fact, the majority of Nyamubaya's poems in *On the Road Again: Poems During and After the National Liberation of Zimbabwe* and *Dusk of Dawn* which focus on women's identities are set at the battlefront where even the masculine identities normally associated with male power and dominance are often altered. Tanya Lyons (2004:26) makes a similar observation when she notes that Nyamubaya's poetry evokes the pain, trauma, and adventures of the war for Zimbabwean women in Mozambique. Lyons's study is not about Zimbabwean women's poetry, but an investigation of women's roles in the liberation war. She discusses some of the poems from Nyamubaya's *On the Road Again: Poems During Poems During and After the National Liberation of Zimbabwe and After the National Liberation of Zimbabwe* to augment her sources on women's experiences in that war. In the work of historian Josephine Nhongo-Simbanegavi (2000), *On the Road Again*: *Poems During and After the National Liberation of Zimbabwe* is also referred to in the midst of 'testimonies of women participants and ZANU's administrative documents' (2000:xx) for the purpose of finding out whether women's participation in the war changed their social status or worsened it.

In contrast to the war spaces that Nyamubaya uses to re-imagine women's identities, the analysis of *A Woman's Plea* in Part Two shows the diversity of women's poetic voices which situate women's experiences in different spaces and re-imagine and re-present their identities from multiple perspectives thereby revealing that the plea of the anthology's title is not expressed using a uniform voice. The poems in this collection disclose various spaces of oppression within the larger space captured by the grand

narratives. The existence of these different voices not only complicates women's status in Zimbabwean history but also calls for critical voices that conceptualize women's poetry to situate it in a critical framework that addresses the specifics of women's oppression in the Zimbabwean context and gives it a specificity that is absent in the generalizations of the grand discourses.

Part One

The liberation war in which Nyamubaya situates her critique of women's identities is one of the landmark events of Zimbabwe's history, and it is also the subject of contending narratives. Nyamubaya's rethinking of women's identities in terms of this historical event, which the ruling ZANU PF party insists should be the sole source of the nation's identity as I argued in Chapter Three inscribes women at the centre of the nation's dominant histories and also questions and alters the structure of the authorized *Chimurenga* narrative. In her poetry, it is not the nationalist ideology underlying *Chimurenga* that is foregrounded as in official narratives, but identity sites within it which provide spaces to contest existing identities and to make and unmake new ones. As a site of identity, the liberation war is imagined as unstable and ambivalent, with the capacity to shape identities for both women and men in unpredictable ways. Nyamubaya exploits this instability so as to creatively critique the politics of women's subordination.

For women, who generally occupy marginal spaces in their society, the liberation war is celebrated in some of the poems as having offered women combatants an opportunity for self-discovery. This is reflected in the poem 'When I look back' as follows:

> I could never have been
> this happy
> this bold
> this knowledgeable
> But most of all, the freedom that I am
>
> That open university!
> Was so open
> That mathematics and physics got simplified.
>
> …
>
> Now when I look back
> No school can beat this one. (1994:19)

The persona's confident tone and the authority with which she expresses the various ways in which her active participation in the liberation war positively shaped her identity ensue from her presence – which gives her writing the authority of experience. For her, the liberation struggle is an open university because it provided an opportunity in which women could assert themselves in roles other than those prescribed for women within the obscure domestic arena.

Ruth Weiss (1986:43) argues that the gap between African men and African women widened after men became participants in European modernity while women lagged behind having been excluded because of their perceived incapability to grasp the sophistications of European civilization. She (1986:43) notes that, 'as few women were being educated in the White man's ways, they came to feel inferior to the men who had gone to school and moved in the world of the whites.' The colonial masters themselves

used their andocentric logic together with Victorian rationale to argue that because the male operated in the public sphere, he would acquire opportunities for advancement. The female confined to the private space would inevitably be left behind, and this was appropriate since the progress of both sexes never has, and probably may never be, on parallel lines (Schmidt, 1992:102). This arrangement was later to change, because of the fear of the black peril, particularly when black women began to be employed in the domestic service of Whites, even though the black women were less likely to receive the same Western education as their male counterparts.

In the poem 'Reflections', the persona outlines the contradictions experienced by female combatants whose role in the war ensured that they operated outside culturally defined spaces:

> I am trying to rewind
> To recollect what it was
> How it felt
> Who I was
> The innocent peasant girl that used to be me
>
>   …
>
> What a peaceful world
> And a beautiful sunset
> I know I will never be
> that innocent peasant girl again
> Now that I am running around
> In the jungle with guns
> Expecting to kill or to be killed
> If wishes were horses
> I would rewind the clock to peaceful times. (1994:51)

Although the persona expresses some regret at having left the familiarity of her cultural roles, the reference to the past in this poem is not necessarily a search for a return to its comfort, but a magnification of the divide between innocence and experience/

ignorance and consciousness. Even if the persona wished to recover the innocence of a peasant girl, such an identity plays to both colonial and traditional patriarchal stereotypes. In the former, African women are perceived as too obtuse to be weaned from the plainness of peasant life and in the latter they are considered as lacking the capacity to be subjects and determiners of their own history.

The strength of Nyamubaya's vision in this poem lies in its location of Zimbabwean women within their socio-historical context, and its immediacy is announced by its ability to penetrate the hidden spaces of Zimbabwean women's subordination. Historically, the peasants in Rhodesia occupied a troubled position together with peasants in other settler colonies such as Kenya, Algeria and South Africa; their production power was undermined by successive Rhodesian governments so as to promote commercial agriculture and waged labour. In Rhodesia, as Schmidt (1992:54) observes, it is women who were principal work force in the peasant economy because men were recruited to work in industries and Whites' commercial farms. The liberation war provided an opening for the peasant woman to move out of her unsophisticated and immobile space. Norma Kriger's (1991:139) study also affirms this observation by contending that Zimbabwean women's participation in the liberation struggle was a well-calculated move as they seized the opportunities the liberation war provided to try and improve their own status.

It is important to note that while in the poems analyzed above, Nyamubaya celebrates and idealizes the freedom and consciousness that come with women's participation in the new spaces opened up by the liberation struggle, she also counterbalances this by

foregrounding their dehumanization and humiliation within the same spaces. This is reflected in poems such as 'Osibisa' and 'Secrets'. The first four stanzas of 'Osibisa' present this thematic concern as follows:

> I was told it's a Chinese word:
> I definitely know of one
> A place of mental torture
> Where women and children were dumped,
> Cut off from life.
> A mental prison for mothers in the war.
>
> Mentally disconnected, but physically involved:
> Of course, they received their share
> Of bombs and firing – from security headquarters
>   in Thornhill.
>
> When it wrecks the human mind
> It destroys the person in them
> Sweeping away the love in them
> Leaving only empty and vicious bodies.
>
> I saw them battering each other
> Jumping at each other's throats
> Witchhunting and rumour-mongering
> Boiling jealous and burning hatred.
> Osibisa, a hot camp of frustration.
> That's what happens
> When the war wrecks off the mind. (1986:66)

The title of the poem 'Osibisa' comes from a women's camp of the same name established during the liberation war. The psychological trauma experienced by women, captured through lines such as, 'A place of mental torture', 'A mental prison for mothers in the war', 'Sweeping away the love in them' and 'Osibisa, a hot camp of frustration' undermines the fulfillment that the persona locates and celebrates in women's participation in the war in the poem 'When I look back' already analyzed. In addition to the dehumanizing mental traumas foregrounded in these stanzas, Fay Chung (2006:192) also describes Osibisa as the Zimbabwean equivalent of Sparta,

characterized by arduous physical exercise and hardships. Thus in the poem, the camp Osibisa represents a psychological and physical space in which the identities of women combatants were viciously degraded. The following stanzas illustrate the point:

> They were all mothers
> With the experience of labour pains
> And bullet wounds on their buttocks
> Fragments all over their bodies.
> They were all fighters
>
> …
>
> Fighters to defend their children
> Mothers to provide child care
> Mistresses to entertain the men:
> Their minds sink in despair. (66-67)

Here, the manifold identities and roles of women at Osibisa (mothers, fighters and sexual partners) suggest the complexity of the identity spaces occupied by women at the battlefront as well as the depth and multiplicity of the traumas that these spaces generated. The persona's disclosure of the multiplicity of women combatants' identities and roles also expands the context in which the meaning and history of *Chimurenga* have to be interpreted because it shows that the experiences and contributions of the freedom fighters cannot be universalized.

The capacity of the liberation war to open up spaces that affected women's identities in unpredictable ways and which is shown in the poems analyzed above is also exploited by Nyamubaya's poetry to destabilize and disrupt the 'binary operation of the dominant discourse' (to use Lashgari's [1995:3] term) which masculanizes narratives about the liberation war by inscribing the masculine as the subject of liberation struggle narratives. In the poem 'Seen enough to go sterile', the poet does this through the use

of satire which not only undermines masculinity, but gives her own version of masculinity during the liberation war in which the orthodox 'truth' about manhood changes:

> When I think of the open dusty
> Buttocks of the male comrades
> With half-torn trousers
> like the tail lights of baboons
> You know what I mean
> The sad look of the male organs
> Hanging open and uninterested from behind. (1995:27)

The persona's movement away from the old centre of official memory of history is signalled by her externalization of andocentric versions of the liberation struggle and emasculation of biological signs of manhood. The male genitals are mocked and so is the identity of masculinity that they represent. The potency of male sexuality as a signifier of power, virility and masculinity is downplayed, and the poem's effectiveness in achieving this reductive effect is in its tone which sarcastically observes the patriarchal sign of manhood, 'The sad look of male organs/ Hanging open and uninterested' symbolize impotence and weakness and this becomes an emasculation that destabilizes phallocratic representations of the liberation war. In this context, the construction of war as that terrain in which masculinity asserts itself is deconstructed. Conversely, the war is recast as testosterone sapping; it actually 'activates' or draws attention to the 'woman' within men; the woman that men are taught to suppress and loathe. At the same time, the images of the weak male offset manifestations of perverted masculinity, such as rape and other forms of violence which resonate in poems such as 'Secrets' and 'Journey and half' in *Dusk of Dawn.* In terms of sex categorizations, the gulf between biological maleness as the signifier of masculinity and

biological femaleness as a pointer of weakness is blurred. The poem 'The brave ones' suggests that there is an effusion of these qualities in both sexes:

> She was born with a hero's mark
> on her forehead
> Received by the mud that wrapped her
> In natural warmth
> Just like the mud her colour
> was camouflage
> She did not cry like all babies
> do at birth
> But wiggled bravely in the whispering wind
>
> Without much concern
> She suckled her mother's soiled breast
> As if to treat herself from all diseases
> She was born with war instincts
> Right in the middle of a battle
> A child is born (1995:45).

Social roles and identities that are conferred by gender are problematized; the undermining of the virile manhood and the foregrounding of the weak manhood reverse the patriarchy's self-proclaimed role of being the protector of the feminine. After all, the women who participated in the war did so on the so-called male terms; they had to be 'tough and cruel' (Irene McCartney & Chiedza Musengezi, 2000:xiii). These are the manifestations of womanhood that are socially unacceptable because they refuse to conform to traditional patriarchal and colonial gender categories. They disturb hierarchies of power, and identities that accompany these arrangements. The identity of black women had been constant over the years in terms of affirming their inferiority to men, and what kept on changing was the nature of negative stereotypes that were imputed to women as circumstances varied and at the convenience of the patriarchy. In the 1970s, women's participation in the liberation struggle was regarded as part of their upward mobility in society, 'as much a process towards the liberation of the nation as

towards the emancipation of women' to quote Robert Mugabe's words (Campbell, 2003:282).

But after independence, this ambitious agenda was denied in the social, cultural and political structures of the society that marginalized such women. Campbell (2003:284) observes that, 'the victory of the guerillas in the independence struggle had been a joint effort by all, but after the attainment of independence, African males who had celebrated women in combat called on these same women to return to the family and carry out their 'respectable' roles as mothers'. However, the experiences of some women combatants as revealed in the analysis of the poem 'Osibisa' above show the difference between the rhetoric immediately after the war and the condition of women both in the camps and in the newly independent nation. The fact that many women were sexually abused (Fay Chung [2006] singles out ZANLA commander Josiah Tongogara as one of the worst abusers) disrupts claims that African males had celebrated women in struggle. In poems, such as 'Aliens' and 'Daughter of the soil' Nyamubaya evaluates how women's participation in the liberation struggle had implications for their social image and identity within the societal structures in Zimbabwe:

> Have you heard of them?
> Have you ever come across one?
> I heard they are something!
>
> They beat up their husbands
> Beat up their in-laws
> Have no respect for elders
> Drink like fish
> Smoke like chimneys
> Sleep with everybody
> I heard they are physically strong too.

Yes I have heard of them
One of them is my sister
The one that comes after me
And she is not like you describe
the female ex-combatant (1995:43).

On a social and cultural level, women ex-combatants were 'men', 'too tough and liberated' to fit into the ethos that defines womanhood, an aspect of which is subservience to all men in general and to one's husband in particular. Female ex-combatants 'returned to a society where the woman was totally subservient to the man, and the housework and care of children was her business quite apart from work in the fields' (Julia Zvobgo quoted in Ruth Weiss, 1986:105-106). The failure of women ex-combatants to fit into the norms of their society suggests that existing cultural constructions of women were more important than an identity that derived from their contribution to the struggle. Appiah (2005:23) observes that collective identities have scripts, that is, they follow a socially created path. In the philosophy of the African patriarchy in Zimbabwe, women such as female ex-combatants are not worth paying the bride price for, and their categorization as social deviants as reflected in the third stanza of the poem connotes their refusal to enter into the ambit of male control. They are different from 'respectable' women such as Maiguru, a character in Tsitsi Dangarembga's novel, *Nervous Conditions* who conforms to the demands of the patriarchy.

On the other hand, the stereotypes of social exclusion were designed to 'tame' these 'estranged' women and bring them back to the set of accepted femininity as evidenced by a government-sanctioned campaign, Operation Clean-Up of 1983 in which police demanded marriage certificates from women walking alone in urban areas to prove that

they were legally married. Failure to do so resulted in their arrest as prostitutes. This campaign was reminiscent of the colonial government's demand for marriage certificates from all African women in urban centres.

However, as Theresa Barnes (1999:101) observes, the early colonial authorities' attitude towards black women's presence in urban spaces was also ambivalent. While colonial authorities constantly rounded up those women deemed prostitutes to appease the African patriarchy, the same colonial government was in practice against those women who might start a family and create a black urban class. In other words, only black women were named and described pejoratively as prostitutes' and their presence in the urban areas was more acceptable to the colonial authorities than that of married women. In addition, as Barnes (1999:104) further observes, there was also another category of women – concubines – which was also acceptable to colonial authorities. These women were not prostitutes, but they co-habited with men who were not their husbands. Barnes's observations are important because they contradict Schmidt's argument noted at the beginning of this chapter that the colonial authorities were wholly in collusion with the African patriarchy to exclude black women from urban centres. For this reason, the early Zimbabwean government's Operation Clean-Up cannot be simply attributed to colonial policies. Rather, it can be interpreted as the government's quest to re-establish the traditional patriarchy's control over women because women's participation in the liberation struggle had to some extent disrupted male authority.

Stratton (1994:17) suggests further that such incidents (as the ones represented by Operation Clean-Up) put the African woman in a particular kind of double bind. If the

woman chooses to migrate to the city or seek employment to improve her economic status she is labeled a prostitute or singled out as the cause of national indiscipline. On the other hand, staying in the village or being a housewife marginalized her economically. Also, from political and historical perspectives, there was reluctance by the Zimbabwean patriarchal government to bring women to the centre of the discourses of the liberation war as fighters, because women's images as freedom fighters could not be accommodated in a set that included the symbols of male power, such as a cockerel for ZANU PF, and an aggressive-looking bull with long horns and big testicles for ZAPU. This symbolism also set the course for the male version of history that dominates narratives about the nation in Zimbabwe.

Women ex-combatants were only supposed to feature in the history of the second *Chimurenga* within the controlling and restrictive image of motherhood, as the magnificent women who kept 'the liberation struggle going by being mothers of the freedom fighters' (Collins, 1991:117), or executing the generic supportive role of domesticated women, that was thought to befit their social and legal status of minors enshrined in the colonial customary laws. Generally, women had to occupy social and political spaces after independence that did not remind the nation of their 'aberrance' during the liberation struggle although a few women were given positions of authority in government. The attempts by Zimbabwean government's to project a one sided version of *Chimurenga* history that seeks to expunge women from the centre of the liberation war are cogently expressed in the poem 'Daughter of the soil':

> Suddenly it was dark
> The air was breathing hard.
> A thick layer of helicopter hovered
> Like vultures ready to attack

Did I know sand would bubble?
In the flames, I saw her perish.

One of the warriors of Africa provided
Her blood spurted above the trees
Like the gushes of a bomb fire
I saw her cry – like a woman dying in agony.
Yet she was laughing the laughs of pain
Screaming long live the suffering masses.

She had shouted and shouted
For the world to hear
Cried and Cried to alarm the public
Fired shots to open their ears.

Oh sister! There was no world to have heard
No public to have alarmed
Not even ears to be opened.
In the timelessness went the daughter of the soil. (1986:3)

There is concern that the unwitnessed death of the female combatant here could not have made its way into the narratives of history as the lines 'Cried and Cried to alarm the public/ fired shots to open their ears'/ and 'no public to have alarmed/ Not even ears to be opened' suggest. Nyamubaya sees as one of the functions of her poetry as making present to her readers the death of the unnamed and forgotten combatant. That presence challenges what the official historical narrative chooses to include or neglect. As historian John Tosh (2000:1) observes, memory is highly selective in political life and sometimes downright erroneous because political exigencies and current priorities lead to the highlighting of some aspects of the past and the exclusion of others. In Zimbabwe's popular discourses of history, foregrounding women's contributions in the discourse of Zimbabwean liberation war would have lowered men's stature by placing the 'feminine' at its core. For Tanya Lyons (1997:13), women ex-combatants are 'the forgotten soldiers', who found themselves ignored while their male comrades were deemed heroes. The act of overlooking them was one of numerous

measures taken in Zimbabwe to silence women ex-combatants so that they do not speak of the abuses they were subjected to by their male counterparts during the war.

In Zimbabwe, a film called *Flame* (1996), that catalogues abuses, such as those of female guerrillas exchanging sex for food aroused angry criticism from the Establishment which argued that the film had cast the liberation struggle in a divisive and unpatriotic light. Such criticism is typical of the controlling discourse whose monologic definition of truth seeks to convince the excluded that a multiplicity of social voices would lead to chaos (Lashgari, 1995:11). In 'Daughter of the soil', Nyamubaya's technique is one of deliberate subversion of the hackneyed phrase 'Son of the soil' (which also happens to be a title of a male-authored narrative about the same war that Nyamubaya writes about here), substituting for it 'Daughter of the soil' to legitimize women's contribution to the history of their country. Nyamubaya looks into the past of women to salvage a history that is usable; a history that is valuable in asserting women's identities in Zimbabwe. As Schmidt (1992:15) notes with reference to women's position in both pre-colonial and colonial Zimbabwe, their status, like their voice in the public sphere was mediated. It was largely determined by their relationship to others, particularly their husbands and their kin.

The problems that surround women's subordination and identity in Zimbabwe ensue from nationalism's failure to confront and challenge the patriarchal side of the colonial oppression. Instead, nationalism concentrated on the simpler homogenizing discourses of the white settler versus the native black that aimed to promote nationhood. Campbell (2003:297) argues that this obvious lacuna in the Zimbabwean liberation movement

provided a welcome space for emerging feminist discourses in Zimbabwe. Even the most progressive male nationalist leaders in Africa, fell into the trap of speaking of men as if they represented all the population. But 'it was clear that these leaders were speaking for elite men of the hegemonic 'patriarchs'' (Campbell, 2003:297). Ogundipe-Leslie (1994:210) underscores this general deficiency in anti-colonial liberation movements when she shows how the theoreticians of African liberation failed to confront the issue of gender within the family or to confront the family as a site for social transformation. 'The theoreticians will talk about changing society, mobilizing Africa, but not about the issue of the relationship of men and women,' (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994:210), she remarks. The silence of these theoreticians can be understood if not defended. Nationalism itself was faced with an ideological crisis; the nationalists were in search of a rallying point that would unite people in dismantling colonialism, and to foreground emotive ideologies of gender on their agenda was potentially divisive and subversive. Consequently, the Zimbabwean liberation movement had to work within the ambit of popular ideologies of popular culture that confirmed identities that promoted solidarity. This happened because Zimbabwean nationalism could not wean itself from the ideological shortcomings of previous liberation movements in Africa and elsewhere in the world which sometimes expressed themselves as a defensive patriarchy. What constitutes national identity is a question raised in the poem 'Machipanda Border Post':

> Aren't you the residue that the Indian Ocean threw away
> During the highest tide
> The queues on the border make one deny one's nationality
> The torture and shame of the elderly woman
> Whose love potion is exposed in public in search of
> Undeclared goods
> While those who made the borders buy their way with
> thirty pieces of silver
> These Africans still belong to yesterday
> Continuously denying to break the chains

That stubbornly tie their hands to other people's makings. (1995:22)

The poem critiques the rationale of using constructs of regional identity to define the contours of national identity for the newly independent Zimbabwean state. This can be sensed in the lines: 'Continuously denying to break the chains/That stubbornly tie their hands to other people's makings'. The new independent states, according to Ashcroft (2002:3) are a reflection of place as it was 're-organized into colonial space through the carving out of estates, plantations and grazing properties, the building of roads, railways, tunnels and bridges. This re-organization of space changed every aspect of local social and individual existence. Ashcroft (2002:3) further outlines the contradictions imposed by colonial boundaries when he notes that they lock resistance and liberation discourse into the categorizations they try to reject, until we are rendered incapable of imagining a nation without a centripetal, exclusory, and monolithic mythology of identity. This problem of the new nation states in Africa is also expressed by Montserrat Guibernau (1996:121) who argues that nationalist parties, far from seeking to dismantle the territorial features of the colonial state and draw new boundaries, decided to fight colonialism while retaining the boundaries imposed by the West.

That Nyamubaya rejects the central images framed by these boundaries as the locus of national identity from which other elements of nation in turn derive their identity is disclosed in the line: 'The queues on the border make one deny one's nationality'. The image of queues at the border post projected in the poem signify a drift from the control of the centripetal force in the nation and the need to revise colonial spatial constructions of inclusion and exclusion. But the contradictions of colonial borders and boundaries,

like most dislocations visited on the continent by the colonial presence, serve to recall other variables of identity, that are often equally contradictory – differences of clan or totem as Achebe shows in his historical novels can be equally exclusive. Nyamubaya's major achievement in this poem is, therefore, her deliberate interweaving of the contradictions of national independence with the plight of African women. This effect is not achieved by exploring their predicament in detail, but by deploying one of the negative stereotypes imputed to African women figuratively as the central metaphor that expresses the inconsistencies embodied by spatial indicators of national identity in the poem. The stereotype is employed as follows: 'The torture and shame of the elderly woman/ whose love potion is exposed in public in search of/ Undeclared goods'. This typecasting designates most black African women in Zimbabwe as people who have access to illicit spiritual power and who spike their husbands' food with powerful medicines to retain their love. At the heart of the contradictions of the new nation state's identity, Nyamubaya injects the politics of the private space that is externalized by the so-called important matters of the state that are the patriarchy's domain with a compelling effect.

It is important to point out that although the poems analyzed so far reflect that the main impetus behind Nyamubaya's re-examination of women's identities in Zimbabwe is women's participation in the liberation war, she also situates women's identities outside war discourses. This is evident in the poem 'Her Right'. The poem reads:

> She has the right,
> A right to say what she is,
> A right to say her dreams.
> She should not have to choose,
> The right that she is.

> She is what she is,
> She is what she will be.
> She is alive, breathes,
> She thinks, cries,
> She feels, hears and sees,
> She is she, herself belongs to her,
> Her power belongs to her as well,
> Because she is what she is. (1986:22)

In this poem, the persona charts an identity for women that is independent and unmediated by socio-cultural mores and creates an inward and independent form of knowledge through which the individual self can come to its own intrinsic understanding. This form of self-definition transcends the existential question 'Who am I?' because it is an oppositional assertion of identity that is in defiance of the prescribed male hegemonic identities that subordinate womanhood.

If, as already stated elsewhere in this study, in constructing an identity one draws models from the kinds of persons available in one's society, there are also many contested ideas about how a certain group of people should behave (Appiah, 2005:22). Nyamubaya's poem above, rejects the use of the existing identity scripts in modeling the identities of women and advocates 'free-standing' identities that do not have as their source extant ideas of womanhood. The individual and private identities that are mapped out in this poem are potent in shattering stereotypes and essentialisms associated with the designation 'women' as a group. Although group identification offers cohesion and solidarity to members of the oppressed group, the limitations inherent in group identities subject them to manipulation by dominant authorities, such as the patriarchy which uses them as a tool for control and subordination. This preoccupation is also evident in poems such as 'The Corrupted Innocent' where the persona

denounces her society's grand-narratives of identity for being prescriptive and serve to deny her other ways of inhabiting identity spaces. The following excerpt from the poem illustrates the point:

> Parental indoctrination,
> Organised dos and don'ts
> Moslem by tradition,
> Christian by education,
> Bourgeois by inheritance,
> Poor by parental background,
> Creativity put to rest.
>
> Conditioned to believe the non-existent,
> Taught to hate 'filthy' neighbours.
> Though born as free as the wind.
> The corrupted innocent. (1986:43)

While the poem's narrative is not about the plight of women, the generally restrictive socio-cultural space that it criticizes, is also the source of the accepted identity scripts for constructing women's identity that are rejected in 'Her Right'. The poem's destabilization of the accepted sites of identity is linked to Marechera's vision in some of his poems already discussed in Chapter Four. However, the difference is that Nyamubaya does not represent her vision through the latter's dissident poetic formulas.

The discussion in this part of the chapter has reflected that Nyamubaya imagines women's identities principally within the context of the complexities of the liberation war and its history. Part Two which follows below, focuses on the anthology *A Woman's Plea* (1998) which comprises various Zimbabwean women poets who are also preoccupied with the place of women in Zimbabwe. However, the female poets in this anthology focus on Zimbabwean history and society through the lens of ordinary civilian

women and not through the eyes of a female ex-combatant like Freedom Nyamubaya whose vision is influenced by nationalist ideology against which some of her poems contest.

Part Two

A Woman's Plea uses various perspectives to address what it means to be a woman in Zimbabwe towards the end of that country's second decade of independence. In this anthology, the liberation struggle discourse, so central in Nyamubaya's poetry is a largely absent context and its place is taken in the foreground by explorations of women's self-definition within both the private and public spaces of Zimbabwe after independence. The different perspectives from which female poets in this anthology explore and interrogate issues of womanhood reflect the plurality of artistic voices that emerged in Zimbabwe to problematize the dominant narratives about women. The poems in this anthology examine and situate women's identities in alternative social, cultural and political spaces. To find out the different ways in which the female poets in this anthology represent women's identities and explore their society's history four poems from different poets are discussed in this section. These poems are 'Fears of the past' by Pretty Mleya, 'Remember when' by Roselyn Mutembedza, 'Mental freedom' by Sylvia Odoteye and 'The Clamour of silence' written by Linda Chipunza.

Mleya's poem 'Fears of the past' captures the tensions in the mind of a woman who revisits a past of private and personal experiences to make sense of her present fear of that past. The poem reads:

Tears dry
 And hope fades
 Will I ever make it
 I fear the day I'll face the past
 Vivid memories of the worst
 Come to thine mind
 Everytime I feel I'm
 Approaching
 A dead end; But I thought I was doing good
 Where did I go wrong
 Was it me who was wrong
Or was it them
Had I been wrong to think that
They were part of me
That they would always be there for me
But now I know
That I have to face the worst
I did it out of my free will
And I now have to leave the past behind
But what about
The day I'll face it (1998:46).

Although the past that the persona dreads is a private one, it is situated in the context of a broader past of the larger society around her as suggested by the use of the pronouns 'I' and 'them' which are set in opposition to each other. It is important to note that although the persona fears her past, it is not disclosed why she is apprehensive of that past. All that is evident in the poem is the persona's persistent questioning of her own actions in the past and those of others: 'Where did I go wrong/ Was it me who was wrong/ Or was it them.' This questioning complicates her position vis-à-vis the past because it does not inscribe her as a victim but rather suggests that she could also be responsible for her plight because of her actions in the past. There is a critical self-examination as well as an interrogation of the context in which the self is immersed which leaves the source of the fear open to probabilities. This suggests that although she fears the past, she refuses to oversimplify her plight. She recognizes her own

agency as well as that of others in the creation of her circumstances: 'Was it me who was wrong/ Or was it them'. Here, her engagement with the past shows that she refuses to rush to regard women who are disenchanted with their past as mere victims but rather she cautiously interrogates both the female subject and her identity context. This contradicts the views of other Zimbabwean women writers, such as Yvonne Vera who argue that if a woman writer is to draw on the past for her inspiration, she has to re-imagine and reconfigure it, and have an imagination that is 'plain stubborn, that can invent new gods and banish ineffectual ones' (Vera, 2000:1).

Vera's argument recommends a self-serving construction of the past for female writers that can conveniently provide an anchor to women whose identities are often excluded or misrepresented in some representations of the past. In addition to not representing the past in ways that would make women relate to it comfortably, the persona does not idealize the psychological spaces that women escape to in order to cope with the trauma of the past. This is hinted in the lines: 'And I now have to leave the past behind/ But what about/The day I will face it', which suggest that the persona realizes that leaving the past behind without addressing it only offers temporary respite, because it will continue to challenge her. In this respect, the poem is not about opening new spaces that women can escape to but it is concerned with exploring the contradictions and tensions that are often overlooked by narratives that conceive women's movement into new identity spaces as the solution to problems that they experience.

In contrast to Mleya's poem analyzed above, the persona in Roselyn Mutembedza's poem, 'Remember when' yearns to break away from the control of family institutions which stifle her freedom by continuously regarding her as a minor. The poem reads:

> I stand up in front of the mirror,
> All grown up and beautiful,
> Remember when I was five mother
> When I stole your make up and plastered
>   it all over my face,
> Remember how you just laughed and said
>   all in good time love
> Well here I am all in good time naked.
>
> Grandmother you were always scolding me
> About how I enjoy the boys' company,
> Remember when I was eight
> Wanting so much to steal young Rod's heart,
> And you took me up on your lap
> And you said all was in due's time,
> And you went on to say I would find a lot of Rods
>   in life,
> Is it too soon to find my Rod now?
>
> Dad, remember when I was sixteen
> Wanting to go out to the movies so much
> Do you remember what you said,
> That books only made a lady's life bright,
> Well now that I am all grown up
> Passed my O'levels just as you said,
> Would you mind too much dad
>   if I went out to the movies now,
> Or is it again too early?
>
> Mum, dad and grandmother,
> Don't worry too much about me,
> Starting my own new life does not mean you are loosing me
> You have to let me go,
> Remember when you wished for that day,
> To just wake up and hear me say I'm all grown up (67-68).

The persona celebrates her growth into adulthood and wants this adulthood to translate into her independence. Her call that her family recognizes that she is an adult indicates that she searches for identity in alternative spaces where tradition and strictures of

family authority do not dominate. In this imaginary, the persona perceives the possibility of independent self-exploration and self-definition. This is why on one hand she celebrates the cultural context from which she derives the meaning of the self as a girl-child (as reflected by her appreciation and recognition of the roles played by her mother, grandmother and father in nurturing her into an adult), and on the other, refuses to allow the control of her family to continue dominating her adult life. The persona is conscious that the identity spaces mapped out for her by her family as a child cannot continue to be applied to her as an adult because they are restrictive in as far as they provide fixed meanings to her everyday life as woman. She sees a degree of freedom coming to the girl when she is an adult as suggested by her continuous questioning of the family whether it is too early for her to move out of its control so that she can establish her own spaces in which to situate her autonomous definitions of the self.

As a socio-cultural site, the family reflects in microcosm the society's politics of power and hence it also embodies society's dominant ideologies of womanhood. The persona is aware that identities forged outside the customary cultural spaces are normally at odds with the ethos of the accepted family life and her voice tries to negotiate contradictions between the identity that she is in search of and the image of her demanded by cultural norms. Failure to move out of the structures that controlled her as a child would result in an existence that Patricia Collins (1991:94) quoting Gwalteney calls the struggle of living two lives, one for "them and one for ourselves". This, as Collins further observes, creates a peculiar tension for women as they try to extract true meaning of the selves. The contradiction between the self and what is expected by society which Collins highlights is also expressed poignantly in Patience Gowe's poem 'Confusion' (51) where the persona seeks a balance between her own search for self-

respect, security and dignity – her true self-identity – on the one hand and societal expectations on the other. This tension and the nature of existence that it confers on women is aptly called 'the damned life of the in-between' in Gowe's poem.

It is important to note that the vision of Mutembedza's poem is also similar to that of Nyamubaya's 'Her Right' already analyzed. However, the difference between the two poems is in tone. In Mutembedza's poem as already indicated, the tone seeks to be reconciled with the identity spaces that it seeks to break away from while at the same time asserting other ways of being. There is an avoidance of direct confrontation with the system's structures. In contrast, in Nyamubaya's 'Her Right', the persona's voice is strident, demanding and assertive of what it perceives to be the right of women to be whatever they choose to be. It seems the visions of both these poems were informed by the Legal Age of Majority Act of 1982 which changed the status of women in that every Zimbabwean citizen upon reaching eighteen years ceases to be considered a minor. Prior to this act, black women were considered perpetual minors and could not enjoy the rights, such as the ownership of property and freedom of movement which had hitherto been the preserve of men and white women.

If the persona in Mutembedza's poem seeks to move into identity spaces occupied by adults which she sees as according more autonomy than the space that she occupies as a girl child by asserting her adulthood, Sylvia Odoteye's poem 'Mental freedom' discussed below calls for society to change practices that restrict and overlook women's creativity. In the first stanza of the poem, the persona bemoans her society's failure to recognize women's imaginativeness as follows:

As a puny man's scream,
 In a lonely, hopeless desert,
 Is her shout for recognition.
  As a mere grain of sand
        on the sea shore,
Her works appear to be
As just another
        of the millions of starving
                children,
On this borderless earth,
Her talents may seem
Yet, she believes them to
        be different
Yes, priceless!

The woman's voice is presented as isolated in an unfriendly society that does not recognize its presence and appreciate its importance. This is disclosed in the opening lines of the stanza which imagine the woman's voice as a scream of a weak, lonely and despairing man in a desert. In addition to the lack of audience for the woman's voice that these lines reveal, they also suggest that her voice is being overwhelmed. This amounts to silencing and it implies that women are not authorized to speak in this society whose 'deafness' is likened to a desert. However, what is important in this poem is that the voice that is being denied an opportunity to speak is not ordinary, but unique as asserted in lines: 'Her works appear to be/ As just another' and 'Yet, she believes them to/ be different/Yes, priceless!' These lines significantly highlight that there are differences in the excluded voices and the marginalized women from which these voices ensue. By making the voice that clamours to be heard distinct from other marginalized voices, the persona generally refuses to essentialize the responses of the silenced voices to their marginality and also subverts the homogenization of dominating patriarchal voices which often oversimplify women as the same. This reflects that in addition to revealing the silenced voices of women, Odoteye is also in search of

individual identities that she wants to separate from the 'common' definitions of womanhood.

If the first stanza laments the lack of audience for women's voices, the third stanza implores the same society that is 'deaf' to women's voices to accord them spaces for expression so that they can be heard:

> Afford Her the chance support Her
> Give Her "Mental Freedom"
> How long shall she have to withstand
> Ridicule-for all she beholds,
> And expresses-without fear?

The space that the persona pleads for is not only discursive but also psychological as captured in the line: 'Give Her "Mental Freedom"'. This line casts the imagination of women as restricted and confined to certain boundaries. This point is clearly reflected in the last three lines of the stanza which show that the Zimbabwean society is not accommodative of women's voices in particular and divergent narratives in general. However what compounds the plight of women who speak in diverse voices is not only the act of thinking against the grain of mainstream discourses, but also their status. This is so because as Lashgari (1995:2) argues, what is considered by the dominant patriarchy to be 'alien, rough-edged, jolting, strident, is more likely to offend when it comes from a woman'. It becomes more offensive because as part of the analysis above has revealed, women are not authorized to speak in the first place. Consequently, Odoteye's achievement in this poem lies in both how she alerts her society to other ways of speaking and also reveal the contradictions present in the discursive spaces occupied by women's voices in Zimbabwe.

The final poem to be discussed in this chapter is Linda Chipunza's 'The Clamour of silence'. This poem explores the inner tension within women that results from the absence of spaces in which to express themselves and the strategies that they adopt to cope with their voicelessness. The poem's title is oxymoronic. It on one hand summarizes the tension that is experienced by women who are silenced and on the other hand subverts the dominance of voices that are authorized to speak by suggesting that the silence of the marginalized voices is capable of communicating. The first two stanzas of the poem read:

> She sits up
> Not alone
> But with herself
> The two of them
> Surrounded by the darkness
> Of yet another night
> And silence
> Clamours to be heard
>
> Her anguish
> No other can feel
> Nor calm the turmoil
> That simmers inside
> Leaving her turned outward (19).

While the first stanza evocatively captures the condition of being silenced and isolated, it also significantly inverts the conventional meanings attached to this marginalization. It suggests that within the marginal space of silence and loneliness the subordinated self rediscovers itself and recognizes its own presence and reaches its own understanding and self-definition within the different inner space that it provides. This is implied in the lines: 'She sits up/ Not alone/ But with herself/ The two of them'. These lines split the physical self from the emotional self and in the process they create multiple selves which enable the isolated woman to cope with the silence around her. The vision of

these lines also parallels the diversity in the experiences of marginalized women's experiences which is implied by the unshared anguish of the woman captured in the second stanza.

The power of silence as a tool for self-definition is underlined by Collins (1991:92) who notes that a retreat into silence by women needs not be interpreted as passivity or acquiescence to the silencing of women, but as an exploration of the private, hidden space of women's consciousness, the "inside" ideas that allow women to transcend the limitations imposed by their oppression. Collins's assertion is based on her theorizations of African-American women's use of silence as a tool of resistance against racial, gender and class oppression. In Chipunza's poem, silence becomes a 'safe' space in which the persona finds a voice through which she can speak confidently of the self as suggested in the last stanza. In this stanza the persona significantly yearns for the enclosure of the space of her mother's womb. This space also symbolizes protection from the outside world.

> Let me curl up and imagine
> Wish for
> My mother's womb
> Tranquility unparalleled
> And hope that –
> When next I see the sun
> It will promise me
> A different sunset (20).

Also important is that the persona's wish to return to her mother's womb locates protection in the woman's body, especially the reproductive system, that is often mystified by men as having unknown powers some of which are perceived as harmful to men. The persona's choice of the womb – a safe place with '[t]ranquility unparalleled' abnegates the male's self-appointed role as female protector and also reveals the

contradictions and ambivalences present in patriarchal discourses of power. In the Shona society from which Chipunza writes, the symbolism of the womb as a place of refuge or rather than escape from the 'rigours' and 'demands' of masculinity is also invoked by men. From the male's point of view, the female becomes protector by 'default' owing to the 'mysteriousness' of her body, and the male's longing for the protection of the female body does not mean privileging the female whose body is perceived as a manifestation of 'weakness.' However, the ambivalence with which the patriarchy relates to the female body reveals the limitations and contradictions of 'the ideology that men are naturally superior to women in essence and in all areas…' (Ogundipe-Leslei quoted in Stratton, 1994:15). What is worth highlighting is that the woman's body is called subordinate simply because it does not have manifestations of the privileged masculinity.

To conclude, the diverse perspectives from which the poetry analyzed in this chapter represents Zimbabwean women's experiences and aspirations in history demonstrate that these women's identities cannot be generalized. Nyamubaya's strategy of using the liberation struggle – an event of importance to national identity often masculanized in national narratives – as the basis on which to think of women's identities and experiences in Zimbabwe enabled her to put women's identities in the foreground of the nation's history. Although different from the informing background of Nyamubaya's vision, the context of private histories and spaces in which the four poets selected from *A Woman's Plea* situate and explore women's experiences, is further evidence of the unevenness of the agencies that shape the consciousness of woman writers in Zimbabwe. *A Woman's Plea* seems to enact a double resistance in that it avoids the grand narrative of the national liberation struggle in favour of private struggles. The

anthology also complicates the voice of Nyamubaya that is located inside and outside the grand national narrative of independence. In short, *A Woman's Plea* re-defines notions of resistance by resisting tendencies that emphasize public, visible, and organized modes of rebellion. By doing this, the poetry contained in this anthology questions the notion of poetic canonicities in Zimbabwe by placing the individualized experiences of its personae as values that can be used to re-constitute national culture. Chapter Six discusses how John Eppel explores the problems associated with the use of race as a signifier of identity on the Rhodesian/ Zimbabwean space.

Chapter Six

John Eppel: Deconstructing Rhodesian Racial Identities

In Chapter Five I explored women's poetic voices to find out how they rewrite their society's history and inscribe their identities into that history. It was demonstrated that women's poetry deconstructs both the narratives of history that use the past to marginalize women and the feminist discourses that homogenize the experiences of women's oppression. In this chapter, the study examines white Rhodesian/Zimbabwean John Eppel's poetry as writing that moves out of the tradition of white Rhodesian writing by deconstructing the racial attitudes that informed the Rhodesians' domination and ordering of the colony. Racism was the principal currency of privilege or subordination during colonial rule and it continued to be used in Zimbabwe after independence. The invocation of race as a signifier of human difference in colonial milieus functions as a metonymy for superiority and inferiority where the former identifies the colonizer and the latter the 'other'. This suggests that discourses and hierarchies of power in colonies were determined and structured along racial lines. Eppel discredits racial identities demonstrating that they were conveniently used by colonial authorities in Rhodesia to justify their domination of the colonial space and in the later years of the colony (especially during the UDI period) to hoodwink other Whites into defending a racial nation state. The Chapter also examines some of Eppel's poems that are set in Zimbabwe after independence to find out how he explores the status of Whites and their relationship with a new order where Blacks that the settlers marginalized on the basis of their race wield political power and control most of the authorizing discourses.

It is important to emphasize at the beginning that Eppel is not the only white writer who destabilizes the accepted consciousnesses of his Rhodesian society. His vision is also shared by some other white writers such as Bruce Moore-King and Angus Shaw, who revisit and probe the ideologies that guided white Rhodesia's decision to go to war in the 1970s. In his novel, *White Man Black War* (1989), Moore-King contests the myth fostered by dominant Rhodesian narratives that whiteness was synonymous with civilization. His narrative discloses that Whites went to war merely to defend their racial privileges rather than to preserve the so-called civilized standards although they probably conflated the two. On the other hand, Shaw's novel *Kandaya: Another Time, Another Place* (1993) engages with the brutal side of this war by exploring the feelings of bitterness and despondency experienced by young white conscripts who participated in it. Shaw utilizes a white Rhodesian soldier-narrator, who throughout the novel uses his own experiences and that of his fellow combatants to question whether it was worth going to war for the sake of protecting Whites' privileged status in the country. Peter Godwin's autobiography *Mukiwa: A White Boy in Africa* (1996) is another important work by a white Rhodesian which writes both white and black people's identities outside the spaces authorized by the governing Rhodesian discourses. Godwin revisits his experiences as a white child in Rhodesia through the eyes of an often naive child narrator who records everything that goes on around him. But this immaturity is counterbalanced by the narrator's sophisticated interpretation of the self vis-à-vis the larger context around him. He realizes throughout the narrative, (despite being a *pukka* African due to his birth as his mother tells him [1996:139] and his own attempts to establish himself in the land of his birth) that he is haunted by a crisis of belonging and feelings of ambiguity. His awareness of self starkly contrasts the pervasive sense of

whiteness that is generally felt and fostered by his Rhodesian society. At the end, it is actually the child narrator's 'naivety' that neither subverts nor censors experiences and feelings that ironically elevates him above his own society and allow the reader a glimpse into the speciousness of the claim of most white Rhodesians particularly in the late 1960s that Rhodesia is incontrovertibly a new and independent African nation. However, what distinguishes Eppel from the other white writers that I have noted is that he has the most substantial body of poetry and prose showing how a white Zimbabwean slowly moved out of his position from being someone who understood why there were Rhodesians who believed they were fighting for something worth defending and eagerly accepting Zimbabwe. His further development is that the satiric contempt that he showed to Rhodesia has been transferred to both black and white Zimbabweans who have profited from corruption. Eppel's latest publication is a novel, *Absent the English Teacher* (2009) which explores the experiences of a Rhodesian teacher who is a victim of both a corrupt black leadership and the current political and economic crises that are afflicting the majority of Zimbabweans in general.

While a lot of critical attention has been accorded to white writing that focuses on the politics of race, identity and belonging, it is crucial to note that white literary output in both Rhodesia and Zimbabwe is not limited to these concerns. For instance, poets Harold Farmer (1990), and Bart Wolffe (1995), despite sharing the same Rhodesian space with the writers discussed above, are preoccupied in their works with the wildlife, nature and the landscapes of the country. Also some young white artists born after 1980, such as musician and poet Farai Munroe who uses the performance name of Comrade Fatso have been able to make the transition from the creative consciousness

created by the history of colonial relations in Rhodesia and focused on the immediate socio-political developments of their time. In an album called *House of Hunger* (2008) Munroe protests against the current Zimbabwean economic and political crises using a voice that is uncluttered by racial histories to articulate the need for redress to the problems affecting his country. Also, in one of his poems titled 'Identity' (http://www.comradefatso.com/inside.php?pageId=4)**,** which mixes both English and Shona languages, Munroe liberates himself from the essentialism of young white Zimbabwean which is imposed on him by a racial ordering of society and simply defines himself as a child of the soil: 'Ndiri mwana wevhu …/I'm a child of the soil'. His definition of the self at once subverts both Rhodesian discourses from the past and the current ZANU PF rhetoric which marginalizes Whites because of their race.

To find out how Eppel problematizes the racial attitudes of the dominant white minority in Rhodesia, Part One analyzes selected poems from *Spoils of War (1989)* and *Sonata for Matabeleland* (1995). In Part Two, the study discusses some poems from *John Eppel: Selected Poems 1965-1995* (2001) and *Songs my Country Taught me: Selected Poems 1965-2005* (2005), to explore how Eppel inscribes the experiences of Whites in a new socio-political context. Before analyzing the selected poems, it is necessary to briefly discuss some theoretical perspectives on how the significations of racial differences are constructed and exploited.

The concept 'race' has never been used with consistency; its meaning is as problematic as the categories that it is applied to signify. The confusion that clouds its meaning according to Martin Marger (1991:21) stems from the fact that 'race' has both biological and social connotations. Its popular usage, that describes a wide variety of human

categories, including people of a particular skin colour (the Caucasian 'race'), religion (the Jewish 'race'), nationality (the British 'race') and even the entire human species (the human 'race' (Marger, 1991:21) has added to the fuzziness of the term. For the purpose of this study, the biological and social meanings of 'race', explained below are adopted because it is these notions of the concept that were used in Rhodesia and are still active in the identity discourses of present- day Zimbabwe.

According to Marger (1991:19), the essential biological meaning of race is a population of humans classified on the basis of certain hereditary biological characteristics that differentiate them from other human groups. The basis of this classification is physical appearance and genetic qualities, where anatomical features, such as skin colour, hair texture, and body and facial shape; internal physiological traits such as metabolic rate, genetic diseases and hormonal activity; and blood composition are signifiers of difference (Marger, 1991:20). In this context of race as a biological category, it is nevertheless the easily observable outward features, such as colour of skin and hair that are normally used for the purpose of identification. This method of classification has its own shortcomings, for among other things, as Marger (1991:21) observes, physical differences between human groups are not clear-cut; they tend to overlap and blend into one another at various points. The simple and popular division of humans into three major groupings Caucasoid, Mongoloid, and Negroid is imprecise and arbitrary, because all human beings are capable of interbreeding and it becomes difficult for them to be classified using these racial categories

The social meaning of race is attached to its biological meaning, that is, 'as long as people believe that differences in selected physical traits are meaningful, they will act on those beliefs, thereby affecting their interaction with others' (Marger, 1991:23). What Marger proposes is that, an acceptance of racial categories determined by physiognomy affects the ways in which racial groups interact. This highlights that the social meaning of race is based on the perception that physical differences among groups of people correspond to social or behavioural differences. Marger (1991:23), quoting van den Berghe, notes that 'What makes a society multiracial is not the presence of physical differences between groups, but the attribution of social significance to such differences as may exist.' In its social sense then, the category race ceases to be a neutral term of signification, but an inflected concept that is appropriated to serve various purposes. In his study, Peter Ratcliffe (2004:20) argues that the significance of thinking along racial lines or 'the racialization of relationships' lies in the associated ideology of racism.

The ideology of racism, according to Mai Palmberg (2001:7), rests on the thinking that one can meaningfully divide the human species into races, distinguished from each other by different levels of inherited qualities, some belonging to higher 'races', some to 'lower'. In racist thinking, some are doomed to inferiority because of the 'races' they are born into. Within this logic of racism, it is therefore manifest, that different racial groups cannot be treated equally because it is a biological 'fact' that some races are inferior to others. However, these 'given facts of biology', have been long discredited, because the impact biological inheritance has on social behaviour has been confounded, and as Marger (1991:27) notes, has been shown by social scientists to be at most questionable, and, at the least, minimal. And yet, in some contexts as this chapter

demonstrates, these definitions of race continue to be believed and often arbitrarily used with the result that they obscure realities more than they are supposed to clarify those realities.

Before applying the theorizations on race and the ideology of racism to the objective of this chapter, it is necessary briefly to examine a few more aspects of race and racism. Racism is sometimes presented as an economic ideology that is used to justify economic disparities in society. This is particularly true of Marxist theorizations of race and racism where, as John Stone (1985:20) observes, economic factors are paramount, and racist ideas reproduce in racial terms the economic divisions of society. Marxists argue that the 'innate' differences racists presume exist between different racial groups are mere excuses to preclude the 'inferior' groups from material resources of the society. As a social, political and economic theory, Marxism situates societal relations on the economic base, which according to Marxists is the foundation on which the structures of society are established. Arguing along the same materialist lines as the Marxists, is Marger (1991:29), who notes that racist ideology promotes a social order in which one racial group dominates the society's economy, polity, and other key power institutions and thus receives the greatest share of the society's wealth. He concludes that racist ideology explains such inequalities as a result of the inherent inferiority of one racial group – 'the place of groups at the top of the social hierarchy and those at the bottom is explained quite simply as "natural"' (Marger, 1991:29). That racism is part of the superstructure that explains the configuration of the economic relations cannot be disputed, but iniquitous discrepancies of economic and political power, between different racial groups is a result of racism rather than a cause. Put in other words, racism as an ideology possesses its own internal dynamics that do not

necessarily have to correspond with issues related to material inequalities in society. A poor white can still imagine himself or herself as superior to a rich black person. Whether or not this is a case of false consciousness as described by Marxists, racism is so powerful an ideology that even economically and politically empowered classes can still feel racially inferior to those who have certain biological traits different from theirs.

So to overemphasize material factors as the origin of racist thinking might be misleading especially when one considers and agrees with Elleke Boehmer's (1995:84) study which attributes European racist theorizing to 'the European symbolic complex called the Great Chain of Being.' This chain, a system which purported to connect the highest forms of life to the lowest, can be traced back to the Renaissance, and in the eighteenth century it was given particularly concrete expression by natural historians (Boehmer, 1995:84). As a result, from the early eighteenth century, scientists, scholars and travellers sought to establish natural orders, measures, and hierarchical orders which would contain the entire natural world. 'It was taken for granted that the apex of all such chains and pyramids was located in Europe' (Boehmer, 1995:84), and when it came to the classification of human beings, people from other cultures were ranked low or high depending on how far they deviated from some imagined European ideal as degenerate or evolving types, filling the gaps between the human and the animal world (Boehmer, 1995:84).

In this conception, black people were presented as inherently backward and savage, and later Enlightenment reasoning which correlated intelligence to race, built on this reasoning. In other words, couched in the endeavor to understand people according to races as Peter Ratcliffe (2004:18) notes, was a form of Eurocentrism, which by

definition led to the assumption of white superiority. It, therefore, became acceptable in western thinking to regard Blacks as genetically inferior to Whites. Ratcliffe (2004:18) further observes that these pre-existing images of 'the other' were taken as unambiguous evidence of this superiority, and in turn they provided 'common-sense constructs of white and black which were central to the discourses surrounding the enslavement of Africans and the development of colonialism' (Ratcliffe, 2004:18). Racism as an ideology remains a complex phenomenon in which social, political and economic factors converge; the ways in which it operated in Rhodesia and continues to function in Zimbabwe, as this chapter demonstrates, were and continue to be an interplay of all these elements.

The purpose of the preceding discussion is to provide a theoretical framework with which to approach the racial politics in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, and the social and political allegiances that this politics creates. The consciousness that shaped Rhodesian racial attitudes and the identities that they constructed in the colony was also informed by the historical events that immediately brought colonial presence to the country. Rhodesia was not colonized from the metropolitan power Britain, but from South Africa after Cecil John Rhodes dispatched his Pioneer Column to occupy Mashonaland in 1890. Until 1923 the country itself became property of the British South Africa Company (BSAC) which operated on a royal concession authorized by the British parliament so that while sovereignty legally subsisted in Britain, the company and the settlers soon saw themselves as possessing sovereign control over the country's affairs. The grand narratives of Rhodesian history located the country's national identity in the Pioneer Column. The history of the pioneers who not only colonized the country but fought off

the Risings of 1896 and 1897, coupled with the myths that it generated in Rhodesian narratives became a symbol of white Rhodesian identity.

Ruth Weiss (1994:30-31) relates the significance of the Pioneer Column to how the Rhodesians defined themselves and the colony as follows:

> White Rhodesian society was a paternalistic, macho-society. The role model of the pioneer was of great importance. Men shot straight, rode hard, drank copiously, were addicted to sport and all outdoor activities, which often turned into raucous all-male affairs around camp fires. The ideal Rhodesian was muscled and broad-shouldered, well over six feet tall, fit when young to lead a rugby scrum, when older able to out-shoot, out-drink, out-ride any 'home-born weakling'. Mounted on a good horse, rifle in hand, slouch-hatted, wearing khaki shorts and strong *veldskone*, he felt and acted as king of the veld.

The above quotation articulates a colonial rationale that assumes polarities of superiority and inferiority. Although there are no explicit references to race, the binary created by the multi-citations of the supposed Rhodesian's domination of the colonial space should be viewed in the context of Anthony Chennells' (2005:133) observation that the primary signifier of a colonial identity was race although what race signified differed between colonial systems and sometimes carried different signification within the same system. What is perhaps even more significant in the above quotation is the way in which it also captures how the particular events that led to the creation of complicated Rhodesian hierarchies of power.

If in colonial contexts, it is the 'norm' to unproblematically explain superiority and inferiority in terms of the White/Black binary, the above quotation shows that the same cannot be applied to Rhodesia without generalizing. The 'home-born weakling[s]' whom the 'real' Rhodesian dominates and seeks to distinguish himself from, are the Whites of

English origin who were not born in Rhodesia and were not descendants of the Pioneers who had established the colony in 1890 (Peter Godwin and Ian Hancock, 1993:7). This shows hierarchies of power within the broad category of race that Whites used to dominate the colony. Thus while the 'home-born weakling' is considered inferior to the 'ideal' Rhodesian, both are superior to Blacks, who in colonial discourses are presented as inherently inferior to Whites whether home or colonial born. Therefore, while race did not determine the politics of power among the dominant Whites, it nonetheless authorized them to inscribe their whiteness as the ordering presence on the disorder of the colonial space represented here by the veld over which the Rhodesian acts as king. Before analyzing the selected poems, it is important to point out that the Rhodesians' perceived racial superiority did not always manifest itself in clear-cut ways. Rather, as the discussion of the poems will show, it comes out through a variety of Rhodesian attitudes that Eppel exposes and mocks. These attitudes include among others a self-centred ordering of the past, illusions that the Rhodesian racial nation state will not collapse and the use of an intolerant nationalism to defend the colony. Thus, it is partly because of their assumed racial supremacy that Rhodesians adopted the attitudes noted above.

Part One

In his poems written in the 1960s and 1970s, Eppel's main strategy for undermining Rhodesian racial attitudes is to use white Rhodesian personae who distance themselves from the spaces where dominant Rhodesian ideas about the colony are forged. However, as the analysis of the selected poems will reveal, in the process of distancing themselves from mainstream Rhodesian history and identities, and the

spaces from which they are constructed, the personae also display an element of self-hatred. Their dilemma is that they also inhabit the same space that they hate. They cannot, without problems, stand outside the Rhodesian space that nurtured them because it is those elements that they find abhorrent which constructed their consciousnesses and identities as Rhodesians. Notwithstanding this dilemma for the Rhodesian personae, the strategy enables Eppel to effectively expose and criticize the limitations of conventional political, social and racial attitudes of other Whites from within and to register how the consciousness of 'typical' Rhodesians is structured and why it came into being. Four poems: 'Pioneer Woman with Four Jacks', 'Thin White Line', 'Rhodesian Lullaby' and 'Spoils of War' are discussed in this section to explore Eppel's poetic vision which falls outside the tradition of mainstream Rhodesian writing.

The first poem to be analyzed is 'Pioneer Woman with Four Jacks', because it usefully 'doubles-back' to the pioneer – the source that informs how 'ideal' Rhodesians construct their identities, relate to the colonized space and interact with it. Because of this reason, the poem also provides an analytical context that enables us to anticipate the attitudes of later generations of Rhodesians which Eppel derides in the other poems analyzed later on. 'Pioneer Woman with Four Jacks' revisits the source of Rhodesianness through a persona who gives what seems to be a characterization of the pioneer woman by recalling the values central to her consciousness. The poem reads:

> And then she'd quote her hero Cecil Rhodes:
> "He spoke of you," she would apostrophize,
> "as Africa's greatest asset: but as far
> as houseboys are concerned, my boy,
> you are Africa's smelliest ass."

And then my grin would fade as she recalled the wagon trek
from Beaufort West to Kuruman, and then

to Bulawayo via Khama's land,
as Kipling puts it somewhere. (Kipling is
her favourite poet, his "If" she knows by heart.)
Recalled the birth of her child, stillborn, in the shade
of a "wait-a-bit" tree – she would have named him John.
Recalled the death of her husband, John: "He was killed
By a lion." And she'd quote:" 'So little done,

so much to do'", and ring the bell for the houseboy,
John, and order tea, and lemonade
for piccanin baas John, and scones with home-made
marula jelly. I'd grin at him, he'd grin
at me, she'd disapprove, give a terrible sigh,
resume her game of Patience, placing Jack
on Jack on Jack, and turning up a Jack. (1995:13)

It is knowledge of the context in which the poem is set that allows one to recognize that it is preoccupied with the attitudes of early Rhodesians towards the country that they colonized. This first signpost is the pioneer woman's duplication of her hero Rhodes's view of Blacks. Rhodes as the founder of Rhodesia referred to Blacks as Africa's greatest asset not to suggest their subject status in the colony, but to mean that Blacks were sources of labour that could be exploited for the benefit of the British South Africa Company in particular, and white settlers in general. Chennells (1982:320) affirms this view by observing that although black labour was indispensable to the development of the Rhodesian colony, Whites saw it as merely confirming 'the fact' that Africans were on some lower level of development and were therefore designed by nature to serve the interests of the Whites. Chennells' observation is justified by the fifth line of the first stanza, where the pioneer woman refers to her houseboy in pejorative terms and also by the following lines in the last stanza of the poem: '…and ring the bell for the houseboy, /John, and order tea, and lemonade/for piccanin baas John, and scones with

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home-made/ marula jelly'. Terms such as 'piccanin baas' and 'houseboy' were an integral part of the colonial idiom employed by Whites in the colonial set up and here, they are employed by the poet to depict and ridicule hierarchies of power and identity that are underpinned by a racial ideology.

The agency of race in deciding the underdog status of Africans in Rhodesia is also presented by Weiss (1994:xx) who argues that in the early years of the colony, Blacks were not regarded as part of Rhodesian society except in their roles as servants, farm labourers, miners and messengers. What this highlights is that Rhodesians, like colonizers everywhere, realized their subject status in the colony when the racial other was objectified into menial occupations. As Abdul JanMohamed (1985:85) argues, by subjugating the native, the European settler is able to compel the other's recognition of him and allow the native's identity to become dependent on his position as the master. This relationship, as a further analysis of the poem reveals, is maintained through racial ideologies. The agency of racial ideologies in upholding the subject/other relationship is symbolized in this poem by yet another icon and favourite poet of the pioneer woman, Rudyard Kipling, whose [in]famous poem, 'The White man's burden', provides moral rationalizations for the subjugation of Blacks on racial grounds. Kipling's poem is actually addressed to the US on the invasion of the Philippines and in it he naturalizes racial imbalances and also offers an apology for colonialism by assigning to the Whites the task of civilizing the 'inferior' races of the entire world.

Thus, that Rhodes, who founded Rhodesia for economic motives and Kipling some of whose poems justified European imperialism in the nineteenth century are revered by

the pioneer woman is no coincidence. Their convergence in her consciousness reflects the interaction of the business motive behind the founding of Rhodesia and the theories of race used to justify this economic venture respectively. This interface features in the consciousness and discourses about the colony by later generations of Rhodesians. The analyses of the three other poems demonstrate exactly how the attitudes of successive Rhodesians were influenced by these aspects.

The poem 'Pioneer Woman with Four Jacks' also discloses the role played by a self-centred remembering of the past in placing the identities of Rhodesians at the centre of the colony. This is signaled in how the pioneer woman recalls a typical pioneer trek into the colony: 'And then my grin would fade as she recalled the wagon trek/ from Beaufort West to Kuruman, and then/ to Bulawayo via Khama's land'. What is significant though, is that the persona does not even respect the authority of presence with which the pioneer woman recollects the journey northwards. Even if the child's grin fades because of the hardships associated with trekking through the dangers of drought and wild animals, the older poet is generally cynical of the pioneer woman and her account. Despite this, the journey of the Pioneer Column was an epic and canonized historical event in Rhodesian memory and it continued to be an integral source of Rhodesian identities in the later years of the colony. The Whites in Rhodesia did not only use it to give themselves a heroic past, but also to construct a rugged identity that centred them in the colony as a civilizing force that could cope with any challenges that arise. They also appropriated it to reinforce the belief that Rhodesians were a closely-knit group that continued to struggle against the odds. However, the irony is that the inspiration that they derived from the memory of the Pioneer Column's journey, often

created a misapprehension of the colony which prevented them from relating to it in ways that the new realities formed out of the anti-colonial history of the mid and later twentieth century when white Rhodesian dominance was confronted by militant black nationalism.

While the above analysis has demonstrated that Eppel does not overtly criticize the pioneer woman, (the source of ideal Rhodesian identity and consciousness), there are recognizable undertones of satire, ridicule and criticism that underlie the persona's attitude towards this paragon of Rhodesianness. These undercurrents become obvious in 'Thin White Line', 'Rhodesian Lullaby', and 'Spoils of War', where Eppel ruthlessly disparages the Rhodesians of the 1960s and 1970s for failing to relate to their realities creatively. The effects of the values revealed in this poem on later generations of Rhodesians are nonetheless not uniform: they range from their construction of an irrelevant and self-serving history criticized in 'Thin White Line' to a failure to anticipate the collapse of a racial nation state in 'Rhodesian Lullaby'. In 'Spoils of War', the limiting consciousness that Rhodesians derive from the pioneer is manifested in the excesses and vacuity of their nationalism.

The poem 'Thin White Line' captures and satirizes the parochial and self-serving construction of history by the Rhodesians of the 1960s and 1970s as follows:

> You, Great-Grandfather:
> colonial volunteer;
> Ladysmith, Wagon Hill, Spion Kop;
> (killed in action):
> you came home a hero.
>
> You, Oupa:
> despatch rider;

Windhoek, Swakopmund, Tsumeb
(wounded in the hand):
you came home a hero.

You, Dad:
lorry driver;
Tobruk, Alamein, Halfaya Pass;
(slightly shell-shocked):
you came home a hero.

You, son:
rifleman;
Plumtree, Bube, Vila Salazar);
(confused):
You came home a polecat. (1989:18)

The thin white line of the title is a metaphor for the linearity of a racialized Rhodesian memory of history. It tellingly alludes to a history that only orbits around the White subject in as much as it mocks the emptiness of such a history and the identities that it forges. This is apparent in the first three stanzas of the poem which indicate that Rhodesians draw their heroes from battles in the Anglo-Boer and the First and Second World Wars in which Rhodesians participated. The irony is that these wars have little that was directly to do with the building of the Rhodesian nation – they were just Britain's wars in Africa. Nevertheless, whatever relevance these wars might have had to the Rhodesians and how they related to the colony and imagined their identities in it, here they imply that the heroes of the colony are not national heroes, but racial heroes drawn from Whites who fought in another country's wars and battles to give the Rhodesians a heroic past. Furthermore, the uncertain significance of the context from which Rhodesians draw their heroes to the realities of the colony entails that Rhodesians could only realize their desired identities by inscribing themselves within British histories. This at once exposes contradictions in Rhodesian discourses about their identities. For example, in the later years of the colony, after the UDI especially,

the Rhodesians were reluctant to think of themselves in the context of British histories because Britain had refused to support minority rule in Rhodesia.

Despite these inconsistencies, the three addressees in the first three stanzas of the poem emerge as heroes in the memory of Rhodesians of their generations. In contrast, the fate of the son in the final stanza, the last descendent in the 'thin white line' of colonial heroes is different. He 'came home a polecat' for participating in wars that tried to perpetuate Rhodesia and abort the birth of Zimbabwe. The battles of the last stanza were fought when white Rhodesia was in rebellion against Britain and as Rhodesia fought against black Zimbabwean nationalists. The unexpected 'polecat' status of the son is a moment of irony in what at first seems to be a 'predictable' narrative of the poem. It points to how the 'smugness' with which younger generations of Rhodesians appropriated the values of their predecessors prevented the former from relating to their realities innovatively. Due to this fact, the object of Eppel's satire in this poem is not the so-called pioneers, but their descendants, the Rhodesians of the 1960s and 1970s. This perception is supported by Khombe Mangwanda (1998:74) who reads the contrast in the fates of the first three addressees (heroes in the eyes of their people and generations) and the son (polecat) as Eppel's technique of showing that it does not make sense for the younger generations of Rhodesians to embrace outdated ideologies. Building on this view, the term 'polecat' can also be understood as a general metaphor for younger Rhodesians who defended a racial nation state using nationalist ideologies, such as the ones represented by the Pioneers, only to find that at the end of colonialism there was no tradition to write them as heroes. Thus, the fate of the son also alludes to the insignificant identity spaces that former Rhodesians like Eppel

himself, will occupy in Zimbabwe where they will not be worshipped as heroes and could be discriminated against in their turn.

In the poem 'Rhodesian Lullaby', Eppel reveals the sense of shock with which Rhodesians reacted to the demise of a racial nation state which they had thought as invincible. He satirizes the fragile sense of national identity of a country that was a pariah from 1965 until 1980 and also ridicules the irrelevance of Rhodesian nationalism in a context where settler power is waning. The first stanza of the poem foregrounds this as follows:

> Like shrapnel from an old bomb we scatter
> to other lands, delivering reasons.
> On our elbows and our knees, a season's
> grass-burns. On the backs of our hands, faces,
> and necks – the first traces of skin cancer.
> Yes, we're Rhodesians. Does it matter? (1989:15)

The historical period that the poem is preoccupied with is circa 1979 when it was evident that the Rhodesian Front could not win the war against black nationalists. From this period and throughout the early years of Zimbabwe's independence, the Whites left the country in droves. With hindsight, the persona therefore questions the significance of a Rhodesian racial identity because the Rhodesian Front government had portrayed the Whites as a closely-knit community bound together by shared values. To add to this homogenization of Whites in Rhodesia, the government also used propaganda with which it legitimated its war against nationalists so as to conscript young white males. It is this idealized construction of united white Rhodesian society and identity that the poem satirizes as having lost its binding force as a controlling discourse. This is what the persona alludes to as 'flat patriotisms' in the third stanza quoted below.

The use of similes 'Like shrapnel from an old bomb/ we scatter to other lands delivering reasons', aptly exemplifies both the literal fragmentation of the Rhodesian society as well as that of the discourses that had acted as its cohesive force. In fact, these similes suggest that the 'Rhodesians were united only by their sense of 'shock' as their 'united' community disintegrated. Also, perhaps an even more important motif that the opening line delivers, and that resonates in a number of Eppel's poems as already noted, is that of a Rhodesian identity could not sustain itself in the face of challenges posed by counter discourses. In this regard, Mangwanda (1998:68) identifies the main motif of the first stanza and the whole poem in general, as a preoccupation with the aftermath of the liberation war for a people that seem to have lost a sense of its constructed identity.

The last three stanzas of the poem read:

> Even our children have learned not to cry
> for their puppies' graves. The women weep
> No more for their gardens. And the men sleep
> less fitfully on their way to Smithland
> or Salisbury-by-the-sea. A boozy band
> of rebels, we fought the world and lost. Why
>
> Should it matter? Rhodesians never die.
> From our mouths flat patriotisms slide
> tight as trouser-legs, unbending as pride
> Stories of war spread like phosphorous
> to our eyes. In a trickling of pus
> and blood down cheeks, we shout our lullaby
>
> Our wallets were fat, our bellies fatter.
> Memories of war slip like envelopes
> under the doors of our minds. Each one copes
> in his own way – a defiant slogan
> on a T-shirt, the old flag printed on
> a dishcloth … hush now – it doesn't matter.

There are suggestions in these stanzas that both Rhodesian nationalism and identity are built on illusions that are typical of colonial hubris that mistakes obduracy for patriotism. This is evinced in the imagery whose inscription of Whites as 'A boozy band/ of rebels, we [which] fought the world and lost' reduces white Rhodesians to a society suffering from delusions of nationhood. These delusions can be attributed to the isolated environment in which Rhodesians lived after the UDI. Following the UDI as already mentioned, the international community imposed sanctions on Rhodesia and this resulted in Rhodesians having limited interactions with global developments. The image of 'a boozy band' also alludes to the malaise of the social and political environment in which the ideas of Rhodesian national identity were formed. But at the same time, the satire couched in this metaphor also literally pokes fun at one of Rhodesians' favourite pastimes – hard drinking and carousal – that was part of a 'typical' Rhodesian's racial identity as already indicated in the earlier quotation from Weiss (1994:30-31). The overall achievement of the image that portrays the Rhodesians as a 'boozy band of rebels' is in how it brings out the interconnectedness between private and public spaces – the Rhodesians allowed the trivialities and egotism that characterized their private lives to mediate in their perception of the world around them.

The last stanza of the poem suggests that all that the Rhodesians can salvage from their crumbling constructed racial identity is their stubborn ego which is signified by 'a defiant slogan/ on a T-shirt, the old flag printed on/ a dishcloth'. However, the irony is that these images in turn symbolize the inconspicuous and peripheral position the former dominant discourses would occupy after independence. The inevitable unobtrusive place of the Rhodesian identity in the new order is made to contrast with

the assertive and yet desperate if not hollow phrase 'Rhodesians never die' which connotes an enduring Rhodesian national identity. The phrase 'Rhodesians never die' which recurs in the poem has to be read in the context of the de facto Rhodesian national anthem 'Rhodesians never die' because the two have an inter-textual relationship. The song encapsulates the spirit of Rhodesian nationalism, and its words, according to Peter Godwin and Ian Hancock (1993:14), were written 'to fulfil Rhodesia's need for 'a semi-patriotic song''. The song reads:

> We're all Rhodesians
> And we'll fight through thick and thin,
> We'll keep our land a free land,
> Stop the enemy coming in,
> We'll keep them north of the Zambezi
> Till that river's is running dry,
> And this mighty land will prosper
> For Rhodesians never die.

The song is an archetypal nationalist song which tries to conceal the fact that the white nationalists are, in fact, settler colonialists; it reflects the restrictive power that the authorizing discourses in the colony hold over the white settler's creativity and imagination. Its defiant tone once again replicates the Rhodesian government propaganda that self-consciously proclaimed that the Rhodesians were indelibly linked to the land in its search for a legitimating identity. This is disclosed by the self-legitimating opening lines: 'We're all Rhodesians/And we'll fight through thick and thin.' The word 'all' in the opening line also misleadingly connotes homogeneity of the white society which in reality was heterogeneous. This universalizing represses ethnic loyalties in a country that had different white ethnicities in as much as it belies the fact that its nationalism excludes other racial categories from being part of Rhodesia. This

notwithstanding, the diversity in origins among the people, the unifying factor might have been that the majority of Rhodesians came in search of wealth. This is not particularly new or unknown since this is what all migrants do, whether they are Americans or Rhodesians or Zimbabweans living in England or in South Africa.

In the case of Rhodesia, some of the Whites favoured racial imbalances because they promoted their material well-being. As Ruth Weiss (1994:27) observes, the concept of 'real Rhodesian' was never as obvious as 'Rhodesians never die' puts it:

> It is a myth that pre-independence Whites were a settled, close community. In fact, from 1890 onwards the settlers were a shifting population. There were several waves of immigration into the area north of the Limpopo and an image persisted of a 'real Rhodesian'. However, settler society was composed of people from different countries, background and class.

Weiss, Godwin and Hancock (1993:20) also stress that Rhodesians were not of common stock, although most were English speaking. Godwin and Hancock (1993:20) further contend that it was their present needs and not their past that bound them together in the 1970s, and committed them to maintain white supremacy and racial separation. Godwin and Hancock's argument is validated by the fact that the song 'Rhodesians never die' itself articulates a nationalism that is based on paranoia and insecurity by its insistence on the use of violence against those it considers enemies of 'our land'. In its nationalist discourse, the song denies both discursive and physical spaces to divergent nationalisms.

Also significant is the song's inscription of Rhodesians as immortal; it seeks to give a spiritual dimension to Rhodesian nationalism by elevating it above the temporal. It is at this level that the ideological purpose of the song becomes apparent – it was designed to define and direct Rhodesian nationalism and imbue it with a transcendental

dimension that would unify an assortment of white people in Rhodesia the way 'Nkosi Sikelel', the anthem of black nationalists appealed to and bound Blacks from various spaces in Africa to an imagined pan African ideal. Notwithstanding this fact, whereas 'Nkosi Sikelel' is a prayer for the whole of Africa (as the analysis of the poem 'Jasmine' in Part Two reveals), 'Rhodesians never die' is about the perpetuation of white colonial rule. This highlights the fact that colonial discourses ran parallel to the discourses that they tried to suppress. However, as already indicated, the problem with the nationalism espoused in 'Rhodesians never die' is its desperation; it ironically succeeds in foregrounding the anxiety of the white settler's identity as it grapples continuously with the place to make meaning out of it. In the end, 'Rhodesians never die' remains closely tied to the 'trailblazing' motif of colonial history, because the violence that it enlists to defend a racial nation identity conjures up the violence with which the settlers established themselves on the land. Rather than inscribing the settler at the centre of the land, its 'flat patriotisms' – 'And we'll fight through thick and thin, /We'll keep our land a free land/ Stop the enemy coming in' – effectively emphasize the artificiality and tenuousness of the Rhodesians' connection to the land. The song maintains the 'stubborn' spirit of UDI, through which the Rhodesians sought to naturalize their presence in the colony by declaring Rhodesia an independent nation. However, contrary to the spirit of this song Eppel ironically shows the Rhodesians' exodus 'from our land'.

If 'Rhodesian Lullaby' destabilizes the myth of a uniform and invincible white Rhodesian society by showing its disintegration, the poem 'Spoils of War', questions the whole concept of Rhodesiana by deriding the excesses of its nationalism and patriotism

against the racial other. Eppel uses a white Rhodesian soldier as the persona to make the point.

> Next morning our section finds their shelter,
> fifteen metres from where we lay. The sight
> of corpses, and their smell, like an abattoir,
> forces warm pilchards into my throat. "Look
> at that," says Sarge, "a Tokarev pistol
> still in its grease." He pockets it. They take
> a portable radio, a fistful
> a fistful of rounds, an empty AK magazine,
> five teeth, a penis, a number of ears,
> and a picture someone in a green uniform.
> Sarge tells me to serve my tears
> for the civilians these gooks have slaughtered.
> But I am not thinking of them, and I
> cannot explain that I am being purged
> of my Rhodesianism. That ugly
> word with its jagged edge is opening
> me. Through a haze of baked beans in chili
> sauce I move to the past tense. (1989:43-44)

In a characteristic Rhodesian psyche, the macabre scene where Sarge mutilates the bodies of dead freedom fighters is supposed to epitomize white Rhodesian valour and typify true and uninhibited Rhodesian patriotism. What Eppel has achieved is to allow the scene to be filtered through the consciousness of a quizzical and atypical Rhodesian persona in this poem. Conventional Rhodesian attitudes are registered as disproportionate machismo, which in the end reduces the so-called Rhodesian cause to worthlessness. The miscellaneous spoils of war, 'a Tokarev pistol', '[a] portable radio', 'five teeth', 'a penis' and 'a number of ears' among others, suggest both sadism and fragmentation of a barely understood enemy and also sound the hollow ring of Rhodesian victory in this particular battle. In the end, it is not so much a war about the preservation of civilization as Rhodesian discourses claim, but a war in which the white male-driven Rhodesian nationalism asserts its identity in a perverted way. Although the

poem registers the savagery of collecting ears and a penis, it ironically shows the sergeant conveniently ignoring the brutality of his side: 'Sarge tells me to save my tears/ for the civilians these gooks have slaughtered.' This statement signifies the perceived savagery of Blacks while simultaneously it implicitly inscribes the white Rhodesian as a figure of integrity and high moral standing whose duty is to protect the nation from marauding black terrorists. It also shows that the persona is crying or at least is protesting the mutilations. This self-accorded righteousness of the white Rhodesian nationalism and patriotism that the persona pokes fun at in this poem, also contradicts Ian Smith, who as Chennells (2005:136) notes, insisted that justice and pure rationality were inherent in Rhodesian nationalist ideology. In this poem, however, the persona discredits this through the spoils of war taken by his colleagues and through his growing contempt for his Rhodesian-ness.

The term 'gooks' which is used to refer to black freedom fighters who oppose white Rhodesian nationalism is also of particular importance in this poem. Eppel deploys it to express the Rhodesians' refusal to accept that the war Blacks were waging was for their own liberation from minority white rule and not about communism. The word 'gooks' was used for the Vietcong by Americans during the Vietnam war. The Rhodesians used it to show that ZANLA and ZIPRA were merely agents of the same international communism that the Americans had fought against. That this was the common view among the Rhodesians is not surprising, because Ian Smith and his Rhodesian Front government fostered the idea that the happiest and most contented Blacks in Africa were in Rhodesia (Ian Smith, 2001:80). Consequently, Sarge's use of 'gooks' reflects in microcosm how the Rhodesians were generally misled by their government into believing that Blacks' clamour for independence and the war that they

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fought were a result of a conspiracy of international communism to destabilize Rhodesia. In fact, this view is one of the major themes that informs Smith's version of history in his memoir, *The Great Betrayal* where he criticizes South Africa for having 'betrayed' Rhodesia by siding with communists and terrorists (Smith, 1997:39).

However, the problem with Smith's argument and the consciousness that it imparted in Rhodesians is that it conveniently ignored the history that Blacks had fought against colonial domination in the late nineteenth century on their own, without influence from the communists. This deliberate subversion of events that show black people's historical contempt for minority White rule, once again implicates the Rhodesians for interpreting both the present and the past in ways that suited their own purposes.

It is also noteworthy that the persona is 'being purged of my [his] Rhodesianism' because he comes to a realization of the indifference to black lives that underpins 'true' Rhodesian identity. This moment of realization is crucial to the discussion in this section because of all the poems analyzed, it best demonstrates the ironic distancing that Eppel's personae maintain from the core values of their Rhodesian society. The fact that as his spoil of war, the persona uproots an *Adenium Obesium* plant (as indicated in the first and last stanzas not quoted), highlights this point and also further symbolizes a desire to escape by communicating with the Rhodesian bush to which both he and the enemy that Rhodesian propaganda has constructed can relate. The persona's contempt for his Rhodesian identity is also cathartic (Chennells, 2004) and in this context it represents an inward micro-narrative of dissidence which contests visible Rhodesian narratives as the ones represented by 'Rhodesian never die'.

It is also important to note that although the persona purges himself of the Rhodesian identity that he finds abhorrent, he manifests the self-hatred that I earlier on observed characterizes Eppel's personae. Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection conceptualizes this self-hatred with profundity. Kristeva (1982:1) argues that abjection is a revolt of being that is directed against what is considered repugnant – what 'disturbs identity, system, order', something that 'does not respect borders, positions, rules' (Kristeva, 1982:4). The paradox of abjection, Kristeva (1982:2) continues, is that while it is supposed to protect and distance the subject from what it considers shameful, the abjected does not stop affecting the subject; although rejected, the subject cannot escape it. This happens because the abject shares the same space with the acceptable values that it threatens and so it cannot be abjected without challenging the subject. Because of this paradox, the Rhodesian persona's jettisoning of the space in which ideas of Rhodesian identity are formed by distancing himself from it is problematic because he occupies the same space that he is trying to reject. This also applies to the personae in the other poems already discussed who maintain an ironic distance from the values that inform the consciousness of their Rhodesian society. The problem of these personae also reflects Eppel's dilemma as a white Rhodesian poet who is writing outside the tradition of white Rhodesian writing but from inside the physical space dominated by a white minority. However, in some of his later poems, such as 'Waiting for the Bus' and 'Colonial Legacy', and novels, such as *The Holy Innocents* (2002), the ironic distancing that he maintains from the populist claims of the Zimbabwean elite is not problematic because he does not share the immediate space from which they derive their political identities.

Part Two

As already noted at the beginning of this chapter, the advent of independence in 1980 signaled the shift of discursive authority and political power into the hands of Blacks who were previously marginalized by Rhodesian racial discourses. This transformation effectively saw discourses that had privileged Rhodesians as superior because of their race replaced by those that celebrated their demise. Thus the post-independence era represents a new social, political and economic terrain that authorizes and shapes identities in different ways from the Rhodesian context where race primarily determined identity and power hierarchies.

For example, in Zimbabwe, other factors such as economic class, that were suppressed by the privilege accorded to race in Rhodesian discourses emerge and actively shape identities. Eppel's poems discussed in this section of the chapter as already highlighted are set in this context. The study in this segment therefore first explores how Eppel imagines and inscribes former Rhodesians' identities in a context where they do not wield all discursive authority and later on discusses his general conception of identity in Zimbabwe. To find out how Eppel does the above within the complexities and contradictions of the new period, six poems from *John Eppel*: *Selected Poems 1965-1995* (2001) and *Songs my Country Taught me: Selected Poems 1965-2005* (2005) are analyzed. The first four poems to be analyzed are 'Jasmine', 'The Midnight Blooming', 'On Browsing through some British Poems', and 'Song of the Makiwa Tree' because they best reflect the various perspectives from which Eppel writes Whites' identities in the new dispensation. The other two poems selected: 'Colonial Legacy' and 'Aluta Continua' are discussed to demonstrate that Eppel complicates the racial terrain on

which identities are usually pegged in Zimbabwe. The visions of these poems explore the role of economic class in structuring identities.

In the poem 'Jasmine', Eppel depicts a former Rhodesian who is in harmony with the new dispensation. This is captured through a white persona who celebrates his identity and the new independence identities by identifying with discourses that symbolize the ascendancy of the power of the formally marginalized Blacks. These new discourses and the persona's place in the identity spaces that they have opened up are represented as follows:

When they cried freedom, when the sweet
mingling of woodsmoke
With dust: grass, granite, antelope
bone: gathered into wrists which turned

light the colour of blood, darkness
a memory of the colour
of blood – when their voices lifted
that song and sent it echoing

across Africa, I knew it.
Sibanda had taught it to me.
Polishing the family's shoes,
squatting outside the scullery
door.

…

we sang: "Nkosi sikelel'
iAfrika …" over and over
till the birds joined in. august birds.
"… maluphakamiso phondo lwayo …".

It comes back to me, this August,
now that the jasmine is blooming
and the air is stilled by woodsmoke;
how they cried freedom, and how I

knew their song. A lingering chill
pinches Zimbabwean sunsets

into the cheeks of my children
squatting beside me as I write.

It is their song too. I teach it
to them, over and over, till
my tired eyes are pricked with tears
held back, sweet smoke, dust, and jasmine. (2001:60-61)

The song 'Nkosi Sikeleli Afrika' was an anthem for black nationalists and it was outlawed in Rhodesia. But with the coming of independence, it became the new national anthem. The song is a prayer for Africa, and its vision transcends racial, ethnic and national boundaries. In this poem, the song symbolizes the dawn of a new political order and epoch of history, and the persona is aware that there is no way that the Whites in Zimbabwe can exist outside the new dominant discourses. This is evident in the persona's identification with the new national anthem, which in turn suggests an adoption of a new identity to replace the racial identities of colonial Rhodesia. That the persona also passes the song on to his children: 'It is their song too. I teach it/ to them …' is important in that it makes them heirs to a new human order. The persona's complete identification with the new anthem, also suggests that the new order's ideology is desirable and that however resistant the Whites are to it, they or at least their children will adapt to it whether their generation wishes it or not. Before concluding the analysis of this poem, it is important to highlight that the persona's uncharacteristic attachment to the context that does not preserve his privilege as a white person conversely mirrors how the Rhodesian personae in Part One detach themselves from a Rhodesian space that is supposed to be a site of their privilege. The overall significance of this to the analysis of Eppel's poetry is that it shows that his vision goes beyond the boundaries that are usually used to map out and frame Whites' identities in both Rhodesia and Zimbabwe.

If in 'Jasmine', Eppel portrays the appeal of the new order to Whites through a persona who, without problems, accepts and identifies with the national anthem, in the poem 'The Midnight Blooming', he reveals that black nationalist discourses and what they represent elicit ambivalent responses from Whites. This is expressed through a persona who on one hand appreciates the new discourses and on the other hand laments the inability of his poetry to capture the depth and full significance of these discourses. The poem itself is a depiction of a political scene that Eppel witnessed in South Africa[1], most likely a rally of the African National Congress (ANC) one of the parties that fought against apartheid rule in that country. Thus, the poetic voice and the persona's merge into each other – the persona's voice becomes a reflection of the conflicting feelings that Eppel experienced when he observed the black nationalists' political gathering.

While the setting is not Zimbabwe, the poem significantly shows how a former Rhodesian reacts to discourses of black power in Southern Africa. The poem reads:

> Although that night, beyond the pitch
> of ululating strings, was dim
> enough to veil the twinkle
> of a riot squad; although the atmospheric pressure
> on the square inch of my brain
> was more than fourteen comma
> seven pounds, my stanzas,
> oh my stanzas, were as light
> as plastic bucket blue.
>
> Although the band that played before
> had twanged *amandla* to a drift
> of flowers sweetly clenched; and then
> *awethu* wafted thousand
> thousand perfumes in reply;
> although the rain came down in dog-
> bites, and the midnight blossoms dripped

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[1] The author's note on the poem indicates that it recalls a political gathering that he witnessed in South Africa.

a crimson song, my stanzas,
oh my stanzas, were as pale
as plastic bucket blue. (2005:33)

The ANC's slogan was and is still 'Amandla Awethu' (it means power to the people). While in 'Jasmine', it is the new national anthem that symbolizes black power, in this poem, it is the slogan 'Amandla Awethu'. What is noteworthy though in 'The Midnight Blooming' as already indicated, is that although the persona appreciates the mood of the gathering and the black power that it symbolizes, he fails to represent it artistically. This is suggested in the lines that end each of the poem's two stanzas: 'oh my stanzas, were as light/as plastic bucket blue. /oh my stanzas, were as pale /as plastic bucket blue.' The lines effectively capture the paradox that the persona finds himself in: he is attracted to the scene before him and yet he is incapable of capturing its beauty.

Kizito Muchemwa (2003) sees the persona's inability to fully represent the discourses representing the new order as an indication of the Whites' continuing failure to cross boundaries of culture and race. While Muchemwa's observation is important, it does not identify the factors that could be responsible for this failure. The persona's loss of artistic power in the face of new and alternative experiences can be attributed to the limiting Rhodesian context that did not allow him to imagine and write outside the acceptable tradition of white Rhodesian writing. As already noted, the bulk of white writing was accustomed to serving the parochial needs of Rhodesian nationalism. The persona's crisis as an artist represents the plight of former Rhodesians who were accustomed to the 'single' reality of the Rhodesian Front propaganda when they encountered other realities. This view is reinforced by the distance that the persona maintains from the proceedings throughout the poem. However, this detachment does

not gesture towards a reluctance to accept change, but to a deep sense of alienation which as already explained is attributable to an intolerant discursive space which the persona is a product of.

It is also crucial to point out that the persona's dilemma leaves him with a contradictory, if not ambivalent identity. He is a product of a Rhodesian past whose limited discursive practice stunted him imaginatively, and yet he is an outsider to the present that he is attracted to as his futile attempts to fully reach out to it suggest. This contradiction can also be read as Eppel's complex way of constructing a middle identity for Whites by imagining their place in Zimbabwe as that of outsiders/insiders. This stance enables him to problematize narratives that have either unproblematically included or excluded Whites in or from the new order without tracing the complexities of the history behind their presence in Africa and in Zimbabwe.

The poem 'On Browsing through some British Poems' represents these unstable identities of Whites differently. It utilizes a white persona who speaks of his plight of homelessness: of not belonging either to Zimbabwe or to Britain. The following excerpt from the poem illustrates the point:

> I know that we do not belong,
> wife, child, puppy, sweet-peas,
> to this brown land; nor in Somerset
> where Sisson lives. But something like the heart-
> break that a road … two strips of tar
> that smelt, when afternoons grew hot
> in Colleen Bawn, of liquorice,
> to which I now add all sorts
> of sweet remembrances.
> I know that we are merely visitors in Africa –
> the blue eyes of our child, the marmalade,
> the pets, the BBC. And when I went to London
> to find some British poets

shuffling verses for a game of rhyme,
I was a visitor.
It's something like the heart-break that a roof …
the first hot drops of Bulawayo rain
that pound the corrugations of my mind
releasing songs of leaves and earth and tin,
to which I add:
I understand you well enough Charles Hubert Sisson.
First, that you are a man of ability:
your poet's tact to express not what you know
but what you do not know until the poem is written (2005:19-20).

It is essential to note that in this poem the persona appropriates the signifiers of race to represent his dilemma of not belonging either to Britain or to Africa. This effectively enables him to subvert discourses that have used race to claim a double-belonging for Whites in Rhodesia. These discourses celebrated the fact that the majority of Whites were settlers who originated from outside the country and at the same time claimed that they belonged to the country by virtue of their perceived racial 'superiority' which enabled them to 'civilize' it. Eppel inverts this 'comfortable' double-belonging that race offered to Whites in Rhodesia, into a homelessness by using a persona who sees himself as a visitor – an outsider – to both Africa and Britain: 'I know that we are merely visitors in Africa – /the blue eyes of our child, the marmalade, /the pets, the BBC' and '… when I went to London/ to find some British poets/ shuffling verses for a game of rhyme, /I was a visitor.' The persona's outsider status to both Africa and Britain also disrupts the singular importance that some narratives have attached to 'convenient' signifiers of identity, such as race when inscribing the identities of Whites in Zimbabwe. The persona's knowledge of not belonging to Britain, for example, challenges the ways in which race has been used in dominant ZANU PF narratives to claim that Whites in Zimbabwe belong to Britain.

On the other hand, the persona's strong identification with the Zimbabwean place, apparent in his sensuous recollection 'of the first hot drops of Bulawayo rain' and 'two strips of tar/ that smelt, when afternoons grew hot' is not enough to accord him a full sense of belonging to Africa because he is aware that the contradictions behind the history of Whites' presence in the 'brown land' do not allow an easy attachment. By imagining the status of Whites after independence as that of homelessness, Eppel's artistic vision refuses to construct for them an identity that is situated in oversimplifying binaries of black and white, or dominator and dominated.

In fact, in a recent e-mail interview, he makes this point when he outlines the vision of his poetry. He notes that:

> My main concern in my poetry is to find a voice which merges British form (prosody) with African content (mostly nature) so that, if not in my life, in my art, I can find an identity which is not binary, not black/white, African/European colonizer/colonized. My concern in my prose is to ridicule greed, cruelty, self-righteousness and related vices like racism, sexism, jingoism (2007).

His use of British form with African content is not only disruptive of binary identities, but it also creates a new poetic voice for him that is outside both British and African traditions. This is noticeable in the poem 'Song of the Makiwa Tree' in which the persona imagines his identity and the Zimbabwean landscape in both indigenous and exotic terms. The second stanza describes the landscape using an indigenous consciousness and imagery as follows:

<div align="center">

Winter
is the time for fires, for limbs to splinter,
trunks to topple down koppies, bark to drop
like peeled skin. Time for Efifi's crop
to tighten, but not crack. Not yet crack.
Ntabemnyama carries on his back

</div>

a herd of Matabele cattle ghosts.
Potgieter and his men are at their posts;
the last Boer raid for many many years.
Bambata pats away Ingwenya's tears;
Inungu, desecrated by a cross,
completes the five that stand and gather moss.

The persona's deep knowledge of the Matabeleland place and his immense identification with it are evident in his personification and animation of the landscape (the koppies that are some of the more prominent of the Matobo Hills – Efifi, Ntabemnyama, Bambata and Inungu). Through personification and animation, the persona creates a narrative account of the place that gives it a deeper meaning and also authorizes it to tell the history about itself. This is suggested in the lines: 'Ntabemnyama carries on his back/ a herd of Matabele cattle ghosts. /Potgieter and his men are at their posts;/ the last Boer raid for many many years' which make the landscape bear testimony to the history that was played out on the Matobo hills. These lines transform the hills of Matobo from being a static landscape, (an object of narrative that is often celebrated singularly for its beauty in tourist narratives) into a dynamic narrating subject of history that communicates its own meanings other than those attached to it. The history that the persona visualizes as being communicated by the physical structure of the Ntabemnyama hill is that of the Afrikaner raids for cattle on the Ndebele who resided in the Matobo Hills.

The last such raid is known to have been led by Hendrik Potgieter in 1837. The persona's knowledge of the place is completed in the line: 'Bambata pats away Ingwenya's tears'. 'Bambata' and 'Ingwenya' mean pat and crocodile respectively in the local Ndebele language, and their use as names of these two hills that form part of the Matobo reflects the symbolic meanings that indigenous awareness attaches to the

place. By referring to these hills using their indigenous names and not describing them as merely boulders, the persona also reflects an aesthetic insight that is in harmony with the place. This awareness is not only a result of a critical observation and understanding of the place, but also of a strong identification with it similar to the attachment that the persona in 'On Browsing through some British Poems' has to Bulawayo.

If in the stanza analyzed above, the persona's belonging to Matabeleland is evinced by his comfortable narration of the place and its history through local imagery, the stanza analyzed below undercuts the indigenous identity that he creates for himself and the place. In the following stanza he uses exotic and botanical names to describe the African vegetation.

> Call me *Commiphora*, the paperbark;
> my trunk is green but my ashes are dark
> as blurred horizons where the earth
> beyond the shudder of a jackal's mirth
> meets the sky – not any sky – the western deep
> where balding koppies and their valleys sleep.
> Smell me smouldering in this chilly night,
> watch the gradual dying of my light.
> Scatter my ashes where *makaza* spills –
> among the slopes of five Matopos hills. (2005:73-74)

The *Commiphora* or paperbark tree, whose qualities the persona celebrates is also known as the Makiwa tree in the local Ndebele language. Makiwa is also a Ndebele term for white people and in this poem the qualities of the Makiwa tree can be read as metaphors for the identity of the Whites in Zimbabwe. Consequently, the different names of the same tree that the persona discloses reveal his versatile and sophisticated knowledge of the place that is capable of describing it in both indigenous and exotic ways, in as much as they also metaphorically inscribe his identity as both an

outsider and insider to the place that he describes. This is fully clinched by the different characteristics of the *Commiphora* tree – its green trunk and its dark ashes which are 'blurred as horizons'. These features show the complexity of the persona's ambiguous identity in as much as they situate it at the unstable intersection of belonging and not belonging. This ambiguity fulfills Eppel's quest to establish an identity that is in-between: 'not black/white, African/European colonizer/colonized' as he declares in the quotation already discussed, because it represents Whites' identities in Zimbabwe as both contradictory and unstable. The paradoxes embodied by this in-between identity also reflect Eppel's refusal to succumb to what (Dan Wylie, 2001:5) calls the tunnel-vision of hate and opportunism which reductively compartmentalizes Whites in Zimbabwe.

Eppel's complication of Whites' identities in Zimbabwe is also mirrored in the broad and shifting contexts in which he views post-independence identities in general. For example, in an (2007) interview he observes that:

> I am beginning to see bad behaviour more in terms of class than race. Blacks with political connections, who have been catapulted into shocking wealth, the so-called middle class (in a country where 80% of the people live in abject poverty) behave just as badly as their white counterparts behave. They are Rhodies too ….

The role played by political and economic factors in structuring identities Zimbabwe is often downplayed and even ignored in the official narratives, and yet the inequities and exclusions that these aspects generate are comparable to those caused by racial categorizations in colonial Rhodesia. The analyses of poems 'Colonial Legacy' and 'Aluta Continua' below reveal that the category of social class even undermines the 'stability' in imagining the new nation that the time of independence is supposed to bring

among Blacks who were victims of racial segregation in Rhodesia. In the poem 'Colonial Legacy' for instance, even the conventional meanings that the subaltern attached to Whites' domination during colonialism are altered by how economically marginalized Blacks think of the past and their identities in Zimbabwe. The poem reads:

> The old man taps my shoulders
> as if it were a snuff-box;
> cataracts have turned his eyes blue.
>
> He calls me Inkosi; he says
> "I am a Smith man, Inkosi;
> please, I have no food to eat".
>
> I proffer a fifty cent coin
> which he receives in both hands.
> "you and me … ACHOO!…are Smith men." (2005:105)

The old man's begging manifests the economic exclusion experienced by the majority of Blacks in Zimbabwe. By identifying with Smith, the old man distances himself from the black government that marginalizes him economically. But in currying favour with a white persona, and thinking that Smith was better than the new government, the old man is playing up to a deception because in these lines, Eppel suggests a double marginalization in which both Smith and the new black government are being equated as evil. Eppel's poetic stance shows the existence of multiple political identities within the racial categories of black and white in Zimbabwe. This in turn negates the notion that race always provides political solidarity. Notwithstanding this, the old man also essentializes the persona's identity. He stereotypes the persona by assuming that he shares Smith's racial philosophy because of his race: "you and me … ACHOO!…are Smith men." The old man is thus an object of the persona's satire for generalizing Whites in as much as he also draws his sympathy for being a victim at the margins of the Zimbabwean society.

However, while the persona is satirical of the old man's homogenization of Whites in Zimbabwe, the latter's attitude also further enables us to see the unstable context from which Whites' identities are constructed and imagined in Zimbabwe. He manifests the influence that the identity structures mapped out by colonialism continue to have in Zimbabwe. As a former racial other, his stereotyping of the former subject destabilizes the new identities that Whites might want to create for themselves in Zimbabwe. He symbolizes the new order's continued view of the Whites in terms of the colonial past in as much as it is a hint at the new nation's failure to imaginatively engage with new challenges.

The last point is elaborated in 'Aluta Continua' where the persona shows how memories of the *Chimurenga* struggle ironically prevent some Blacks from interrogating their marginal identities that ensue from economic disparities of the new era. The poem makes the point through an ex-combatant who continues to derive his identity from the *Chimurenga* war instead of thinking of his identity in terms of the new realities. This thematic concern is represented as follows:

> The ex-combatant
> who still talks
> of that time during
> the Chimurenga
>
> when his landmine
> took out a Scania,
> takes out his 'scania'
> trolley on market days,
>
> fills it with cabbage
> leaves and other left-
> overs, and hawks it
> along Robert Mugabe Way. (2005:104)

The irony is that the ex-combatant even seems oblivious of how actively the new sites of identity around him are involved in the construction of his identity. Put differently: it is the identity that emanates from the new sites (economic factors) which he ignores that paradoxically is visible in defining him – it dominates and even undermines the identity from *Chimurenga* that he harps on. The persona makes this evident by punning with the word 'scania'. 'Scania' refers to the military truck used by the Rhodesian army during the liberation war and it alludes to the sacrifice that the ex-combatant made. The 'scania trolley' that the ex-combatant fills with leftovers by contrast, is a metaphor for the betrayal of the sacrifice made during the war and it symbolizes the economic deprivation of the ex-combatant in Zimbabwe. The betrayal of independence that the poem explores here is not new to Zimbabwean literature. Other Zimbabwean narratives, such as Shimmer Chinodya's novel *Harvest of Thorns* (1989), George Mujajati's novel *Victory* (1993) and Nyamubaya's poetry already discussed in this study among others, are preoccupied with this subject. What is significant in this poem (as already pointed out) is that unlike the protagonists in other Zimbabwean narratives on the same theme, the ex-combatant does not use his past to question his present humiliating circumstances. At a different level however, the fact that the ex-combatant is trapped in the past also shows how hierarchies of class and class exploitation have replaced race as the principal issues of fragmentation in Zimbabwe that Eppel believes should be addressed. The ex-combatant is representing through an inchoate voice, discourses that will later on become dominant in Zimbabwe, which attribute most of the problems confronting the nation to colonialism and the minority Whites in the country. It would have been useful to discuss Eppel's poetry on this subject, but he does not have

poems that focus on the political and identity dynamics in twenty-first century Zimbabwe.

Eppel's main achievement in his poetry lies in his adopting an atypical voice in writing Whites' identities in both Rhodesia and Zimbabwe. This distinctive vision is also evident in his versatile exploration of identity in general. The analysis in Part One has demonstrated that the distance that he maintains from the conventional political, social and racial attitudes of other Whites enables him to reveal in full the limitations of the discursive context and consciousness that inform Rhodesians' claims to racial superiority and the attitudes that they adopted towards the colony. The poems discussed in Part Two have shown Eppel's complex imagination and representation of Whites' identities in Zimbabwe through his continuous search for paradoxical 'in-between' identities for them. This, as the study has revealed, undermines narratives that have systematically utilized race to claim Whites' belonging or not belonging to Zimbabwe. In addition, Eppel also broadened the discursive space in which identity in general has to be thought of in Zimbabwe. He showed the role economic factors play in complicating how Whites' identities are imagined and the contradictions that these elements also create in Blacks' thinking of their own identities. Overall, in both his pre-independence and post-independence poetry, Eppel refuses to yield to the limitations of the dominant ideologies of the time whether these are colonial or postcolonial periods in the history of Zimbabwe.

Conclusion

The aim of this study has been to investigate the elasticity of the conceptual notions of history and identity, thereby exploring their meaning and potentials, as well as determining the extent to which they are manipulated through imagery in some selected poetic works by Zimbabwean poets. Chapter One mapped out the analytical framework for the entire thesis by exploring different theoretical perspectives on history and identity. This exploration concluded that history is not simply a collection of facts laid bare by the conventional historian's useful skills, but rather a very broad, uneven concept that carries multiple meanings in different disciplines and contexts. Given the controversial nature of the concept of history, I limited my discussion to observing how definitions and usages of the term history are polarized between how first, it is conceived within the academic discipline of history and, second, how history is more generally conceived outside history as a discipline.

 My outline for this debate used Hayden White's equation of (1975:13) the controversy surrounding the meaning of history today to that of the natural sciences in the sixteenth century, where the different conceptions of what 'science' ought to be reflected different perceptions of 'reality' and the different epistemologies generated by them. White (1975:13) concluded that 'disputes over what 'history' ought to mean reflect similarly varied conceptions of what a proper historical explanation ought to consist of, as well as different conceptions of the historian's task'. The study went on to explore the specificities of some of these debates and showed that disputes surrounding history are more of contests about how the past is represented than whether or not a certain event happened. This insight was important for this study because it crucially reflected that

poetic narratives are also history which nonetheless differ from conventional history in that they actively make use of metaphor and imagery. Furthermore, the study disclosed the complex relationship between history and identity by demonstrating that identity is a product of narrative, whose meanings are informed by the instabilities that underlie history, in as much as it shapes narrative. In this respect, it was demonstrated that the link between history and identity is born out of the ability to have a sense of who one is, and this requires one to be able to tell a story about oneself, and, furthermore, a story which relates one to others by connecting with the stories they tell about themselves. I used theorists such as Paul Gilbert (2000) and Stefan Jonsson (2000) among others to capture in depth the implications of this identity-history relationship.

In the subsequent chapters, the debates on history and identity outlined in this chapter enabled me to anticipate the contrasting and shifting perspectives from which the selected poets explore these concepts, and to engage with the interpretations and meanings that each poet attaches to them. This, in turn, required that I apply different critical approaches to each of the selected poets' texts. Chapter One also contextualized the poets' works by briefly outlining some of the significant events in Zimbabwean history so as to give a general context of reference in which to situate the visions that inform the poets' works. The rationale was not to seek generalizations to explain how the poets relate to Zimbabwean history, but to highlight that their narratives also share and contribute to the broad space of Zimbabwean history and that the impetus behind their visions is driven by aspects or events of that history. This was demonstrated by both similar and dissimilar trends in the works that were explored in my analyses.

The Zimbabwean poets I considered assumed that at some point, the histories and identities of their own people and themselves were represented by different dominant views in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. The poets then used their poetic imaginations to retell their histories and constructed their own identities in their own terms which showed both similarities and major differences in the manner in which they reconstructed their individual identities, as well as in their use of different poetic imagery or vocabularies when enunciating Zimbabwean identities. In other words, there was no homogenous reconstruction of Zimbabwean identities. Ideological diversities marked how the work of different poets created different identities. This logic was replicated in the entire study in which the authenticity of the Zimbabwean poets was, in fact, distinct, in the ways in which they engage differently, and manipulate the symbols, imagery and metaphors in their cultures to emerge with distinct identities whose distinguishing features were their differences in reconstructing identities within Rhodesia and Zimbabwe.

The discussion on Musaemura Zimunya's poetry in Chapter Two revealed that his aim is to subvert self-serving colonial narratives that privilege the colonizers' presence and their identities in the colony's history which represented the colonized as the racially 'inferior' other. Zimunya's strategy in achieving this goal, as the study demonstrated, was to celebrate the pre-colonial past and Blacks' identities that emerge from its spaces as superior to the 'civilization' that the colonizers claim to have brought to Africa. This strategy resulted in a poetic vision which imagines history and identity in Zimbabwe in terms of the colonizer/colonized dichotomies. This was first evidenced in my analysis of *Thought-Tracks* where Zimunya simultaneously moves back to the pre-colonial African

past and celebrates identities located in its spaces and criticizes colonial discourses that centre the colonizer in the colony, by denigrating identities from the pre-colonial past. The poems analyzed from *Country Dawns and City Lights* and *Kingfisher, Jikinya and other Poems* complicate the vision in *Thought-Tracks* by their use of the country-city trope to signify the imagined 'purity' of the country space where Zimunya locates 'true' African identities. In the same texts, the corruptness of the urban space is conceived as an embodiment of colonial values.

However, while Zimunya ably demonstrated that African identities were deracinated by the colonizers' convenient self-serving ordering of the colonial space, his voice is problematic in that it limits the discursive context in which issues of identity and history can be understood in Zimbabwe. This is principally reflected in his failure to realize that the modern city in post-independent Zimbabwe has to be represented in terms of the dynamics of the new era, rather than only as an expression of the colonizer/colonized division. His poetic and imaginative approaches simplify identity - a concept that is complex in that it is unstable and is fraught with contradictions. This limitation in his vision stems from 'writing back'- an approach whose unintended effect often locks discourses of resistance in the generalizing discursive spaces mapped out by the colonizers. To support my argument on the shortcomings of such writing, I referred to the studies by Mudimbe (1988) and Ashcroft (2002) in which issues of identities are conceptualized in terms of their constant change rather than fixity, and literary contamination rather than their imagistic purity.

In Chapter Three, the study shifted and focused on Chenjerai Hove's four collections of poetry: *Up in Arms, Red Hills of Home, Rainbows in the Dust* and *Blind Moon.* The chapter argued that his poetry revisits and re-tells the history of the second *Chimurenga* and also disrupts the post-independence government's official accounts of both the past and present. In the process of engaging with these concerns, the discussion crucially reveals that Hove situates identity in different phases of Zimbabwean history – *Chimurenga*, early post-independence, and early twenty-first century Zimbabwe. As the study demonstrated, this resulted in a shifting vision of history and identities both of which were imagined as unstable. Hove's vision moves from affirming black nationalist discourses in *Up in Arms*, to a tentative questioning of early independence achievements in *Red Hills of Home* and, finally, to a subversion of the ZANU PF government's calls for a patriotic representation of both the nation's past and present in *Rainbows in the Dust* and *Blind Moon*. This ideological self-conscious representation of poetic imagination suggests that Hove is aware that the poets' visions change as the history and identities that determine them or are over-determined by them also change.

In each phase of Zimbabwean history that Hove explored, he showed the existence of different micro-narratives and identities and thus gave insight into some of the complex ways in which history and identity interact and mutually shape the significations of each other at any given time. This approach enabled Hove's narrative to penetrate the diverse spaces of Zimbabwean society and to reveal some of the contradictions of both history and identity that were captured in the theorizations of these concepts in Chapter One. This makes his account on the dynamics of history and identity in Zimbabwe more insightful and convincing than that of Zimunya explored in Chapter Two.

In Chapter Four, the study focused on Dambudzo Marechera and Philip Zhuwao's poetry and discussed their complex visions of history and identity. The study argues in this chapter that the aspects of history and identity that both poets articulate in their poetry are not new to Zimbabwean writing, but it is their 'unorthodox' vision and representation of them that strikes the audience and provocatively challenges them to rethink the accepted significations of these concepts. It is because of the unstable and ever-shifting meanings of history and identity that emerge from their imaginative dissidence, that I used 'anarchism' as the theoretical framework for analyzing their poetry. Anarchism allows the chapter to contain contradictions that show their poetry deals both with the obvious as well as the subtly original and, more important, contains unresolved conflicts within their own poetic narratives. Although it was noted in this chapter that Zhuwao's writing is influenced by Marechera, I found Zhuwao's vision to be more subversive and radical than that of the older poet. This is demonstrated in Zhuwao's rejection of regimentalized history and identities, because he prefers open ended definitions of both self and society. On the other hand, Marechera employs both conventional and unconventional voices. However, the eclecticism of Marechera's vision makes him a more complex poet than Zhuwao. It was further argued in Chapter Four that the importance of Marechera's and Zhuwao's poetry to Zimbabwean writing stems from their re-interrogation of the sources from which the Zimbabwean society derives its narratives of histories and notions of identities and their rejection of the officially sanctioned formulaic representations of these.

The discussion of women's poetry in Chapter Five sought to establish how female poets of Zimbabwe engage with their society's histories and represent their identities in their poetic narratives. The chapter reveals that while the voices of these poets champion the cause of women, their visions of Zimbabwean history and the women's identities challenge both the grand and universal feminist discourses of women's emancipation and the Zimbabwean patriarchal and colonial versions of black women. This was first demonstrated in my analysis of Freedom Nyamubaya's poetry in which it was pointed out that she explores Zimbabwean women's identities in the context of the histories of the liberation war. The chapter also argues that Nyamubaya's stance reclaims the nationalist narrative and bends it to accommodate women's contributions towards the war and their experiences as they fought in that war.

In contrast to Nyamubaya, the female poets from *A Woman's Plea*, represent women and their identities outside the spaces of the liberation war. This demonstrated the multiplicities of Zimbabwean women's thoughts and experiences. The contribution of women's poetic vision in *A Woman's Plea* complicates Nyamubaya's preoccupation with women's identities from the location of the liberation struggle that both enabled and constrained what she could say about it because she both lived it and identified with it in as much as she also experienced its negative side that she covertly criticizes. The analysis of women's voices in *A Woman's Plea* also revealed a deepened understanding of history that moves beyond organized resistance as the only nationalist yardstick of measuring poetic patriotism. The women's poetic voices gathered from different poets enabled the diversity in women's identities and experiences to emerge,

thereby revealing the limitations of theoretical works that homogenize women's experiences.

In Chapter Six, the study traced how John Eppel deconstructs identities that are based on race in both Rhodesia and Zimbabwe. The discussion revealed that his voice is atypical of a white Rhodesian/Zimbabwean writer because he distances himself from the attitudes of most other Whites that are informed by claims to racial superiority. The study also demonstrated that the ironic distance that he maintains from the accepted values of his Rhodesian society enable his poetic vision to expose most of the limitations and contradictions of Rhodesians' claims to racial superiority and the attitudes they adopted towards the colony. In Part Two of this chapter, the study also argued that in some of his post-independence poetry, Eppel seeks to establish paradoxical identities for Whites in Zimbabwe that disrupt narratives that used race to claim Whites' belonging or not belonging to Zimbabwe. In this regard, Eppel's work breaks new ground on discourses of race and identity in Zimbabwe in that he refuses to imagine essentialized identities within Rhodesia and Zimbabwe that were produced from the limited spaces mapped out by the dominant ideologies. Notwithstanding this, the problem with Eppel's voice is that he is a white Rhodesian/Zimbabwean poet, who occupies the same space that he detests. This has resulted in a poetic vision that reflects elements of self-hatred and guilt whose contradictions have not been reconciled poetically.

The significance of this pioneering study is that it differs from previous research not because it focused on history and identity, but because my primary sources which are the poems reveal the instability of the categories of history and identity. The study also

showed that poets manipulate symbols of history and identities in ways that ironically subverted their desire for stable identities. Poetry as a mode of representation can extensively utilize signs and symbols which endorse instability of meaning. This provides the conditions for the possibility that new values will be articulated. These essential qualities of poetry, as the study demonstrated, not only give new meanings to conventional understanding of Zimbabwean history and identity, but also show that poetry is also capable of creating its own versions of history and identity. Since this study used poetry to discuss history and identity, future studies will build on it and place their emphases differently.

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