



Chapter Six

Of ancestors, spirit possession and post-colonial resistance

The novels studied in the previous chapter privileged African male narratives of resistance. It is of great importance that in post-independence novels such as *Bones* and *Nehanda*, the female-inspired narratives of resistance are constructed and represented through spirit-possession. The female narratives in *Bones* and *Nehanda* form the subject of this chapter and they are analysed in order to establish a composite picture of the discourse of national resistance.

In Shona traditional thought and belief systems death is not the 'end' of human life. Death is the crossing of the threshold from earthly existence into the spiritual realm where the 'departed' assume new responsibilities towards the living and the unborn. Ancestors or the 'departed' are thought to protect the living from whom they demand loyalty, although as Michael Bourdillon (1993) observes, not all that the ancestors say and demand from the living is complied with. The Shona people distinguish *vadzimu*, ancestors who protect the clan, from *mhondoro* who are national guardian spirits and some *shave* or evil spirit and *ngozi*, the avenging spirit. These spiritual distinctions suggest that in Shona mediumistic religion, certain ancestors are preferred and more regularly evoked in situations of national crises. Their cultural symbols are politically privileged over others as representative of the 'soul' of the nation.

Both within literature and to some extent outside it, spirit-possession belongs to the discourse of the imaginary that nevertheless constitutes the 'real'. Imaginative narratives call attention to their constructed-ness and their artifice. The symbolic processes through which they constitute themselves as cultural authority with the capacity to assign meaning to reality takes place within and not outside representation. Hayden White suggests that, with regards to literary narratives whether written down or oral, however seemingly 'full' (White, 1987, p. 10) they are constructed on the basis of a set of events that might have been included but were left out. This is true of imaginary narratives such as spirit-possession.

In post-independence Zimbabwe, spirit-possession is largely experienced as a lived encounter in social contexts associated with ancestor veneration. When spirit-possession is incorporated in the novel, the 'facts' which the author creates

through the exploration of spirit-possession within the realm of fictive imagination, generate new meaning which can be distorted or subverted by the ideals and prejudices of the individual author. Individual authorship and ownership of a work of art enables the writer to experiment with and manipulate spirit-possession within the text so as to make it express his/her declared ideological intentions. This is a process that also often reveals meanings sometimes unforeseen by the author. These new meanings may confirm the communal memory recovered by spirit-possession as desirable, question it or even reject it as obsolete.

The ancestral *mhondoro* connected to the medium of Nehanda in these two novels appears through spirit-possession, dreams and divination. Perceived as image and metaphor, spirit-possession constructs a double, as well as a paradoxical reality of resistance. Through its symbolic representation, spirit-possession reorders and manipulates historical events in order to construct and establish what David Lan identifies as, 'an ideal alternative society . . . based on the ideal of one lineage, one territory, the ideal of pure descent . . .' (Lan, 1985, p. 116). This desire by spirit-possession to represent itself with the intended formal coherency of a narrative of resistance is however interrogated by its own internal principle of contradictory unity. In the words of Hubert Bucher, spirit-possession encourages amnesia since the possessed person is not supposed to have any memory of how she or he behaved or what was revealed during trance, which in fact is the very process that enacts the remembering of history and retrieval of communal memory. In spirit-possession, 'the possessed persons are not supposed to be their normal selves: they must visibly move out of the order of things and become altogether different persons' (Bucher, 1980, p. 97).

Possession of a 'host' (human or text) implies spiritual displacement, a cultural process that in new contexts generates new meanings due to 'possession's' impulse towards the metaphorical and the fantastic. These inherent aspects of spirit-possession interrogate single or unitary ways of seeing which problematizes re-presentation of an empirically 'real' world and renders its narratives open, preferring to remain perpetually dissatisfied with stabilized meanings attached to resistance. Spirit-possession can also be used as an ideology of authority and control, as in the colonizer 'possessing' both the human and material resources of the colony or as in nationalism attempting to 'limit' the potential meanings of the language of resistance. Both colonialism and nationalism 'dis-possessed' Africans, sometimes successfully, of the knowledge to exhaust the meanings of resistance in the processes of change, a situation akin to what Carolyn Cooper (1991) writing of the relationship between slaves and their masters in the Caribbean, calls 'zombification or spirit thievery' (p. 70).

Ancestral voices in *Bones*

Bones (1988) by Chenjerai Hove recognises the ideological fractures of the nationalist narrative. The use of spirit-possession ensures that the novel remains open-ended. This makes it possible for the author to include other narratives of

resistance whose relationship to the 'official' narrative of nationalism (realism) ironically entails, in the words of Laurice Taitz, 'both an act of construction and deconstruction' (Taitz, 1996, p. 106). Chenjerai Hove is aware of the multiple ways in which resistance is articulated in national literature. In the article, '*Children of Memory: Reflections on the Southern African Novel*' (1998), Hove suggests that the novel can embody collective memories of pain, suffering and longing for freedom, all of which not only have the potential to challenge dominant narratives but also aspire to become dominant narratives in themselves.

Bones is about retrieving a collective communal memory of the struggle for independence in Zimbabwe. But as depicted in the novel, this very process of 'remembering' and reconstructing collective identity threatens to impose on the reader's mind a new form of national amnesia because the novel's 'official' project is in conflict with what it reveals. The ironical tone and self-reflexivity of the narrative is also aimed at a partial revision of the 'official' account of collective memories. This attempt to reveal the contradictory unity within national memories is an acknowledgement of the fact that within the post-colonial space depicted in the novel there is no single memory, but several counter-memories constantly struggling to constitute themselves as the principal narrative authority with the power to assign meanings. *Bones*, therefore, addresses the issue of how the discourses of the collective and individual memories of resistance confirm and interrogate each other in the process of constructing a post-colonial idiom of resistance.

The specific challenge that the novel confronts in its construction of a post-colonial idiom of resistance is further complicated if we apply David Palumbo-Liu's (1996, pp. 211–12) observation that for post-colonial texts

to make a space for themselves, to carve out an area for revision, they must first dis-place history, and yet such destabilization of the dominant history necessitates a preliminary critique of any history's epistemological claims. Any counter history, furthermore, must legitimate itself by laying claim to a firmer epistemology than that claimed by dominant history. The question then becomes how can one deconstruct the dominant history on the basis of its ideologically suspect nature, and not admit that one's revision is also overdetermined? [For] . . . to offer a counter-history within literary narrative, then one must still subvert history via a discourse that is equally, if not more, stable (Palumbo-Liu, 1996, pp. 211–12).

Although in *Bones* Hove attempts to dispense with linear time scale, he reconstructs its four successive historical periods beginning with the pre-colonial, the colonial and liberation struggle and finally the post-independence phase. He evokes the authority of the voices of the ancestral spirits in order to reconstruct the binding myth of a collective history and an organic unity among Africans as well as between them and the land in the pre-colonial period. In the novel, ancestors guarantee the fertility of the land and control rain to ensure the cultural continuity of the communal consciousness. Those 'living' among the Shona are depicted

in the novel as a natural extension of the ancestors. The living hold the land in trusteeship and can only inherit it to pass it on to their children thus signifying the continuation of Shona/African world-view.

As the communal voice of the ancestral spirit says in the novel: 'We did not inherit this land for ourselves but for the children whom we have inside us' (p. 48). The portrayal of the relationship between the ancestors and the living in terms of a cyclical family is meant to be an allegory of the cultural roots of a new Zimbabwe nation in 1980. Hove in this case partially succeeds in refuting colonialist claims that Africans do not have a proud history to talk about. In the novel, the voices of the ancestral spirits operate in a way that offers a subversive revision of the colonialist version of African history.

What also motivates Hove to use the spiritual voices of ancestors in order to recreate the Shona past in collective terms, is that the adoption of such a device naturalizes the ideological imperatives of a nationalist discourse of resistance to colonialism. The voices of the ancestors enable the writer to depict the pre-colonial African consciousness as uniform (p. 51). This then helps the author to forge a viable myth that legitimises not only the nationalist struggle but also the black government that assumes power at independence in 1980. What underlies these voices is also the desire to recover and preserve what is perceived as a pure or authentic concept of 'culture-nation' that seemed to have been trampled into oblivion by colonialism. The significance of the ancestral voices lies in that they 'think' and 'know' themselves to be the repository of the communal memory and truth. By harnessing the cultural symbols associated with the guardian spirits of the nation (*mhondoro*), the ancestral voices provide the moral authority to validate and legitimize the anti-colonial resistance of the Second Chimurenga carried out by Marita's son in the 1970s. The 'modernisation' of the ancestral voices is realized through their capacity to reinvent themselves in the colonial period and be recalled in order to contain, facilitate and express nationalist thought during the struggle for independence.

The voice of Nehanda actually insists that African 'people' possess a single subjectivity that Chenjerai Hove as author can access and portray in an unambiguous position that is opposed to the assumed single subjectivity of colonialism. This is clear when the voices of ancestors call upon cattle, locusts and the 'bones' of human beings to rise and fight the colonial system.

Arise all the bones of the land. Arise all the bones of dying cattle. Arise all the bones of the locusts. Wield the power of many bones scattered across the land and fight so that the land of ancestors is not defiled by strange feet and strange hands . . . (p. 51).

This political appeal urges Africans to take up arms and fight the 'strangers' who are depicted as the white people. The ancestral voices acknowledge that white people have 'forcibly' possessed the land and that this possession of land by strangers fractures the cultural well being of the African people. The cultural symbolism

of the ancestors' voices functions politically in a similar way to that provided by the moral economy of the fantastic to retrieve the unseen, the unconscious and more often the repressed elements of culture, re-vitalizing them for purposes of resisting oppressive social systems.

The erection of a binding myth of national oneness is not sustained up to the end of the novel. Hove interrogates his own construction of post-colonial discourse of resistance by showing how it has simultaneously shaped and constrained him. He does this by revising within *Bones*, the image of the national myth of collective interests embodied in the ancestral voices. Besides the exploration of the ancestral space, Hove also portrays the cultural and political spaces occupied by and within which Africans articulate themselves, as characterized by a plurality of centres, each with its own logic and yet tied to the colonial narrative in contradictory ways. All the African men on Manyepo's so-called white land are depicted as sell-outs who protect the exploitative interests and values of the white farmer, Manyepo. The African men use proverbs to justify their own impotence in the face of Manyepo. For Chisaga – the white farmer's cook – Manyepo is not bad. It is the African people who Chisaga thinks must adjust to and be accommodated as labourers at the white man's farm. He urges other Africans not to speak out against Manyepo. For Chisaga, '[n]othing beats a closed mouth, nothing' (p. 33). This gospel of a 'closed' mouth is one of humility in the face of the formidable colonial institution. In Chisaga's character, we see an African man bereft of any noble ideals to live by who then resorts to inept proverbs to *resist* change but at the same time justify the colonial status quo.

On the other hand, Marume who is Marita's husband senses his powerlessness in front of Marita and Manyepo and he too justifies his powerless position at the farm by saying that Africans are like chief's sons in a strange land (p. 28). Marume implies that Africans ought to acknowledge alienation as naturally god-given and should therefore humble themselves before white authority, accepting without question their ascribed position of inferiority. The use of proverbs by Chisaga and Marume reveal dissociated aspirations or selective recall of culture. The appropriation of the minds of Chisaga and Marume by colonialism constitutes a 'takeover' of their souls a situation that then renders spirit-possession to be 'read' as a metaphor for cultural imperialism. This is so because the link between the 'spirit' (colonialism) and the 'host' (African men) is and cannot be mutually beneficial because Chisaga and Marume are, in the words of Carolyn Cooper transformed into 'duppies, zombies, living deads capable only of receiving orders from someone else and carrying them out' (Cooper, 1992, p. 70).

With singular economy, Hove shows that Africans appropriate proverbs which are part of their oral tradition not for the purposes of advancing their struggle against the system but as a way of accepting and justifying their domination by the colonial system. Hove deconstructs the notion that links African oral literature to an authentic, ontological African being. The writer refutes, in the words of Paul Gilroy, 'the idea that an untouched, pristine Africanity resides inside these forms,

working a powerful magic of alterity in order to trigger repeatedly, the perception of absolute identity' (Gilroy, 1993, p. 101). It therefore seems that Flora Veit-Wild somewhat misses the point when she claims that *Bones* 'encloses' the reader because the novel, '... imposes a set of concepts and images which seem fixed and closed,' and that its '... language re-creates a world of sayings and proverbs and registers a sense of oneness with the land and with tradition' (Veit-Wild, 1993, p. 17). The African men's collaborative role with the colonial dispensation suggests that there is no simple 'one-ness' between the African people, the oral tradition and the land in the novel.

Female narratives of resistance in *Bones*

In *Bones*, the nationalist narrative of resistance is thus fractured from within in the sense that the African men in the novel use proverbs to justify their passivity to the colonial system. One reason why Hove creates memorable caricatures of African males bereft of any noble ideals to live by is to create space for his female characters. The post-independence cultural space that the female characters occupy is not made up of one coherent 'public space', nor is it determined by a single organizing principle. Instead, that post-colonial public space is

rather a plurality of 'spheres' and arenas, each having its own separate logic yet nonetheless liable to be entangled with other logics when operating in certain specific contexts: hence the postcolonial 'subject' has had to learn to continuously bargain [marchander]and improvise. Faced with this... the postcolonial 'subject' mobilizes not just a single 'identity', but several fluid identities which, by their very nature, must be constantly 'revised' in order to achieve maximum instrumentality and efficacy as and when required (Mbembe quoted by Werbner, 1996, p. 1).

The relationship of the African women's counter-memories to the nationalist narrative of resistance is contradictory. The spiritual voices of Marita and the Unknown Woman extends and redefines resistance in terms of how black women 'remember' and reconstruct their own resistance narratives from their encounter with the black nationalist government. In the process of recovering their voices through narrativizing their memories, black women also deconstruct the male constructed narrative of resistance and national one-ness. Where the spiritual voices of the ancestors project the image of African counter-memories as homogeneous, Janifa, who in the novel is turned into the spirit medium for the other women, interrogates this construction. She shows that in the process of revealing themselves, women's counter-memories direct their attention to the heterogeneous systems that inhabit the formation of several forms of identity. Janifa elevates Marita's personal memories of pain and suffering to the status of the historical and reinscribes them as a revision of an official history. Pitted against the depiction of the pre-colonial Shona past in organicist terms as a single and coherent cultural entity, Marita's memories recall the time when she was persecuted by her own patriarchal society for not having children (p. 14).

In post-independence Zimbabwe Marita is tortured to death by the same black government officials who called her 'mother' (p. 21) during the liberation struggle. Her perceived crime is seeking the whereabouts of her guerrilla son. In order to underline further the significance of the betrayal of the expectations of the masses for total independence, the voices of ancestors reappear in chapter fourteen refusing to forget those who died in the struggle and who are not accounted for by the authorities. The ancestral voices bemoan the fact that those who are dead have not even been accorded decent burial (p. 103). The voices question the wisdom of the new black officials in incarcerating those of the masses who dare to remember the bitterness of the war. The construction of the language of national resistance through the figurative trope of spirit-possession reflects a paradoxical reality, that of the unifying potential of nationalism but also the negative desire by nationalism to limit the meanings that can be potentially attached to resistance during the post independence era. Nationalist resistance during the liberation struggle as depicted in *Bones* started as a contestive counter history. However, in the period after the war it is manipulated by the new officials to become the dominant *national* narrative that legitimizes their rule while suppressing other forms of communal memory.

Chenjerai Hove's success in his depiction of Janifa's reconstruction of Marita's memories of struggle against both the colonial system (Manyepo) and African male authority (Marume) is to dismantle a particular post-colonial thinking, a writing about and an understanding of resistance that projects nationalism as the role of active men with women merely playing a supportive role. In Hove's symbolic representation of Marita's 're-remembered' memories, what is depicted as distinctively national are the women's alternative and different perceptions of the struggle. What African women 'remember' and reconstruct through spiritual possession is significantly different from what African men recall. These conflicting remembered narratives of nationalism show how African women interrogate the processes by which the biological identity of femaleness or maleness are conscripted to represent certain imagined and yet naturalized processes of arrogating social roles that reflect the differing social positions of African men and women in a colonial context. This deconstruction of both nationalist resistance and the language used to describe, justify and legitimize it are crucial from the point of view of African women's counter-memory, because the '[m]anichean allegories of colonialist representation portrayed the colonized as the other, as deviant, passive and disorder – as 'female' – it followed that national leaders on achieving power . . . arrogate dominance, autonomy, 'maleness', to themselves (Boehmer, 1992, p. 243).

Although Janifa associates memories of Marita with proverbs that carry a resistance metaphor, there are aspects of these memories as represented by Janifa that are still 'possessed' by the colonizer. For example, Marita's opposition to Manyepo and the colonial culture he represents is vitiated by her desire to protect him from the wrath of the freedom fighters. This is the same Marita who defies Marume and derisively dismisses Chiriseri, the 'baasboy' as the white man's loincloth (p. 19) or swab. According to Janifa, Marita was sometimes fiery but always a 'gentle fire

which burns all the time' (p. 45). As suggested above, Marita's consciousness of her role in both the liberation struggle and after it, is uneven. It seems that these obvious 'incoherences' in Marita's counter-memory of defiance is Hove's way of denying this narrative the status of an already finished, predictable and stable narrative of resistance. Hove refuses to seal off Marita's narrative with the closure that would reconcile its internal contradictions.

Chenjerai Hove may thus be credited for revealing in *Bones* that even those poor and marginalised African women who find themselves in a serious crisis of identity can still protest against their own predicament (Chennells, 1993, p. 128). Further to that, Hove seems also to emphasize Marita's role as Mother, a biological identity that tends to complicate her role as resister against Manyepo and the African patriarchy on the so-called white land. Marita's political situation is akin to that of a number of African rural women who testified to Irene Staunton in *Mothers of the Revolution* (1990), that black women doubled as mothers (expected to bear and bring up children) and as militants or couriers on the front during the war.

The ambiguities implied in Marita and the Unknown Woman's narratives of defiance are further amplified and refracted through the 'hysteric' character of Janifa. As the spirit medium of the other two older dead women, Janifa reincarnates their pain, suffering and longing for total freedom. Janifa's possession by the spirit of Marita and the Unknown Woman enables her to reconstruct their stories which the new black state machinery would like to suppress: 'They will talk of evil spirits and bad days in their lives, but nobody will mention the spirit of the woman who wanted to bury a woman they did not know' (p. 104). What the official narrative of resistance insists on deliberately eliding, repressing and silencing, Janifa hopes to recover, thus revealing the novel's ironical insistence on the impossibility of forgetting the war and its aftermath.

Through the recollection of her rape by Chisaga, Janifa assures the reader that the very act of recreating and reconstructing memories of African women constitutes the staging of an oppositional voice: 'We will remove the chains soon . . . But I will take the broken chains with my own hands and say . . . Do not worry your-selves, I have already removed them by myself' (p. 112). By situating her struggles in the past, present and the future, Janifa implies that the very process of reconstructing the spiritual voices of the women disrupts the authoritarian and male-centred nationalist narrative. The immediate effect on the male-centred nationalist narrative of resistance is to deny it the absolute authority of an uncontested order.

Even though Janifa extends the women-centred counter-narrative of protest initiated by Marita and the Unknown Woman, Janifa's life also shows the instability of her narrative. She remembers that her own mother sold her to Chisaga for material gain: 'But to sell me to Chisaga or the herbalist like a goat is to . . . cure wounds in the mouth with hot pepper' (p. 99). Not only has Janifa's mother 'sold' her to Chisaga, but she protects Chisaga from being persecuted by the colonial law, however skewed it is. What is implied in Janifa's accusation against her mother is

that some African women have also been co-opted to collaborate with the exploitative patriarchal values operating within the colonial context. Janifa's mother and the herbalist think that the 'evil spirit' possesses Janifa. (p. 96). What the mother, the herbalist and by extension, the officials cannot control, or censor, they demonize as that which ought to be removed from public scrutiny. That Janifa is linked to potential possession by either the good or evil spirits in the novel problematizes the kind of resistance she represents. Caroline Rooney (1995, p. 126) suggests that Janifa is 'something that does not *achieve symbolization*, (my emphasis) and so is enigmatically and unconsciously transmitted without exorcism or catharsis'. This argument presumes that Hove intends to reconcile the internal contradictions in Janifa's resistance narrative and lends that narrative the status of a stabilized counter memory. Contrary to this, is the fact that Janifa's desire to 'postpone the fight for another day' (p. 100), suggests that she too is aware of the temporariness of the values and meanings that underpin her own narrative of resistance.

Spirit-possession in *Nehanda*

In contrast to Hove's flexible use of spirit-possession to construct post-colonial resistance in *Bones*, Yvonne Vera in *Nehanda* advocates a return-to-roots narrative that takes the pre-colonial Shona society and the first Chimurenga as its imaginative canvas. In *Nehanda*, Vera uses the spirit-possession of Nehanda in order to re-map colonial and post-colonial space by tracing the discourse of resistance to British colonialism and Shona patriarchy. Memories are crucial to the inscription of the female identity of the self onto the emerging consciousness of nationhood because not to remember is to accede to the erasure or distortion of collective experience, to repress memory is to reenact and perpetuate oppression (Couser, 1996, p. 107).

Furthermore, the ideological imperative for women to create their own texts in which they reconstruct their own counter-memories arises from the realization that

[t]o write is to claim a text of one's one; textuality is an instrument of territorial repossession; because the other confers on us an identity that alienates us from ourselves, narrative is crucial to the discovery of our selfhood. The text is the mirror in which the [female] subject will see itself reflected (Gikandi, 1992, p. 384).

The use of spirit-possession to recall and reconstruct an idyllic pre-colonial Shona past through organic imagery, enables Vera to artistically effect a reversal of the racist terms which have been used in such colonialist narratives as *Heart of Darkness*, to project Africa as barbaric. The voice of Mother with reference to the pre-colonial Shona past expresses the nostalgic view that '[t]he valley was spacious and surrounded by mountains covered with lush grass. From the mountains, rivulets flowed filling a small lake in the fertile valley in which fishes of various kinds swam' (p. 60).

In this 'fertile valley', there is a deliberate blurring of the boundaries between 'reality' as sensuously experienced on earth and 'reality' as lived and felt in the spiritual world. In the unified cosmology of the pre-colonial Shona past that the novel portrays the spirit-world offers a continuous extension of human responsibility beyond the world of tangible things. As Nehanda's mother says: 'The dead are not gone. The dead are among us, guiding us to clearings in the future where we shall all triumph' (p. 53). By insisting on the continued relevance of African ancestors because of their perceived role in 'protecting' and 'guiding' Africans, the novel projects the post-independence nation as consisting of the 'departed and the living' (Mangwanda, 1998, p. 83).

The spiritual world of ancestors is imaginatively reproduced and depicted as a storehouse of a distinct, immutable and authentic identity retrievable from the realm of cultural consciousness. This impulse to retrieve a pristine and unsullied spiritual essence of the African is based on the assumption of a unified reality within what is deemed 'authentic'. The reality of pre-colonial Shona society was that there were differentiation of social roles between women and men as well as within the social roles of women themselves. Elizabeth Schmidt in *Peasants, Traders and Wives: Shona Women in the History of Zimbabwe, 1870-1939* (1992) suggests that pre-colonial Shona women were not necessarily subordinate by showing that female diviners, healers, midwives, headwomen spirit mediums and some older women possessed some authority with which they could challenge male elites. Privileged Shona women enjoyed relatively better status than poor Shona women who had been taken as prisoners of war, pawns, or hostages. Pre-colonial Shona women did not define resistance in a singular way and fight as a monolithic social force. Poor women could defy their husbands by running away to their parents or eloping with other men. The same poor women could lampoon errant mothers-in-law in such songs as

My mother-in-law holds a grudge against me, Marianga I thought I brought good firewood and she said they are twigs. I went to fetch clear and clean water and she said it was murky and unclean. I cooked sadza and she said it is underdone. I ground corn and she said the product was poor. I wanted to be cheerful and she said I was a flirt. I wanted to rest after work and she said I was lazy. I wanted to travel and she said I was an enemy (Kahari, 1981, p. 81).

This complexity of multiple voices with which pre-colonial Shona women fought back at their exploiters is however, glossed over in *Nehanda*, whereby the possession of Nehanda is used to retrieve a stable and homogeneous life of the Shona women.

Spirit-possession as counter-memory is also encoded in dreams and re-activated through the folktale mode in the novel. Dreams perform the function of being the oral culture's mnemonic system. Mother's dream of the birth of Nehanda and the trader woman's dream of the conquest of Zimbabwe become the sites of African people's struggle to recover a counter memory that colonialism had ruptured.

In Mother's dream, only ancestors are able to will and sanction the birth of Nehanda: 'The departed had come to deliver a gift to the living, to shape the birth of voices, to grant the safe passage of the unborn' (p. 3). The ancestors also confer on Nehanda the power to name reality and create a new cultural consciousness of nationhood. The 'birth of voices' represents the community of women who are present at Nehanda's birth. These women have been chosen by the ancestors and have already met Nehanda in a dream so that the process of evolving a national consciousness becomes a community undertaking.

The novel gives a sense of the birth of a new nation at which historic occasion women are active presences. But the paradox of using dreams as mnemonic devices within *Nehanda* is that while dreams simultaneously affirm the need for a collective identity, they also problematize the form of that identity especially in the context of the threat from colonial agents. Even in real life, the dream world also reveals its own internal dislocations. The metaphysical dimension of dreams is that they open new spaces of meaning in man's quest for a fulfilling existence. The fantastic dimension of Mother's dream is that it rejects closure of African resistance and shows instead, the possibility of another uprising because it has reconstituted women as a coherent group. The trader woman's dream suggests the potential destruction of that organic way of life by the divisive forces of colonialism since it underlines the fragility of the Shona people. As the trader woman says, her dream is a spiritual journey that frames the political context of the confrontation between Africans and the colonial system

'Only to tell a tale. We were indeed surprised by what we saw . . . You met the symbol of death on your journey's path? . . . We saw a sign, but the sign had decided to live among us.' Was it a sign? . . . Tell us what you witnessed.' The women reached toward the story-teller and shook her shoulders with impatience as though to wake her . . . The sign was in the form of a human being. A stranger, but a human nevertheless.' (p. 10).

Unlike in colonial narratives in which the journey motif is meant to extend imperial frontiers for the control of other people's resources, the trader woman's dream reinscribes dream as a journey of communal rediscovery. The dream itself becomes a counter narrative that deconstructs imperialist claims that colonialism had come to civilize Africans by introducing what Mr Browning in the novel calls 'order, culture and . . . justice' (p. 55). In the trader woman's dream, it is the Africans who travel and their journey is not one motivated by the imperial desire to interrogate, interpret and dominate other people. It is a dream journey underscoring women's potential to control and author a cultural text in which they name reality in the processes of constituting their own everchanging social identities. There is thus, in the trader woman's dream a reversal of roles, for as Khombe Mangwanda observes 'it is the native rather than the Western traveller and so-called explorer who tries and interprets the unreadable 'text' of the other. Interestingly . . . the native[assumes] . . . the role of the Self and the stranger becoming the 'Other' (Mangwanda, 2000, p. 5).

Apart from exploring the role of dreams, Vera portrays the desire by African women to escape the colonial prison-house through Vatete's tale of the abducted girl. Vatete's tale is about a young girl who was abducted by strangers and 'walked' away towards a faraway land. The girl freed herself from her captors by way of singing a song, 'taught to her by her mother which put the men to sleep' (p. 15). When the captors are asleep the girl makes her way out of captivity by chewing off the skin of the bag to freedom. This folktale of captivity and struggle for independence is reminiscent of the *Jikinya* legend of the Shona oral tradition. Yvonne Vera has however shifted the emphasis of the meaning and context of her story so as to enable her novel to acquire the identity of a narrative of nationalist resistance. The strangers in the story are the British colonisers and the young girl is Zimbabwe in captivity.

In the story by Vatete, the girl uses a song and she draws her inspiration for resistance from the African people's internal spiritual and subterranean resources to contest the domination of her life by her captors. What is implied in the 'girl tale' is that Africans such as Kaguvi in the novel have to stand up and fight the colonial system. By capturing the opposition between the African people and colonialism through the folktale mode, Yvonne Vera lends an allegorical quality to the narrative of African resistance. Attesting to the power of tradition does not however allow orality unquestioned authority for in that very folktale of captivity and struggle for independence, Vera simultaneously interrogates the colonial and Shona patriarchal systems.

In the novel, not only is Kaguvi a man, subordinate to the spiritual powers of Nehanda but he also derives his 'limited' war-like powers from the 'people, who are the only ones with the powers to grant him authority over their future' (p. 71). What is implied here is a reversal of political roles in which women take on a new positive initiative of fighting both the colonial system and Shona patriarchy. The new role of fighters that women assume in *Nehanda* deconstructs the images of African women in male-centred African nationalist discourse that depict women merely as victims or biological mothers. With regards to the position of the African woman in nationalist representations, Boehmer comments that the mother-figure is made to stand for the national territory and for national values so that 'symbolically she is ranged above men; in reality she is kept below them' (1992, p. 233).

The portrayal of Nehanda reveals the author's desire to elevate the image of African women as different from the stereotypical image of the African woman as generally depicted by most conventional African male/female writers. Although the placement of Nehanda in a timeless confrontation with white invaders is intended to project her heroism, however, it tends to ignore the fluid and often, ambiguous identities of African resisters during the first Chimurenga. Apart from engaging in military resistance in 1896-97, African women employed new forms of resistance to challenge colonialism's expropriation of their land. These included the illicit selling of African beer in order to pay tax and ward off the possibility of complete absorption into the capitalist dispensation as wage labourers. Through the

'peasant option' (Ranger, 1985) Africans grew food crops to supply emerging capitalist markets. These numerous economic activities empowered African women until the 1930s when there was wholesale seizure of productive African land.

Ironically, though, through the peasant option rural women subsidized the very capitalist system that sought to undermine African economic independence (Schmidt, 1992, p. 71). So, in a way, *Nehanda* simplifies the modes of African resistance because the novel relies on what Ira Berlin (1998), commenting on the first two centuries of slavery in North America, calls the 'binary opposites [which] fit nicely the formulation of history as written, but . . . do little to capture the messy, inchoate realities of history as lived.' (p. 5). By presenting African women's resistance as stable and ignoring its own inherent contradictions Vera shows that she has fallen into the trap of what Appiah (1992, p. 60) terms, 'artefact of Western modernity' which ironically reproduces the modes of thinking inherent in colonial discourse whose essence is its 'dependence on the concept of 'fixity in the ideological construction of 'otherness'. Fixity as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition' (bhabha, 1996, p. 37).

Consequently, through the mode of imagining post-colonial resistance to oppression, *Nehanda* is still entrapped in the position of counter-identity. This is an ideological position that remains interlocked with and at the same time feeding on the very dominant values that it resists. This paradox denies the narrative the opportunity to revise the history that it seeks to question while at the same time failing itself to step outside those very principles of nationalist ideology that it interrogates.

Vera therefore, refuses to complete the interrogation of the nationalist narratives of resistance that she constructs despite the fact that spirit-possession is meant to reorganize historical fact in a way that drastically revises our notions of the real. Nonetheless, in an interview with *Moto magazine* (1994), Vera claims she resorts to the use of myth because the latter constantly subverts stable notions of history and identity; 'myth kind of challenges history . . . It is forceful and liberating to use myth, which is nevertheless, history' (Vera, 1994, p. 20). Meg Samuelson (2000) echoes the same sentiments when she states that in *Nehanda*, Vera engages with the 'question of how to write orally [since the novel] . . . is riddled with contradictions as . . . [it] . . . scorns the conditions of its own existence.' The novel confirms this oppositional act to the protocols of realist representation by its focusing on the conflicting interface of orality and literacy. As the voice of the narrator says,

[o]ur people know the power of words. It is because of this that they desire to have words continuously spoken and kept alive. We do not believe that words can become independent of the speech that bore them, of the humans who controlled and gave birth to them. Can words exchanged today on this clearing surrounded by waving grass become like a child left to be brought up by strangers? Words surrendered to the stranger, like the abandoned child, will become alien - a

stranger to our tongues. The paper is the stranger's own peculiar custom, a trick he employs against time. Among ourselves, speech is not like rock. Words are as malleable as the minds of the people who create them. (pp. 39–40).

From the passage above Vera suggests that the permanent form of the written word affirms the novel as authoritarian. It is only through incorporating dreams and the folktale mode within the novel's narrative structure, that Vera stages a literary resistance of the '... spoken word which is alive, flexible and humane ... against the fixed rock-like inhumanity of the printed word in the form of a treaty, in the two cultures' (Jones, 1996, p. 51). Nevertheless, this statement from Jones ironically implies a desire to reclaim a racial essence in the way Africans use orality. What is implied in *Nehanda* and in Jones' remark is that orality is 'superior', natural and inherently African, while the written mode is considered as distinctively 'inferior' and totally European. This mode of thinking is clearly 'reverse discourse' and is prompted by the desire to search for a pure, authentic and unmediated literary medium. But as Julien convincingly argues

[t]he dominance of oral language in Africa is obviously a matter of material conditions and not of an 'African nature', but more than a few literary critics take this accidental fact for an essential one and assume almost invariably that there is something ontologically oral about Africa and that the act of writing is therefore disjunctive and alien for Africans ... (Julien, 1992, p. 8).

One could in fact argue further that there are qualities in the 'oral' which are absent in the written literature. For example in lived encounters, the oralness of oral literature is determined by how it comes out of the processes of composition-in-performance and transmitted by word of mouth to a readily available audience in specific social contexts. According to Ruth Finnegan (1977) the oral elements of tone, context, participation of an audience and the use of gestures, (extra-linguistic features) all help to distinguish 'oral' art from the written one. In this sense, there are some elements of orality that can never be included in the written one.

Orature therefore, ensures that the voice of the women in *Nehanda* potentially receive full authorization. In its lived contexts, orature is not trapped on paper and thus rendered cold and unlively. During an interview of two African women, Rossina Mdhuli Tshuma and Fumbathani Tshuma in 1996 Vera was told that for women to carve wood or stone, represented a transgression that 'broke with African tradition which recognises man as carvers' (Vera, 2000, p. 11). Through carving, women appropriate the African male-centred cultural resources in the same way that in *Nehanda* Vera has appropriated spirit-possession through which she constructs and represents female narratives of resistance to colonialism and African patriarchy.

The paradox then of Vera's creative imagination in *Nehanda* is that she has simultaneously to represent and repress the orality implied in spirit-possession through the written mode. This forces the author to acknowledge unconsciously

the authority of the written mode that she seeks to displace. And yet it seems that the incorporation of orality in the novel validates the new existence of that form in a written mode. The existence of orality within the narrative destabilizes as well as expands our notions of 'literary borders and centres' as well as our understanding of the 'real'. It also ensures that a complete transference from one form (realism) to the other (spirit-possession as myth) never takes place and the novel remains suspended between the two. The ideological effect of the novel's literary suspension between realism and spirit-possession is to deny the validity of the claim of Shona women's unchanging identity that the novel promotes.

The novel's exploitation of the language of surrealism, myth, dream and the folktale mode as mnemonic aspects within spirit-possession imply that cultural syncretism is the irrefutable condition of post-colonial discourse of national resistance. As a strategy for recreating new meanings associated with the discourse of national resistance, cultural syncretism is desirable because it raises the question of African identity in the light of some positive influences from other cultures exterior to the Zimbabwean experience. Whether Zimbabweans like it or not and no matter how determined Yvonne Vera is at reclaiming the African past with the intention to uphold cultural purity, this cannot give automatic access to a national essence or soul, especially in the context of 'corrosion of tradition during colonial occupation.' (Boehmer, 1995, p. 202). Instead, cultural syncretism makes available new linguistic and ideological resources with which to signify new processes of constructing and representing new forms of orality and resistance. By attempting to 'police' the meaning of spirit-possession towards articulating resistance against colonialism and African patriarchy, Vera is oddly unaware that her desire to construct a viable female narrative of resistance necessitates a preliminary critique of the ideological claims of that same female narrative that she promotes.

Conclusion

We have established that in *Bones*, Chenjerai Hove initially used ancestral voices to construct and present an image of African nationalism not only as the desirable cultural ideology of decolonisation but also as one that is internally cohesive. In the process of doing so, the relationship of the pre-colonial ancestors, the people, guerrillas as well as the ordinary people during the second struggle has been presented as cordial and without conflict. 'Political' strategies adopted by Africans as modes of resistance such as the peasant option and the self-empowering effects of projects such as selling of beer to pay tax and ward off complete incorporation into the capitalist system as wage labourers, have not been considered in the novel.

However, the complexity of *Bones* lies in the fact that Hove has also begun to interrogate his own construction of nationalism. Through the counter-memories of Marita and the Unknown women that are remembered by Janifa, Chenjerai Hove paradoxically shows that the post-colonial resistance originates from and is sustained by recognition of a plurality of cultural centres. Women's narratives in *Bones* remain open-ended and incomplete since they affirm continuously the

need to interrogate collective national memories as they are represented through spirit-possession. Hove's success is also to deconstruct this female narrative of post-colonial resistance by registering Janifa's own memories that reveal how her own mother participated in her rape by Chisaga. What is implied in the 'hysteric' narrative of resistance by Janifa is that post-colonial narratives of resistance are internally unstable.

The ideological effect of the use of spirit-possession in *Bones* is that the text is a site of the repossession of an African history that cannot be reduced to a single identity or mode of resistance. The aspect of the fantastic inherent in spirit-possession ensures that the novel perpetually interrogates its own constructions of post-colonial resistance. The novel, according to Caroline Rooney, 'opposes a history of succession, son succeeding father, being his linear, historical substitute. It does this in its very textuality. Its structural movement is that of a spiral, ever going towards and returning away from its beginnings and endings, in defiance of a [stabilized story or history]' (Rooney, 1995, p. 128).

In contrast to Hove's exploration of the paradox of post-colonial resistance, Yvonne Vera in *Nehanda* presents a picture of a unified Shona past that is only ruptured by the colonial presence. Spirit-possession, which is meant to expand the author's imaginative treatment of time and space ironically constrains her because Vera finally settles on an unproblematic collective identity of the African women. The novel's insistence on the pre-colonial Shona society's cultural homogeneity ignores the differentiations in the social roles and status of these women. *Nehanda's* attempt to retrieve an authentic African identity is to some extent, a failure. The cultural nationalist stance of the novel falls within the purview of nativism which as understood by Regina Bendix encourages cultural discourses to search for ethnic purity so that the 'quest for authenticity is a peculiar longing at once modern and anti-modern. It is oriented towards the recovery of an essence whose loss has been realized only through Modernity, and whose recovery is feasible only through methods and sentiments created in modernity' (Bendix, 1997, p. 8).

Ironically, if it were possible to preserve cultural authenticity, to represent it imaginatively necessarily undermines that endeavour. By using spirit-possession to impose a uniform response to colonialism in the country, the novel fails to show how some African women resisted the colonial system by remaining on the communal land producing food crops for their own consumption and also taking the advantage to sell their surplus produce on the new capitalist markets.

Yvonne Vera rightfully complains that post-independence male writing in Zimbabwe has chosen to recall a 'narrative that became patriarchal' (M. Samuelson, 2000, p. 4). However, the author reconstructs in *Nehanda*, an ethnic memory that privileges the discourse of cultural absolutism that refuses to differentiate the multiple ways in which African women define and engage in resistance against multiple social forces. In short, in *Nehanda*, (1993) Yvonne Vera reappropriates the cultural symbols of a validating male-dominated tradition of spirit-possession in order to weave into it women-centred meanings of independence and install

these at the heart of the new nation's cultural consciousness of selfhood. Unfortunately, through *Nehanda* the author fails to differentiate adequately and underline the multiple and possibly contradictory identities of black women within the post-colonial space they inhabit. This fact alone suggests or is symptomatic of the entrapment of the novel's discourse of resistance in the very nationalist ideology that it questions.



Chapter Seven

Allegory in post-colonial Zimbabwe

Post-colonial allegory and a fractured sensibility in a fissured form

The ways Marechera uses orality in *Black Sunlight* to construct a new idiom of post-colonial resistance in Zimbabwe is markedly different from the authors considered in the previous chapters. He uses allegory in order to resist ideologies of Zimbabwean cultural nationalism based on single notions of the 'African image.' The subversion of nationalist discourse of resistance in Zimbabwean literature that Marechera presents in *Black Sunlight* stems from the author's desire to generate narratives of post-colonial resistance that encourage literary open-endedness and incompleteness as a strategy to anticipate cultural change. This technique enables the author to construct an idiom of resistance that is aware of the temporariness of the values it underlies.

For Marechera, nationalist allegories insist on recalling what is perceived as the cohesive, stable and unitary experience of the masses and this causes the allegories to fail to reveal the conflict-ridden tensions within the narratives authored by the subalterns. Consequently, nationalist allegories run the risk of excluding what Slemon calls 'heterogeneity from the domain of utterance and [are] thus functionally incapable of even conceiving the possibility of discursive opposition or resistance' to themselves (Slemon, 1987, p. 11). In place of nationalist allegories that are informed by the telos of a linear narrative, Marechera proposes in *Black Sunlight* the use of 'post-colonial allegory' that, according to Stephen Slemon helps the reader to produce 'new ways of seeing history, new ways of 'reading' the world' (Slemon, 1988, p. 164).

Post-colonial allegories are conceived as ideological sites 'upon which post-colonial cultures seek to contest and subvert colonialist appropriation through the production of a literary and specifically anti-imperialist, figurative opposition or textual counter-discourse.' (Slemon, 1988, p. 11). They do not have anti-imperialism only as their single object of attack. James Ogude argues that within the post-colonial African countries, post-colonial allegories function as 'primary sites for testing the reconciliation of ethnicity and the nation, tradition and modernity,

betrayal and hope and indeed the possibility of rebirth . . . [Allegory] . . . stand[s] for the state of degradation on a post colony and in their striving gesture towards the possibility of redemption and the birth of a nation . . . (Ogude, 1999, p. 109).

Deborah Madsen (1994) distinguishes post-colonial metonymic allegory from the post-colonial metaphoric allegory. Metonymic allegories gesture towards symbolization. They favour stable narratives. Christian narratives, such as Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, plot history in binary movement from dark ages to enlightenment, poverty to plenty, from cursed lives to redemption. Metonymic allegories imply notions of 'unitary subject and a unitary end to history . . .' (Madsen, 1994, p. 125).

In contrast, post-colonial allegories of the metaphoric type, which Dambudzo Marechera favours in his novel, incorporate the cracks and crevices of representation and they insist on lack of closure to narratives. Metaphoric allegory works from within to fracture the 'romantic' expectation of harmony between nature and the human psyche. Allegories of the metaphoric type attempt to retrieve for the present moment, the multiplicity and frequently contradictory narratives of resistance that are opened by the materiality of the metaphor. In the metaphoric allegory, the sign is marked by arbitrary referentiality, meaning is multiple and the sign is 'liberated into polyvalence' (Madsen, 1994, p. 125).

For Jameson, within post-colonial allegory, 'the . . . spirit is profoundly discontinuous, a matter of breaks and heterogeneities, of the multiple polysemia of the dream rather than the homogeneous representation of the symbol' (Jameson, 1991, p. 90). Because metaphorical allegories embody fractures, fissures, jumps and contradictions, it is neither the ideological site where ordinary people retrieve their *authentic* identity nor the cultural space where these identities are simply and completely distorted by the oppressive social groups. Rather, metaphoric allegory describes and registers the dislocations within 'mastering discourses' and also reveals the ambiguities, uncertainties and semantic instability within discourses of resistance (Madsen, 1991, p. 14) authored by ordinary people. The above descriptions of allegory help to explain Marechera's use of allegory in *Black Sunlight*.

The historical context of Marechera's post-colonial metaphorical allegory

The historical context into which a work of art is written is useful in deciphering the meaning of allegory. When Dambudzo Marechera was writing *Black Sunlight* in 1980, he was fully aware of the internal limitations of the ideology of nationalism. He always feared that in Zimbabwe, the betrayal of the masses would be re-enacted as had previously happened in countries such as Kenya and Nigeria. In the eighties, Marechera shared with Wole Soyinka of Nigeria and Ngugi wa Thiong'o of Kenya the conviction that after the failure by the nationalist governments in Africa to make independence meaningful to the black people, nation, national consciousness and narration did not walk hand in hand in African literature. Acts of narration and cultural production by African writers could no

longer be predicated on a single point to which everyone assented. The challenge that faced individual African writers including Marechera was the need to question the very notion of a communal narrative of decolonisation that was based on assumed collective identities and aspirations.

Marechera consciously adopts the allegorical metaphor that he believes contains the capacity to oppose, subvert and undermine official culture from within. Marechera also finds the contradictory narratives of post-colonial resistance well represented in the allegorical novel whose 'worlds' according to him are 'complex, unstable, comic, satirical, fantastic, poetical and committed to the pursuit of truth' (Marechera, 1987, p. 101). These attributes that allegory encourages within the novel, all imply that national narratives of resistances are acts of social construction and as such, cannot claim to be relevant for all times. Narratives of resistance can be revised. This yields the possibility of authorizing alternative forms of resistance based on different emphasis of African people's experience under colonialism and after it. It is this awareness of the dynamism of people's actions embodied post-colonial allegories that Marechera brings out in *Black Sunlight*.

Allegory and the portrayal of the African past in *Black Sunlight*

Black Sunlight is a novel about many things: the rejection of an African past depicted as violent, the rejection of the arrogance growing within an opposition political party that is seeking to dislodge a violent post-colonial regime and the rejection of the representativeness within the protocols of classical realism. These forms of rejections are meant to be an affirmation of a deeper quest for enduring values that free the spirit of mankind from the shackles of past ideologies. The rejection of both a specific locality for setting and a linear formal narrative informed by a telos of a beginning, middle and end is signalled right from the first chapter of *Black Sunlight*.

The narrator appears, first hanging from a tree, in a chicken yard, his head touching chicken shit. His crime is having laughed at the old Chief's erection. From this 'vantage point upside down' (p. 7) the narrator is able to generate a vision from below, one that carnivalizes or satirizes the underside of the chief's authority. The chief is portrayed as sadistic, gluttonous and licentious. His throne is made up of 'human skulls' (p. 2) and he has a 'necklace made of human finger bones' (p. 6). The Chief's huge physical appetites, ignorance and cruelty anticipate the grotesque in the novel. The portrayal of the exaggerated greedy nature of the Chief is meant to mock and undress the Chief's authority. In his self-ignorance the chief is not aware of a 'world . . . closing in on him in the shape of white people, the first one of whom was Blanche Goodfather' (p. 6).

Marechera's mockery of the Chief is meant to undermine the very cultural authority generated by and invested in this traditional symbol that the chief epitomises. In the novel the Chief is only weakening his rule by brutalizing his own kind because colonialism will sweep him under. As in *Bound to Violence* (1971) by Yambo Ouleguem, where black people perpetrate acts of aggression against

other black people, Marechera's Chief exposes the futility of cultural nationalists' search for an authentic identity of black people in a past characterized and circumscribed by black on black violence. Christian, the narrator, who searches for his 'true people' while swinging upside down as the Chief's prisoner is meant to be satirical. What Christian finds are, 'caricatures of people who insisted on being taken seriously' (p. 4). The fact that he finds 'caricatures' instead of his 'true' people, implies that colonialism has severely dislocated the African psyche. By parodying the Chief's physical excesses, Marechera rejects cultural nationalism's claim to recall with total authority a harmonious and glorious African past.

Part of the discourse of 'otherness' favoured by cultural nationalists is revealed by Mbulelo Mzamane who criticizes Marechera for not including orality in his works: '[Marechera's] analogies owe very little to the African tradition, and this robs his work of a Zimbabwean authenticity. Indeed there is a sense in which Marechera could try to write within the 'African tradition . . .' (Mzamane, 1983, p. 213).

Mzamane is guilty of being too simplistic when he advocates for a single 'African tradition' when Africa has a plurality of both written and oral traditions that act as potential imaginative and cultural centres from which African writers can authorize the discourse of resistance. 'Zimbabwean authenticity' is not defined by either adhering to a single narrative of the nation or by simply inserting proverbs in a written text. There exists however, a distinct aspect of orality in *Black Sunlight* in the form of the cultural resource of allegory that acts as an interpretive grid. Marechera exploits allegory in the novel to enable him to question the notion of a single 'African image'.

In *Black Sunlight*, Marechera is very much operating from within the 'African traditions' of protest art. The criticism by cultural nationalists, that Marechera fails to work with orality, stems from a limited understanding of the cultural resources available within orality. The attempt to 'return to the past' in order to revive a 'convenient' image of 'African tradition' and 'Zimbabwean authenticity' implies a search for an idyllic and homogeneous African culture which would inevitably ignore the fact that African societies had their share of flaws and complexities that could not be represented by a single narrative privileging coherence against the realities of ruptures and discontinuities. Marechera suggests that there is no single way to talk and write about the Zimbabwean past. Nor is there only one way in post-independence Zimbabwe to mark, construct, theorize and write about the discourse of resistance in both a colonial and post-colonial society in Zimbabwe.

The very act of deconstructing the African image is in itself a subversive act of resistance to the homogenizing tendencies of Zimbabwean cultural nationalism and is explored in *Black Sunlight*. Because the discourses of cultural nationalism refuse to recognize these complexities and multiplicity of the African identity, they are implicated in reproducing the flip side of colonialist modes of thinking and writing about Africans. A 'new fascism' sanctioned by the 'African image' not only obscures the emerging contradictory alignments based on gender, class

and even ethnicity in the African societies. The same 'African image' is used by post-colonial African leaders to silence dissent.

What Marechera successfully subverts here is the cultural economy of nationalism's Manichean image of the African past as good with Europe as its evil Other. In that refusal to characterize the African past as coherent, positive and unified, the author undermines both the African cultural nationalism's discourse of resistance of the 1960s that emphasized stable narratives of identity as well as European anthropology whose imperial mode of functioning to name and control Africans depended on a stereotype that fixed African identity for all time in an unchanging past. In *Black Sunlight*, Blanche Goodfather seeks after the 'ideal human society . . . [and she ferrets out] . . . few bits and pieces of authentic people reducing them to meticulous combinations of the English alphabet' (p. 4). The paradox of that discourse of cultural nationalist resistance that purports to be built on unitary and stable definitions of the African reality is that it is itself, inherently unstable. It simultaneously implies a 'rejection' of colonial ideology's processes of othering and yet the same cultural nationalism attempts to assign racial essence to blackness and Africanness.

Marechera's ideological success here is that he manages to demonstrate that the colonial discourse of power that operates to name and mark Africans for purposes of controlling and exploiting them is not entirely possessed and controlled by the colonizer. Africans are themselves also implicated in reviving and sustaining colonialist modes of defining African reality as long as they single-handedly continue to promote the 'very political ideals which are to do with the authentication of the African image . . . (Marechera, 1992, p. 221). The major effect of such an uncritical cultural enterprise is to narrow the 'political' meanings of resistance that Africans can generate and authorize. Allegory in *Black Sunlight* then becomes the cultural mode best suited to recover the ideological instabilities and ambiguities of the narrative of European Enlightenment and its derivative discourse of cultural nationalist resistance.

Allegory and the paradox of urban guerrilla oppositional politics in *Black Sunlight*

In *Black Sunlight* the effect of reviving the 'African image' is to sanction political repression of alternative narratives of resistance. At the Devil's End there is a community of people who are the products of this 'memory of those centuries of nightmare' (p. 71). As Christian puts it, the enslavement of some Africans was made possible by the help given to slavers by some African chiefs:

Devil's End was also used as a collection point by the slave drivers . . . Floggings, impaling, body inspections, tortures of all kinds . . . All kinds of men found refuge here: robbers, heretics, pirates, criminals, hermits, lepers, swindlers, pariahs of all types. We are as it were the living memory of those centuries of nightmare. But then everybody must have roots. A sense of identity, continuity. Disease, war, persecution, rapine, these are our ancestors, you know (p. 71).

In the moral economy of the imagery of cultural nationalism, 'roots' and 'ancestors' suggest a genealogy traceable to a distinct, coherent African past. The irony here is that Christian suggests that what he has known is not the history and experience of security, warmth and care provided by roots and ancestors, but disease, war and persecution. Christian draws parallel links between the sadistic Chief and post-colonial African leaders when he asks: 'Was there a difference between the chief on his skull-carpentered throne and the general who even now had grappled all power to himself in our new and twentieth-century image?' (p. 13). Through this remark, the novel situates itself into the present of post-independence Africa and rejects the idea of perceiving the struggle of the African communities against the colonialism as constituting the only historical experience that Africans know.

If the cave in *On Trial for my Country*, is the abode of ancestors from which Gobinsimbi, who is Lobengula's spirit medium, emerges with a unified and collective narrative of resistance to Rhodes, in *Black Sunlight*, the cave at Devil's End serves to reveal the fractures in post independence discourse of oppositional resistances. Marechera evokes the cave motif as a cultural site so that he can more effectively mock and interrogate the notion of the 'African image' and also, in order to highlight the political instabilities of the urban guerrilla movement of resistance to authoritarian black rule in the period after independence. Devil's End in *Black Sunlight* (1980) does not operate as a cultural site for the retrieval of an unproblematic African essence. Instead, Marechera posits a counter discourse to the African image of authenticity and proceeds to interrogate the traditional construction of the ideological values through the portrayal of the urban guerrilla oppositional politics at Devil's End. To this extent the allegory of the cave in *Black Sunlight* is much closer in the meaning of what it reveals to the Devil's Lair in Ngugi Wa Thiongo's novel, *Devil of the Cross*. In Ngugi's novel the modern ogre or devil are the capitalists who compete with each other in giving testimonies as to how they cheat and exploit the masses. Like in *Black Sunlight* it is in the Devil's lair in *Devil on the Cross* where the war to redeem the land from local exploiters begins.

Black Sunlight recalls the urban guerrilla movement characterized by repression in order to reveal the contradictions within oppositional resistance in post-independence Zimbabwe. Repression in the novel is ironically the condition that makes possible the authorization of the discourse of resistance. The enemy that is fought by the urban guerrillas at Devil's End are visible through their agents: the army, the police, the churches and the educational institutions (p94). These are the vicious ideological state apparatuses that in the words of David Maughan-Brown 'guarantee, for the dominant class, the reproduction of the relations of production' (1985, p. 5).

The ruthlessness of the state agents however, encourages the possibility of open revolt or rebellion. Thus far, for Christian, the status of being in opposition to state terrorism is itself an unfinished form of identity that does not exhaust the subjective resources implied by the term resistance. The very fact that the

urban guerrillas at Devil's End are trained and committed (p. 72) means that their political choices are already subjected to and curtailed by an adherence to a particular political programmes or formats. The guerrilla leader at Devil's End also threatens to smash the movement by imposing new forms of authoritarian rule and order. Like the very state that the political movement is fighting against, the urban guerrilla movement develops structures that encourage conformity to a particular and narrow social ideology. As Christian is to learn from Chris, '[n]obody smokes tobacco here. You have to smoke what we smoke . . . If you smoke different that's undemocratic and upsetting. It smacks of individualistic opportunism' (p. 54).

In *Black Sunlight*, Chris's desire to suppress differences and individuality within the narrator is symbolic of the totalitarian tendencies growing within the movement. It is impatient, if not outright intolerant, of that which dares to be different. The lack of tolerance to alternative views within the political movement at Devil's End recalls to the reader, cultural nationalism's desire to suppress alternative narratives of national resistance that are authorized by different social groups within the nation. In *Black Sunlight*, Marechera therefore reveals that a discourse of national resistance that began at Devil's End as a counter history, aspires in turn, to become the dominant narrative with the potential to suppress alternative voices.

Dambudzo Marechera is on record as having linked the urban-guerrilla movement at Devil's End in *Black Sunlight* with the 'dissident menace' in the region of Matabeleland in Zimbabwe, 1982:

Black Sunlight was the first and only book to deal seriously with an intelligent opposition – what they (officials) now call 'dissidents'. That is why the Zimbabwean government banned it. They saw people like Susan, Katherine, Nicola, Chris as the prototypes of dissidents in Zimbabwe (Marechera in Veit-Wild, 1992, p. 220).

The fact that Marechera lends to his book an allegorical dimension may be useful in helping the reader to understand the civil strife that threatened to engulf the newly won independence of Zimbabwe. When the state sent the Sixth Brigade into Matabeleland following the tide of 'dissident' activities, the military operation resulted in the loss of life of many Shona and Ndebele men, children and women (Vambe, 2000, p. 78). Marechera's conscious desire to interpret this history through allegory suggests, in Stephen Slemon's words that:

[a]llegory . . . foregrounds the fact that history, like fiction requires an act of reading before it can have meaning. History must be *read*, and read in adjacency to, a fictional reenactment of it, and this relocation of the received shibboleth of history into the creative and transformative exercise of reading opens a space within which new ways of formulating the past can come into being (Slemon, 1987, p. 12).

Marechera does not, however, privilege the historical account of the events of the early 1980s in Zimbabwe as the incontestable narrative of resistance. The

'creative and transformative' power of allegory that Slemon recognises prevents any narrative from speaking with the certainty of a completed political agenda. In *Black Sunlight*, the urban guerrilla movement is denied both military and political success against the repressive state. For Christian, the political movement's commitment to an overt political programme is precisely its major fault:

No Black Sunlight Organization existed – publicly and even privately to the Special Branch and the security forces . . . Even the very name, BSO was a joke. Bakunin Shits Okay. Bleeding Sodds (cf. Orifices). Black Souls Organize. To atrophy ourselves with a BSO label was shit (p. 104).

For Christian, the tyranny imposed on the individual by fossilised values espoused by political dogma is that it threatens to 'snuff . . . out with types of religion, education, legislation, codes and in the last resort, jails and lunatic asylums . . . this tiny spark that will detonate all creation' (p. 66). The narrator and his double concur that political manifestoes spread, 'more snow and ice than before in the space within the human heart' (p. 66). Anthony Chennells commenting on the 'failure' of the rebellion at Devil's End, suggests that in *Black Sunlight*, 'revolution's probable failure is . . . anarchism's conviction that authority and privilege are necessarily despotic' (Chennells, 1999, p. 47). The fact that the rebellion by the urban-based guerrilla movement fails to achieve a certain political coherence is also in keeping with the author's desire to reduce the notion of opposition *ad absurdum* (Stein, 1999, p. 67).

Marechera admitted that while he was writing *Black Sunlight* he was also reading books on intellectual anarchism to reinforce his own sense of protest against everything. He advocates for some sort of intellectual anarchy that is 'full of contradictions in the sense that it can never achieve its goals' (Marechera in Wild, 1992, p. 31). The author envisages a political programme that perpetually anticipates change. Consequently, *Black Sunlight* refuses to emplot the BSO narrative of resistance as comedy, with a finished political agenda. Marechera constructs a narrative that endlessly desires to subvert its own authority. Meanings are no longer fixed and authority, whether as epitomized by the state machinery or the BSO political infrastructure, is constantly made to reflect on the conditions of its possibility.

It seems as though the ultimate 'political' act in *Black Sunlight* is the author's recognition of the multiplicity of meanings that allegory can engender. For Marechera, the metaphoric allegory makes it possible to bring to the fore the ambiguities and contradictions within dominant narratives and those of resistance narratives that allegory authorizes. Through metaphoric allegory, Marechera creates narratives of resistance that anticipate change, accommodate new contradictory realities and accept as 'natural', the transient nature of the values that those narratives of resistance underscore. This knowledge is as critical to an understanding of alternative political voices in the 'real' material world as it is for comprehending the instabilities inherent in the urban guerrilla movement at Devil's End. Marechera is

aware that to destabilize the dominant literary narrative as the guerrillas at Devil's End attempt to do necessitates a preliminary critique of their own counter-narrative. The relevance to Zimbabwean literature of Marechera's 'anarchism' is that the author refuses to hold on to any certainties and instead subverts the values of the discourse of resistance in nationalist literature that threatens to seal with closure the different potentials within the multiple national narratives of resistance. The liberation at potential of *Black Sunlight* is according to Mark Stern, in its ability to demonstrate, 'seizure of meaning – making machine to specific ends' (Stern, 1999, p. 66).

Marechera's mode of contributing to nation building in *Black Sunlight* is not to flatter it, so that it becomes complacent and oblivious to the many internal contradictions that define its processes of longing for national form. The author's sense of patriotism implies a paradoxical relation not only to the discourses of resistance that compete in constructing the ideas of nationness but to the nation itself: the idea that one has simultaneously to work *for* one's nation by working *against* it. Marechera was an 'outsider' to his 'own biography, and to his country's history . . .' (Marechera, 1987, p. 101) because he criticizes hallowed concepts of African cultural nationalism associated with the 'African image'. In the process he reveals how inadequate they have become in creating a viable discourse of resistance to Africa's internal and external oppressors. That very subversion of nationalist politics makes the author at once, a real insider and a patriot. Thus the importance of Marechera in African literature is that he is that kind of writer who interrogates the ideological assumptions surrounding the cultural discourses of nationalist resistance. Marechera enables the reader to comprehend the ambivalence at the heart of the discourses of cultural absolutism, an ambiguity that is propelled by a desire to contest the hegemony of colonial forces on one the hand, while paradoxically working in collusion with those forces on the other hand.

Allegory and resistance to narrativity in *Black Sunlight*

The complexity of *Black Sunlight* is further confirmed through the ways in which Marechera engages with and actually interrogates the medium of narrativity itself. For Marechera, there are no natural or organic meanings fixed in the texts for all times. What is 'real' and what is, not cannot to be taken as self-evident because 'reality' itself is constructed within social contexts that are negotiated through particular social discourses. Christian tells his double in a discussion on violence, that human beings are distinct from feral animals because man is defined by his conscious acts of either oppressing or resisting domination: 'Man defines man. Man defines nature. Man defines violence. And he himself is defined by his own definitions' (p. 67).

Christian then is suggesting that narratives, including Marechera's, are seemingly 'complete' but are constructed on the basis of a set of events that might have been included but are left out. Christian rejects the protocol of realist representation that purports to think and know itself as that which constitutes the 'real.' The

narrator is in fact satirizing the homogenizing tendencies that characterise classical realism when he states that 'To write as though only one kind of reality subsists in the world is to act out a mentally retarded mime, for a mentally deficient audience. If I am an illusion, then that is a delusion that is very real indeed' (p. 68).

Marechera apparently supports Sinyavsky's rejection of classical realism in favour of fantastic realism:

I don't think of modernism as some kind of device. It is no more so than realism which is itself a convention, an artificial form. Realism pretends to be able to say the truth about life. I'm not against truth, but it can be sought by different routes. In the nineteenth century realism was very productive as a form, but in this century – it's impossible (Marechera, 1987, p. 104).

Through the character Christian, Marechera argues that to name reality is to seek to impose one's will on that reality. It is to attempt to control it. Furthermore, as Chennells argues, '[t]he authority to which realism lays claim derives not from the real but from the realist's definition of the real' (Chennells 1999, p. 46). Within allegory there is no single definition of and attitude towards what is real. Maureen Quilligan concurs: 'All true narrative allegory has its source in a culture's attitude towards language, and in that attitude, as embodied in the language itself, allegory finds the limits of possibility' (Quilligan, 1979, p. 15).

Fortunately, for Marechera, there is no single attitude toward language. The author is aware that language can be used to create some form of connection between the object and the linguistic modes that represent it.

Marechera's intention in his 'linguistic allegory' is to disrupt the social pretence to 'reality' that realism imposes on narratives of resistance. He positions his novel, *Black Sunlight* as counter-discourse to such pre- and post- independence Zimbabwean novels as *A Son of the Soil* (1976) by W. Katiyo and *Victory* (1992) by G. Mujajati that celebrate realism, at the expense of African myths, fantasy and the folktale. Such texts attempt to create the impression that the discourse of African nationalism is an uncontested or incontestable political order. But this is not to suggest that all forms of realism are negative and incapacitated from within. For instance, the realism of the African novel of cultural nationalism such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1956) formulated itself as a stable narrative in order to destabilize colonialism. This is notwithstanding the suggestion by Hayden White that realism is '... simply one discursive "code" among others, which might or might not be appropriate for the representation of reality' (White 1987, p. 31).

In post-colonial allegory that Marechera favours for his novel, deference of meanings, operating with conflicting levels of experience are permanent features of the author's desire to construct an allegorical narrative of resistance that will capture the complexity of post-colonial resistance. There are, for example, in *Black Sunlight*, cracks, jumps, fissures as well as disappearances in the plot itself, erratic compilations that defy the sequentiality of a realist narrative. Bill Ascroft

(1996) identified these formal features in the novel as characteristic of post-colonial writings. These fissures and jumps in the plot within *Black Sunlight* are deliberately 'inserted' by the author. Marechera has to confront the use of English language that is not his mother tongue. In order to make it say and do what he wants to mean, he has to have harrowing fights and hair-raising panga duels with it. That means in particular 'discarding grammar, throwing syntax out, subverting images from within, beating the drum and cymbals of rhythm, developing torture chambers of irony and sarcasm, gas ovens of limitless black resonance' (Marechera in Veit-Wild, 1992, p. 4).

Marechera not only uses language without inhibition but also explores new levels of the relationship between literature, creativity and post-colonial resistance. His own subversion of nationalist models of resistance is an attempt to generate a new idiom of that same resistance. For him, a resistance discourse such as the one that hinges upon an immutable 'African image' which fails to reevaluate its own conditions of possibility and continuity is bound to subvert itself from within. Alternatively, a resistance that recognises the dynamism of its values remains open to new experiences.

Ironically Marechera's modes of resistance in *Black Sunlight* have to do with his own awareness that even his own narrative of resistance is ideologically suspect. This admission that one's revision of dominant narratives is also partially over-determined is in actual fact an ideological strength and not a weakness. The fact that in *Black Sunlight* Marechera acknowledges the incapacity of his own narrative to construct an enduring idiom of post-colonial resistance is in keeping with the ambiguous spirit of allegory that in the words of Deborah Madsen, 'is able simultaneously to express the dissemination of signs and a desire for semantic unity' (Madsen, 1991, p. 9). Mark Stein argues that the significance of *Black Sunlight* in Zimbabwean literature in particular and African literature in general is that 'in a world without certainties, in which facts are fought over . . . the itinerant narrator constructs meaning: he authorizes what is true and what is not' (Stein, 1999, p. 66). In other words, the attempt to muzzle African writers like Marechera who refuse to tow the nationalistic line is frustrated in such novels as *Black Sunlight*.

Conclusion

Where some Zimbabwean writers such as Mutswairo, Ndhhlala, Samkange, Katiyo and Vera exploit various aspects of orality in their fiction, to invoke and construct a stable narrative of post-colonial resistance based on the 'African image', Marechera writes in a way that undermines that image. He is aware that there is no single 'African image' in Zimbabwe and that there are many contradictory narratives of resistances through allegory in post-independence Zimbabwe. In constructing his own meta-narrative of resistance, Marechera draws our attention to the arbitrariness of that symbolic process of assigning meanings. *Black Sunlight* is a critique of the processes of narrating resistance and the authority that this process confers to the events being depicted. The instability inherent within the metaphoric allegory enables Marechera to reveal and subvert the 'stable' narratives of resistance

authorized by Zimbabwe's nationalist writers. In the process of doing so, Marechera shows us that there are multiple ways of using orality to construct resistance in the black novel in English in Zimbabwe. In the next chapter we explore how Yvonne Vera in *The Stone Virgins* uses cultural memory and remembering to construct a Ndebele women's perspective on post-colonial narratives of resistance to male official narratives of post-independence peace and stability.