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**Writing the Land:
Representations of 'the land' and
nationalism in Anglophone literature from
South Africa and Zimbabwe 1969-2002**

By

James John George Graham

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Philosophy In English Literature

Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies, University of Warwick

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Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own, and that it has not been used in previous work, published separately or submitted for examination at another institution.

Abstract

As a material possession and as an imagined space of belonging, land was the principle draw for European settlers in southern Africa from the 17th century onwards. The legacy of racial dispossession and conflict that ensued still resonates in the 21st century, as post-colonial nation-states face up to the daunting task of redistributing land between newly enfranchised peasants, commercial farmers and displaced communities. Representations of 'the land' in literature signal not only geographical entities but also a variety of social and cultural landscapes. In literature written in English from southern Africa the semantic terrain of 'the land' is thus constituted by a diverse range of experiences, encounters and ideologies, testifying to the manifold contradictions that settler colonialism produced.

The primary concern of this thesis is to examine how writers from Zimbabwe and South Africa have engaged with these experiences and articulated them as historical 'structures of feeling' (Williams 1978) in their work. In particular, it explores the relationship between representations of 'the land' and the articulation of nationhood and nationalism in selected novels. It argues that certain structures of feeling rival official nationalist discourses in varied and subversive ways. As a comparative project, it focuses on literature produced at important historical moments both before and after the transition to majority rule in South Africa (1994) and Zimbabwe (1980). A transition between two major structures of feeling is identified within this comparative horizon. This thesis explores how representations of 'the land' both propagate and question an ideology of (revolutionary) *repossession* in the 1970s, but also of (reconciliatory) *reform* in the 1990s.

Abbreviations

- A: Chenjerai Hove, *Ancestors* (1996)
AT: Lauretta Ngcobo, *And They Didn't Die* (1991)
B: Chenjerai Hove, *Bones* (1988)
BB: Alex La Guma, *Time of the Butcherbird* (1979)
BF: Yvonne Vera, *Butterfly Burning* (1998)
CT: Bessie Head, *The Collector of Treasures* (1977)
D: J.M. Coetzee, *Disgrace* (1999)
F: Alex La Guma, *In the Fog of Seasons' End* (1972)
HR: Zakes Mda, *The Heart of Redness* (2000)
HT: Shimmer Chinodya, *Harvest of Thorns* (1989)
NC: Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions* (1988)
RR: André Brink, *Rumours of Rain* (1978)
S: Chenjerai Hove, *Shadows* (1991)
SV: Yvonne Vera, *The Stone Virgins* (2002)
TC: Nadine Gordimer, *The Conservationist* (1974)
TM: Stanlake Samkange, *The Mourned One* (1975)
WG: Bessie Head, *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1969)
WN: Yvonne Vera, *Without a Name* (1994)
WR: Charles Mungoshi, *Waiting for the Rain* (1975)

Introduction: Writing the land in South Africa and Zimbabwe: from a 'an endless drama of domicile and challenge' to 'a country with land but no habitat'

The father loved the land: to him the country was not only a geographical entity, an anthem, celebrations of Dingane's Day, the day of Blood River. For him country was a matter of who owned the flat, dreary red and yellow plains and the low, undulating hills, the grass and the water. This was a heritage which had been gained through the sacred blood of their ancestors and the prophetic work of God. It had come to their fathers through the musket and the Bible. (BB: 57-58)

Since the arrival of a European presence in the mid 17th century, the land in southern Africa has always been a space of contest and conflict. Many wars have been fought over it, but it has also been a "deeply contested idea in wars of representation" (de Kock 1993: 207). It is the interconnection between these two forms of struggle that this study focuses on. It has at its core what seems to be a straightforward linguistic problem: when does land become Land? In the *Oxford English Dictionary* we find eight different meanings for the noun 'land'. Of these, three bear particular relation to this work: it signifies "an expanse of country; ground; soil"; a "country, nation or state (*land of hope and glory*)"; and "landed property". The relationship between these different meanings and their usages seems simple enough. But when approached from a literary-historical perspective with the appropriate questions, it becomes far more profound. For example: in recent novels from South Africa and Zimbabwe, when, how, and to what purposes, we might ask, does land (an expanse of country; ground; soil) signify the Land (a country, nation or state; or landed property)?¹ Or put another way: in what ways does a novel that offers a narrative of 'the land' also narrate the nation? From such a perspective, I argue in this thesis, this linguistic idiosyncrasy encapsulates vital aspects of national and even regional history.

Given the numerous languages of southern Africa and the myriad ways in which different cultures conceive of their relationships to land, nation and property, such a reliance on the English language is clearly problematic. We find the imperial

¹ In the study I capitalise the noun—Land—in order to indicate this second meaning of 'country, nation or state'. Used in its non-capitalised form—land—the noun indicates the first meaning of 'an expanse of country; ground; soil'. When the noun appears in scare-quotes as 'the land', this signals ambivalence, a moment of slippage where the textual reference carries both meanings.

anthem ‘land of hope and glory’ in our dictionary etymology, for example, rather than ‘Izwe Lethu’, a slogan used by Poqo, the militant wing of the nationalist Pan-African Congress (PAC) in the early 1960s, which translates as ‘our land’ (qtd in Lodge 1983: 244). This problem is in turn exacerbated by the focus in this study on the novel written in English. Not only are novels written in other languages excluded from the study (Afrikaans, Portuguese and Shona being the most notable), but so are other genres and forms that might relate a more intimate or authentic relationship to ‘the land’; those written modes, for example, that come closer to an oral story-telling tradition, such as praise poetry. From another angle the study might have included autobiographical genres or the short story cycle (though Bessie Head’s *The Collector of Treasures* (1977) is the exception that proves the rule in this case), not to mention more popular forms of cultural expression and experience such as theatre, art, music and architecture (cf. Gunner 1990, 1996, Boehmer et al. 1995, Bunn 1998).

Apart from the practical limitations imposed by the thesis and the cultural location of the author, the only defence against these omissions is that where the colonial medium of English literature creates what M. Van Wyk Smith (1990) calls South Africa’s “grounds of contest”, it also creates an invaluable opportunity for comparative study in the region. The novel written in English is malleable enough to incorporate or at least to point towards the different forms and sensibilities of southern African literary cultures, even when unable authentically to reproduce them. It also creates the subversive possibility of ‘writing back’ to the centres of colonial power.

Putting such faith in the apparent universalism of this most colonial of mediums runs many risks of course (cf. de Kock 1993, Ngugi 1986, Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 1989, Spivak 1999). The resulting debate is succinctly and to my mind compellingly answered in the preface to the second edition of Michael Chapman’s *Southern African Literatures* (2003). His premise, which I share, is that “although various elements of literary life might have found few interstices, the contribution of literature to the entire society” requires “the critic to construct necessary intervening spaces: spaces in which the reader could be alerted to arrangements of difference within the single map.”(xv) In acknowledging its many limitations then, this study attempts to create such an ‘intervening space’, whereby ‘the arrangements of difference within the single map’, in this case the novel in English, are critically and comparatively examined in ways that I hope will contribute

to the understanding of how literature registers, transfigures and indeed creates different forms of historical consciousness.

And so the question is modified: how does the *representation of* 'the land' in fictions written in English signify more than the straightforward scene depicted? When, for example, does a literary landscape become a cultural statement of belonging, or perhaps alternatively, consciousness of alienation? Similarly, how might the expression of an *affective relationship to or with* a certain place or landscape be tantamount to the expression of nationality or nationalism? In what ways might this connection between landscape and nation be gendered? These then are the literary-historical questions that animate this study.

The reference to 'the land' in my epigraph, taken from Alex La Guma's *Time of The Butcherbird* (1979), refers to a particular 'geographical entity': the Karoo. But by associating it with a certain national-historical context it is imbued with ideological meaning. La Guma's atavistic Afrikaner in fact refers to the Battle of Blood River in Natal on 16th December 1838, when Andrius Pretorius defeated the Zulu Chief Dingane, avenging the betrayal and murder of Piet Retief's Boers earlier that year. The Boers in the commando are reported to have vowed to build a church on the site of the battle and commemorate the event should God grant them victory. Henceforth known as Dingaan's Day, it was celebrated as a *national* holiday by the Transvaal Republic from 1865 and then the Orange Free State in 1894, but also by the first South African government in 1910. In 1952 the name was changed to the Day of the Covenant and in 1980 to the Day of the Vow. In what Leonard Thompson (1985) calls the "political mythology of apartheid", 'the Covenant' is repeatedly resurrected in the service of Afrikaner nationalism: it is "the prime symbol of Afrikaner Christian culture, the exemplary vindication of Afrikaner hegemony in South Africa." (212) And so for the old Afrikaner in La Guma's novel, the land that he claims ownership of constitutes an originary *national* identity.

The land thus becomes the Land and enters a national imaginary as such: a material possession and group identity. It is gained through the 'sacred blood of the ancestors' and licensed by 'the prophetic work of God' to be *owned* by the Afrikaner people. But what kind of 'national' imagination is this, in a Land inhabited by numerous racial and ethnic groups, all with their own connections to the land and claims to nationality? What are we to make of the fact that it is penned by a leading opponent of apartheid, exiled because of his work for the anti-colonial nationalist

movement? And how does the relationship between different or conflicting representations of 'the land' play out in his work?² Clearly the discrete relationship between land, nation and nationalism in any given text needs to be historicised if these kinds of questions are to be addressed.

The literary problem—of the semantic slippage between land and Land—thus speaks directly to the history of colonisation and decolonisation in southern Africa. For the particular countries on which this study focuses, South Africa and Zimbabwe, it offers a concise allegory of national emergence. An allegory, that is, of how the land became, and indeed still becomes, the Land: of its habitation, contest and ownership; of those who have claimed it, settled on it, fought for it. But it is also the story of those for whom the land was already a source of cultural identity, of nationhood even. It offers in effect a counter-allegory for those who resisted these incursions on the land they inhabited, only to be defeated, to lose their land and in places and to degrees this identity, but who later protested and fought to regain them. This thesis focuses on key moments in these stories, these narratives, articulated in contemporary literature as what Raymond Williams (1977) describes as 'structures of feeling'.

In South African novels before the end of apartheid such a structure of feeling broadly corresponds to what Van Wyk Smith (1990) identifies as an "endless drama of domicile and challenge."⁽³⁾ Yet such a précis in many ways still rings true almost two decades later. The post-apartheid government has still to redistribute the vast majority of lands appropriated during the colonial and apartheid eras. Tension between landless blacks, white farmers and the state simmers now as it did thirty years earlier. Despite the newfound emphasis on 'reconciliation', much writing still registers this anxiety over ownership of 'the land'. The situation in Zimbabwe has taken a different trajectory. Promising the return of stolen land, anti-colonial nationalism was widely supported by the national majority—peasants in rural areas—in the 1970s. As much contemporary writing seems to anticipate, however, the promises failed to materialise: white-owned property was protected by the negotiated independence settlement in 1980. Discontent slowly grew in the 1990s as the World

² We learn from Thompson (1985), for example, that in 1983 "the celebrations of the day of the Vow were overshadowed by the latest wave of African sabotage. For members of the African resistance movement, 16 December 1983 was the 22nd anniversary of the founding of the ANC fighting arm, Umkhonto we Sizwe, rather than the one hundred and forty-fifth anniversary of the Battle of Blood River."⁽²³³⁾

Bank Structural Adjustment Program sapped the economy and rural poverty increased. This resulted in a radical volte-face by the Zimbabwean government in 2000, which saw almost all white-owned farmland being expropriated by the state. Any renewed hopes for national development built on programmatic redistribution were soon mired by the authoritarian proclivities of the nationalist elite.

Following rigged elections and the collapse of the economy, many hundreds of thousands have moved into the diaspora. Even greater numbers now face poverty and starvation inside the country. Vast tracts of land remain fallow without the investment needed to return the agrarian sector even to a subsistence level. Many of the landless poor, lacking resources to work what land is available, are now being forced from what homes they could make in the cities and towns. Like so many of their colonial forbears, these people are now internally displaced. It seems that post-colonial Zimbabwe, as a disaffected freedom fighter in Yvonne Vera's *The Stone Virgins* (2002) puts it, is "a country with land but no habitat." The abject condition this creates, being "out of bounds in our own reality,"(82) as the character adds, is one that postcolonial literature expresses in all its complexity.

Above all this study is concerned with this kind of fictionalised response to the material and historical conditions of life lived *on* the land. Such complex and intimate sensibilities are read against those discourses, institutions and social formations which represent land *as* the Land. Paul Rich (1997) frames this problematic for us in his review of the important collection of essays *Text, Theory, Space* (Darian-Smith, Gunner and Nuttall 1996). Cultural landscapes, he argues, "are socially constructed entities that emerge out of layers of memory. They provide a vital dimension of myth in the construction of ethnic and 'national' identities that is often lost in a narrow focus on political discourse and agendas such 'the politics of nation building'." (518) While acknowledging such an insight, this study also recognises that political discourse, especially concerning the return and redistribution of land as a 'nation building' exercise, was and *remains* a vital aspect of decolonisation in South Africa and Zimbabwe, particularly so in its relation to *the lived experience* of decolonisation. With such an agenda anti-colonial nationalist movements fought not only against the white settler states, but also against their validating historical discourse and cultural symbols of settlement, propriety and superiority. In taking up this 'cultural' struggle, however, the attendant risk is that their own ideologies of belonging and nationhood, sovereignty and exclusivity, have simply replaced the colonial ones.

By focusing on novels written by people largely in support of the liberation struggle across southern Africa, this study explores how nationalism is both refracted and refused in their writing. In this way, for example, we find that many of the problems of Zimbabwe's authoritarian nationalism are anticipated in Zimbabwean literature of the 1970s and 80s. Robert Mugabe's regime did not have to turn out the way it did, but the way the novels under discussion represent 'the land' provides us with some proleptic insights into why it has done so. Similarly, in novels from both countries we find an emphasis placed on the deep historical linkages between rural and urban spaces; the same linkages that are now being downplayed in South Africa and virtually erased by the compilers of "patriotic history" in Zimbabwe (Ranger 2005: 241). Although often idealised in nationalist discourse, land, peasant consciousness and traditional beliefs are typically portrayed in a sympathetic but nonetheless *anti-pastoral* vein in literature: the uneven penetration of metropolitan colonial modernity is felt by even the most parochial of characters. Representations of migration and especially migrant labour, in national but also *transnational* contexts, are every bit as important as representations of 'the land' itself.

Beginning in the mid 1970s, as anti-colonial movements were striving for ascendancy in the region, this study identifies in contemporary Anglophone literature a sense of what Alex Callinicos in his book *Southern Africa After Zimbabwe* (1981) calls "a region in crisis"(8). In the work of both black and white South Africans a revolutionary moment is anticipated with 'the land' at its epicentre: as the vanishing point of conflicting nationalisms. The revolution is already afoot in Zimbabwe at this time, but as a result of censorship, exile and personal political convictions, black writers before 1980 are reluctant to endorse a nationalist narrative of 'the land'. By contrasting novels from this period with those produced in the wake of democratic transition (1990s-2000 in South Africa, 1980-2002 in Zimbabwe), this thesis explores both change and continuity in structures of feeling as the anti-colonial nationalist movements move from an ideology of *repossession* to one of *reform*. These are the two fundamental structures of feeling that this study identifies.

In post-apartheid South Africa, for example, land reform enters political discourse as the "cornerstone in the development of our country."(Department of Land Affairs 1998: xv) It is closely associated with the more public discourse of reconciliation, but to privilege that would be to overlook the fundamental economic and political motivations of the post-apartheid government. For rather than

immediately returning it to 'the people', the strategic political and economic currency of land in the era of globalisation led to a market-based redistribution regime in both countries. While this caused widespread resentment among the black majorities, it also safeguarded the economic interests of both the dominant and emergent social orders. Such is the *realpolitik* of 'reconciliation' (see, for example, Bond 2000). Zimbabwe's unfortunate *dénouement* has intensified calls from (increasingly black) business and (still very much white) agriculture in South Africa to prevent similar events there. Though some South Africans fear the Zimbabwean allegory of 'the land', a great many others also desire it.

Selected recent South African novels, I suggest, provide a vital *critical* insight into the structures of feeling that emerge from such contradictory and conflicting interests in the land. Comparable Zimbabwean novels, by contrast, reveal a more abject condition. Through the sphere of cultural representation they attempt to redeem traditional relations to the land as a potential source of national renewal: as the 'habitat' it has lost in the post-colonial period. On the other hand they have increasingly become *obliquely* critical of the way 'the land' has been re-politicised by nationalism: of the detrimental effects it has on peasants, farm workers, migrant workers, the landless urban poor and, above all, women and children in those contexts.

The modest hope of this thesis is that a critical comparison of these trends, so intimately connected at a historical and geopolitical level but rarely so in literary studies, might contribute in however small a way to the growing debates on land reform and 'the agrarian question' in southern Africa and the Global South. The literary readings of this thesis are thus primarily informed by the following aspect of these debates, identified by Sam Moyo and Paris Yeros in *Reclaiming the Land: The Resurgence of Rural Movements in Africa, Asia and Latin America* (2005):

A fourth tangent of enquiry, well within the terms of the agrarian question, has been concerned with the dynamics of socio-economic change in the countryside, including proletarianization, semi-proletarianization, and re-peasantization, rural-urban linkages, and gender relations. While this has not sought to articulate global theory as such, focusing instead on more 'local' dynamics, it has also provided rigorous empirical research and robust debate ... this debate has focused on one question in particular: can we still speak of a 'peasantry' after a quarter-century of structural

adjustment? A related political question has also been posed, which until now has been less prominent: how can we reconcile the posited 'disappearance' of the peasantry with the fact that the most progressive and militant movements in the world today are based in the countryside?(2)

This brief summary of the wider debate should make clear the motivation behind this thesis. Which is to say it is not simply or solely concerned to explore the *discursive* slippages between representations of the land and the Land in literature. Rather, it negotiates a more nuanced historical position by focusing on how texts gesture towards the often discontinuous and disparate historical experiences of those still on, trying to return to, or finally 'reclaiming' land. While such leitmotifs often return to the politics of nationhood and nationalism, they do so from the kind of 'grassroots' perspective that since the late 1990s seems to have become anathema to the governments of South Africa and Zimbabwe.

The thesis is divided into four main chapters, alternating between South Africa and Zimbabwe. Each of the four chapters contains an introduction to contemporary events and resonant social, economic and cultural trends. Discrete historical contexts referenced by the novels are discussed in relation to the particular structures of feeling they articulate. The first two chapters, dealing with Zimbabwean fiction between 1975-1988, and South African fiction between 1969-1979, provide contrasting perspectives on the 1970s, a decade of regional crisis. Similarly, the last two chapters, looking at Zimbabwean writing between 1989-2002 and South Africa writing between 1990-2000, offer differing perspectives on the prospects of 'nation building' and the resurgence of the 'land question' in periods of apparent democratisation. Before turning to these, and by way of further justifying the geographical, historical and literary foci of the thesis, it will be useful to provide a summary historical background.

The expropriation of land in southern Africa, with its various material resources and strategic political value, has been the primary feature of European settlement since the mid 17th century. The Cape Colony was consolidated with the British defeat of the Xhosa and expansion into the Eastern Cape in the early 19th

century, and then later into what became known as Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) in the 1890s. Between these two moments the *trekboers*, descendants of the first Dutch settlers, annexed their own lands, creating the South African Republic (Transvaal) and Orange Free State. They did so in the wake of the Zulu Kingdom that was established in what is now Kwa-Zulu Natal by Shaka, again early in the 19th century. The dispersal of defeated tribes and factions, known as the *mfecane*, had left vast tracts of land seemingly unoccupied. One such faction, led by Mzilikazi, was forced north through conflict with the Griquas (a fiercely independent mixed-race people descended from the early settlers, their slaves and the indigenous Khoi people) and Boers trying to settle the land between the Vaal and Limpopo rivers. The Ndebele, as they became known, eventually settled in what was to become modern Zimbabwe, subjugating the prosperous but un-warlike Shona peoples.

Of the violence and momentous demographic shifts of the early 19th century, Noël Mostert (1992) writes that “Nothing else in southern African history can match these convulsions in revolutionary scope.” He goes on:

They changed the face of southern Africa and affected peoples all the way to the Great Lakes. Above the Orange river and in Natal the social fabric of many centuries was torn apart for incalculable numbers of people. Whole societies vanished, or disintegrated into rootless surviving bands, which were reincorporated into wholly new nations. Huge areas were depopulated by the passage of seemingly interminable raids and counter-raids between predators such as the Griqua and the warlord leaders of migrating hordes, or between refugees, as well as by the famine that followed as villages were destroyed, lands left untilled or abandoned, crops pillaged, cattle herds rounded up and driven away. In this manner much of southern Africa was permanently and irrevocably altered, and much of its demography changed beyond recognition. (502)

From this it should be clear that the ‘land question’ in southern Africa is in no way *simply* the result of colonial territorialisation. Nonetheless, for many in southern Africa, land—lost *lands*—remains an essential but also traumatic source of deep cultural memory. As Stephen Chan and Ranka Primorac (2004) gloss for us, the “African belief in a spirit world populated by previously fleshly creatures, capable of autonomous interaction with the human world (in order to requite past wrongs, reward

past acts, or act maliciously) and accessible through human mediators or spirit mediums, made land much more than an agricultural commodity, an economic unit, or a site of elite aspiration.”(65) By expropriating land and displacing its prior inhabitants, often through the use of force, the agents of colonial modernity *politicised* this potent cultural memory. This created the grounds for local resistance and, later, cultural nationalism.

By the turn of the century the conflicting interests of emergent Afrikaner nationalism and British imperial consolidation were shaping the colonial territories of southern Africa into something like the regional map we have today. African nationalism was also making its embryonic presence felt (Chrisman 2000: 15-19). Important events include the discovery of Gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886-7; the defeat of the Zulus by the British in 1879; of the uprisings by the Shona and Ndebele in Southern Rhodesia in 1896-7, the Boer Republics in the South African War in 1902 and the Bambatha rebellion of 1906; and of the formation of the South African Native National Congress (later ANC) in 1912.

The colonial political landscape was consolidated in South Africa by the Act of Union in 1910; the demographic one by the infamous Natives Land Act of 1913. The first of many laws that institutionalised racial segregation, the Native Land Act overruled all previous land ownership and tenure agreements, arbitrarily limiting the land purchasable by Africans, constituting around 70 per cent of the population, to reserves which amounted to between 8 (1913) and 13 (1936) per cent of the land. It was an unprecedented act of racist land alienation, precipitating in momentous social and cultural changes. But as William Beinart (2001) argues, it would be a mistake to suggest that the African majority were forced *off* the land as such:

If Africans had been physically restricted to 8 or even 13 per cent of the worst land in South Africa, then a much larger number would have moved to town far earlier and the county's history would have been different. The fact that very many Africans were able to retain some access to land helps explain critical historical issues such as the tenacity of the peasantry in the reserves; the predominance of migrant labour as a form of proletarianisation; the importance of tenancy on white farms; and the character of African political struggles. (14-15)

The point, rather, is that they were displaced *from* but also *on* ancestral lands. Being either forced into cramped and underdeveloped reserves (and then ‘homelands’) before migrating to the towns and cities for work, or compelled to work on white-owned land, such a varied ‘rural’ experience informed ‘the character of African political struggles’ in South Africa in ways that urban-based nationalist movements, the African National Congress (ANC) and later the PAC, struggled to control or coordinate (Lodge 1983: 290).

This was particularly true in the 1930s, when the failure of the ANC and the ICU (Industrial and Commercial Worker’s Union) to organise resistance to the three ‘Native’ or ‘Slave’ Bills of 1936-37, saw the founding of the All Africa Convention. In response to the “decline” of the ANC and ICU, as I.B. Tabata notes in *The Awakening of the People* (1974: 12), a number of political organisations came together with the singular aim of “national liberation”. But the limits to this early phase of black nationalism were evident in the “compromise” accepted by the Convention: “Gone was the spirit of national unity which had been the motivating power carrying people to the highest peak of political consciousness”(33). Struggling to emerge from paternalistic Cape liberalism, a similarly circumscribed form of nationalism is voiced in Solomon T. Plaatje’s seminal novel *Mhudi* (1930). Working within the conventions of the colonial romance, Plaatje articulates a subversive nationalist claim for ‘the land’ through its panoramic narrative. As Elleke Boehmer (2005) notes:

To adopt the birds-eye view was to arrogate oneself, even momentarily, the cartographic and metaphoric authority of the colonizer ... First, importantly, the trope of the gaze asserted the right of the nationalists to conceive of the land in their own terms, that is, to represent what they claimed as their own, to invent independently, to take narrative and also political command. (99)

The literary motif of claiming ‘narrative but also political’ command of the landscape may have had intermittent historical corollaries in subsequent decades, but the motif itself disappears until the 1970s, when the ‘character’ of this struggle becomes regional and this study begins its enquiry. Resistance to white settler rule in Zimbabwe took a quite different trajectory however.

Southern Rhodesia was a self-governing colony from its inception. In the historical record the Ndebele chief Lobengula signed over to Cecil Rhodes's British South Africa Company the commercial rights not only to his own land, but also to the vast territories of Mashonaland, which he claimed to administer, under the so-called Rudd Concession of 30 October 1888. From gaining a Royal Charter in 1889 to the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) in 1965, Rhodesia was, in Anthony Verrier's (1986) words, "Empire on the cheap."⁽¹⁷⁾ As he laconically puts it, the "adventurers, remittance men and 'gentlemen rankers' who left Kimberley for Salisbury on 6 May 1890 were heirs to a *laissez-faire* colonial policy which, in Rhodes's words, 'preferred land to niggers.'"⁽⁶⁾ But as Terence Ranger informs us in his seminal history *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia, 1896-7* (1967), the prejudiced British South Africa Company dismissed the organisation of pre-colonial societies at their peril:

far from being rootless and without a sense of history, then, the [Shona] peoples and especially the aristocracies of these paramountcies could relate themselves to two or three centuries of a traditionally known past. The paramounts, thought of as so powerless, in fact exercised a profound, extensive and subtle influence through their relationship with the previous occupiers, with the dead, and with the land. (15)

The bloody and bitter uprisings in Matabeleland and Mashonaland in 1896-97 that resulted from conflicting cultural, commercial and political interests in 'the land,' shaped the character of both black and white society in Rhodesia in profound ways. In particular they were recovered and mythologised during the 1970s by nationalist guerrillas as the first *chimurenga*—the first nationalist anti-colonial uprising. As Ranger so presciently remarks in 1967, however, the risings "should not be seen as exclusively anti-colonial phenomena. They must also be seen in the context of the African history of Southern Rhodesia as such; of the relations between the Shona and the Ndebele, both before and after the risings; of the tensions operative within Ndebele and Shona societies themselves."⁽³⁴⁶⁾ He highlights the unresolved tensions and contradictions that nationalist idealisation of these events in the 1970s was shortly

to pass over, but which still bedevil ‘the character of political struggle’ to this day.³ Verrier discusses how the anxiety over further uprisings affected the disposition of early white settlers:

A racial psychosis developed as a result, all the more dangerous from a lack of compensating values and standards in white Southern Rhodesia as a whole. The white farmer developed qualities of independence and hardihood in wringing what was for long—and for many, always—a bare living from the hard red soil stretching to the hills under those enormous skies. For many, and for long, a tin shack was home, not the cool rooms and spreading lawns of a picture-postcard colonial ranch. (18)

This uncompromising portrait of early settler life is brilliantly fictionalised in Doris Lessing’s *The Grass is Singing* (1950). Though too early to be among the novels discussed, Lessing’s farm novel nonetheless provides a narrative of white presence on the land in Zimbabwe that is missing in more recent Zimbabwean literature (and so also, as an unfortunate consequence, in this thesis).⁴ It is one that records the belligerence of white settlers in their attempt to master the land as well as the ‘racial psychosis’ Verrier talks of. But it also registers the obdurate strangeness of the African landscape, its indigenous peoples and even the African farm in relation to metropolitan European sensibilities. And it draws attention to the function of gender in this context and the violence latent within the racialised exploitation of labour.⁵ So while at one level *The Grass is Singing* is very much a novel of its time, its daring

³ Benedict’s Anderson’s (1991) remarks on the *discursive* birth of the nation capture this contradiction perfectly: “All profound changes in consciousness,” he argues, “bring with them characteristic amnesias. Out of such oblivions, in specific historical circumstances, spring narratives.” (204)

⁴ This is true only so far as *novels* are concerned. It is the work of another study to undertake (cf. Harris 2005 and Rooney 2005), but Lessing’s own autobiography, *Under my Skin: Volume One of My Autobiography, to 1949* (1994), is one of several by white Zimbabweans who have chosen that form to express a complicated sense of belonging in and to Zimbabwe, especially in the preponderance of childhood perceptions of landscape. See, for examples, Peter Godwin, *Mukiwa: A White Boy in Africa* (1996), Alexandra Fuller, *Don’t Let’s Go Home to the Dogs Tonight: An African Childhood* (2002).

⁵ Caroline Rooney has recently questioned the representative extent of these features in ‘Narratives of Southern African Farms’ (2005). Where Olive Schreiner’s *The Story of An African Farm*, Lessing’s *The Grass is Singing* and J.M. Coetzee’s *The Heart of The Country* concentrate “on the abject breakdown of a female protagonist in environments found to be unsympathetic or hostile”—where the farm is a “place of European self-imprisonment, a claustrophobic place that cannot be escaped from”—she discusses other forms of representation, notably paintings but also “settler poetry” and “pioneering farm reminiscences”, which “suggest a contrary desire to get away from European modernity.” (431, 435)

themes and style capture important and in cases enduring aspects of an intensely contradictory white settler society, itself divided between town and country, that was to become embroiled in a guerrilla war by the 1970s.

This study is interested in how literature is shaped by and gives shape to different forms of historical consciousness. It is unable, however, to chart an empirical historical narrative in the manner of, say, Terence Ranger's environmental and social history, *Voices from the Rocks: Nature, Culture and History in the Matapos Hills of Zimbabwe* (1999). By focusing instead on the *representational* capacity of the literary to propagate, question or rival certain forms of historical consciousness, it nonetheless makes recourse to such studies in order to situate the particular historical moments that a given novel engages with, and to elucidate, along the lines of those just noted, the *kind* of intervention a writer makes. Sometimes this might reveal a clear ideological subtext. At other times it might be a case of distinguishing between culturally encoded symbolisms and the complex textual meanings created by narrative technique or psychosocial tropes within texts.

What this thesis offers, then, is a representative but nonetheless selective—and therefore contentious—narrative of 'the land' in southern Africa. It identifies and explores structures of feeling in South African and Zimbabwean literature at two broadly comparative moments. In *Marxism and Literature* (1977) Raymond Williams defines structures of feeling as "a particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities, which give the sense of a generation or a period." (131) "Feeling" is emphasised rather than simply "thought" or even "experience" in an effort to express the idea of "a social experience which is still *in process*" (132). It is the emphasis on the dynamic as opposed to static aspect of historical experience that makes Williams's mode of enquiry salient to this study. The idea of a structure of feeling can be "specifically related to the evidence of forms and conventions—semantic figures [such as 'the land']—which, in art and literature, are often among the very first indications that such a new structure is forming." (133)

At this point we encounter an important methodological problem. Formalist thought, and especially an ethically inflected variety that has arguably become

hegemonic in South African academic circles, has long critiqued historicist readings which suggest that literary texts offer mimetic insights, authentic or otherwise, into *lived* social and historical experience. For South African writer and intellectual J.M. Coetzee,⁶ to give the most obvious example, deconstructing the liberal-humanist assumption that literature provides an empathetic insight into the singular experience of others has itself become an aesthetic principle (cf. Durrant 2004, Attridge 2004). But in Williams's understanding, this aesthetic and its ethical precepts can and *should* be read in relation to a historical structure of feeling. Literary forms, including self-deconstructing ones, are *themselves* "social formations of a specific kind". This point is crucial:

We need, on the one hand, to acknowledge (and welcome) the specificity of these elements—specific feelings, specific rhythms—and yet to find ways of recognizing their specific kinds of sociality, thus preventing that extraction from social experience which is conceivable only when social experience itself has been categorically (and at root historically) reduced.(133)

So above all Williams warns against the kind of analysis that extracts, reduces and "fixes" (129) social forms; either in formal abstraction or in a static, past tense.

In chapters one and three such a taxonomic perspective is precisely the problem found in novels in English by black Zimbabwean writers. I follow Ranka Primorac's pioneering thesis research (2003) which suggests that their chronotopic atavism expresses the enduring hegemony of colonial conceptions of space and time, in particular the post-colonial government's regressive return to that model in novels written between 1989-2002. Novels from South Africa in similar periods, by contrast, express a different kind of crisis. They seem ever poised on the brink of momentous historical change, but are rarely able to *directly* represent the forces behind it.

Chapter one, 'Melancholy Possessions: black writing, nationalisms and 'the land' from 1975-1989 in Zimbabwe', charts the relationship between representations of 'the land' and different articulations of nationalism. It looks at everyday life on the land, but also the increasing influence that an urban world came to have for rural peoples in the late colonial period. Recurring motifs include migration between town

⁶ J.M. Coetzee assumed Australian citizenship on 6 March 2006. This thesis only discusses work produced by Coetzee during his time as a citizen of South Africa, hence the description of him as a 'South African' writer.

and country, the ‘modernising’ influences of Christianity (the ubiquitous missionary education) and consumerism in rural areas, and an abiding sense that ‘the land’—in this case the underdeveloped Tribal Trust Areas—exists solely in the past of the modern, colonial nation. These precipitate in a crisis of traditional authority and a younger generation alienated from their rural heritage. It is a world that anti-colonial nationalism seeks to revivify, but the perspectives of this younger generation reveal a discontinuity between the aims of the nationalist movements and the experiences and aspirations of those who live on the land (and also, increasingly, *between* rural and urban spaces). It is a time of simmering rural revolt, a time of repossession, yet the novels do not express this as a ‘structure of feeling’.

‘Peasant consciousness’ in these novels, in contrast to historical accounts, is not necessarily concomitant with nationalism. Yet nationalism still seems to possess these fictions in profound ways. It exerts palpable pressure on the social and cultural constellations of colonial and also postcolonial texts. The notable difference is that where this is made manifest in the former novels, published (if not written) in exile from the colonial regime, it is more often oblique in the latter. The chapter is divided into four sections that look at: Stanlake Samkange’s *The Mourned One* (1975); Charles Mungoshi’s *Waiting for the Rain* (1975); Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* (2002 [1988]); Chenjerai Hove’s *Bones* (1988).

Chapter two, ‘Revolutionary Repossessions: subterranean nationalism in South Africa 1969-1979’, looks at texts from a period that overlaps that of chapter one, but which articulate quite different structures of feeling. With widespread industrial agitation from the early 1970s onwards, the guerrilla war in Zimbabwe, Angola and Mozambique gaining independence in 1975, the Soweto riots of 1976 and subsequent escalations in the ANC’s sabotage campaign—not to mention growing international economic and diplomatic pressure on the apartheid state—the 1970s is portrayed as a time of crisis and opportunity in South African novels in a markedly different way to the Zimbabwean texts. Both black and white South African novelists presage an approaching revolution of which ‘the land’ constitutes both the material and literary ground of repossession. Notably, however, novels by white writers allude to but are unable to *directly* represent the agents of black nationalism in this context.

Yet at the same time a black writer such as Alex La Guma⁷, committed to the ‘cultural struggle’, is unable to harmonise his literary representations with the historical reality of nationalist rural mobilisation. Such contradictions correspond to Williams’s understanding of structures of feeling as being ‘social’ in two important ways. The revolutionary moment of the later 1970s and early 1980s in South Africa is “felt” in novels discussed in this chapter as “palpable pressures”, but because they are still only “emergent or pre-emergent” they also “set effective limits on experience and on action.” (1977: 131-132) Three sections look at: André Brink’s *Rumours of Rain* (1978) and Nadine Gordimer’s *The Conservationist* (1974); Alex La Guma’s *In The Fog of Seasons’ End* (1972) and *Time of the Butcherbird* (1979); and Bessie Head’s *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1969) and *The Collector of Treasures* (1977).

Where earlier Zimbabwean fictions tend to question but still propagate traditional relations to the land as an implicit form of cultural nationalism, the novels discussed in chapter three, ‘Reconstructions: abjection and the re-writing of cultural nationalism in Zimbabwean fiction 1989-2002’, react to this trend with literary innovation. While some novels document the increasingly “abject condition” (Chan 2005) of being a rural (and especially female) Zimbabwean, others look to the future, re-writing the dominant historical narrative of official nationalism and attempting to *redeem* or, with more practical connotations, *reform* cultural relations to the land. With the exception of a small number of short stories (see, for examples, Vambe 2005b), all notable novels in English to date elide the question of land redistribution. Again, divided into four sections, the chapter discusses: Chenjerai Hove’s *Shadows* (1991) and *Ancestors* (1996); Yvonne Vera’s *Without a Name* (1994) and *Butterfly Burning* (1998); and her final novel *The Stone Virgins* (2002) with Shimmer Chinodya’s *Harvest of Thorns* (1990 [1989]).

In 1994, following the transition to black majority rule in South Africa, the ANC could put in place its long held plans for the restitution and redistribution of land. The fictions studied in chapter four, ‘From Repossession to Reform: a new terrain in South African fiction 1990-2000’, are subversively critical of the neoliberal reforms, documenting the occluded lives and experience of those whom the reforms continue to fail, and, more ambiguously, those who continue to benefit from such

⁷ Under apartheid categorisation, Alex La Guma was of course ‘coloured’. Unless the analysis of a particular text or historical moment demands a discussion of particular racial or ethnic categories, this study refers to writers of African and mixed-race heritage as being ‘black’.

failure. The relative absence of AIDS-HIV in novels up to this point is also noted—partly as an implicit critique of national attitudes to the pandemic but also, I suggest, as a *symptom* of them. Though the dominant ‘structure of feeling’ has moved from a sense of revolutionary repossession to one of reform in South Africa, the ‘land question’ is still very much alive in the cultural imagination of post-apartheid South Africa. Three sections look at Laretta Ngcobo’s *And They Didn’t Die* (1990); J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace* (1999); Zakes Mda’s *The Heart of Redness* (2000).

Chapter 1 – Melancholy Possessions: nationalisms and ‘the land’ in black Zimbabwean fiction from 1975-1988.

In order to understand the current state of crisis in Zimbabwe it is important to examine how narratives of land ownership and African nationalism have become intertwined. Together they become central motifs of colonial and postcolonial modernity, to the point where they are now, seemingly, inseparable. From the migrations and tribal conquests that led to the pre-colonial states and chiefdoms, to the colonial expropriations in the 1890s (Beach 1986, Ranger 1967, Samkange 1968); from the consolidation of a settler economy in the early 20th century to the socialist liberation struggle of the 1960s and 70s (Ranger 1985, Lan 1985), and from there to the vicissitudes of a postcolonial state under pressure to reform an economy burdened by white protection (Astrow 1983, Moore 2003)—the history of land ownership and the struggle over it have been vital to the political project of both anti- and post-colonial African nationalism. For the needs of this project, once so full of hope and idealism but now corrupt and in a perpetual state of crisis, ‘the land’ inevitably becomes a synecdoche for the nation, the Land.

As a sign of the nation, ‘the land’ represents a teeming multiplicity of landscapes, cultural and symbolic as well as social and material: mountains, river valleys, forests, savannah, villages, farms, homesteads, squatter camps, urban land—the list goes on. In order to establish an imagined national community in resistance to the colonial state, itself involved in a project of decolonisation from Britain up to 1965, black political nationalism in Zimbabwe has long exerted a hegemonic force on this sign, attempting to control both what and who ‘the land’ signifies: that is, who the land belongs to, and who belongs *to* the Land.

Being able to engage with ‘the land’ as both signifier and signified, as a marker of space and lived experience as well as a political, historical and cultural formation, black Zimbabwean literature provides an illuminating insight into how these forms interact, overlap and often contradict each other. By looking at four English language novels that straddle Zimbabwe’s independence in 1980, this chapter explores how writers have attempted to deal with the legacy of a national history rooted in the struggle for the return of land. These writers reflect critically and from

disparate political perspectives on the nationalism that has given shape to that history, anticipating as well as evading its authoritarian trajectory.

Due to the censorship regime of the colonial state, the first two novels discussed in this chapter were both published abroad in 1975: Stanlake Samkange's *The Mourned One* and Charles Mungoshi's *Waiting for the Rain*. The latter two novels, Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and Chenjerai Hove's *Bones*, also share their year of publication, 1988, and so usefully contrast the early postcolonial moment with the late colonial one found in Samkange and Mungoshi.⁸ These novels are much better known to a Western readership. If the publication of Dangarembga's novel was also delayed by the residual prejudices of the Literature Bureau (Zwicker 2002), the audience it has reached following its publication abroad by the Women's Press in 1988 has no doubt played an important part in enshrining it in the canon of postcolonial African Literature. Hove's novel, winning the 1989 Noma award for Publishing in Africa, is celebrated both on and beyond the continent for its foregrounding of women's experience and its 'African' aesthetic (Bryce 1990). Rather than seeing the latter novels simply as advances over the former in terms of their aesthetic innovation and political enquiry, however, this chapter follows trends in recent Zimbabwean historiography in revisiting both colonial *and* postcolonial discourse which implicitly develops relationships between rural spaces and sensibilities, and the material and discursive construction of the Land.

As an academic field, Zimbabwean historiography has played both foundational and revisionist roles in connecting the struggle for the return of 'the land' with the project of black political nationalism (see Raftopoulos 1999, Ranger 2005). Terence Ranger's *Revolt In Southern Rhodesia 1896-7* (1967) pioneered the argument that the early instances of anti-colonial resistance in 1896-7 saw both Ndebele and Shona catalysed into resisting the British colonialists, precipitating the 'first' nationalist uprising or *chimurenga*.⁹ The 'supra-tribal' uprising, portrayed by Ranger as the result of *spiritual* commonality and religious leadership, mythologized in later years by, amongst others, Samkange in his novel *Year of the Uprising*

⁸ I refer here to when they were written, not the chronotopes they represent. Samkange's novel is set in the early colonial period, leading to the mid 1930s. Hove's novel straddles independence in 1980 and Dangarembga's moves from the late 1950s to the late 1970s. Mungoshi's novel is the only one that is contemporaneous with its time of writing.

⁹ As Brian Raftopoulos (1999) notes, the "book had a formative influence not only academically, but also politically as it helped to feed the nationalist invention of a continuous thread of anti-colonial struggle" (117).

(1978),¹⁰ provided both a firmly historical *and* mythical tradition of resistance that was appropriated to the nationalist ideology of the guerrilla war of liberation (1965-1980), known as the second *chimurenga*. That Ranger repeatedly warns against the isolation and fetishisation of events in the 1890s (1967: 347) is frequently overlooked by historians and politicians alike. As, indeed, are the consequences of the different resolutions to the uprisings in Mashonaland and Matabeleland (367-375), which perpetuated the ethnic contradictions that to this day still bedevil nationalist politics.¹¹

Although it was principally religious leadership rather than a shared consciousness of land dispossession that featured in Ranger's narrative, the confluence between the two has been manipulated into a powerful ideologeme: that black Zimbabwean national identity was and is ineluctably tied to the colonially expropriated land which belongs by spiritual right to *all* black Zimbabweans. The effacement of historic ethnic and political differences in this ideologeme, as well as economic, environmental and demographic specificities, is an obvious problem (Cheater 1990, Mararike 1999: 87). Nonetheless, following the constitutional referendum in February 2000 which threatened ZANU (PF)'s waning hegemony, the government named the project to seize and re-distribute white-owned farms, protected by the rule of law since the Independence negotiations of 1979-80, the third *chimurenga*. Initially it only involved condoning the War Veterans who were aggressively squatting white commercial farms. But it soon became officially sanctioned and known as the 'fast-track resettlement programme'. Once again, the very real drama of land ownership was mobilised in the discourse of anti-colonial struggle: the 'third chimurenga' (2000-2003) was propagated as both a nationalist *and* a spiritual battle for the return of 'the land', which has led to and legitimises the current authoritarian nation-state (see, for example, Mugabe 2001).

But this process has by no means been inexorable or continuous. Land redistribution was key to policy in the early 1980s, but Mugabe and ZANU PF's

¹⁰ Flora Veit-Wild (1992) argues that lacking "an in-depth treatment of the causes and a genuine and plausible connection between the first and the second *chimurengas*, Samkange has to compromise his historical facts by heavily mythologizing that history to make his message clear. He creates the joint procession of Shona and Ndebele chiefs and religious leaders to Great Zimbabwe and a religious ritual at a national shrine of Mwari, of which there is no historical evidence" (126).

¹¹ In *An Economic and Social History of Zimbabwe, 1890-1948* (1988), Ian Phimster expands this point when he argues that "it was not so much one rising or *chimurenga*, as several local uprisings, or *zvimurenga*", and that the "extremely uneven political and economic impact of the Chartered intruders combined with Shona diplomatic and political considerations to bring about an extraordinary complex and equally uneven response from Mashonaland's various African polities." (19)

hands were tied by the Lancaster House agreements which prevented the expropriation of white-owned property. Recent studies draw attention to how the government could not or did not anticipate the difficulties facing a postcolonial government in reforming the entrenched colonial economy, doing so within the context of international economic coercion, and overcoming its own internal contradictions. As Lene Bull-Christiansen (2004) puts it: the “government’s socialist rhetoric was turned around in a move to reconcile the expectations of social justice with the new policies of structural adjustment.”(58) Social historians Amanda Hammer and Brian Raftopoulos (2003) provide a useful summary of how, in the context of growing disaffection from war veterans, the rural poor, internal and international political opposition in the late 1990s, these failures resulted in the ‘land question’ being re-politicised—manipulated to consolidate both elite and ethnic political and economic sovereignty. This summary illuminates the hegemonic control exerted, in both discourse and practice, over both the variegated reality of ‘the land’ and the absolute nationalist concept of the nation—the Land:

Not surprisingly, ‘land’ as an historical trope and a metaphor of colonial subjugation and conflict, has lent itself easily to a particular nationalist narrative, serving especially the ruling party’s need to assert its hegemonic claim to historical ‘truth’ and sustained legitimacy. Land’s seeming primacy as a signifier of just possession, indigenous location and national belonging has been woven as a central thread into the cloth of the dominant liberation message. Thus the seeming ‘naturalness’ of a certain vision of ‘the land question’ is presented as the basis for its singular status, as the sole, authentic signifier of national identity. The complexity and multiplicity of colonial and postcolonial social, political and economic struggles in varied locations and amongst differentiated groups are obscured through their distillation into a ‘timeless’ and unchanged struggle over land: hence the simplistic sequential notions of Chimurenga I, II and III. (18-19)

These criticisms are central to the concerns of this chapter. As Ranka Primorac argues in her important study of postcolonial Zimbabwean literature (2003), the manipulation of history in order to serve ‘a particular nationalist narrative’ has produced a spatio-temporal atavism: “Although the take-over of farmland is meant to represent a ‘fast-track’ movement of Zimbabwe’s national identities into *the future*, the official government rhetoric has, paradoxically, conceptualised it as a return to *the past*” (80).

This atavism is a cardinal feature of ZANU PF's recent politics, but is by no means peculiar to the postcolonial literature Primorac focuses on.

Whereas postcolonial writers like Yvonne Vera create literary chronotopes that challenge or, to borrow J.M. Coetzee's term (1988b), *rival* the post-colonial nationalist narrative, colonial writers such as Samkange and Mungoshi, as well as, in her analysis, Wilson Katiyo's *Son of the Soil* (1976), Dambudzo Marechera's *The House of Hunger* (1978) and Stanley Nyamfukudza's *The Non-Believer's Journey* (1980), 'write back' to the *colonial* chronotope which polarised city and country by showing "that this chronotope was a lying one." (81) Now, while the colonial literature may, in cases, employ less sophisticated techniques, my argument is that in their engagement with the iconography and events of anti-colonial nationalism, certain novels are every bit as circumspect as their postcolonial descendants. Which is remarkable, even when taking the pressures of censorship and exile into account, given the context of anti-colonial mobilisation and struggle in which they are written.

In all the selected novels 'the land' and life lived on it is viewed by at least one central character as the traditional, rural social world of the African *past*. This rural past is then juxtaposed with, and faces dissolution in, an increasingly urban *present*. This characteristically precipitates in crisis, as communities struggle to come to terms with simultaneously occupying the disjunctive spaces of capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production and their attendant social relationships. This trend is exemplified by Lucifer's 'alienated' perspective on his home in Mungoshi's *Waiting for the Rain*. In these instances 'the land' is viewed as what Henri Lefebvre (1991), in a different context, calls *absolute* space: space which remains materially and conceptually locked in the 'primitive' pre-capital past, despite experiencing the material encroachment of colonial modernity (agricultural capital, European, Christian education, waged labour and migrancy, commodification and the advent of consumer culture).¹² What is significant about the trope is that in each novel I discuss, a different kind of rural space is focused on: in *Waiting for the Rain* it is a peasant homestead in a Tribal Trust

¹² I use the term following Henri Lefebvre's (1991) definition of 'absolute space' and its concomitant ideological function: "The cradle of absolute space—its origin, if we are to use that term—is a fragment of agro-pastoral space, a set of places named and exploited by peasants, or by nomadic pastoralists. A moment comes when, through the new actions of masters or conquerors, a part of this space is assigned a new role, and henceforth appears as transcendent, as sacred (i.e. inhabited by divine forces), as magical and cosmic. The paradox here, however, is that it continues to be seen as a part of nature. Much more than that, its mystery and its sacred (or cursed) character are attributed to the forces of nature, even though it is the exercise of political power therein which has in fact wrenched the area from its natural context, and even though its new meaning is entirely predicated on that action" (234).

Area; in *Bones* it is a white commercial farm—its black workers having been previously evicted from their Tribal Trust Area; the Waddilove Mission is the moral and epistemological hub of Samkange's novel; and Tambudzai in *Nervous Conditions* shuttles between homestead and Mission school.

Unlike 'the farm' of the Afrikaans *plaasroman* and English farm novel in South Africa (see Coetzee 1988a), there is no such singular semantic figure of nationalist ideology in Zimbabwean literature. The closest social microcosm would be the peasant homestead, or *musha* (Rutherford 2003: 196), with its similar emphasis on cultural homogeneity and the relation between "individual" and "lineal consciousness" that Coetzee (1988a: 101) discusses. But after decades of rural displacement, underdevelopment and urbanisation, it generally presents a more disparate picture of colonial dislocation and political paralysis than even the *plaasroman* of the 1930s Depression in South Africa.

This observation presents a challenge to the historical thesis, found in both Terence Ranger and David Lan's (both 1985) peasant histories, that identifies a strong and generally harmonious relationship between peasant consciousness and nationalist mobilisation. In an analysis that has recently been adopted by Maurice Vambe (2005b) to discuss representations of 'land resistance' in Zimbabwean literature, Ranger argues that

the balance of the equation of consciousness between peasants and guerrillas in Zimbabwe was very different from that in Mozambique, allowing for a more direct input from the peasantry into the ideology and programme of the war. In Zimbabwe, peasant demands for lost lands were part and parcel of a developed consciousness of the mechanisms of their oppression; of an understanding of how the state had expropriated them to the direct advantage of settler farming. In Zimbabwe the development of rural cultural nationalism prevented the past from being expropriated in its turn by the belated 'traditionalism' of Rhodesian Front 'tribal politics'.(14)

Now while I am not in dispute with this generalised observation, it is striking how rare literary representations of it are. In Vambe's account there is no mention of novels, and much of his discussion focuses on short stories written in Zimbabwe since ZANU PF's authoritarian turn in 2000. The early materialist critic Flora Veit-Wild (1992), by contrast, censured the likes of Mungoshi's *Waiting for the Rain* for being

inadequately politicised and historically misleading in its representation of alienation rather than peasant consciousness. Although her diagnosis of the role played by censorship and the colonised literary imaginations of some writers in the 1970s is persuasive, it is telling that from Samkange in the 1970s to Vera in the 2000s, there is a pervasive reluctance in novels written in English to straightforwardly equate peasant life on the land with either political consciousness or unequivocal support of the guerrillas during the liberation war itself. In the more recent postcolonial novels, discussed in chapter three, the reasons are made clear: that the postcolonial government has *itself* in many ways been guilty of what Ranger suggests the Rhodesian government attempted: the distortion of rural cultural nationalism in order to 'expropriate' the past and propagate a violent 'tribal politics'.

My contention, therefore, is that the earlier novels I discuss illustrate a sustained—but by no means consistent—attitude of circumspection towards the militant nationalism of the liberation struggle. They suggest a quite contrary 'structure of feeling'. If these fictions seemed lacking or misleading to an earlier generation of readers and critics, searching for cultural documentation of the liberation struggle, then for more recent readers they are interesting in that they anticipate the revisionist impulse of historians and postcolonial scholars that look to recover the suppressed narratives of that struggle: peasant indifference and even antipathy to guerrillas and nationalist agents; the production of the colonial 'Master farmer'; gender oppression and ethnic conflict; environmental degradation, and so on.

To return to the texts then, only Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* attempts definitively to portray 'the land' as a dynamic and differential space that is implicitly linked to metropolitan colonial experience. Tambudzai moves away from the rural homestead, is acculturated and develops an acute historical awareness via her European education at the mission school run by her uncle. In doing so, however, she neither rejects her family nor the rural way of life, which she is initially so keen to leave behind: she is acculturated rather than alienated. Throughout the novel she returns to the homestead to help with harvesting and family occasions. Her subjectivity is not absolute but polycentric (Primorac 2003: 118). Spaces and social relations she moves away from remain fundamental to her sense of self. As she states, "If I forget them, my cousin, my mother, my friends, I might as well forget myself. And that, of course, could not happen." (NC: 192).

Similarly, Hove's *Bones* polarises country and city in order to rival colonial—but also post-colonial—paradigms of spatial control and power, revealing the ways in which women negotiate patriarchy and share their experiences *in and between* those spaces. In doing this, his novel, I argue, reproduces an essentialised and gendered narrative of anti- and post-colonial nationalism, but does so with the aim of showing how women have played a central yet marginalised role in the liberation process. Of all the novels in this section, *Bones* is the most nationalistic, but like the others it circumscribes an official nationalist narrative with its own particular demands. In this way, the novels discussed all to an extent either utilise or reproduce the nationalist ideologeme that links the land to the Land but in order *to question* its limits and implicit exclusions. As this chapter shows, however, some novels are more successful in this project than others.

The presence of the past in Stanlake Samkange's *The Mourned One* (1975)

Stanlake Samkange's third novel, *Year of the Uprising* (1978), along with Lawrence Vambe's *An Ill-Fated People: Zimbabwe Before and After Rhodes* (1972) and Solomon Mutswairo's *Mapondera: Soldier of Zimbabwe* (1983a), belongs to a corpus of black Zimbabwean Literature that uses Terence Ranger's "nationalist historiography" (2005: 217) of the first *chimurenga* of 1896-7 as a central theme. As Flora Veit-Wild (1992) notes, "they all mythologize the uprisings of 1896-7 in order to support the ongoing war of liberation" (109). The novels reclaim a history of *nationalist* anti-colonial resistance by re-writing colonialist history from a perspective that draws on spiritual traditions and a sense of collective injustice at the expropriation of ancestral lands. Veit-Wild goes on to add, however, that these writers had their own ideological agendas: "by establishing the pride and dignity of their people, the three authors try to prove to the whites that they were wrong to betray the concept of partnership and destroy the achievements of Federation." (190) Concerning the representation of 'the land' in this literature, this last point is important. Samkange, Vambe and Mutswairo were all moderate nationalist intellectuals who split with militant radicals like Robert Mugabe and Herbert Chitepo following Ian

Smith's Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) in 1965 (Veit-Wild 1992: 106-7, 117).

While these groups may have shared an ultimate vision of African national emergence, the literature produced by the former does not always correspond to the emphasis placed by the latter on a racialised and militant fight for the return of land and political sovereignty for the black majority. In the following section I look at an earlier novel by Samkange—one which *does not* refer back to the first *chimurenga*—in order to explore the ambivalent sway of African nationalism at a time when the liberation struggle was embryonic, and the complex relation between such politics and 'the land' that is depicted. The intention is to demonstrate that whilst black literature written in English before independence invariably referenced or encoded African nationalism, it did not always express a straightforward relation between 'the land', life on it and national liberation.

Samkange's second novel, *The Mourned One* (1975[1968]), is intriguing, seemingly anomalous even, as it addresses neither 'the land question' nor nationalism *per se*. The mourning which the novel foregrounds is ostensibly that of Samkange's readership: for the demise of his protagonist—who is also a cipher for his father—the Mission-educated and westernised African, Lazarus Percival Ockenden, whose death-row memoir Samkange claims to transcribe 'as' the novel. However, within the recounting of his education and assimilation, victimisation and impending death, lies an allegory for the betrayal of the aspiring African elites leading to UDI in 1965. The actual work of mourning which the novel performs, then, is more complex. It is predicated on Samkange's biographical narcissism on the one hand, and the recognition of a division between Zimbabwe's tribal, spiritual and rural *past* and its colonial, liberal, Christian and urban *present* on the other. The two are linked in that Samkange takes his father's own journey from rural village to a Mission education, and subsequently to the (urban) centre of nationalist politics as being exemplary.¹³

¹³ For the biographical resonances see Terence Ranger's history of the Samkange family and brief reading of the novel in *Are We Not Also Men? The Samkange Family and African Politics in Zimbabwe 1920-64* (1995: 134-138). Ranger argues that the novel reads as "a reflection on Thompson Stanlake's [Stanlake's father] career and its meaning," and more generally as "a compressed account of the Samkange family's Christian experience – their conversion, education, relation with missionaries, employment as teachers, evangelists, ministers" (135).

The ‘trial’ with which the novel culminates takes place in 1935,¹⁴ invoking an earlier moment of Rhodesian history characterised by the urbanisation of the African elite from both major ethnic groups as well as the partial and uneven proletarianisation of peasants across the colonial nation (Yoshikini 1999). The didactic impetus of ‘mourning’ for the betrayed promise of this earlier era, foregrounds a form of politics (liberal and multi-racial) that had in many ways been superseded with the advent of armed, socialist-orientated struggle in Zimbabwe from the mid 1960s onwards. Primorac (2003) categorises the novel as being ‘axiological’ in that it foregrounds “the moral evaluation of missionary discourse” (19), while for Ranger (1995) the novel is an “assessment” of Samkange’s father’s career and “the betrayal of the promise of ‘Christian Civilization.’” (204) Set in the 1930s but written shortly after UDI in 1965, the novel, I argue, uses this time-lag to lament—to mourn—the demise of the religiously inflected, liberal, multi-racial politics of an earlier generation, in the context of a seismic shift towards a more radical and militant black nationalism.¹⁵

“saved to die”: *bildung* between village, mission and towns

As with Franco Moretti’s (1987) reading of the European *Bildungsroman*, in Samkange’s novel the contradictory experience of modernity is best allegorised by the passage from childhood to adulthood. In the Zimbabwean context this transition is concomitant with leaving the land for the city but is mediated, crucially, by the partial experience of colonial modernity in the rural missionary stations.¹⁶ The narrative charts the journey of a child from his rural birth place in the village of Chipata to the Waddilove Mission, from there to the rapidly growing towns of Bulawayo and Umtali, and finally to the Salisbury prison in which he writes the manuscript which

¹⁴ According to the archival research of Neil ten Kortenaar (1997), the date refers to the actual trial and execution of one Edwin Ndachana, who was falsely accused of raping Bessie Dodds in 1935. It is part of the enigmatic quality of this novel that Samkange claims to be transcribing the *memoirs* of this person when in actual fact “a dozen or so pages are copied directly not from handwritten memoirs but from the official record of the trial of Edwin Ndachana” (20).

¹⁵ Samkange’s moderate sensibility is captured in this biographical snapshot: “Although a firm believer in the aims of African Nationalism, he found the faction fighting between the PCC [ZAPU] and ZANU in 1963-64 distasteful and unacceptable. As a man who thought deeply, and who believed in the amicable settlements of disputes, he concluded that his future, at any rate for a time, lay in the academic field.” (Cary and Mitchell 1977: 34)

¹⁶ In post-colonial Zimbabwean fiction the experience of childhood, especially during the war, often also represents “a politically convenient social structure from which the imagined singularity of the national formation can be projected.” (Muponde 2005: 130)

Samkange later ‘finds’. Condemned to death by his community for being born a twin, the child is ‘saved’ by Rev. Percival Ockenden, a white missionary, in a chance if propitious encounter. He subsequently “grew up to be a Christian,” an “educated and civilised native, while my twin brother remained a so-called ‘raw-native’ in the Zwimba tribal area” (*TM*: 26).

Lazarus Percival Ockenden, as he is named by the missionaries, triumphs both in the classroom and on the sports-field at Waddilove and moves to the towns in order to pursue a teaching career. It is an exemplary trajectory of the African elite in Rhodesia in the early 20th century, but it is by no means unproblematic. Upon leaving the cloistered world of the Mission and entering the towns, Lazarus is exposed for the first time to the inequalities of the racist state in its various forms. In chapter 14 the urban world of a rapidly growing Bulawayo is recounted in all its ethnic, racial and socio-economic multiplicity. He recounts the experience of unequal pay structures and the ‘story’ of small-scale anti-colonial resistance told to him by his drinking-partner, Moses; the caste stratification of the ‘coloured’ community; the humiliating experience of being moved from second to third class on the train; his matter-of-fact remarks on the segregated Locations and policing of urban space; his secularisation and the political meetings of the “I See You” (the ICU: Industrial Workers Commercial Union); and finally the street violence between the Ndebele and the Shona “tribes” (*TM*: 120-125). In spite of all this, however, the preoccupation of the memoirist is on his coming betrayal by the “civilised Christians”: “my life was much safer among savage Africans than it would be among Christian white men and women” (*TM*: 125).

It is notable, then, that whilst the narration foregrounds a form of politics couched in the language and episteme of colonial ‘civilisation’, another form of politics *is* articulated through it, captured by the relatively crude naturalistic gaze. This politics is the natural consequence of such visible oppression and the racial, class and ethnic contradictions that foster it—all potentially formative of anti-colonial nationalist sentiment. Like Samkange in the mid 1960s, however, Lazarus steers clear of internecine conflict as well as the militant socialism proposed as its antidote. It transpires, for example, that the ICU orator is the same anti-colonial hero whom Moses had previously lionised in conversation. Lazarus transcribes his speech for us:

Yes, the white man has a God he has not told you about. That God is MONEY ... Let us refuse to be tools, working for nothing! Let us not separate into tribes ... All workers of the world are united. We must also unite our forces together and so achieve something and have freedom in Africa. (*TM*: 121).

Socialist, secular and revolutionary in its rhetoric, this nationalist exhortation leaves no mark on Lazarus. The disparate urban locale is fleshed out with a political and historically resonant character, but it is merely the grist of verisimilitude in relation to the 'civilizational' tragedy which Lazarus is convinced his life comes to represent: "If I hang and die, the brotherhood of man, peace and racial harmony in this land will die with me" (*TM*: 146). Far from being the optimal place for the nurturing of nationalism, the city, or rather the African Location that Lazarus has been describing, is portrayed as a chaotic and divided space bereft of moral values and leadership. Although clearly preferable to the racial prejudice Lazarus will experience 'among Christian white men and women', the evident heterogeneity of this space is reduced to an *absolute* space of 'savage Africans'.

The city marks the end of Lazarus' journey but it is neither the political nor the moral centre of the novel. Rather, it is the Mission where he was brought up which, in its pictorial recollection, presents the ideal landscape of hybridised Afro-European modernity that colours Lazarus's recollections:

Waddilove was, at this time, a small but beautiful place. At its centre stood a pretty church from which radiated roads lined with gum and pine trees which whistled in the wind of its cold, drizzly winters ... Waddilove was situated on excellent farmland, thirteen miles from the Marandellas, along the Wedza road. On its wide plains, pastures and marshes, stretching towards the Mutandare river in the east and Border Church in the west, grazed Friesland, Jersey and Hereford cows, Afrikander Oxen, scrub heifers and merino sheep. Wild animals, monkeys and baboons roamed and frolicked in the elephant grass, bushes and thickets, and among its countless granite rocks, kopjes and forests of gum, pine, musasa, munondo, and mipfuti tress. I was to know them well; to know where the most tasteful matamba, mazhinyu, matapfu, matowhe and makayu could be found and tsambatsi, hute, maroro and tswandzwa picked. (*TM*: 29)

‘Radiating’ from the church at its axis, the landscape is dominated by flora and fauna both indigenous and imported from afar. This tableau indicates a genial legacy of international commerce and the seemingly harmonious accommodation of colonial stock with local plant-life. The impression is more of a preternaturally cosmopolitan farm than a colonial religious institution. Whether this is an accurate recollection of the Mission and its agrarian history is of secondary importance in relation to the symbolic capital it contains: a happy symbiosis of the colonial and the local, through the grace of God.

As the sole institutions in Rhodesia to offer Western formal education to Africans until 1920 (Küster 1994), the Missions became, as the imagery suggests, regional hubs, drawing (and producing) a class of Africans destined for future leadership from across southern Africa.¹⁷ Complementing Waddilove’s ‘hybrid’ landscape is the following depiction of a football match:

Cities, small mining towns, and rural areas all seemed to have no difficulty in nurturing football stars ... Lashad Mulenga, came from Blantyre in Nyasaland, the stylish dribbler Kamanga was a Copperbelt boy[Zambia], while the Mugadza brothers, James and Titus ‘Punctuality’, were Zwinjanja boys, and Jonathan Motsi, the formidable fullback, was a local boy from the near-by tribal area. (TM, 80)

In this recollection the geo-political make-up of a region is compressed within the Mission’s cultural space. Unlike the city, where space is specifically identified with class, racial or ethnic groups and, where appropriate, conceived of as the homogenous absolute space of ‘savage Africans’ and avoided, Lazarus’ narrative of the mission celebrates a history of colonial assimilation which unites Africans from a wide spectrum of spaces: ‘cities, small mining towns, and rural areas’. In doing so, however, it does not pass comment on the socio-economic practices and flows that make this possible: of commodities, migrant labour, land expropriation, rural displacement and so on. ‘Waddilove’ even manages to include traditional spiritual symbols and practice on its ‘land’:

¹⁷ Küster (1994) argues that far from serving the purposes of economic underdevelopment and cultural imperialism, the rapid growth of Missionary education was very much a *response* to Africans’ “vigorous demand for education”. Colonial education was desired by the elite in order to maintain their own hegemony in “a perpetuation of self-defined forms of African socio-economic and cultural life.” (37)

Near Waddilove was also a unique tree which Africans called *muti usima zita*, the tree that has no name. It was so named, because there was no other tree like it in the world. 'Pascigone'—that is, in the halcyon days of the Mashona—people often found *sadza* and pots of beer under this tree. (*TM*: 30)

There is, however, a marked difference between the *inclusive* space of the Mission, and that of the 'tribal area' where Lazarus was born.

In the course of his migration between the mission and the city, Lazarus is compelled to question the 'European' identity he has acquired when he achieves the status of "a public figure, a school hero" (*TM*: 90). His enquiries lead him back to the village of his birth where he meets his br(other),¹⁸ Zana, and experiences a circumscribed reconciliation with his African heritage. He feels *physically* ill-at-ease there—"sleeping on the earthen floor turned out to be only one of the inconveniences I was to endure"—yet he nonetheless experiences a social, and concomitantly *spiritual*, well-being:

There was something about the African community that I had never detected in the European community in which I lived at Waddilove ... a code of behaviour, an attitude to life and to other people; perhaps something embodied in the Shona 'hunhu' or the Sindebele 'ubuntu,' 'humanness' or 'personness'. The same thing, I believe, which black men in America call 'soul'. (*TM*: 95)

In the village Lazarus, or Muchemwa—"the mourned one"—as his mother calls him, is able to reconcile his worldly 'European' education with the values he finds 'embodied' there. The conflation of Shona, Ndebele and Afro-American notions of humanism signals Samkange's own investment in pan-Africanism, burgeoning amongst black African elites throughout southern Africa from the early decades of the 20th century onwards.¹⁹ The Pan-Africanist sentiment embedded in this remark is

¹⁸ As I make clear later in the section, 'br(other)' indicates that Zana functions as Lazarus's twin, his double, but that his existence in the Native area is also 'other' to Lazarus's formative experiences in the European Mission and in the towns. This duality is also captured in Lazarus's hybridised identity. His colonial name is Lazarus, resurrected by the missionaries but 'saved to die'; in contrast to his African identity, Muchemwa, meaning the mourned one, disavowed by his 'own' people but also mourned, belatedly, as the lost promise of their liberation.

¹⁹ Stanlake's father, Thompson, was one of the progenitors of pan-African nationalism in Southern Rhodesia from 1925 onwards (Ranger 1995: 88). As for the Afro-American connection, Gore and Kahari, Zana and Lazarus's best friends, uses Booker T. Washington's 'Atlanta Exposition Address' to impress the villagers on a visit home (*TM*: 101).

predicated, however, on the experience of timelessness within the village. Lazarus/Muchemwa “felt the inexplicable, serene tranquillity of village life” in contrast to “that panic, mad rush and race against the clock which I was used to” (*TM*: 96).

Nostalgically recollected, his pastoral idyll in the tribal area village, functioning as ‘the land’ in this instance, is depicted as being *outside* of the instrumentalised time of modernity by Lazarus/Muchemwa, implicitly denying the co-evality of life in the village and that lived at the mission and in the city. This discontinuous space functions as the converse to Lazarus/Muchemwa’s subjective formation at the mission and in the city. It is the other scene of the colonial modernity that Lazarus, and by implication also Samkange’s father, initially embraced: the past from which the modern Rhodesian African emerges, and from where the primitive African mourns the loss of originary identity through his passage into colonial modernity. When he realises he has been ‘betrayed’ by this form of modernity, however, Lazarus/Muchemwa projects the redemptive aspect of this past, the humanity of life lived still lived ‘on’ the land, onto the twin he was separated from at birth, his br(other) Zana. Excoriating the missionary institution that formed him, he notes that of “all the people who have been to see me, however, the visit of my twin brother, Zana, remains indelible in my mind ... I was glad to see him. I love him. I admire him and, *secretly, I have envied him.*” (*TM*: 142, my italics) Such envy, the desire to have been his alter-ego, is distinctly melancholy. As Neil ten Kortenaar (1997) argues:

The Mourned One has a sense of two trajectories that both define his life: a life he has lived and a life that he has not lived but might have and should have ... Zana, the twin who remains on the land and whom we might call the Unmourned One, represents for Muchemwa a potentiality that had once been every bit as real as the fate that was actualized, but that is now sealed off in a past only accessible to him through the stories of others.(23)

While Lazarus/Muchemwa’s narrative asks us to mourn his demise and all he represents, the ‘other’ story of national development, Zana’s story, remains marginalised. Having exhausted such marginal narratives, ‘the stories of others,’

Lazarus/Muchemwa arrives at a last-minute political conversion by way of race-consciousness:

the missionary only wants me to be his *brother in Christ*, not his *brother in law* ... in *matters of colour* he considers himself a white man first and a Christian man second ... There are many things in *African culture* that are superior to European ways ... Sons of Africa will, one day, arise and recover *the rule of our land* from the white man ... If I hang and die, the *brotherhood of man* peace and racial harmony in this land will die with me; because *where the white man rejects me—one, who, except for the colour of his skin is European—black men everywhere will realise that there can be no half measures, that co-operation with these people is impossible and that either the white man or the black man must rule this land but not both.*” (TM: 145-146, my italics).

Religion, law, a homogenous ‘African culture’ and a Christian ‘brotherhood’ are all identified as markers of racial ‘rejection’. References to class and ethnicity are tellingly absent, however, and a simplistic version of the land question is invoked. Nation and land merge in the appeal to ‘recover the rule of our land’. For Lazarus/Muchemwa, the issue is one of civilisation, morality and racial prejudice; of the unfulfilled promises of the liberal and Christian whites who were trying to accommodate a multi-racial society in the 1930s. It was evidently not difficult for Samkange to transpose this scenario to the break-up of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland in 1963. The issue is expressed in the language of radical nationalism that Samkange was shying away from, that precipitated in the militant socialist struggle in the later half of the 1960s. Lazarus/Muchemwa invokes the Land, but it is a form of nationalism that necessarily separates and marginalises the narratives of ‘the land’ itself.

Despite this oration being addressed to Zana, he is tellingly absent from it. Zana symbolises for Lazarus/Muchemwa not just his alter-ego, but the very materiality and multiplicity of the land and its histories that is the other scene to Lazarus/Muchemwa’s own experience of elite, westernised and eventually urbanised national consciousness. The implication of this quote is that whatever happens to Zana, materially, is irrelevant at the *symbolic* level of the nation. That we are told

Zana and Lazarus/Muchemwa come from the Zwimba tribal area has extra significance in this respect.

In discussing how the 1896-7 uprisings led from a “tradition of revolt” to one of “protest” in the early 20th century, Ranger (1967) uses the example of Matthew Zwimba, who founded an independent Christian Church and anti-colonial “movement” in the Zwimba tribal area, which “grew out of Shona tradition and especially out of the tradition of the uprisings.” (379) Although unsuccessful, it was constitutive of a “millenarian” nationalism, the symbols and traditions of which nationalists seized upon again in the 1950s and 60s (382-6). It thus offers a perfect example of how the ideological work of Samkange’s novel occludes the actual history of rural resistance in a specific area of Rhodesia. To repeat a crucial quote, the fate of the nation (the Land) hinges on the youthful, hybrid figure of colonial modernity—Lazarus/Muchemwa—not on any reality of rural peasant consciousness: ‘If I hang and die, the brotherhood of man, peace and racial harmony in this land dies with me’.

In this novel, therefore, ‘the land’ and all it represents is only given a subsidiary role in the historical formation of an anachronistic and melancholy elite national consciousness. The exemplary journey of Samkange’s protagonist involves a return to his rural ‘origins’, but that space remains for him part of an African past that is left behind in his enthusiastic journey into colonial modernity. Ultimately it is idealised in such a way as to make it seem like a natural locus of nationalist sentiment, but his formative education at the Mission and the cursory snapshots of the city reveal the racial, class and ethnic divisions that better characterise the disparate and discontinuous spaces of the colonial nation. Bridging the divide between the African past and colonial present, the Mission represents for Lazarus/Muchemwa all that is redemptive about the colonial experience: it is his inclusive landscape of modernity.

The enlightened atmosphere of racial harmony and cultural largesse found there encapsulates (and no doubt produced) Samkange’s own nationalist vision: ‘the brotherhood of man’. By slipping into a discourse of uncompromisingly radical (though notably not socialist) nationalism at the end of the novel, Samkange’s protagonist becomes the victim of the contradictions latent within that ideal vision. The veneration of the other self, Zana, itself a mournful longing for ‘the land’ of his birth, provides a parable for understanding why frustrated nationalists turned to ‘the land’, with its promise of cultural continuity and political resistance, in order to

bolster anti-colonial nationalism in this period. As stated in the introduction to this section, Samkange and others did go on to mythologise ‘the land’ in this way. But not until Mungoshi’s *Waiting for the Rain* in 1975 did an English language novel seek to explore what life was actually like ‘on’ the land, for a rural family struggling in a colonial and increasingly capitalist society.

Charles Mungoshi’s *Waiting for the Rain* (1975)

In recent studies, Charles Mungoshi’s *Waiting for the Rain* (1975) has been established as a classic of early Zimbabwean fiction written in English. In particular it is seen to represent the pervasive mood of individualistic *alienation*, characteristic of the ‘second generation’ of western-educated African writers in the late colonial period.²⁰ Writers, that is, who rejected the early nationalist idealism of Samkange’s generation with literature that voiced feelings of “anger, despair and pessimism”. In her ‘social history’ of Zimbabwean Literature, Flora Veit-Wild argues (1992) that

while writing had been very much a public affair for the pioneers of Zimbabwean literature—driven as they were by the impulse to promote African nationalism, to educate, to teach, to preserve culture and traditions through their writings—the next generation developed and cherished the personal, private, individual voice.(153)

Following the discussion of Samkange’s parable of ‘African nationalism’ in *The Mourned One*, my contention in this section is that Mungoshi’s focus on the atrophy of the traditional rural family runs *against* this particular reading of the ‘second generation’ writers.

Rather than emphasising a singular ‘personal, private, individual voice’ within the novel, I follow Rino Zhuwarara (2001) in displacing the emphasis away from the individual (and autobiographical) fate of Lucifer, the educated, urbanised and

²⁰ Flora Veit-Wild establishes the generational schema on the research carried out in her *Survey of Zimbabwean Writers: Educational and Literary Careers* (Bayreuth, Bayreuth, 1993a). In *Teachers, Preachers and Non-Believers* she offers the following synopsis of the ‘second generation’: “Mostly born after World War II, they went to school in the 1950s and 1960s, and began their writing careers in the 1970s. Their adolescence was incisively influenced by the political climate in Rhodesia after UDI: the polarisation between the radical white settler minority under the leadership of Ian Smith on the one hand and the radical black nationalist movement on the other; violent clashes by the two sides in the townships; politicisation at secondary schools, colleges and university, and finally the war of liberation which rendered the country a battleground on which thousands of people lost their lives ... Political and cultural isolation from the outside, fierce oppression inside and the general feeling of hopelessness made this period what later became known as ‘those years of drought and hunger’”(153).

increasingly alienated figure of the 'second generation', and on to the social and cultural changes precipitated in the *durée* of colonial modernity as it infiltrates the lives of all those who still live on the land. As Zhuwarara argues, the events of Lucifer's homecoming and departure present a communal crisis on the land rich in historiographic potential: "Lucifer's impending departure for overseas generates family tensions which provide the writer with an opportunity to dramatise the crisis of a society whose cohesion is falling apart." Crucial to this 'dramatisation' is the polyphony of the novel's realism, conveying the "process of disintegration from the perspective of key members of the family". We are given the disparate views of three generations of rural Africans who, whilst not perceiving "their material, cultural and social situation in a uniform manner"(50), nonetheless offer a complex picture of the way in which these factors played out in the rural spaces of Zimbabwe in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Of the colonial legislation on land ownership and use, the Land Apportionment Act of 1930, which segregated land on racial lines, and the Native Land Husbandry Act of 1951, which consolidated this segregation, were the most pernicious in alloying the colonial project of land expropriation to the economic and political subjugation of the rural masses (see, for a regional perspective, Mamdani 1996). In respect of this, the Tribal Trust Area 'land' itself is arguably the most alienated character of the novel. But that is not to say that all Mungoshi's characters are severed from the cultural heritage that is associated with it. Rather than showing that this alienation spontaneously generates nationalist feeling, those members of the Mandengu family who do not wish to flee the Manyene Tribal Trust Area (as Lucifer, Betty and, at times, Garabha all wish to) are more concerned with maintaining cultural continuity through the everyday relationship with the land that they still have. They do not *all* reach the "peasant consciousness" that Ranger (1985) discusses.

What they do oscillate between is something like the "individual" and "lineal" consciousness J.M. Coetzee (1988a) identifies in the South African *plaasroman*. Just as Coetzee sees the genre and the conflict between these modes of consciousness as arising from the economic and demographic turbulence of the Great Depression of the 1930s, Mungoshi's focus on a peasant social order betrays a similar reaction to the situation in post-war Rhodesia. He is more concerned with the pressures facing cultural homogeneity and patrimony—the factors that produce individual consciousness in the place of lineal consciousness—than he is with emphasising how

such continuity is itself politically and historically determined, or indeed realised within an individual consciousness. That anti-colonial nationalism features as one such factor is of major significance.

being *with* the land, but not fighting *for* it

The social realism of *Waiting for the Rain* is mediated by the representation of animist beliefs and practices, probing and at times subverting the normative conventions of its European influences. The opening chapter of the novel, for example, offers a “protean” (Zhuwarara 2001: 62) dreamscape which defies attachment to any one individual, but rather comes to represent the general socio-spiritual malaise within Lucifer’s family and community.²¹ The passage is defined by a distinct and seemingly absolute spatial representation: “Way, way ahead of him is a pinpoint flash which keeps on going farther and farther, but it’s all right—the distance is always the same despite sensations of now being very far away and cold and lonely”(WR: 1). The topography of the dream is spiritually distinctive, but geographically unspecific: “Hazy blue mountains ... heat-tortured plains ... the Bearded Forest” (WR: 2). A sense of *distance* is evoked as “a nameless thing, a feeling, akin to hunger”, but is also associated with another feeling, one of *intimacy*: “It is under there, together with the feeling of being very near to, and involved in, the pulsing and flashing and brilliant centre. This is the Old Man’s drum” (WR: 1).

The ‘Old Man’s drum’ thus becomes a central trope of tradition in the novel. It embodies an organic sense of being *with* the ancestors, being *with* ancestral land: it symbolises the spiritual and cultural connection to it. Contradicting this intimacy, or traditional sense of ‘being’, are the intimations of alienation and distance from the ancestral source of tradition—from the ancestral lands lost to the colonisers. The passage thus leaves us with a sense of the increasing impotence of tradition, leading to spiritual retribution: “you don’t have anything to clutch at because the Old Man’s drum is silence ... The Thing raises its claws high in the air. Ready to STRIKE!” (WR: 3-4). In the subsequent narrative, however, this notion of being with, being a *part of*

²¹ Both Zimunya (1982) and Zhuwarara (2001) relate this dream to an originary myth: of the picaresque great-great grandfather Samabwa. It recurs later in the novel through dreams (Sekuru), poetry (Lucifer) and music (Garabha, the spirit-possession). While the alienation of Lucifer and Garabha can be read in terms of the mythical archetype of Samabwa (Zhuwarara 2001: 63), “the subjective and objective aspects of myth integrate on the road to universals beyond discrete personal experience.” (Zimunya 1982: 4).

the land, and its predication on 'traditional' socio-spiritual continuity, is brought into conflict with the stark material changes facing the rural family. Traditional relations, with nature and with others, are increasingly compromised by the increasingly intrusive presence of colonial capitalist modernity.

At the beginning of chapter two we learn that, as the Old Man wakes, his "movements" are "mechanical, out of habit" (*WR*: 4). The chapter then unfolds with a tension between the Old Man's conscious and unconscious thoughts as he goes about his habitual work—his husbandry of the land and the animals the family rears on it:

He makes an unconscious mental note that it's only his son's cocks that are not yet up. It is an unconscious mental note but the sadness and regret it evokes push up to the forefront of his consciousness and this disturbs a little the pre-dawn stillness and this makes him lose interest in the bush as he turns now to the duties that should be his son's. The animals. But first the home. (*WR*: 4)

He goes round the pen, looking at the poles, shaking them one by one, all the suspicious looking ones. But only half-consciously because his eyes are on the animals. Part of his mind recognises them by name, and another part goes a little deeper into the circumstances surrounding each animal: the animal-personal history. And now his one hundred head of cattle—when grass was still the earth's grass—now reduced to ten. (*WR*: 5).

By unpacking this portrait of the Old Man going about his daily work, we begin to grasp a sense of his habitus, as Pierre Bourdieu (1977) would call it: the discrete architecture of "dispositions"; of social, cultural and economic structures, some static some dynamic, which produce the anxiety prefigured in the dream and experienced by the waking consciousness here.

The sense we are given of the Old Man's habitus suggests that we are in a precapitalist social world at this point. The pastoral and the patriarchal coalesce, for example, as mutual 'duties' towards the 'animals' and 'home'. This corresponds to an economic and a concomitantly social imperative centred on the male members of the family, bound to the well-being and reproduction of the family, but not to its commercial productivity. The workaday picture of the homestead, its land and the patriarch's relation to it, is represented through different degrees of consciousness, recalling but also jarring against the animist dream of the first chapter. Such intimate

experience of 'the land' is conveyed through a motif of rural life also found in Samkange's novel: the 'pre-dawn stillness', inculcating a sense of *timelessness*. However, unlike Samkange's epistemological use of this trope, here it corresponds to an ontological sense of identity. The Old Man's semi-conscious 'being' is disturbed by events happening on the land, affecting his family and culture—rather than being used solely as an object of anthropological comparison, as is the case in *The Mourned One*.

Firstly, we note the admonishment of his son, Tongoona. Caring for the 'animals' and the 'home' is Tongoona's role as the present head of the household, but his own anxiety and inertia threatens the patriarchal homeostasis, the homestead's *patrilineal* consciousness. Secondly, the Old Man's intimate knowledge of the animals, 'the animal-personal history', is brought to his conscious thought in association with dispossessed ancestral lands: 'when grass was still the earth's grass'. The Old Man now only has enough land to support a tenth of the stock he used to have. He finds consolation for this material impoverishment (and the associated socio-cultural atrophy) not in anti-colonial organisation, but in the hours he spends making his drums, hoping to transmit his troubled patrilineal consciousness to his second son, Garabha (WR: 7): "only the drum will help him explain the thing he hasn't got words for" (WR: 92).

But in spite of Garabha's love of the drum and nature, we learn that he is also torn by the desire to distance himself from the traditions he is expected to further (WR: 103). Indeed, as the narrative progresses through the intimate spheres of the other family members, there are similar episodes whereby the continuity or linearity of traditional, *habitual* socio-cultural structures, is shown to be in crisis. This is especially acute where the female members of the family are concerned, the older generation in particular.

The numerous episodes depicting the domestic travail of Old Mandisa, Tongoona's mother-in-law, are tellingly contrasted with the laziness of Japi, the Old Man's wife and Tongoona's mother. For Old Mandisa, like the Old Man, praxis is gnosis (see Gikandi 1987). She understands personal and social change through quotidian domestic work:

She takes the basket with the nuts, reaches for a pot of water, sprinkles water on the nuts again thinking to herself: I have come to rely on the water to soften them up.

And this immediately makes her feel about what is happening to her old body (WR, 11).

Enjoying and, increasingly, *abusing* the privileges held by the mother of the family patriarch, Japi, in contrast, attempts to control and manipulate the extended family to serve and hide her own indolence. Her insatiable desire for the commodity sugar is a comic leitmotif. Away from the men, Mandisa is scathing of such abuses: “In need—of sugar? Sugar is a foreign luxury that’s brought more ruin than the spear” (WR, 26). For Mandisa, then, it is Japi’s selfishness and unquestioning desire for ‘foreign luxury’ that represents the most damaging influence on the traditional rural family.

The sugar is supplied by John, Tongoono’s nephew, who like Lucifer also returns to the homestead from a new life in the colonial capital, Salisbury. He brings other presents also: a radio for Lucifer and tobacco for the Old Man. Whilst the comical *novelty* with which these commodities are received by the family is, perhaps, a disingenuous picture, the flow of imported commodities from the city to rural areas is historically accurate and was, according to historian Timothy Burke (1996), a powerful motor of social change:

Commodification in Zimbabwe ... was shepherded along after World War II by a conglomeration of capitalist functionaries and state officials whose interest in penetrating what they call the “African Market” necessarily demanded that they try to change the nature of African selfhood.(11)

John, an unwitting ‘capitalist functionary’, bears more than the just the material products of the metropolis however. The expanded horizon which the radio brings to the isolated rural episteme is used by John to highlight a growing political consciousness across the nation: “things are changing. Sooner than you realise we are going to be rulers of our own country” (WR: 31).

In an important episode, the Old Man Sekuru, a veteran of the first *chimurenga*, dismisses this sentiment, informing us that Paul, John’s brother, has already been imprisoned for his political views. While rooted in the static, lineal consciousness of pre-capitalist, pre-peasant culture, his subsequent critique provides an intuitive prolepsis of the pitfalls of neo-colonial consciousness:

‘Don’t mind me, I am an old man. Bound to see double. I am only thinking that it’s going to be a long fight—what with the snares they have set—sugar, that talking machine of yours, all those other things they have brought and their gods you have taken as your own drum. It’s going to be a long fight—against phantoms most of the time.’ (WR: 32)

For the Old Man, colonial modernity, in the form of commodities, mass communication and Christian education, are ‘snares’. The youths are not so much hybrids as doubles; fighting against their ‘phantasmic’ colonial selves. The ‘change in the nature of African selfhood’ (Burke) is clearly born by the flow of commodities and culture between town and country. The Old Man’s suggestion is that, like John, the predominantly urban nationalists are alienated not so much from the land itself, as from its traditions, its culture, having displaced them for a colonial ‘drum’. But in John’s appeals to him, representing the new, militant nationalist movement, they nonetheless fight in order to bring the Land, the imagined community of the future nation, into being. They wish to appropriate the Old Man’s history of anti-colonial resistance in order to do this; to produce a continuous narrative of *nationalist* anti-colonial resistance. For the Old Man, however, they “fight for something they don’t know. We fought for what we knew ... [w]hat they didn’t know, which we knew, which made us survive, was that we owned nothing and it wasn’t our own cunning which made us live. Everything was the Earth’s” (WR: 116).

The Old Man’s memory of dispossession and resistance is more mobile and less politicised than either the colonialists or John can countenance, and so stymies John’s nationalist reading of his past.²² Sekuru, at least, has not yet reached the kind of ‘peasant consciousness’ that Ranger and Lan observe. Cultural continuity is put before political liberation, as the preservation of socio-spiritual values which nourished the rural family (such as the spirit possession later in the novel) are seen as more important than fighting for the land itself: “You may not live to see this land return to you, but what’s that to you or me if your drum remains the same?” (WR: 117). Like his father Kuruku, the bitter nationalist who tries to politicise Lucifer, John is a peripheral character and Mungoshi tempers their anti-colonial sentiment through

²² It is worth noting that in making this distinction the Old Man also propagates the potentially mythogenic memory of communal land tenure with this statement. Whilst the intention is clearly to question the dogmatic politics that John represents, the Old Man cannot do so without invoking the concept of absolute space, as discussed in the previous section.

contrasts with the more emollient views of the other family members. It is Lucifer, then, the apolitical grandson, who focalises the *social* drama—of a family trapped between “the African past and the inhospitable colonial modernity and its corrosive effects.” (Zhuwarara 2001: 50)

seeing the land through ‘the eye of an impartial tourist’

Travelling home from the city in a bus full of migrant workers in chapter fourteen, the narration assumes Lucifer’s perception of the passing countryside. The narrative no longer offers us an insight into the experience of being-with the land—the praxis and gnosis exhibited by the Old Man Sekuru, Old Mandisa and Garabha—but rather it offers a specific perspective *on* the land:

The sudden transition from the rolling ranches of the Hampshire Estates, with their tall dry grass and the fertile soil under the grass, into the scorched nothing-between-here-and-the-horizon white lands of Manyene Tribal Trust Land, with the inevitable tattered scarecrow waving a silent dirge in an empty field, makes a funeral intrusion into the bus ... This is our country, the people say with a sad familiarity. The way an undertaker talks of death, Lucifer thinks. (WR: 39)

Lucifer shares the migrant labourers’ despondent view of the unevenly developed spaces which they pass through. In contrast to the verdant white-owned commercial farm, their ‘country’ is the “uniformly dead landscape” of the Tribal Trust Land, bequeathed following the colonial expropriations of the 1890s and consolidated through the land legislation previously mentioned. As Veit-Wild (1992) argues, the passage provides a “socio-economic analysis” of Rhodesian land distribution policy, yet “Mungoshi does not explain or comment; he simply allows the description to make the economic situation visible.”(292) Yet any anger or critical consciousness generated by this very different form of gnosis is displaced by Lucifer’s distaste for the ‘backwardness’ of rural life: “Not until you cross the Chambara River into the old village with roofless huts and gaping doorways and the smell of dog-shit and burnt rags are you truly at home” (WR: 40). This corresponds to a very different conception of the ‘spiritual’ nature of the land. Whereas the Old Man and other family members *experience* the spiritual unconsciously, in their everyday work on the homestead, for Lucifer, outside of his dreams, the spiritual can only be *seen*; that is, accessed from a

distanced, alienated perspective: “Not until you look towards the east and see the tall sun-bleached rocks of Manyene Hills casting foreboding shadows over the land beyond like sentinels over some *fairy-tale land of the dead*, are you really at home.” (WR: 40, my italics).

It is a telling irony that Lucifer can only be ‘truly at home’, as the refrain has it, when he perceives the village and the surrounding landscape through “the eye of an impartial tourist” (WR: 180). This perspective does similar anthropological violence to Lazarus’s narrative in *The Mourned One*. The land and the way the family live on the land are severed from the present. They are viewed as belonging to the absolute space-time of the ‘African past’.

This taxanomic chronotope is signalled by the ubiquitous ox-cart: “the signature of time truly appears in the work-scared body of an abandoned ox-cart with its shaft pointing an accusing finger toward the empty heavens” (WR: 40). It is the first “disagreeable” thing Lucifer sees on returning to his “home country ... barely moving” (WR: 40), and also the last. As he speeds away from the family homestead in his missionary teacher’s car on the novel’s final page, “they slow down to pass an ox-drawn cart. The people on the cart stare blankly at the passing car, and after it is well past them, they raise their hands as an afterthought” (WR: 180). This vignette aptly captures the plight of the underdeveloped Tribal Trust Lands: the rural peoples are always already left behind in the colonial modernity which speeds Lucifer into the future.

Indeed, in these closing paragraphs Lucifer is associated with a sense of speed synonymous with colonial modernity, with the inexorable changes that are increasingly felt on the land which his family inhabits. The narrative effect of this association, however, is ironic:

The car picks up speed and Lucifer watches the leprous skin of his country slough off and fall back dead behind him. The speed of the car creates a pleasant breeze and Lucifer breathes deeply for a long while. In about two hours they will be in Salisbury.

Lucifer leans back and tries to look at his country through the eye of an impartial tourist. (WR: 180)

The noun ‘country’ functions here as a synonym for ‘land’, but in this instance the ‘nation’ is not invoked as such. It is, rather, the prescribed space of the Tribal Trust

Land, his ‘home country’, which represents Lucifer’s abstract sense of Land. There is no suggestion of national allegory here as the rural space depicted, the ‘country’ which Lucifer ‘sheds’, is not yet *the* Land of Zimbabwe. It remains the segregated and underdeveloped African land of Rhodesia: a ‘uniformly dead landscape’ for him if not others in his family. Having no kind of political commitment to the land which he leaves, the place Lucifer races towards is Salisbury and then Europe—not the space of an independent Zimbabwean nation (Primorac 2003). Once again, a black *Rhodesian* author is unable to conceive of an alternative to the seemingly static rural present, without representing that space, however ironically, as being frozen in the past.

But while the family heir, Lucifer is able to leave this space, his sister Betty is denied such an escape. If Lucifer’s flight suggests the atrophy of static, patrilineal rural identity, then Betty’s narrative makes it clear that authority in the rural homestead remains resolutely patriarchal. As with the extensive sections given to Garabha’s internal conflict, Betty’s thwarted attempt to realise an autonomous identity and be rid of the ancestral curse put on her, first through sleeping with a colonial official and then attempting to leave for the city (where the older sister Sekai is already), articulates a much broader experience of colonial modernity and alienation from traditional rural life than it is often credited with. It is this complex *gendered* portrayal of life lived on the land that resists the kind of nationalist appropriation that John and Kuruku attempt. At the same time, however, Mungoshi unwittingly foregrounds the masculinist biases of a nationalist perspective. Anne McClintock’s discussion of time and gender in nationalism (1995) sheds light on Lucifer’s escape from the rural past:

the temporal anomaly of nationalism—veering between nostalgia for the past and the impatient, progressive sloughing off of the past—is typically resolved by figuring the contradiction in the representation of *time* as a natural division of gender. Women are represented as the atavistic and authentic body of national tradition (inert, backward-looking and natural), embodying nationalism’s conservative principle of continuity.”(358-359)

Representing ‘a natural division of gender’, Betty is left behind as Lucifer ‘sloughs’ off the past—the ‘leprous skin of the country’—heading for an as-yet unrealised national future. But there remains enough irony in the novel to offer a critical stance

on this gender division. In this novelistic world the kind of perspective that *sees* ‘the land’ solely in terms of ‘peasant consciousness’ and masculine alienation, represents a partial engagement with colonial modernity, much like Lucifer’s own: a potentially reductive national consciousness blind to the manifold narratives of local as well as national history. Which is not to say that the novel censures the liberation struggle, its symbols²³ and accepts colonial continuity. Far from it in fact. The novel offers a challenge to Zimbabwean nationalism, whether read in its 1970s context or 30 years on. The challenge is for political nationalism and its avatars to appreciate fully the complexity of ‘the land’; those who live on it and the different ways in which they negotiate colonial and neo-colonial modernity, in the present, not the past. The moral edge to this challenge is that if those who claim to represent the nation fail to respect its diverse constituents and changing circumstances, then that nation’s future, its youth, will, like Lucifer, flee into exile.

Between lands: Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* (1988)

Nervous Conditions is, like its narrator, quite a reserved text, but also a very knowledgeable one, one that can tell us a lot, if not everything. (Rooney 1997: 130)

As Caroline Rooney puts it, *Nervous Conditions* (1988) is an ambiguous text, but one which, sharing much of Mungoshi’s realism, nonetheless seems to offer a socio-cultural cornucopia to the attendant critic. Such is its scope the novel has generated an ‘intellectual industry’ in its wake (see Willey and Treiber’s introduction 2002). As Zhuwarara (2001: 259) and Primorac (2003: 112) have illustrated, it takes the themes prevalent in black male-authored pre-independence literature and ‘feminises’ them from the perspective of a postcolonial female narrator. In particular, the story of Tambudzai Sigauke’s transition from rural homestead on Tribal Trust Lands in Umtali to Mission and then to the Convent, re-writes the Zimbabwean *bildungsroman* as it is manifested in, among others, Samkange’s *The Mourned One* (cf. Andrade 2002: 25-29). In a positive contrast to Mungoshi’s negative portrayal of alienation in *Waiting for the Rain*, Tambudzai’s experience of alienation from her humble rural

²³ In a personal discussion, Maurice Vambe has pointed to Kukuru’s dispute with the colonial pawn, Chief Rukwa, over the right to wear his *ngundu*, a hat proudly worn by Joshua Nkomo, as one such symbol: “They keep my son, I keep my *ngundu*, or skin-hat, as they want to call it” (WR: 64).

origins enables her to reflect critically on it. Rooney's point, however, is that there are notable historical gaps in what the text (or Tambudzai, the self-reflecting narrator) chooses to tell us.

Critics generally acknowledge such gaps to be the elision of the liberation struggle in the narrative, displaced into the "un-said" (Andrade 2002) margins of the text. Though keen to show how Dangarembga avoids a unitary narrative that offers an easy 'national allegory', most, nonetheless, identify facets of the text in an oblique relation to national emergence.²⁴ This is a view which I share, though for different reasons and with differing conclusions. The following section examines how, in re-writing themes that have occupied earlier Zimbabwean novelists, Dangarembga both displaces and refigures the symbols of anti-colonial nationalism which have gained currency from Samkange and his peers onwards. Notably, the focus on rural space and a protagonist's *leaving* of that space, are motifs which *Nervous Conditions* shares with all the other novels in this chapter. Dangarembga's representation of this motif is more complex than either of the pre-independence novels, however, and more concrete than Hove's 'poetic' novella, discussed in the final section of this chapter. There is, consequently, no simple slippage from land to the Land in *Nervous Conditions*.

life on the land

As in Mungoshi's novel, Dangarembga's representation of 'the land' in *Nervous Conditions* foregrounds the quotidian of rural life. The narrative is rich in cultural reference and scenic detail, accumulating in a naturalistic fashion but also suffused with and within the social relationships of the people who live within that landscape. The homestead scenes in *Nervous Conditions* are almost as painstakingly rendered as in Mungoshi's *Waiting for the Rain*. In this descriptive manner the opening chapter introduces socio-cultural themes that resonate through the text: education and the inevitable journey away from the homestead; the social and cultural importance of agriculture, "cultivating strips of land" (NC: 2,6); landscape and memory, especially with the bathing rituals in the Nyamira river; colonial 'development' in the form of

²⁴ Charles Sugnet's (1997) comments are typical: "Allegorizing the women's struggle in terms of the national struggle seems to me a serious mistake, because it does just what Radikrishnan lamented, subordinates women's politics to a masculine, master narrative. But I do think that for well-informed readers, *Nervous Conditions* will suggest various hazy parallels between the two struggles." (46)

“the Governments Council Houses” (*NC*: 3); the concomitant growth of commodity culture; the influence of the educated Uncle Babamukuru on the family; and laborious domestic duties. In one way or another, all of the above are linked with Tambudzai’s struggle against the patriarchal pattern of life in colonial Rhodesia.

From the outset, the novel disrupts the association between cultural continuity and patrimony in the homestead—what I describe in Mungoshi’s novel, expanding on Coetzee (1988a), as patrilineal consciousness. The novel’s opening line, “I was not sorry when my brother died” (*NC*: 1), indicates the importance of the chosen son’s death to Tambudzai’s development and the ensuing perspectives offered by the novel. Only following Nhamo’s death does she assume his role, expected to deliver the family from poverty. Although unable materially to change the patriarchal structures which control her life, she learns to take what advantages are offered in her bid for self-improvement. Famously, she is able to pay her school-fees because she has the initiative to grow a cash crop of maize on a patch of land inherited from her grandmother (*NC*: 20). Before she can sell them, however, Tambudzai’s “fine crop” of mealies is incrementally stolen by her brother. The resulting fight she starts gains the attention of the teacher who helps her to sell the crop (*NC*: 24). This is the first time she actively resists the social norms which she is subject to, but not the last. Following her transition to the mission, she finds that resisting her uncle Babamukuru’s authority leads her back into a world of domestic servitude. She takes “a deep and grateful masochistic delight” in her chores, however, for “punishment was the price of my newly acquired identity”—an identity won through “rebellion” and “disobedience” (*NC*: 172).

The new identity won through struggle here is recollected differently from the identity Tambudzai projects when she first moves from the homestead to the mission. As with Mungoshi’s *Lucifer*, her rural childhood is threatened with obliteration by the changed time, space, and speed of the ‘modernity’ she anticipates at the point of departure:

What I experienced that day was a short cut, a rerouting of everything I had ever defined as me into fast lanes that would speedily lead me to my destination. My horizons were saturated with me, my leaving, my going. There was no room for what I left behind. (*NC*: 58)

At this stage, Tambudzai is unequivocal: “When I stepped into Babamukuru’s car I was a peasant ... This was the person I was leaving behind” (NC: 58). ‘Peasant’ is, inevitably, a loaded term in Zimbabwean literature. The irony of this statement is that without having exercised the ‘peasant option’ in her limited way—by cultivating her mealies on her grandmother’s plot and selling them for a profit—Tambudzai would not be in a position, as she sees it, to leave it behind. Compounding this irony, we might well read her as a ‘daughter’ of the soil in light of this. Her enterprise presents a matrilineal model of land ownership, usage and consciousness that rivals the dominant, patrilineal nationalist model. But definitive allegorical meaning is diminished, both by Tambudzai’s early *desire* to be alienated from the restrictive ‘peasant’ existence she led on ‘the land’, and the circumstances whereby her labour on the land (and her own personal ‘struggle’ to reap the fruits of her material *and* intellectual labour) is rewarded. The victory Tambudzai wins by selling her mealies is undercut by the fact that the sale is effectively an act of colonialist charity. But in spite of this, the economic transaction which enables Tambudzai’s development nonetheless does remind us of the insidious penetration of capitalist colonial modernity into rural areas in the form of commodity relations, first shown in *Waiting for the Rain*, and the unequal access to markets that Ranger (1985) argues galvanised ‘peasant consciousness’.²⁵

Sally Ann Murray (2002) draws on Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism and Andrew Burke’s work on Zimbabwean commodity history²⁶ to suggest that although Tambudzai’s development comes of her own volition and resourcefulness, “the author is struggling to acknowledge that the dreams, aspirations and realities of young women such as Tambudzai were inevitably shaped by new relations to goods.”(200-201) From the entrepreneurial opportunism of Tambudzai’s peers, “who built their little tuckshops which sold the groceries we needed—bread, tea, sugar, jam, salt, cooking oil, matches, candles, paraffin and soap” (NC 3), to the brands, luxury items and obsession with domestic hygiene which demarcate the elite space of Babamukuru

²⁵ As Brendan Nicholls (2002) notes, however, Tambudzai’s immediate profit also threatens to drag her back into a traditional economic matrix: “Tambudzai’s initiative has the upshot of bringing the traditional Shona custom of the bride-price (in cattle), with its communitarian notions of property, into conflict with her nascent sense of an entrepreneurial alternative ... Jeremiah is quite understandably concerned that the dowry he might receive for Tambudzai will not be realized if she continues in her quest for education.” (109-110)

²⁶ I also borrow from Burke’s insights in my analysis of commodity relations in Mungoshi’s *Waiting for the Rain*, in section two of this chapter.

and Maiguru at the mission, the novel is replete with indices of economic as well as cultural change. The novel is less interested in a critique of capitalist and colonial collusion, however, than it is in exploring how such an interaction produces and maintains certain forms of subjectivity, and how these subjectivities relate to certain spaces. Following Murray, there is much to suggest that the realities of consumer acculturation in a poor, rural context, remain quite different to characters' fantasies of the process:

Whatever their fantasies, neither Nhamo nor Tambudzai, for instance, can simply shrug off their peasant selves for sophisticated urban identities. If the youthful Nhamo returns to the homestead with soap, toothpaste, and sugar, items which he then reserves for his private use as a defining mark of his superior status as an African versed in the cultures of the modern world, this does not automatically enable him to produce himself, either materially or imaginatively, as an elite individual who is separate from rural poverty and labour. He must still on occasions work in the fields (197-198).

Labour on the land remains an integral part of their lives, even when Tambudzai is schooled at the Mission. Correspondingly, Tambudzai's subjective 'development' within the novel involves revising her younger self's conception of 'leaving behind' her peasant origins. In respect of this, Primorac (2003) argues that the *returns* to the homestead depicted in the novel, "to see her family and help with agricultural work", are as significant as her initial leaving:

These repeated returns underline the instability of Tambudzai's new identity as her life straddles two different ways of measuring time: the maize year, with its cycle of planting, weeding, and harvesting, and the academic year. The fact that she participates in both means that she has not, after all, left peasant status that far behind.(118)

Tambudzai is thus able to "revise" her conception of self when at the Mission, through the conflict between her own emergent worldview and that of her already 'worldly' cousin, Nyasha (NC: 118). Nyasha, she states, "knew nothing about leaving. She had only been taken places—to the mission, to England, back to the mission. She did not know what essential parts of you stayed behind no matter how violently you

try to dislodge them in order to take them with you.”(NC: 176). It is this attitude of stubborn self-advancement, reconciled with the memory of her ‘essential parts’ which ‘stayed behind’, that marks Tambudzai’s difference from those family members who, through one form of alienation or another, have ‘left’ the land before her. Her father, Jeremiah, for example, “deprived by the British of his ancestral lands, becomes the stereotype of the shiftless ‘native,” in Charles Sugnet’s reading (1997: 38); Babamukuru is able to balance the two through the increased authority he gains as the educated family patriarch—but he is no less a colonial subject; Nyasha, in many ways Tambudzai’s ‘double’, exhibits psycho-somatic ‘nervous conditions’, symptoms of her own cultural alienation from ‘the land’ of her birth.

At no point, then, are Tambudzai’s memories of the homestead and its land either romanticised or invested with spiritual, much less mythical, resonance: “The river, the trees, the fruit and the fields. This was how it was in the beginning. *This is how I remember it in my earliest memories, but it did not stay like that.*”(NC: 3, my emphasis). Change is ever present for Tambudzai, but never definitive. She finds it easier “to leave thoughts knotted, their loose ends hanging” in order to “avoid the mazes of self-confrontation” (NC: 118). In a symptom of her own psychological colonisation, her persistent desire for social mobility sees her brush aside those issues which might prevent it. This includes a political consciousness, peasant or otherwise, that might link her personal and domestic anxieties with ambient political events (for examples of which see Sugnet 1997: 34):

Above all, I did not question things ... I was not concerned that freedom fighters were referred to as terrorists, did not demand proof of God’s existence nor did I think the missionaries, along with all the other whites in Rhodesia, ought to have stayed at home. (NC: 158)

Instead, at the times when the new environments and social relations afforded by this mobility begin to oppress her, she relies on pity to rationalize her situation, taking “refuge in the image of poor female relatives” (NC: 118). In this context, remembering life lived ‘on’ the land is a rem(a)inder of a less worldly subjectivity, of social conditions and interactions she had, but also *still has* on the homestead. This involves remembering rural life as female community, as female continuity;

remembering domestic resistance (especially in the figure of her aunt, Lucia) as well as oppression:

How could I possibly forget my brother and the mealies, my mother and the latrine and the wedding? These were all evidence of the burdens my mother had succumbed to. Going to the convent was a chance to lighten those burdens ... I would go. If Babamukuru let me. (NC: 183)

But, in spite of this, she never directly equates memories of gendered oppression or female community with complete liberation, personal or otherwise. The caveat to this last passage confirms patriarchal authority as a 'dominant' aspect of the culture in which Tambudzai's 'individual consciousness', her autonomy and the limited gendered emancipation it represents, is still 'emergent', to use Raymond Williams' (1977) terms (see also Kaarsholm 1989: 177).²⁷ In that sense it is the exception that proves the rule of patriarchy's lingering authority in all the novels discussed in this chapter. As much as it is an expression of the continuity of traditional rural social values, as the novel unfolds this authority is also shown to be bolstered and perpetuated by colonial economies and institutions. While the critical trend is to compare and contrast Tambudzai with her peers, Nhamo and Nyasha, the snapshots we have of Babamukuru's youth provide an often overlooked historical frame to the cultural alienation experienced by Nyasha and Tambudzai, and the enduring influence of patriarchy in their lives.

Babamukuru: an 'historical artefact', 'cultivable, in the way that land is'

Despite Tambudzai's views to the contrary, Nyasha is incisive when she identifies Babamukuru as an "historical artefact" (NC: 163) of the colonial project in Rhodesia. If the conflict in Tambudzai's narrative between her youthful views and those of others close to her forecloses any direct allegory of that narrative, the same cannot

²⁷ I refer here to the chapter on the function of 'Dominant, Residual and Emergent' categories in cultural theory in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977): "By 'emergent' I mean, first, that new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationships are continually being created. But it is exceptionally difficult to distinguish between those which are really elements of some new phase of the dominant culture (and in this sense 'species-specific') and those which are substantially alternative or opposite to it: emergent in the strict sense, rather than novel." (123)

necessarily be said for Babamukuru himself. He belongs to that generation of educated and Christianised Africans epitomised by Veit-Wild's 'first generation' of nationalist intellectuals, and as such he offers a prehistory for the experience of late colonial 'modernity,' as Tambudzai articulates it in her memoir.

Having been assimilated into the institutions of colonialism through a Mission education, Babamukuru views—celebrates, even—African development as a *laissez-faire* process of self-advancement, rather than as resistance to cultural imperialism. This concords with Küster's (1994) view of the early *enthusiastic* African response to colonial education in Rhodesia, and anticipates some of the arguments in Jean and John Comaroff's *Of Revelation and Revolution Vol.1: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa* (1991): that contact between missionaries and 'natives' in southern Africa was for the most part a reciprocal encounter, taking the form of a benign hybridisation; that the Native subjects 'demanded' (Küster) education in what amounted to a culture of 'sly civility' (Bhabha 1994). In light of this, the simile used to describe his acculturation is both scathingly ironic and instructive: "They thought he was a good boy. Cultivable, in the way that land is, to yield harvests that sustain the cultivator"(NC: 19).

Babamukuru's labour was exploited on the land as his education alienated him from it. Not that this bothered him, though: he "surprised the missionaries by performing exceptionally well at school, in spite of putting in a full day's work on the farm" (NC: 19). Nonetheless, Tambudzai's narrative reveals his revered learning and the authority it bequeathes to be a duplicitous gift of colonialism. It is an 'historical artefact' that encapsulates the connections between colonial education and the history of expropriated land and exploited labour that it suppressed. This inference is further developed through the 'story' of colonial expropriation and rural displacement, as told to Tambudzai by her grandmother.

In Dangarembga's only direct reference to oral tradition in the novel, Tambudzai identifies this story as "History that you could not find in the text books" (NC: 18). The story is one of a prosperous pre-colonial family destroyed by "Wizards" who "came from the south and forced the people off the land"—fertile land in the region of Chipinge (NC: 18). The family was forced on to a white farm and her grandfather compelled to seek work in Johannesburg's gold mines, where he died. Redemption comes in the familiar form of the Mission, where Babamukuru "was educated in their wizardry" (NC: 19). This *précis* of the early colonial experience, so

central to the politics of the anti-colonial movement, is otherwise marginal in Tambudzai's narrative. The oral history of the family, of their displacement from their ancestral land is, like the liberation struggle itself, peripheral in the text. So too are the feelings of loss and anger, "of a developed consciousness of the mechanisms of their [the peasants] oppression" (Ranger 1985), which would be associated with this 'history' of expropriation. For Tambudzai, conversely, it is "truly a romantic story ... a fairy tale of reward and punishment, of cause and effect" (NC: 19). Which is to say in *her* narrative of modernisation it functions as a consoling moral parable, a 'story' by which she evaluates personal, but not social or historical, development.

The novel meditates on many of the 'effects' of this story, especially of cultural imperialism, but the 'causes', their continuity and debilitating 'effects' are left to Nyasha to articulate in a pathological frenzy.²⁸ Despite experiencing milder symptoms of Nyasha's 'nervous conditions', Tambudzai remains in thrall to the 'divine' wizardry of Babamukuru and a colonial education, even when her alter-ego Nyasha lambasts them (NC: 183). At the Mission she learns to disassociate patriarchal power and female victimisation from class or racially specific backgrounds: "It was universal. It didn't depend on poverty, on lack of education or on tradition. Men took it everywhere with them. Even heroes like Babamukuru." (NC: 118). To a certain extent this is perspicacious, expressing the salient continuity of patriarchy between the spheres of tradition and modernity, homestead and Mission/Convent. Alarming, however, the dissociation also involves a myopic violence, marginalising, if not erasing, the 'causes' and historical resistance to these factors in her narrative.

This is a price Dangarembga seems willing to pay in order to offer a compelling story of personal, female development, in a period of growing national awareness and 'peasant consciousness', but from a cautionary, non-nationalistic perspective. Tambudzai thus follows Babamukuru and a colonial education in the hope of a better future. As negatively as he appears in the novel, he remains a central figure to Tambudzai, even after she has seen Nyasha destroyed through her battle with

²⁸ As the novel progresses her pronouncements on colonialism appear more and more delirious to Tambudzai. Much has been made by critics of Nyasha's delirium and the relationship to the 'nervous conditions' of the title, but it is in my view telling that the most explicit articulations of anti-colonial feeling are associated with self-destruction and further alienation: "Nyasha was beside herself with fury. She rampaged, shredding her history book between her teeth ('Their history. Fucking liars. Their bloody lies.'). breaking mirrors, her clay pots ... jabbing the fragments into her flesh ... 'There's a whole lot more,' she said. 'I've tried to keep it in but it's powerful. It ought to be. There's nearly a century of it. ' ... 'It upsets people. So I need to go somewhere where it's safe. You know what I mean? Somewhere where people won't mind.'" (NC: 206).

him. Babamukuru, ‘cultivable like the land’, remains as central to Tambudzai’s growth as the rural home she oscillates around, and the cousin who bears the burden of her own alienation. The novel makes it impossible, however, to rest on an association between the dominant patriarchal culture enshrined in Babamukuru and ‘the land’. To repeat an important point: his enforcement of patriarchal authority expresses the colonial mechanisms of his European educated, elite status, even as it invokes aspects of traditional Shona male identity. Indeed, if ‘the land’ remains a ‘lost’ space—an imaginary central to both national and personal identity formation in the other texts—then in this novel no such conclusions can be exclusively associated with a certain space, history or worldview.

Charles Sugnet (1997) argues that this strategy avoids the pitfalls of asserting an ‘essential’ national identity and subsequently ‘gendering’ the nation:

Nervous Conditions is in no danger of producing a univocal Woman, who can be allegorised to serve the national purpose. And because the narrator is the writer of her own account and therefore in some senses a maker of history and a producer of knowledge, the novel connects the ‘old deep places’ of childhood, homestead, and inner self with history, change, and agency, rather than isolating them in some eternal essence of Woman/Landscape/Nation. (42)

The argument is compelling, though for all Dangarembga’s subversive felicity, the *actual* elision of the nationalist struggle in favour of foregrounding its cultural symptoms seems incongruous at times. We remember, for instance, the remarks on pop-music which “pointed unsystematic fingers at the conditions of the times” (NC: 4).²⁹ That said, Dangarembga certainly avoids ‘isolating’ Tambudzai’s identity in ‘some eternal essence of Woman/Landscape/Nation’, and this marks a departure from the reductionism of either *The Mourned One* or, as we shall see, Hove’s *Bones*. Unlike them, however, Dangarembga avoids *the city* in any meaningful form in her novel. We are left to wonder what role urbanisation and actual metropolitan culture

²⁹ See, for example, Neil Lazarus’s essay “‘Unsystematic fingers at the conditions of the times’: Afropop and the paradoxes of imperialism’ in *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999) pp.144-196.

will have—indeed what in all probability *has* had—on Tambudzai during and after her time at the Sacred Heart Convent.³⁰

There is a telling disjunction between Tambudzai's aspirations, her social mobility, and her actual physical mobility. Her movements are constrained to the homestead, the Mission, and finally also the convent. This creates something of a contradiction. On the one hand the novel both represents and performs resistance to the culture of colonialism. As Primorac (2003) suggests, "the novel subverts the Rhodesian [colonial] chronotopes, together with the clear cut, European-imported spatial/literary opposition between city and country" (114). But with this we also find the myth of a unitary Land and the attendant symbols of anti-colonial nationalism dispersed within an individual narrative of acculturation. So on the other hand, then, the novel also redeems aspects of this same colonial culture. If alienation is portrayed as negative and socially corrosive in *Waiting for the Rain*, in *Nervous Conditions* the distinction is made between an even more debilitating *alienation* (Nyasha), and the positive opportunities offered by *acculturation* and social mobility (Babamukuru).

The difference no doubt reflects Dangarembga's postcolonial and feminist, but also *elite*, cosmopolitan perspective. She casts an ultimately redemptive light on social and cultural changes that were, for an earlier generation of *colonial* writers, one that perhaps did not enjoy either her opportunities or talents, a much more bitter pill to swallow. No more so is this apparent than in Tambudzai's adolescent interpretation of her grandmother's oral account of colonisation and its aftermath: a 'truly romantic story ... a fairy tale of reward and punishment, of cause and effect'. While this forecloses a nationalist reading of the text, it also downplays the importance of spiritual belief and oral tradition within rural communities and, like *Waiting for the Rain*, 'peasant consciousness' of 'lost lands'. Quite the opposite is true of the final novel in this section, Chenjerai Hove's *Bones*, which shares Dangarembga's feminist overtones, if not her marginalisation of anti-colonial nationalism.

³⁰ This chapter was written before the publication of *The Book of Not* (2006), the long-awaited sequel to *Nervous Conditions*.

The ecology of cultural nationalism in Chenjerai Hove's *Bones* (1988)

If a national drama is refracted through the social prisms of family and homestead in *Waiting for the Rain* and *Nervous Conditions*, then in Chenjerai Hove's first novella, *Bones* (1988), this evolving drama is staged by a quite different form of community: an historical continuum of female voices. The focus shifts away from the traditional locus of the homestead toward the alienation and otherness of the colonial farm, and from there to the even more alien postcolonial city—but without the intermediate space of assimilation and education at the Mission. The vital chronotopic link between rural and urban worlds, between the past and the future of the nation, is omitted. No longer can the Mission redeem colonial modernity in Hove's vision. With *Bones*, his project is to tackle the questions of class, gender oppression and violence that earlier writers were unable or unwilling to do.

By focusing on the plight of farm workers rather than peasants in native reserves or Tribal Trust Lands, Hove draws attention to a demographic that was in many cases as alienated from the nationalist movement as it was from ancestral lands. As Blair Rutherford (2003) argues, farm workers 'belonged' neither to the land of their birth nor the Land of nationalist imagination. They were instead the *property* of the white farm(er):

Farm workers were unlike Africans living in other locations—such as native reserves or, after the 1950s, in most other formal sector occupations where they were typically classified as workers—who became subjects/objects of national projects, whether colonial or anti-colonial in origin. Farm workers became, instead, principally the object of national and individual projects of European farmers. (201)

But *Bones* is not only important for lifting the veil on the historical plight of this marginal group (a 'marginal' group which numbered around 320, 000 with up to 2 million dependents before the fast-track land reform in 2000 according to Sachikonye (2004: 69)). Hove's achievement with the novella is to fuse the rural context of the novella with a literary form authentically expressive of it. Like Dambudzo Marechera's earlier novella, *The House of Hunger* (1978), *Bones* represents a stylistic landmark in both Zimbabwean and African fiction. Shona oral idioms are syncretised

with a “quasi-modernist narrative technique” (Primorac 2003: 82) into a mode of written English that has caused much debate.³¹ It does so against a backdrop of political instability in the late 1970s and early 1980s, depicting the pressures felt by black farm workers on the white commercial farms which dominate their lives, but also from the guerrillas fighting to emancipate them.

The novel focuses on two women, Marita and Janifa, who live on one such farm. Their relationship is defined by shared suffering, but also by absence: Marita leaves the farm to search for her freedom-fighter son in the city, where she is raped and killed, following independence in 1980. But their connection is not severed. Throughout the novel women continually try to establish community, to tell each other stories and share experiences. It is this emphasis on *reproducing* memory, I argue, that signals Hove’s most important literary innovation; but it also leads to a problematic association of women and nature, land and nationalism.

female memory and community: *matrilineal* consciousness

In a contrast to *Waiting for the Rain*, in *Bones* the central connection between patriarchal authority and cultural continuity (symbolised in the former novel by the Old Man’s drum) is displaced by a *matrilineal* consciousness, a female-centred cultural memory. But unlike *Nervous Conditions*, this model is not circumscribed by a narrative of individual development that *consciously* perpetuates the dominant patriarchal structure of the social world. Marita, taken by most critics to be the central protagonist in *Bones*, is a spectral figure in the novel. In Katrin Berndt’s (2005) appraisal she is an “interstice” for the various female identities whom, like the royal spirit Nehanda, she possesses:

Marita’s function as a protagonist stresses her being an individual while her employment as interstice strengthens her communal features. Living at a time when the personal is suppressed by old and new traditions alike, her efforts are condemned to failure. (127)

³¹ See, for example, Veit-Wild’s assertion that Hove in *Bones* “recreates a world of sayings and proverbs and recreates a sense of oneness with the land which does not exist anymore” (1992: 316), or Wylie (1991) who identifies: “a richly created *illusion* of Shona-ness” (50).

Her tragic story is thus primarily told by others and focalised through Janifa, who narrates the majority of the novel. Other narrative voices include Chisaga, the farm cook; Marume, Marita's husband; the prophetic voice of Nehanda in 'The Spirits Speak' chapters; and a nameless Unknown Woman whom Marita meets on her journey to the city. Through this polyphony the absent figures of Nehanda, Marita and the Unknown Woman are connected to Janifa—presented within her focalising consciousness. It is the relation between these female figures—a relation that merges memory, history and myth in a spiritual idiom—that links life on 'the land' to the politics of the emergent Zimbabwean nation.

In oscillating around the moment of independence in 1980, the novel broaches the enshrined patriarchal values of rural life in both colonial and postcolonial periods. Such values are exacerbated by the naturalisation of colonialist social hierarchies (Zhuwarara 2001: 220-222) and the opaque and violent face of state bureaucracy that treats Marita and the Unknown Woman without mercy in the city. This perspective enables a moving portrait of female suffering at the hands of both colonial and post-colonial regimes. In doing so, however, it endows the female characters with allegorical resonance. The meaning which they are burdened with corresponds to a gendering of anti- and post-colonial nationalism. As such, the women are abject before the nationalist narrative they must reproduce. The result is that the continuance of oppression in the postcolonial period, through Marita and the Unknown Woman's deaths in the city, Janifa's rape and isolation on the farm and incarceration in a mental institution, are overshadowed by Janifa's symbolic liberation at the novel's end: "I will take the chains with my own hands and say ... Do not worry yourselves, I have already removed them by myself" (*B*: 112). The contradictions that flow from this are symptomatic of Hove's conflation of female resistance and cultural nationalism.

This conflation arises, literally and metaphorically, from a spiritual relation between women and the land, centred on the myth of Nehanda, a royal-spirit whose medium Charwe was one of a number of religious leaders who organised resistance in the first *chimurenga* of 1896-7. When executed by the British in 1897, Charwe is reported to have said 'my bones will rise' (Lan 1985: 6), elevating her to the status of a mythic icon: the 'mother' of the second *chimurenga*. Hove's novel poeticises the resurrection of her 'bones', though without actually depicting the nationalist uprising it prophecies. By linking the embodied narrative of Janifa to the disembodied narratives of Marita, the Unknown Woman and Nehanda (who exist only in memory

and myth), Hove's women 're-possess' the dominant patriarchal narrative of this resurrection-revolution—of anti-colonial resistance and liberation. By exploring how the marginalised women remember and speak to each other, Hove seeks to create a medium through which they speak for themselves.

As Caroline Rooney (1997) suggests, this is in the first place a consolatory gesture: "it addresses the sufferings of mothers who have lost their sons, women who have been forgotten, and it engages with the need for consolation, mourning and remembrance" (120). However, the question that Rooney raises also addresses the social and political purpose of their Antigone-like abjection: "Defying patriarchal laws and representatives of the state, they persist in their unanswered demands or appeals, to the point of death and incarceration. What possesses these women?" (121) The answer for Sibanyoni (1995) is unequivocal: unwitting martyrdom. They are precisely "the mothers and midwives of the nation" that Rooney claims them not to be (122). From a similar angle, Viet-Wild (1992) argues that the novel presents "a monolithic view of African society" which "corresponds in a peculiar way to anti-pluralistic tendencies in official thinking in Zimbabwe"(319). Whilst these arguments neither do justice, in my mind, to Hove's aesthetic achievement nor to his political position, they do highlight an unwitting propagation of 'anti-pluralistic' nationalist ideology in his novel. To borrow from Lene Bull-Christiansen's (2004) discussion of Yvonne Vera's novel *Nehanda*, the "spiritual temporality" of *Bones*, like that in *Nehanda*, "can also be read as representing a narrative of the nation's past, present and future that operates within the same temporal-spiritual narrative framework as the nationalist discourse of the ZANU (PF) government." (72)

melancholy possessions

Dialogue in the novel is reported rather than directly spoken. It functions predominantly within the realm of memory, even when narrators claim, as Janifa does in the early chapters, to be relaying conversations had "today" (*B*: 24). This creates a very unstable sense of the 'present' within the text, whereby it seems to be denied any kind of existence in its own right. With this technique, Hove expresses the *temporal* marginality of rural people, especially women: they are archaic characters, existing as cultural traces in the interstices—as the interstice—of tradition and modernity. But he also wants it to do more work, to show how these women nonetheless create webs of

shared experience, of community, even when their temporal presence, their very humanity, is denied in the present of colonial and postcolonial modernity. It is a compelling strategy, but at times does not quite hold together.

When Marita leaves for the city, for example, her interlocutor, Janifa, seems trapped in a dialogue with her. This apostrophe is problematic as both her active resistance and passive subjection to oppression on the farm can now only be articulated in the form of a confession to her memory of Marita, towards that part of her immediate past which contained solidarity, love and hope:

I go to the places we went together. I smell the smell of your sweat in each grain of sand you sat on. I crumble like the soil you warmed with the palm of your hands. Suns and suns come, many suns, but with the smell of many palms which you had. Palms for carrying the grain home. But all will be well. (*B*: 89).

Walking around the farm provides a phenomenological link to Marita. Her memory is sedimented into the places where they shared intimacies, and so revisiting these places rejuvenates Janifa through the remembrance and repetition of their *shared* time. Absent she may be, but Marita's presence on the farm *is* material for Janifa. However, the consolation gained from this process hinges on Janifa's supplication *to* Marita's memory. This is crucial, because rather than remain in the concrete world of her immediate present, Janifa becomes increasingly dependent on her memory. This, in turn, reveals itself to be a pathological dependency. Psychologically, she 'crumbles like the soil' that Marita handled, enervated by her *actual* absence. Her confessional narrative seems to act as a form of mourning whereby Janifa returns to Marita, the lost libidinal object, and repeats conversations and anecdotes in a bid to cope with her loss. The circumstances of these returns, however, signal a more melancholy reality.

The oppression Janifa experiences on the farm is primarily physical, of the body. If remembering Marita summons the will to resist bodily oppression, then Janifa seems equally unable to transcend it. In chapter 13 she recalls Marita's self-sacrifice and advice:

The work I did at Manyepo's farm is enough for you also. I worked so that you do not work as hard as I have done ... To rest is to allow the milk of your body to come

again, the power of your body ... To fight on is all right, but a good fighter knows when to postpone the fight for another day (*B*: 100).

Janifa acknowledges the advice she was given and their exchange of *labour* (one works so the other might become pregnant). But then she remonstrates with Marita—with her memory of Marita—for having *bodily* left her:

That is the way to fight. That is the way to walk the path whose destination you do not know ... yes, I hear you call for the rest of my body Marita. But you died, they killed you just like that. How can my soul rest? How can my body rest when my soul is not ready to rest? How ...? (*B*: 101).

Following the famous distinctions made by Freud (1991) between the cathartic effects of mourning and the pathological ones of melancholia—"In mourning it is the world that has become poor and empty, in melancholia it is the ego itself" (254)—Janifa's narrative seems to articulate the latter. Marita's absence, made painfully present through the memory-narrative of Janifa, is internalised, embodied and repeated in her own growing isolation and persecution on the farm. Read by some critics as a form of psychic resistance (cf. Rooney 1997: 129; Backström 2001: 79-93; Keldis 1993: 134-5), Janifa is nonetheless surrounded by people and structures that perpetuate the normative forms of domination and control which oppress her. As she states, neither body (especially not the reproductive female body) nor soul can 'rest' independently in that environment. Hers remains an abject and melancholy state. The will to resist, her *deviant* behaviour, thus sees her incarcerated in the place "where they kept people with heads full of bad things." (*B*: 103,108,111) It amounts to a telling contradiction if we take Janifa to symbolise the redemptive hope of 'the present'; that is, of channelling the memory of Marita and, by corollary the nationalistic *spirit* of Nehanda, as the memory of a better future. Janifa's imagination and memory, her spiritual connection, *does not empower her*—at least not in any material sense (Zhuwarara 2001: 229).

The overriding message of liberation does not reside in the fate of Janifa, the Unnamed Woman and Marita as oppressed (but resistant) rural women. It emerges instead through what their relationships and communication symbolise as a form of *matrilineal* consciousness. It is rooted in memory and intimately connected to 'the

land.’ This is especially true of Marita, who as a *mother* nurtures both spiritual and political connections to ‘the land’ that otherwise seems absent amongst the farm workers. Yet despite its subversive potential, Hove’s representation of matrilineal consciousness manages to conflate women, nature and ‘the land,’ all in the name of the patriarchal nationalist ideologeme that he attempts to resist.

Critics have compared Hove’s novella to the actual testimonies of women indirectly involved in the war—Irene Staunton’s *Mother’s of the Revolution: The War Experiences of the Thirty Zimbabwean Women* (1990) often being cited—in order to criticise (Sibanyoni 1995: 58) or at least contextualise (Zhuwarara 2001: 225, Rooney 1997: 120) his appropriation of that female experience. There is another collection of poems and testimonies, however, by former freedom fighters, that offers a more programmatically nationalist perspective than is found in Staunton’s collection: Kathy Bond-Stewart and Leoardia Chimbandi Madima’s *Young Women of the Liberation Struggle: Stories and Poems from Zimbabwe* (1984). While it is difficult to read the latter as little more than a propagandist exercise, endorsed in a preface (and no doubt commissioned) by T.R. Nhonghu, “Minister of Community Development and Women’s affairs and Secretary Zanu (PF) Women’s Affairs” (1), its language and iconography are directly correlative to poetic episodes in Hove’s novel. A comparison of the two reveals the contradictions inherent in the novella’s poetic landscape of orality and memory—which I describe as a gendered ecology of nationalism.

the ecology of nationalism: motherhood and the land

Yes, the mother gourd must look for the child gourd, tracing the footsteps of the child gourd until the final reunion ... That is the way to know the tree of life. Leaves fall to the ground, rot in the soil, the roots drink from the rotten leaves and feed the inside of the tree again so that new leaves can sprout, new buds that cannot stand on their own feet until the seed decays to feed new plants near the old mother plant. That way people are also made. (*B*: 95-6)

In this arresting simile, Janifa equates Marita’s relationship with her son to the organic regeneration of ‘the tree of life’. Throughout the novel her ability to produce and nurture a ‘son of the soil’ (a freedom fighter) is questioned; ‘womb’ and ‘barrenness’ are images pejoratively associated with her (*B*: 25, 89). Here, Janifa

makes a political defence of Marita's motherhood, based on her status as an objective part of 'nature'. She has nurtured a freedom fighter and in searching for him in the city thus justifies herself as a progenitor of the new nation: "Marita, look for your leaves so that they will not say that you did not feed the roots of the plant for the sake of the new plant." (B: 97)

This ecological trope of reproduction, nurture and regeneration, recalls the metaphorical language used by Nehanda in the section where she wills into being the first *chimurenga*. Through repetition of 'the land', her narrative urges the connection between nature, women (in their 'natural' reproductive capacity) and nation in resisting colonial appropriation of ancestral lands:

The locusts of diseases will eat into the fields of our harvest until we remain like orphans in the land we inherited of our children. We did not inherit this land for ourselves *but for the children inside us* ... Arise all the bones of the land ... Rise all the insects of the land. Sing the many torturous tunes of the land so that strange ears will know there is an uprising at hand. Rise you the colourful birds of the rivers and hills. Sing all the tunes of the land so that any stranger will know that this land is the land of rising bones. *Rise all the children of the land and refuse to suckle strange breasts* (B: 48, 51-52, my italics).

It seems that by placing women—'but for the children inside us'—at the centre of his engagement with cultural nationalism, Hove falls foul to a familiar problematic in much nationalistic African literature. As Elleke Boehmer (1992) argues:

if women are placed as the stuff of nations, the womb and ground of origin, we know who is doing the placing ... Gender, I would argue, thus operates at a primary level of structuration in nationalism—its symbology is both constituted by and is constitutive of patriarchy in nationalism (234).

In this context, the trope is compounded by associating women, and especially mothers, with both the *memory* and *continuity* of anti-colonialist resistance, and doing so within an aesthetic that mystifies and politicises an ecological relation between motherhood and 'the land'. But such imagery has not been mobilised in a vacuum of

cultural reference. In *Young Women of the Liberation Struggle: Stories and Poems of Zimbabwe*, similar motifs are repeatedly invoked in poems and stories.³²

Where Marita is described by Janifa as the 'old mother plant', responsible for nurturing the 'seed', her son the freedom fighter, the female freedom fighters themselves describe friendships with other women fighters in similar terms, as do those who express their sense of personal growth after 'the struggle':

This friendship was so strong I can hardly describe it, it was like plants growing in fertile soil. (15, Tsitsi Masuku)

My friend had died, and I was sad, but I looked forward to our coming victory. So I say to all Zimbabweans: let us protect and develop our country, for many people died to water the seeds of freedom that we have today. (15, Voilet Mhova)

I will never have someone like Eunice again.
I lost her forever, my beloved one.
If Eunice was a grain of maize,
I would have sown her
so that we could play again when she came out. (16, Agnes Mutoonono)

The roots of pain are always in the ground to form the plant of Joy.
(42, Linnet Mlambo)

My present life is growing gradually like a plant. (52, Jelita Moyo)

My life is now starting to shoot like the roots of seedlings. (52, Kudzai Chimurenga)

Like Janifa these women mourn the loss of female friends. They also use the ecological ideas of germination and nurture to redeem the sacrifices they made. While the repetition of images and concepts clearly suggests that these stories and poems are the result of politically motivated workshops, the organic and even phallic images they cluster around provide a useful insight into the nationalist discourse and self-imagination of ZANU (PF) in the immediate post-war period. Though the characters

³² For further examples and critical discussions of nationalist poems and songs see Gunner (1991: 80-82)

in *Bones* might be better represented by Staunton's *Mothers of the Revolution* (see, for example Rooney 1997: 120), the web of language, symbol and memory that ties them together is more closely related to this insidious kind of nationalist discourse.

In the introduction to the collection, "the women" write that without "progress there is no future. Progress comes with preparation, like a tree planted and well-cultivated. Progress is the shade where people can rest before moving further."³³ It suggests a sincere and positive project of self and commununitarian development; the image of planting and cultivating a tree being a quite understandable and appropriate metaphor for the process. But the nationalist instrumentalisation of such sentiments is betrayed in Nhongo's preface. "Those personal experiences", she writes, "are an attempt to write down the memories of the emotional and ideological experiences they went through during the struggle *in the preparation for their role in post-independence Zimbabwe*."³³ (1, my italics) This statement superimposes a narrative *purpose* that is reflected in the editorial shape given to the collection: beginning with 'The First Struggle', 'Why we joined the struggle', then moving to 'Life in the Camps', 'Friendships during the struggle', and culminating with 'Returning home', 'How our experiences changed us', 'Freedom', Growth' and 'The New Zimbabwean Women.'³³

The vicissitudes of female experience during the war are ordered within a pre-determined teleology of national development. But so also is the ecology of the land itself. It is a motif that Hove revises in his subsequent work, discussed in chapter three, but *Bones* nonetheless perpetuates this reductive feature of nationalist discourse. For all the space that Hove gives to images of the land and nature, what we might now call an 'eco-critical' engagement with the politics of environmental representation—of the implicit gendering of 'the land', of the rural eco-systems both during and after colonialism, of spirituality, bio-rhythms and eco-holism, of land *use*: commercial rather than subsistence farming, overpopulation, underdevelopment and soil degradation—all are missing in this novel. When the land is exhorted to 'sing' by Nehanda and Janifa at the end of the novel (*B* 111), it is the Land and not the land itself that is offered a voice.

In terms of its gender and ecological politics, Hove's attempted subversion of nationalist discourse with *Bones* is therefore subject to the very contradictions it

³³ This list of sections is not exhaustive. It is meant merely to convey the (nationalist) teleological project behind the book's editing.

exposes. But by setting the rural drama on a colonial farm rather than a peasant homestead in Tribal Trust Land, Hove goes against the grain of anti- and post-colonial nationalist attitudes to rural black workers, setting a critical tone explored more subtly in subsequent work. In Rutherford's (2003) analysis, where the "native reserves or Communal Lands have been easily and frequently associated with the nation, both colonial and independent" (200), the farms and farm workers, by contrast, have been denied a "true class and history": they did not exist "legitimately within the national imagination of various social groups." (203) By linking the plight of this subaltern group to Nehanda's prophecies, Hove reincorporates these marginalised peoples into 'the national imagination' in a manner that protests their continuing marginalisation by the postcolonial government.

farm workers—not peasants

Bones lays bare the inherent problems and contradictions of associating nationalism exclusively with *peasant* consciousness in Zimbabwe. From Chisaga, for example, we learn that the farm workers have previously been evicted from Tribal Lands by the expropriations of the colonial state:

Manyepo's farm takes us as children without homes of our own because we came here to look for him on his farm. Do you not remember how the whole Muramba village came here to look for work when they heard a new farmer was coming to open a new farm? (39).

The white commercial farm effectively serves as a feudal demesne that absorbs these displaced people. Yet there is surprisingly little resentment towards Manyepo, the farm owner. Quite the opposite, in fact, as he is portrayed by the cook as a saint next to Makaza, the District Commissioner who evicted them and bulldozed their village in order to build a new road: "then after he has destroyed our homes he comes the next day on his horse, to ask for taxes" (40). Chisaga, as Zhuwarara (2001) suggests, alludes to "demographic pressures which forced many blacks to forgo the peasant option especially in the 1930s and 1940s":

Shortage of fertile land plus the numerous taxes which the settler government imposed on an already impoverished peasantry compelled many destitutes to seek employment in the mines and factories which were mushrooming all over the country as well as on the white-owned farms ... [t]his intensified the process of proletarianisation which almost became synonymous with brutal exploitation of blacks. (217)

In its focus on Marita's doomed flight, first from village to farm before then going to the city, *Bones* stages the mythologised moment of national emergence in 1980 in an acutely ironic manner. While this irony draws attention to the marginalised histories of the land, of those that live and work on it, but do not share in communal let alone private ownership of it, these stories are absorbed and contained in the images of natural, maternal reproduction, to which Marita is tied. Her allegorical tragedy, marking the "radical innocence" (Zhuwarara 2001: 224) of untold amounts of Unknown Women both during and after the Liberation struggle, is politicised by the text but is also subject to the consolatory work of memory, focalised through Janifa. As discussed, this conflation of 'radical innocence' with nationalist mythopoeisis does not, however, lead to a cathartic and progressive work of mourning. The final words in the novel are not Janifa's anticipation of self-liberation, but her agonistic memory of Marita: "... Marita ... she asked me to read the letter to her again today, every day she comes to me all pleading." (112).

The women in *Bones* are 'frozen' in a colonial chronotope (Primorac 2003) which remains as entrenched as the 'land question' itself. That said, the novel is rightly celebrated for the attempt it makes to rival that chronotope and foreground obscured lives and forms of rural resistance. As Liz Gunner (1991) suggests, the novel brings to the forefront of Zimbabwean literature the vital but problematic relation between "the possibility of empowerment" and "popular consciousness"(84). It is precisely this connection that all the novels discussed in this chapter promise, albeit in different ways. In none, however, is the promise realised. Where, historically, there were regions that saw strong connections emerge between 'peasant consciousness' and the nationalist guerrillas, the novels I have focused on choose not to tie the one indelibly

to the other. By no means do those characters who live on the land do automatically act for, or in the name of, anti-colonial nationalism or the post-colonial nation it struggled for. As David Lan (1985) at one point acknowledges:

the loss of land was not the only cause [of resistance] nor was it sufficient to make the great, brave leap into armed resistance seem the only available option. Though people had had their lands reduced, though many had been removed to distant places where they felt none of the intimacy that the Shona characteristically feel (or feel they should feel) for the land on which they live, there was it seems a readiness to accept all this provided they were able to exercise 'the peasant option.' (122)

The limited commercial horizon of 'the peasant option' cannot be underestimated, and also features prominently in later Zimbabwean novels.

In the novels discussed in this chapter, the inability or unwillingness to represent rural landscapes, rural peoples and traditional forms of knowledge and community—including what I have described as 'lineal consciousness' or 'spiritual temporality'—as being within, or cotermporal with, colonial modernity, indicates a consistently ambiguous stance toward that modernity. Colonial capitalist modernity brings Christianity and western education, creating consciousness of oppression while acculturating the Native subject into acceptance of it; it brings waged labour, commodities and markets, creating displacement, urbanisation and economic development, but in a racist asymmetry that leaves African land overpopulated and underdeveloped, and traditional beliefs and practices in desuetude. Despite this, the selected novelists, with the exception of Samkange, resist creating a nationalist hero in their novels. That they do so by no means makes them representative of all Zimbabwean fiction published between 1975 and 1988. But that they all variously protest colonial power without creating the kind of nationalist hero recognisable to contemporary *postcolonial* nationalists—freedom fighters or the selfless peasants who harboured and fed them—is, in my view, suggestive of a prescient attitude of circumspection towards the contradictions *within* anti-colonial nationalism in Rhodesia-Zimbabwe during the colonial period. The writers have different enough agendas, and write from different enough contexts, for any suggestion that they share political principles to be implausible. Rather, it seems that it is trajectory of anti-

colonial nationalism in Rhodesia and Zimbabwe itself that has fed such circumspection.³⁴

³⁴ There are, of course, novels that refute my thesis here. Solomon Mutsaers' *Chaminuka: Prophet of Zimbabwe* (1983b) provides one important example. However, as Maurice Vambe (2001) notes, "in its 'longing for form' the Zimbabwean nationalism expressed in *Chaminuka: Prophet of Zimbabwe* draws on an 'apparatus of cultural fictions' from an invented past." (105)

Chapter 2 - Repossessions: Subterranean (Trans)Nationalisms in South Africa 1972-1979

From the early 1960s the Southern African region witnessed the birth of militant anti-colonial struggle. Repressive measures that took hold in South Africa from 1960 prevented anti-colonial nationalist movements in South Africa gaining the foothold they did in the surrounding 'frontline'³⁵ however. It was not until the mid 1970's, following the Soweto riots in 1976 and the resurgence of the ANC's sabotage programme, that widespread uprising in South Africa became a real possibility.³⁵ With Angola and Mozambique gaining independence in 1975, the mid-1970s thus represents a crucial juncture in South and Southern African history. In the following chapter I explore six texts that dwell on the connection between land and nation at this crucial historical moment: André Brink's *Rumours of Rain* (1978), Nadine Gordimer's *The Conservationist* (1974), Bessie Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1969) and *The Collector of Treasures* (1977) and Alex La Guma's *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* (1973) and *Time of the Butcherbird* (1978).

As Stephen Clingman notes in his discussion of Nadine Gordimer's fiction (1986), much writing by white authors of this period is notable for the way that it increasingly reveals the presence of these *regional* developments. In the two novels I take to be best representative of this trend, Nadine Gordimer's *The Conservationist* (1974) and André Brink's *Rumours of Rain* (1978), the spectre of revolution, of regional anti-colonial nationalism flooding South Africa, is manifested in the symbolic transferral of land ownership, from white to black. Although it is a spectre that is figuratively mediated, obscured even at times by the authors, both their texts foreground it through the same historically resonant event: giving up 'the Farm' and all that it has come to symbolise in the ideological origins of white settlement and colonial rule.

There is a burgeoning academic discourse that focuses on the white South African pastoral modes that these novels seek to unsettle, especially from within the South African academy (J.M. Coetzee 1988, Macaskill 1990, Rich 1982, de Kock 1993, Oboe 1994, A. Coetzee 1997, Crehan 1998, Van Wyk Smith 2000, Harris

³⁵ Tom Lodge (1983) notes how the ANC was able to capitalise on the vast numbers of politicised youths fleeing South Africa in the months after the uprising. By 1978 South African security police chiefs estimated that around 4,000 were in training camps in Angola, Libya and Tanzania (339).

2001). These include studies of the Afrikaans *plaasroman*, the English ‘farm novel’, Romantic and modernist South African poetry, and also Missionary discourse. An aporia emerges, however, in the relative lack of critical discussion of literature which contrasts counter-hegemonic texts written in these modes with other texts that also focus on rural life and ‘the land’, with all its semantic ambivalence, but that do not necessarily conform to these modes: in particular literature written by black men and women.³⁶

On first enquiry it would indeed seem that black writers in the 1970s were not interested in depicting the rural world (Ndebele 1994: 17). According to Es’kia Mphahlele’s important essay ‘The Tyranny of Place and Aesthetics’(1981), urbanisation after the 1913 Natives Land Act effectively re-colonised the black literary imagination, which in turn adopted the urban as its own aesthetic, typified by both the *Drum* generation of journalist-writers in the 1950s as well as the protest writing that was to be given a voice through *Staffrider* magazine from 1978. This trend is converse to that found in contemporary Zimbabwean fiction. Writing in Zimbabwe was a similarly metropolitan activity, but as we have seen it was by no means ‘tyrannised’ by the demands of an urban world (or at least not in the same way).³⁷ Not only did black writing in English in the 1970s emerge during a predominantly *rural* anti-colonial conflict, it also did so from a different climate of social and economic relations between town and country.

According to the pioneering thesis of historian Colin Bundy (1988), the migrant labour economy had sown the seeds of urbanisation and rural ghettoisation throughout South Africa *prior to* the officially codified expropriation of black owned land with 1913 Natives Land Act. If this frustrated the subsequent development of anti-colonial nationalism across the city-country divide in that country (see, for example, Bundy 1987), the situation could hardly be more different in Zimbabwe.

³⁶A major exception to this trend is the literary ‘surveys’ of South African literature. See, for example, Smit, Van Wyk and Wade (eds) *Rethinking South African Literary History* (1996). No contributors to that volume are easy with the idea of a ‘national’ literary history, but most accept that it has, or will have some kind of value when properly theorised. For examples of ‘national’ literary histories see M. van Wyk Smith *Grounds of Contest: A Survey of South African Literature* (1990); Christopher Heywood *A History of South African Literature* (2004); David Attwell’s *Rewriting Modernity: Studies in black South African literary history* (2005). Michael Chapman’s *Southern African Literatures* (1996) stands unique in its regional emphasis, though has been criticised for doing so.

³⁷ Indeed, the opposite might be said to be true. In an insidious manifestation of indirect rule, the combination of colonialist schooling and rigid state censorship meant that African writers were compelled to write in their own languages — for a tribal rather than national audience — about a bucolic rural world which was deemed to be less politicised than the urban one. (see Veit-Wild 1992)

Terence Ranger (1985) argues that there existed in the former a peasant economy and 'consciousness' conducive to nationalist mobilisation well into the 1960s and 1970s. David Lan (1985) also points to a healthy syncretism between the political guidance of nationalist guerrillas and the spiritual leadership of rural peasant communities.

Lacking peasant consciousness and being more rigorously administered, rural areas in South Africa were much less amenable to urban middle-class or trade union organisations. Where the two different nationalist movements in Zimbabwe, ZANU (with their militant wing ZANLA) and ZAPU (ZIPRA) shared similar goals, were able to launch attacks from neighbouring countries and to operate effectively amongst rural communities, the main black nationalist movements in South Africa, the ANC (with their militant wing Umkhonto we Sizwe) and the PAC (Poqo), were driven underground and their leadership either imprisoned or exiled between 1961-63, and so denied any such rural foothold. Rural resistance between 1945-1965, in particular the uprising in Pondoland in 1960 and the 'Thembu Revolt' of 1962-63, was widespread but often localised and easily suppressed. The various 'reformist' schemes that the South African government implemented in rural areas in the 1950s and 60s had more success than their Rhodesian counterparts in frustrating political organisation and cementing the mechanisms of indirect rule, or "Balkanisation" as Colin Bundy (1987: 254) has described it. As Tom Lodge (1983) suggests: "Acceptance of reclamation, betterment, rehabilitation or stabilisation implied acceptance of the way the land had been apportioned in the first place." (265)

In chapter one I argue that the relatively straightforward connection that historians depict between 'peasant consciousness' and active rural support for militant nationalism in Zimbabwe is by no means straightforwardly reflected in literature at that time. Instead, we find nationalism refracted and even refused through the varied and often disparate experiences of rural peoples on 'the land', and the steady stream of migrant workers leaving it. The pressures of capitalist-colonial modernity are felt most directly through the 'civilising' presence of the Mission, the urbanisation of younger generations and the lure of commercial farming. In spite of this the writing remains typically rural-centric. Even when written in exile or from urban centres, its primary setting is the rural homestead, the Tribal Trust Lands or the Mission. The only comparable South African text of the period is R.L. Peteni's *Hill of Fools* (1976).

In the style of the indigenised historical romance, pioneered by Thomas Mofolo and Sol Plaatje some 60 years earlier,³⁸ Peteni portrays inter-tribal conflict and adolescent love (*Romeo and Juliet* providing the template) within the Ciskei 'homeland'. The author makes clear that in spite of the migrant labour system, the traditional rural economy allows at least one character, Ntabeni, to be "a prosperous peasant", giving him "important status in the community." (46) The novel counters the view that the 'homelands' were solely sites of "social and environmental devastation", and anticipates revisionist historical accounts that argue they "should not be viewed purely in terms of their functionality to the capitalist system or as exhibiting the scars of underdevelopment." (Beinart 2001: 222) Reverence for traditional moral codes and customs is complemented by the representation of a complex social milieu and, despite, or perhaps because of the inhibiting presence of indirect rule, limited prosperity. Peteni's moralistic text eschews an aesthetic of 'protest' and the latent presence of African nationalism in favour of a resolutely parochial scene of social change.³⁹

If *Hill of Fools* purposefully avoids confronting the system that created the so-called 'homelands', the later writing of Alex La Guma is dedicated to fictionalising resistance to the same. In both *In the Fog of the Season's End* (1972) and *Time of the Butcherbird* (1979) La Guma focuses on the politicisation of black characters across the city-country divide. In doing this he is one of the first black writers⁴⁰ to depict the migrant labour system not only destroying aspects of traditional society and culture, but also presenting real opportunities for the mobilisation of urban and rural peoples in resistance to apartheid. Such a view reveals the extent to which his later writing, in particular, grapples with the ideology of the Congress Alliance. Forced into exile in

³⁸ See Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* trans Daniel P. Kunene (Oxford, Heinemann, 1981 [1931]), and Sol T. Plaatje's *Mhudi* (London, Heinemann 1978 [1930]).

³⁹ By no means do I wish to suggest that *Hill of Fools* is a politically naïve text, however. In an address to the Winter School of the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown on July 7th 1977, Peteni makes a compelling argument for writing about local rather than national issues: "I did not wish to analyse the present Ciskei as politically constituted, as one of the 'homelands' of South Africa, because I feared that I might get carried away by criticism of the policy of 'separate development' and weaken the theme of clan or tribal prejudice which was my main concern. Separate development is a temporary dispensation and is limited to South Africa. But tribalism or sectionalism in one form or another will I believe continue long after separate development has disappeared from the body politic." (2004: 27) For a discussion of how Peteni's text is both radical and conservative, not to mention easily appropriated by the Ciskei government as a validating cultural document of its existence, see Laurence Wright, 'Politics, Latent and Overt, in *Hill of Fools*' (2004) 58-60.

⁴⁰ Under apartheid classification La Guma, like many of his characters, is 'coloured'. I use 'black' in this instance to reflect the Congress Alliance's universalist understanding of the word to mean all non-white persons in South Africa.

1966, he continued his political work as an ANC representative in London and later Cuba.

Where *In the Fog of the Season's End* offers a social vision in which rural and urban consciousnesses are linked in organised resistance to the state, *Time of the Butcherbird* depicts spontaneous violence and inchoate insurrection. The difference between the two might be seen as the difference between ANC and PAC (Pan African Congress) stances towards political mobilisation. While La Guma spent his life propagating the former, I suggest the later novel betrays a growing realisation that the experience and interests of those on the land was not adequately matched or represented by ANC policy in the 1970s. Even for such a political writer, organised resistance in rural areas is depicted as being patchy and isolated; while clearly latent, organised nationalism is a presence without any coherent form.

Brink, Gordimer and La Guma devote all their imaginative power to depicting the subterranean forces of migrant labour and political organisation in the context of a growing crisis of labour unrest and land ownership. If the two white novelists provide an insight into the anxiety felt by landed whites (and the institutions of white power more generally) with regard to their sacrosanct rights to property in the early to mid 1970s, then Alex La Guma tells the hidden side of this story. Not the least of his achievements is to bring attention to the continued, indeed the *accelerated* dispossession of blacks—of land, property and opportunity—throughout the seventies.

The discontinuities between the three novels express the tension between a rapidly growing black population and a lack of land on which to house them on the one hand, and the fluctuating labour requirements of the white economy on the other. The *Surplus People's Project* (1983), for example, estimated that 3.5 million ('non-white') people were forcibly removed from both urban and rural areas between 1960 and 1982 (quoted in Davis 1989: 128). The vast majority of Africans were 'relocated' to the 'homelands' where population more than doubled from 4.2 million in 1960 (39 per cent of all Africans) to 11 million (52.7 per cent) in 1982. In short, "Millions of people found themselves in barely planned rural slums, which were urban in respect of their population density and lack of agricultural opportunity, but rural in relation to facilities, services and employment." (Beinart 2001: 213-214)

These measures bred widespread resentment and resistance in rural areas when first implemented in the 1950s and early 1960s (see, for examples, Lodge 1983). But

if the nationalist movements had failed to harness rural resistance by 1963, the measures themselves ultimately also failed in their mission to stabilise labour flows and African urbanisation. Caught between repression and reform as economic recession began to bite in the early 1970s (Lodge 1983: 326); the state's response was to intensify the process. "When the impossibility of enforcing rurality became clear" Beinart argues, "government strategy changed to one of displacing African conurbations outside the major metropolitan areas. Boundaries were changed and urban growth was contained within extended homeland zones." (2001: 205)

In *The Conservationist*, the protagonist Mehring is well aware that he can profit from selling his farm to the government in order to 'contain' the urban growth of the homeland 'location' adjacent to it. This scenario is exactly what Mynhardt in *Rumours of Rain* succeeds in doing. Most critics discuss the counter-hegemonic significance of these farm-owners either giving up their land or seeing it being 'repossessed'. Few, however, are alive to the irony (which is a structuring principle in Brink's text) that in their geographical and historical contexts these acts could well be perpetuating the hegemony of the apartheid state. Disavowal does not correspond to a straightforward restitution of expropriated land. This is especially true when international markets allow the likes of Mynhardt to relocate to Europe and secure foreign investment for his mining interests that remain in South Africa.

If these novels anticipate the arrival of anti-colonial revolution, already in evidence elsewhere in the southern African region, then none, not even La Guma's novels, can envisage what *visible* form that it might actually take. The selected novels nonetheless share an aesthetic of *contest*. 'The land' becomes an object of real contestation for the first time in South African literature. I take this aesthetic to be indicative of a structure of feeling in South Africa in the mid 1970s, where the state's racist and economic imperatives were confronted with an explosion of urban protest, rural resistance and regional decolonisation.

In terms of its inability to move beyond the inherited and at times inhibiting modes of European social-realism and modernism, the solipsistic and Manichean weaknesses of this aesthetic prove to be the departure point for Bessie Head's idiosyncratic humanism. Whilst all the fictions make liberal universalist gestures—in representing other ethnic and racial groups or characters, by subversively introducing other narratives of belonging into their own—Bessie Head's fiction is the only one that is rooted *in* the experience of others. With *The Collector of Treasures* (1977) in

particular, the short story cycle as opposed to the novel becomes a way for Head to represent the traditional rural life of her Botswana community 'from the inside.'

By transliterating stories and experiences that are drawn from the rich oral history of her adopted home, *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind* (1981), she allows issues that lie latent within the community's collective consciousness—of gender and class politics, racial prejudice and neo-colonialism—to rise to the surface. Her skill is to do this in a way that "effaces her own judgement by having the colliding cultures speak for themselves" (Daymond 1996: 57). This cultivated impersonality allows Head to reconfigure aspects of her first novel *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1969). In that text Head's own experience of marginality and as a refugee from South Africa are expressed through the outsider figures of Makhaya Maseko and Paulina Sebaso (Eilersen 1995: 100). As the country moves from its first democratic elections in 1965 to independence in 1966, Makhaya and the English émigré Gilbert Balfour act as catalysts for the development of agriculture in the village of Golema Mmidi. Paulina Sebaso represents the indigenous agency that can benefit from this. The resulting engagement with the politics of development in decolonising Botswana creates a sense of 'the land' which is radically different to the 'ground of contest' found in contemporary novels set inside South Africa.

By revisiting social themes from the earlier novel, *The Collector of Treasures* questions ideas of rural masculinity that the other fictions take for granted. Representations of femininity and masculinity in these novels seem more directed towards locating certain political viewpoints or colonial pathologies than exploring how gender relations on the land are actually constructed. Through Head's careful positioning of herself as interlocutor for her adopted community, she discloses the gendered divisions of labour, authority and economic development within it. By distancing her later writing from the kind of instrumental political visions that these other novels gesture towards or encode, *The Collector of Treasures* might be considered a vanguard text for what Njabulo Ndebele (1994) was later to define as 'the rediscovery of the ordinary' in black writing of the 1980s, what David Attwell has recently described as the "'civil turn' in post-apartheid society" (2005: 9) and what

Michael Chapmen (2003) has identified as “the need to step beyond categories of separation”(xiv).⁴¹

The Land blackens: repossession in Nadine Gordimer’s *The Conservationist* (1974)

Contained for the most part *outside* South African borders in the early 1970s and so not necessarily visible within the country at the time (see, for example, Breytenbach 1972), anti-colonial nationalism nonetheless exerts a palpable pressure in contemporary white writing. *The Conservationist* alludes to the growing danger which mobile black labour presented to the social and economic infrastructure in the early 1970s, and to the incipient organisational threat of regional black nationalism. In respect of this it is crucial to note that Gordimer’s novel was published several years before the Soweto uprisings in 1976, but after “the dramatic explosion of labour unrest in Durban in the first months of 1973.”(Lodge 1983: 326) In light of this it is revealing that Gordimer chose instead to reference the strike in Namibia between 1971-2 that Stephen Clingman (1986) tells us “virtually brought the region to a standstill.”(138) This contextualises M. Van Wyk’s (2000) suggestion that *The Conservationist* could only ever be a “counsel of abandonment” (20), given the historical conditions of its production.⁴²

If *Rumours of Rain* is even more ambivalent in its outlook, it is because it is marked by a properly revolutionary structure of feeling. The Soweto uprising and consolidation of ‘homeland’ boundaries⁴³, for example, points to a slightly later timeframe than Gordimer’s novel. It is a moment when the revived threat of black nationalism began to elicit a concerted reformist effort on the part of the state to

⁴¹ I should add, in order not to misrepresent Attwell, that he uses this term to illustrate an aspect of black literary history that “has actually been with us all along.” Whilst I stand by my assessment of Head’s fiction, Attwell makes a crucial point that I will return to in the following chapter. He finishes the sentence—“what is different is simply our capacity to recognise what has always been part of a complex picture. (2005: 9)

⁴² See, for example, ‘Letter from Johannesburg 1976’ and ‘Relevance and Commitment’ (1979) in Gordimer’s collection of essays, edited by Stephen Clingman, *The Essential Gesture* (1988). For a discussion that charts Gordimer’s oscillation between liberal humanist and more radical positions see J.M. Coetzee ‘Gordimer and Turgenev’ in Reckwitz (ed) *South African Literary History: Fragment and/or Totality* (1997) pp.23-34

⁴³ In the glossary of Separate Development jargon provided by *The Surplus Peoples Project* (1985), ‘consolidation’ is defined as the “official term used to describe the policy developed by the central government in the 1970s to reduce the number of separate, isolated pieces of land making up each of the Bantustans; it is part of the process of turning these areas into independent ‘national states’ (ix).

contain it with increased financial support to the newly ‘independent’ ‘homelands’ (Beinart 2001: 222-227). But it is through the representation of migrant, displaced and surplus labour as aspects of the landscape that these novels come to resonate most closely with contemporary black writing.

The Conservationist is well described as a “libertine pastoral” (Gorak 1991). The narrative is focalised through the consciousness of Mehring, an English-speaking industrialist who has bought a farm in the early 1970s in order to indulge his desires for future profit, women and a natural landscape that can be both conserved and exploited. Filtered through a modernist free-indirect style, this consciousness sublimates certain social and economic contradictions in a way that presages an impending crisis: of the increasing economic insecurity of landed white interests and the increasing pressures exerted by displaced and transient labour. This is adroitly captured midway through the novel when Mehring stops to show his disaffected son a sign he has erected on the road to his farm. In three different languages it intimates the deep-rooted differences between an English-speaking industrial magnate, his parochial Afrikaner neighbours and the transient blacks who look for work there:

No Thoroughfare

Geen Toegang

Akunandlele Lapha

—As if anything’ll keep them out. It’s a constant parade, cutting up through the farm to that shanty town beyond the vleis. And old De Beer and Nienabar, too—a short cut for their damned milk trucks. It’s the fire risk that bothers me.—

You nod; and to what are you assenting? The signboard’s absurd, a hopeful claim that can never be recognized? Or that it’s not a sense of possession but concern for the land that has set it up? What do you mean *Namibia*? With that bloody effected laugh of hers: You can’t own it by signing a bit of paper, the way you buy a farm, you know. (TC: 140-141)

This passage illustrates the drift in Mehring’s thought between the immediate farm environment which he sees and feels, and his more abstract concern for local and regional politics. These thoughts include questions of property and labour, of ownership and tenancy: ‘a hopeful claim that can never be recognised’; of the regional political tensions which frame his anxiety: ‘What do you mean *Namibia*?’; and of the

personal relationships through which all of these are filtered — his son, mistress and estranged wife.

Through his ownership of the farm Mehring is thus haunted in three ways — three related ways as we shall see. Firstly, he is haunted by the feeling that he does not belong on the land, that somebody else has a greater claim to it; haunted, that is, by the presence of the dead black man buried in a shallow grave in the third pasture. In refusing to return to the earth, the black body seems to be asserting a primordial claim over it. The dead man's body is a constant reference point throughout the text, but perhaps more profoundly its presence is felt through a variety of narrative tropes which foreground the *blackening* of the land. Mehring's unease at this is palpable but also counterbalanced by the narrative of his ideological background.

He is a successful transnational capitalist, but by attempting to *become* a farmer through his purchase he invokes principles of economic and moral seigniority that return to the mythic roots of white settlement. Whilst not having been raised as a farmer he feels sure that "there is farming blood somewhere, no doubt". (TC: 22) The farm is thus something "already inhabited in imagination" (TC: 41) by Mehring: a powerful demand of the white colonial unconscious that he must serve in order to appease. Thirdly, the conflicting drives and demands of these first two spectres are sublimated into his Romantic desires for solitude in nature and for women: "he was possessed only by the brilliant idea of the farmhouse as a place to bring a woman." (TC: 42).

The trinity that haunts Mehring is symptomatic of a distinctly South African pathology. The farm is the place where the deepest desires and fears of the social order coalesce and overflow. As a consequence, and unlike the Afrikaans novelists whom J.M. Coetzee (1988a) discusses in his critique of the *plaasroman* and English 'farm novel', Mehring is obsessed with the *working life* of the farm, its excessive *productivity* as a counterbalance to his insular, emasculating insecurity.⁴⁴ He counters his mistress's desire for him to leave the farm unchanged, in picturesque atrophy, with the assertion that "No farm is beautiful unless it's productive." (TC: 70) The irony here is that the bourgeois lifestyle which can *afford* to think conservatively — which is to say thinking in terms of the picturesque as an expendable surplus of nature and

⁴⁴ One of the principal differences that Coetzee notes between the English 'farm novel' and the Afrikaans *plaasroman*, is that the latter is marked by an atavism towards fading peasant modes of rural living, whilst the former distances itself from such atavism in its anti-pastoral emphasis (Coetzee, 1988: 73-74, 77-81).

labour—emerges from a ‘productive’ base of capitalist exploitation, as Mehring asserts. Stephen Clingman (1986) argues, for example, that Antonia’s liberalism symbolises the ‘surplus’ of Mehring’s class interests; for “liberalism, as shown here, is the flourish of conscience whose possibility is created materially and licensed morally within and by capitalist society.”(145)

Gordimer uses a number of devices to show how Mehring—and all that he represents—is *unsettled* on the land he owns but does not belong to. His Namibian upbringing and English ethnicity leave him out of place on the Highveld. He has no ancestral connection to the land, no ‘lineal consciousness’. Despite being ‘possessed’ by the mythic power of ‘the farm’, his connection to the land, like his complicity with apartheid’s white nationalism, is more economic than it is ideological. The text is therefore deceptively ambivalent about what historical form of disavowal his unsettled narrative corresponds to. It also problematises a counter-claim to the land for the black people who live on his farm.

‘they who are beneath’: subterranean repossessions

The novel stages a dual gesture of repossession. If the resurfacing black body represents an allegorised political claim to the land on the part of the dispossessed blacks (Clingman 1986: 158), then the narrative “interruptions” of Zulu folk-lore⁴⁵ progressively repossess the historical *discourse* of land ownership. As Brian Macaskill (1993) summarises:

While she [Gordimer] herself refrains in this text from speaking openly and in her own voice on behalf of black aspirations—a reverse to which the mute presence of the corpse bears silently eloquent testimony—Gordimer allows the italicized extracts from Callaway to speak for the dispossessed and to intimate an ‘underground’ tradition of socio-political organisation and possession from the land utterly different from the ‘legal’ and ‘above ground’ conquest of the land familiar with to the lineage of white colonisers from whom Mehring is descended and whose conquests he seeks to conserve.(63)

⁴⁵ Appearing on un-numbered pages, these interruptions are clearly intended to ‘haunt’ Mehring’s narrative.

Writing in the early 1970s Gordimer is clearly still uncertain in her representation of black experience. Macaskill convincingly argues that such narrative sleights allow her to circumvent the ethical assumptions of liberal humanism, ‘speaking on behalf of black aspirations’. But the strategy has its limitations. The folk-lore interruptions, inferring a more ‘authentic’ claim to the land, are also orientalist ethnographic transcriptions.⁴⁶ They distort a pre-colonial connection to the land, and are equally unable to convey an ‘authentic’ sense of alienation from the land wrought by colonial modernity.

At a party in the farm workers’ compound following a prophetic “interruption” from Callaway’s ‘Zulu’ narrative, Phineas’s wife recounts a spiritual story based on a recurring dream. It is carefully juxtaposed with the extract from the ‘Zulu’ narrative—an extract that draws attention to itself as being *colonial discourse*:

The Amatongo, they who are beneath. Some natives say, so called, because they have been buried beneath the earth. But we cannot avoid believing that we have an intimation of an old faith in a Hades or Tartarus, which has become lost and is no longer understood. (TC: 163, pagination added)

So obvious is the colonial influence in this inscription—‘some natives say’, ‘Hades or Tartarus’—that it threatens to undo the reflexive or counter-hegemonic subversion of which it is part. But in the following section Gordimer subtly contrasts Callaway’s orientalist questioning of spiritual authenticity with a suspicion amongst the black farm workers of Phineas’ wife’s own ethnic ‘authenticity’. Solomon, for instance, remarks to Jacobus that she and those with her are not Zulu but come from Pondoland (TC: 165). Her recurring dreams of “some wild animal” presage a totemic ancestral presence, but the beer-drink lacks any coherent ritual with which to communicate with such a presence. The farm workers come from across southern Africa; they have different spiritual backgrounds. Her entranced voice becomes “lost” and the party breaks up when, in an ironic juxtaposition, “Izak’s radio took up with an advertising jingle about washing powder which the children knew by heart.” (TC: 166)

⁴⁶ As acknowledged in the flyleaf, the quotes are taken from the Rev. Henry Callaway’s *The Religious System of the Amazulu*. Although Gordimer uses the reprinted 1970 edition in the novel, the original facsimile of the text dates to 1870. It is therefore a classic document of South African *colonial discourse*. The attendant problems of orientalism are rarely brought up in discussion of it however. See, for example, Macaskill’s essays and Judie Newman, ‘Nadine Gordimer’s *The Conservationist*: “That Book of Unknown Signs”’ *Critique* 22:3 (1981) pp.31-44.

Her invocations, far from presenting an actual corollary to the spiritual claim to the land made by Callaway's narrative (as suggested in early criticism of the novel, see Rich, 1982: 63), or indeed to the symbolic, prophetic presence of the recalcitrant black corpse, are *feared* within this group. Jacobus and Alina, under a bond of "special accountability" to the farmer, are suspicious of her because "She's bringing people from over the hill there. And also from the location." (TC: 68) They fear the growing numbers of displaced and unemployed migrant workers—the surplus people—as much as Mehring does. There is scant suggestion that either the farm workers or those in the location are in any way politicised.

The farm workers are depicted as being spiritually alienated from the land which they till and economically dependent on Mehring, whom they serve. But they seem happy to live their dependent lives, secure for the time being in their tenancy, only having to bow to his authority on the infrequent weekends when he visits. As they party in his absence the narrator remarks, ambivalently, "all—all might have been theirs." (TC: 172) The novel thus stages a crisis in the historical narrative of white land ownership, but it also depicts a lack of a spiritual, peasant or historical consciousness on the part of the dispossessed blacks. There is no black *agency* to fill the cracks in Mehring's white landscape. Instead the novel relies on ironic symbolism, on Mehring's neurotic consciousness of the landscape in order to allegorise a "subterranean" claim for the land for which there is no analogue among the blacks themselves.

Consequently, Mehring's land is only repossessed in a figurative sense. It 'blackens' following a bush fire during his absence from the farm. Although a common enough occurrence, through repetition and subtle association, the description of the burnt land comes to have the more direct and possessive meaning of a noun—'the picnic bank is in *black* territory' for example:

he walks along the new boundaries of black and finds at close quarters how inexplicably the fire has reaped a patch of tall grasses here ... leaked a trickle of black towards the fence. The picnic bank is in black territory ... he follows the black edge wherever it is possible to go on foot ...down through the third pasture. Where black has made a promontory out into the unburned veld ... (TC: 95)

The allegorical resonance of this encroaching blackness does not precipitate in a revolutionary change of land ownership. Instead it captures the white farmer's traditional anxiety towards *Swart Gevaar* (black peril/danger), the uncontrollable influx of black labour on his land: Antonia chides Mehring that his reluctance to leave the farm will see the figure of "Swart Gevaar" tending his grave there (*TC*: 177).

If Mehring sees and experiences his landscape through the modernistic gaze of a "disintegrated consciousness" (Clingman 1991: 136), representations of 'black' space are conveyed in much more naturalistic terms. Unlike Mehring, who occupies different levels of narration simultaneously, representations of African and Indian characters conform to a more traditional mode of realism—one that does not indirectly express their consciousness, other than through dialogue. In this way Gordimer's sketches of the farm workers' compound, the Indian store and pestilent location, all bear close resemblance to the naturalistic style of Alex La Guma. In the following passage, for example, the territoriality of the guard-dogs kept by the Indians becomes a crude metaphor for the conditions that Indians and blacks are forced to live with under apartheid:

What had begun as their own passion to be let out had long since become a fierce passion to keep out others. The dogs held within their range of savagery the Indian's store, house and family, and the blacks in the yard, surrounded together. It was the Indian's only form of tenure; and the African's had papers that made them temporary sojourners where they were born. (*TC*: 114)

Such overt criticisms of apartheid socio-spatial engineering are enabled through a more direct third-person narrative of 'black' spaces. From this perspective, the Group Areas legislation and Pass Laws make the Indian's claim on their small piece of peri-urban land tenuous to the point of generating a violent insularity. Without employment and therefore the cash to pay off the authorities, the Africans' tenure is even more insecure. As we witness the lives of these peripheral black characters unfolding, this representative scene is reported but rarely *reflected on* by the characters themselves. They are not privileged with the narratorial authority Mehring has. The problem this creates is that it becomes hard to connect this 'realistic' narrative of lived experience with the symbolic world—with Mehring's neurotic landscape. As Clingman (1986: 160-161) notes, there is an ironic disparity between

the historical reality the text references, and the prophetic symbolism that it assumes. Nowhere is this more evident than with the storm from “the Moçambique channel” (TC: 232) that forces the dead body to the surface and Mehring, potentially, from the farm.

Clingman (1986) argues, persuasively, that Gordimer’s novel foregrounds not just a crisis in white South African hegemony, but also in white *regional* supremacy. He suggests that the neurotic representation of white society in the novel exemplifies the apartheid state’s response to the rising tide of anti-colonial activity in the frontline states in the early 1970s: a “period when the country began to ‘draw up into the laager’” (1986: 137). This perceived threat assumes the form and ‘natural’ power of the aforementioned storm. The fact that it is a displaced farm worker from Zimbabwe, Witbooi, who eventually buries the corpse (which increasingly becomes the avatar of black nationalism), reinforces this regional reading whereby the previously unclaimed black body takes “possession of this earth, theirs; one of them.” (TC: 267) Embodying the “total historical onslaught” (Clingman: *ibid*) of anti-colonial nationalism in the region, the storm nonetheless has a negligible corollary in South Africa at the same time. In moving to a discussion of André Brink’s *Rumours of Rain* (1978), set on the weekend of the Soweto Riots, we are similarly struck by the background focus on a labour dispute that threatens to spill over into violent revolt, but also by the absence of an organised politics behind it.

André Brink’s *Rumours of Rain* (1978): Giving up the land, consolidating the Land

There exists the powerful imagery, fostered by Afrikaner ideologues as well as by their liberal critics, of the rugged rifleman of the Boer War who still places his beliefs before his pocketbook. To what extent does such principled behaviour apply to an Afrikaner elite behind BMW and Mercedes steering wheels? What other options does an ethnic oligarchy have in the specific historical circumstances of the domestic and international context of South Africa at present and in the foreseeable future? (Adam and Giliomee 1979: 7-8)

Writing in the potentially revolutionary aftermath of the 1976 Soweto uprisings, Heribert Adam’s searching questions allow us to unlock André Brink’s deceptively

ironic farm-novel, *Rumours of Rain* (1978). It is a novel that in several ways re-writes Gordimer's *The Conservationist*, placing more emphasis on Afrikaner culture and the 'international' as well as 'domestic' challenges facing the 'ethnic oligarchy'. Again we witness a farm being given up, but this time a counter-narrative of repossession is almost completely mystified. This is because the land is not repossessioned. It is sold to the government, at a huge profit, in order to 'consolidate' the Ciskei homeland. The novel begins and ends with its protagonist, Martin Mynhardt, behind the steering wheel of his Mercedes, driving away from the land.

Unlike Gordimer's adroit use of free-indirect style in *The Conservationist*, *Rumours of Rain* relies on a more straightforward narrative irony. We are asked to read Mynhardt's first-person narrative as a memoir. The double of Gordimer's Mehring, Mynhardt is distinguished from him in that he can claim to be a 'full-blooded' Afrikaner. His lineage is traced back to 1732; his family settled on the land since 1821. Whereas *The Conservationist* stretches over a prolonged but indeterminate period of time, *Rumours of Rain* is the recollection of this heritage being disavowed in the course of one weekend. A weekend in which, having dealt with a mine-workers' dispute earlier in the week, Mynhardt must travel to his family farm bordering the Ciskei 'homeland' in order to persuade his mother to let him sell it.⁴⁷ When driving back to Johannesburg, mission accomplished, details of the Soweto riots of June 16th 1976 come through on his car radio: it completes a tableau in which the fundamental structure of a dominant social order shifts from an emphasis on cultural to economic survival.

The weekend is recalled day by day but interlaced with nostalgic and associative digressions, providing a historical background to the weekend's events. In the prefatory 'memo' section, Mynhardt, our putative author, abnegates the historical responsibility which he, as a nationalist Afrikaner, albeit a *verligte*, or 'liberal', might be held to account for: "Here I am with no one to consider and nothing to account for. No dead to bury, no arrangements to make, no guilt to explain or exorcise." (RR: 12) He thus also denies that the subsequent narrative takes a confessional form, "since my Calvinist heritage frowns on such a striptease of the soul." (RR: 13) That this invocation of a cultural heritage comes so soon after a disavowal of the historical responsibility to which that heritage might be held accountable, is to signal the deep

⁴⁷ This is more of a symbolic gesture, however, to appease the wrath of the ancestors, as the sale is *fait accompli* prior to his journey, but he needs his mother's signature in order to finalise the deal.

irony that suffuses his narrative. It is the effectiveness of this narrative irony that has split critical reception, especially with regard to the counter-hegemonic claims that Brink, for one, has made for the novel (see, for example, Macaskill 1990: 168).

Joseph-Vilain (2004) shares Macaskill's (1990) reservations that the novel ultimately reinforces an unreconstructed discourse of 'heroic' Afrikanerdom. It does so almost as a reaction against Gordimer's *The Conservationist*, a text which it seems to want to replace through re-writing it, palimpsest-like: as "a mythographic projection of the 'positive aspects of Afrikanerdom' into the interruptive figures of Bernard Franken and Louis, whose structural function in the text is to intervene against Mynhardt, the odious exemplar of the hegemonic." (Macaskill 1990: 171) The positive aspects of Afrikanerdom are filtered into the narrative through these two figures, the first drawing heavily on and mythologizing the life and trial of the Afrikaner lawyer and communist, Bram Fischer.⁴⁸ Macaskill argues that 'interrupting' the discourse of Afrikanerdom in this way fails as a counter-hegemonic device. Paul Rich (1982) elaborates a class critique, arguing that the novel fails in that it does not sufficiently undermine Mynhardt's bourgeois world-view, "whose autonomy as a private individual is never critically examined in the novel." (68)⁴⁹

More recently, Diala Isidore (2000) has sought to redeem the novel by focussing on the religious mythology that Brink uses to assert principles of "transcultural" dissidence (86).⁵⁰ Isidore draws attention to the idea of "Christian self-sacrifice" that is played out through Bernard, but that is also evident in Mynhardt's black lieutenant, Charlie Mofokeng, his mistress, Beatrice Fiorini, and that precipitates in the Apocalypse presaged in the novel's dénouement. All of this is in a contrast to Mynhardt, the Pilate figure, who desires, above all, to *survive* (93). Despite this focus on religion, Isidore's discussion fails to acknowledge, let alone critique, the

⁴⁸ Gordimer has also engaged with this figure in both fiction and non-fiction. She has shown herself to be more interested in the world of post-war anti-apartheid political organisation than in a valorisation of dissident *Afrikaner* culture, however. See 'Why Did Bram Fischer Choose Jail' (1966) in Clingman (ed) *The Essential Gesture* (1988) pp.68-78. In contrast to Brink's direct characterisation of Bram Fischer as Bernard Franken in *Rumours of Rain*, Gordimer chose to reference the man and his work obliquely, by taking his daughter's perspective in *Burger's Daughter* (1979).

⁴⁹ In a contemporary review for the *Times Literary Supplement*, Lewis Nkosi is even more caustic: "Brink's strategy of using the voice of the Afrikaner bigot to pinpoint the moral failures of the system nearly comes off; but in the end his consistent lack of virtue leaves a vacuum at the centre of the novel." (20th October 1978)

⁵⁰ Ben Obumselu (1990) has attempted to show a similar moral correlative through the "Xhosa ideal" that, in his reading, encapsulates "the positive value in terms of which all the characters in the novel are conceived" (58).

role of Mynhardt's 'Calvinist heritage' in the novel, the creed intrinsic to nationalist Afrikaner ideology.

There are indeed a number of areas left unaccounted for in these discussions. In particular, there is a failure to historicise the specific event that the novel focuses on: the disavowal of the farm. A more critical reading suggests that this disavowal is actually more sympathetic to white interests than to the symbolic black *repossession* of the farm as seen in *The Conservationist*. Secondly, published in the immediate aftermath of the Soweto uprisings,⁵¹ Brink's novel is haunted by a more specific (if no more tangible) presence of black labour and resurgent black nationalism. Thirdly, something both alarming and interesting happens at an aesthetic level on the few occasions when Brink delves into the black world—notably during Mynhardt's trip to Soweto township and the mystical kloof beyond the farm. In depicting these spaces Brink resorts to a naturalistic technique, similar to that which I discuss in relation to both Gordimer's and La Guma's representations of urban black worlds. Before taking these points up we must first return to the prefatory 'memo'. It is this section of the novel, I argue, that generates a level of narrative irony overlooked by other critics. And further to this, it also firmly grounds Mynhardt's narrative in political and economic discourses that penetrate to the core of the evolving hegemony of Afrikaner nationalism in the mid- to late 1970s.

the farm: more than a piece of land

In his 'memo' Mynhardt reflects that whilst "the future of the farm" was at stake that weekend, the events themselves were the culmination of something that involved "more than a piece of land" (*RR*: 13). In this self-conscious jump beyond 'the land' as a local reference point, Mynhardt suggests that the events as he tells them are symptomatic at one level of a more general crisis in Afrikaner culture, but above all suggestive of a crisis in Afrikaner political hegemony—the politics of the Land. The way he describes this crisis is doubly revealing: of his debt to Gordimer's novel but also in the way it reinforces the preoccupation with—the fear of—loss:

⁵¹ In *Mapmakers: Writing in a State of Siege* (1983) Brink tells us that parts of *Rumours of Rain* were "resuscitated" from an earlier novel, *The Saboteurs*, which had been suppressed by censorship legislation (95).

If I may try to define it at this early stage I believe one may call it a sense of loss. (So much can come to an end simultaneously even though one fails to recognise it as an end at the time.) I can specify a fourfold loss. A father, a son, a woman, a friend. Perhaps even these are more than tokens, symptoms. (RR: 13)

These manifold losses in Mynhardt's personal life are thus symptomatic, as they are in Mehring's, of a wider pathology: of an atrophying social order retreating into the shadows of transnational capitalism. Whilst critics are quick to discuss this allegorical aspect of the novel, only Macdermott (1988) notes that Mynhardt (unlike Mehring) *survives* the Apocalypse in order to tell this tale of 'loss'. Mynhardt's narrative, like so many of Brink's novels, is retrospective (1988: 180), but perhaps not as *melancholy* as we would expect. Mehring's narrative ends, *closes*, when the black body is finally interred in a symbolic act of repossession. By contrast it is as if Brink offers Mynhardt's 'memoir' in anticipation of its ideological criticisms, but also of the very real resilience of a certain class of Afrikaner in the late 1970s and 1980s. Mynhardt represents a contradiction in the historical development of 'Afrikanerdom' that *chooses* to leave the ancestral farm, that *chooses* to break the bond between land and 'lineal consciousness', fleeing to a hotel on the other side of the world as a transnational free-marketeer.

Overcoming the nostalgia for his heritage, his 'early romantic' phase, Mynhardt has no qualms in forcing his mother to give up their family farm for a proposed expansion of the Ciskei Homeland. Although she refuses to give up the sacred place of her familial and cultural heritage, she recognises the necessity for Afrikaners like her son: "I mean: perhaps it was necessary for our history to take the course that it did to produce a man like you. Otherwise we might have gone under." (RR: 375) However, if the diversification of Afrikaner economic interests (from agricultural to transnational industrial capitalism) survives its own Apocalypse in the novel, it cannot do so without a radical displacement of political and economic power.

Mynhardt pens the narrative from London, where he has travelled as a representative for the "Afrikaans Institute of Commerce", giving a paper to a conference on the economic "development" of the Third World. The focus of the conference—note the cutting irony—is "on the exploitation of mineral resources." (20) His paper is entitled *The Strategic Value of South Africa's Mineral Resources to the*

West. In this context ‘the land’ is still materially important, as a resource to be exploited, but it is mobilised in terms of global politics rather than cultural history. The reference to ‘the West’ here, in the Cold War context of the mid 1970s, alludes to the increasing importance South Africa held as a subimperial actor for Western powers at that time.

Heribert Adam (1979) quotes Samir Amin on this subject, who in 1977 argued that ‘Azania’ was “the heart of the citadel which comprises the *merging* of the interests of the Anglo-Boer settlers, of their State, and of American, British and European monopoly capital.”(56) But, as Adam points out, the insecurity of the apartheid state saw it aggressively assert what independence it could from those Western governments that were shaping to lobby for democracy within South Africa:

The immense wealth in scarce minerals and long-established trade links make countries such as Britain more dependent on South Africa than vice versa. Powerful interests in most Western states could intervene if the anti-South Africa rhetoric was carried so far that it effected crucial business [...] Rather than the ‘merger’ of outside ‘monopoly capital’ with its South African partner, a growing cleavage can be expected, because the local section has not only the most to lose but is also economically strong enough to resist the outside dictate for the time being.(3,58)

The novel reflects this structure of feeling at both public and personal levels: anxiety, a fear at what might be *lost* by giving up the land, is counterbalanced by the self-interest of the *verligte* class of Afrikaner. This in turn represents a spirit of *ethnic* survival grounded in economic strength; a spirit strong enough to give up ancestral land in order to consolidate the homelands and so consolidate political hegemony within South Africa.

At a later stage in the ‘memo’, for example, Mynhardt uses economic principles to justify his enmity towards the radical social changes that Bernard stands for (revolution, but in Mynhardt’s eyes, Apocalypse). Despite the *verligte* discourse of ‘separate development’ which he supports having already been unveiled as renewed exploitation, he continues to invoke it in order to justify his personal “exploitation of the land”:

Whatever I possess, I've earned. It is a just reward I'm entitled to in terms of my economic contract with the land: that I'm allowed to take from it what I can; and that, in return, the capital I've earned with my know how and hard work be used to stimulate the economic development of the underprivileged to the point where they can assume greater responsibility for themselves. In this way the country at large benefits from it. (RR: 55)

Mynhardt symbolises the modernising force within Afrikaner nationalism compelled to abnegate its heritage (in favour of the 'liberalism' of the free market) and hence its nationalist ideology of land ownership and belonging. Mynhardt is eloquent and unequivocal in stating as much: of the need to give up 'the farm':

Even if a choice had still existed, the situation was impossible. For it was a matter of balancing two comparable elements, but two essentially different contents, two value systems. The farm was an ideal, a dream, a sentimental quantity: involving, let us say, our history, our pastoral past, our tribal tradition, perhaps our freedom ... The same choice which had confronted my ancestors in one generation after another, but in a totally different dimension. And I refused to consider the prospect of going under. (RR: 265)

The problem here is that Mynhardt manages to conceive of his abnegation—quite different from Bernard's Betrayal—as being mandated by the same lineage, the same heritage that he is disavowing. This is the point where critics spot the weakness in the novel: it capitulates to its own hegemony. But the novel is more complex than many suggest. Mynhardt may talk the talk of continuing a dynamic Afrikaner cultural heritage, but he actually embodies the "crisis" of its political hegemony in the late 1970s, as observed by Stanley Greenberg (1980: 401-403).

Rather than being dismissed as a romantic exploration of Afrikaner dissidence, I would argue that the novel's depiction of a 'hegemony in crisis', with residual and emergent elements now visibly struggling against the dominant order, provides readers with a perspective on aspects of South African society that few other novels of the 1970s offer. It demonstrates how, as Greenberg (1989) with reference to Hermann Giliomee (1982) puts it, "apartheid lost its hegemonic character and became merely instrumental"(393) in the late 1970s. This emphasis on 'instrumentality' in the novel is in evidence when our attention is shifted from the land question to that of labour

unrest in the mid 1970s (which is historically accurate), and the absence of black youth in the uprising (which is not). This transitional aspect of the novel is vital, given Brink's own immediate reaction to the uprising:

The only relevant question is: will the dénouement of this final act be peaceful or violent in nature? And I must make it absolutely clear: a *peaceful solution* implies the acceptance of all the implications of living in a permanently multi-racial society: a *violent solution* may aim at an elimination of the white presence as a political factor from the South African scene. (Brink 1983[1976]: 147)

'It was as if the dark red earth had become a voice, thrusting up through her feet and body': revolution or parody?

Mynhardt's representation of the farm and his 'tribal' origins belongs to the conservative Afrikaans tradition of the *plaasroman* discussed by J.M. Coetzee (1988a). The right to husband the land is grace-given but also, we are lead to believe, *legal*. Mynhardt's ancestors "bought a piece of land from a friendly Xhosa tribe" in 1821, "and settled on the land which was to remain in our family for nearly one and a half centuries." (RR: 212) Although Mynhardt's father was an unhappy steward of the land, his philanthropic mother naturalises a lord and bondsman ethic on the farm. She tames the farm by exerting discipline over the rowdy farm workers; this "anchored her to the place" (RR: 193)

But her adoption of the traditional white farmer's role comes too late in the day. The Mynhardt's farm, like Mehring's, is inundated with transient workers and squatters—too many for the mother either to provide work for or to keep out. Whereas the labour dispute that unnerves Mehring takes place in distant German South-West Africa, *Namibia*, here the expanding homeland, overflowing with displaced, unemployed workers, threatens the surrounding white farms directly. The regional anxiety that pervades *The Conservationist* is felt close at hand and expressed openly in *Rumours of Rain*: "What's the use?" Louis demanded. "We're just exposing new vulnerable frontiers all the time. Angola, Rhodesia, Moçambique, South-West. And now you're starting right here too." (RR: 325)

But such directness becomes problematic at an aesthetic level. Compared with Gordimer's novel, the ironic approximation of a gendering gaze is much less nuanced.

Mynhardt's feminisation of the landscape, in particular of the African 'otherness' of it, pushes Brink's narrative irony to—perhaps even beyond—its limits. The farmland in the novel is gendered in a way reminiscent of the "Porno-Tropics" of earlier colonial discourse identified by Anne McClintock in *Imperial Leather* (1995). The farm's horizon takes the form of a supine female body through the repeated image of "a dark, dense kloof running between two hills." Observing this prospect, Mynhardt and his son urinate over the land in an almost ritualistic spectacle of phallic power and patriarchal consolidation, becoming "allies again." (RR: 177) This gendered landscape sustains the Afrikaners' patrimony of the land: the vital 'lineal consciousness'.

It is this same kloof which a 'blinded' Mynhardt stumbles into after having lost his glasses in a visit to the family graveyard (353). Having rebelled against his ancestors (the archetypal Law of the Father) through his disavowal of the farm, a symbolically castrated Mynhardt is forced to enter into a primordial, maternal space in search of absolution. This place has become moribund through his lack of *husbandry*, however, "compared to the luxuriant virgin forest I'd known before." (RR: 203) Inside it, disorientated and frightened, he meets an old Xhosa man. The absolution Mynhardt desires is offered to him in the form of a conveniently masculinist myth:

If you really want the Momlambo to come to you, and you want her to sleep with you under one Kaross and remove her inciyo for you, you must first kill your father in your own heart.

That night I'd spent with Bea: and Dad died. (RR: 397)

As Antonia symbolises Mehring's liberal conscience in *The Conservationist*, this encounter allows Mynhardt to reconstruct his ancestral disavowal, licensed by his *verlig* economic liberalism, as bearing a mystical quasi-Oedipal relation to his mistress, Beatrice. By gendering the disavowal in this way, and by using an orientalist representation of African folk-lore in order to do so, Brink seriously threatens our faith in his use of narrative irony. Mynhardt's capitalist motivation is mediated through a narrative that locates both blame and redemption within the conflated otherness of women and an African worldview. This exoticism is exemplified by the almost parodic depiction of a wailing black mother(earth), arriving at the farm to mourn her murdered daughter:

It was as if the dark red earth had become a voice, thrusting up through her feet and body, through bursting entrails and tearing lungs and breaking heart, howling against the bleeding sky. (RR: 363)

In both of these examples the representation of *other* relations to the land is conflated with essentialised notions of Xhosa culture and caricatures of black people. Even if we accept that these representations *are* Mynhardt's and therefore fulfil an ironic purpose, there is still a question mark over the extent to which such irony offers an adequate counter-claim to the land, or indeed the Land. Local Afrikaners may perceive the expansion of the Ciskei 'homeland' as a threat, but on a national level it is part and parcel of the evolving hegemony of the apartheid state. Equally mystified is the prophetic ending to the novel. Despite the focus on the farm, the threat of 'Apocalypse' comes from urban, not rural, unrest.

Through the shrewd employment of Bernard's childhood friend, Charlie Mofokeng, Mynhardt manages to stave off "rising industrial tension in the land" (RR: 42). But when he arrives at the Westonaria Mine in the week before his trip to the farm, he finds that Charlie has joined ranks with the workers. Charlie later claims he was playing Devil's advocate, appearing to sympathise with the workers in order to win their trust and curb their anger. But Mynhardt refuses to compromise, sanguinely brushing off the escalating violence: "Then all the different tribal groups turned against each other. Xhosas, Zulus, Tswanas, Sothos. It happens invariably." (RR: 45)

At this stage Mynhardt assumes that the workers lack the organisation and *national* consciousness to threaten his control. We are left to assume that his discomfort on hearing of the riots is related to the fear that this situation has now changed, though he is perhaps equally concerned to hear that his mistress has herself been arrested in connection with the riots. It is thus hard to make a strong connection between the augury of revolution at the end of the novel and an actual representation of the agency or world with or in which it might materialise. Mynhardt perceives a particularly decrepit black urban world. The township, literally, is a dump:

Rubble heaps, erosion ditches, the skeletons of old cars: children scuttling like cockroaches in the garbage of smoky mounds. Old thin women poking in the rubble like moulting black fowls, or crows, or vultures [...] Terrifying quarrels, screams, shouts. Short staccato silences. And, because of the innumerable houses huddled so

closely together, the staggering sensation of the *presentness* of everything became even more overpowering. And one reacted to it, not with one's ears, or nose, or mouth whatever, but physiologically, with one's whole body.(RR: 342, 346)

On the one hand this account relies on a limited and stereotyped perception of township life. But in reminding ourselves again that this is Mynhardt's narrative, the naturalistic rendering is intended to capture the jarring discontinuity of his own experience within the alien space, rather than providing an empathetic vision of black urban life.

Mynhardt is tricked into accompanying Charlie into the township. Charlie offers Mynhardt the opportunity to revise the negative opinion of 'the land' held by foreign investors, by showing them the Soweto township: "Why don't you show them what the land really looks like for a change? See South Africa and die."(RR: 270) Despite having himself grown up on a farm and benefited from the patronage of liberal Afrikaners, 'the land' for Charlie means Soweto, an urban township fermenting with anger. Yet at the same time, there is no indication of political mobilisation within that space. Brink's fear of a violent dénouement, expressed in his essay 'After Soweto', does not find a corresponding vision of how that violence is the result of specific protests and organisation, not just widespread disaffection. Instead the novel remains preoccupied with the contradictions in white (Afrikaner) nationalist politics. For the missing narrative of black experience and oppositional politics in the febrile 1970s, we need to turn to the 'coloured' writer Alex La Guma.

The Rural in the Urban: nationalism in Alex La Guma's *In the Fog of the Season's End* (1972) and *Time of The Butcherbird* (1979).

'I am thy father's spirit, doomed for a certain time to walk the night ...and ... for the day confined fast in fires, till the foul crimes done in my day of nature's ... nature are burnt away ... But' ... 'That's us Michael, my boy. Just ghosts, doomed to walk the night. Shakespeare.'

'Bull,' Michael Adonis said, and took another swallow at the bottle.(A Walk in the Night 1962:28)

All this was our land, since the time of our ancestors. In that my brother was right. Are not the fields still ours, the soil, the hills? All this is our home in spite of the white man's law. Listen, we have a committee and the committee has spoken and decided. (TB: 83)

Taken from Alex La Guma's first and last novels, *A Walk in the Night* (1962) and *Time of the Butcherbird* (1979), my epigraphs give a sense of the twofold movement that runs through his work. The first captures the alienated and abject condition of the individual living in Cape Town's 'coloured' area of District Six in the 1950s: 'ghosts' doomed to 'walk the night' of apartheid. The second comes from the rural world of the 1970s where no black-owned land is safe from the expropriating apartheid state. In both cases, La Guma's characters are naturalistic subjects, struggling to come to terms with the politically overdetermined worlds in which they live. From this inhibited and dormant state critics consistently interpret a gradual movement towards individual awakening and communal liberation in his five novels (see for example J.M. Coetzee (1992), Abrahams (1985), JanMohamed (1988) and Balutansky (1990).

The critical trend has been to focus attention on the kinds of social processes and historical developments that produce class-consciousness, or 'political understanding' as J.M. Coetzee (1992) puts it. Between the two novels highlighted the development of La Guma's characters is plotted against the evolution of apartheid legislation: from the Group Areas codifications of the 1950s to the suppression of all black political activity in the 1960s and 70s, with particular attention to the regime of forced removals begun in 1950 and accelerated in the 1970s. Whilst these changes compound the oppression experienced by disenfranchised blacks during this period, they also produced a political consciousness that would become able to assert, as Mma Tau, the leader of rural resistance in *Time of the Butcherbird* does, that 'all this is our home in spite of the white man's law'. The novels plot a trajectory from town to country that reflects, I argue, the ANC's growing realisation in the late 1960s and early 1970s that a successful guerrilla campaign would need to mobilise those on the land as well as in the cities for a national democratic revolution.

The problem with the established critical response to La Guma's work lies in both the stylistic and political incongruity of the final novel. Despite the mobilisation of the rural peoples by Mma-Tau, they and the rioting 'crowd' that enters the city at the end of the novel are sublimated into the existential individualism of the central

protagonist, Shiling Murile. His one-dimensional character suggests regression, not awakening. He returns to a naturalistic state whereby his fate as a victim of racial and socio-economic oppression corresponds to *reactionary* violence against his oppressors. Here Njabulo Ndebele's (1994) lament that images of "general social oppression" become "ends in themselves" (32) in 'protest writing' of the 1970s rings particularly true. Abdul JanMohamed (1988) also declaims this aspect of the novel in that it "straightforwardly advocates and valorises heroic participation in an armed war".(261) Other critics see the final novel as a problem of both style and historical authenticity (Maughan-Brown 1991). The implicit criticism of La Guma's ideological leaning that all these contain, however, does not actually amount to an ideological critique. In the following section I hope to rectify this. If La Guma's close relationship to the ANC's subversive activity is best expressed through the courage and sacrifice of the underground cell in *In the Fog of Seasons' End*, then the mixture of organised resistance and spontaneous violence in *Time of the Butcherbird* would seem to draw on the activities of the ANC's more ardently nationalist rivals, the PAC.⁵² The occasional critic has also made this suggestion, but none has asked why this might be.

Nahem Yousaf (2001) and Anders Breidlid (2002) both invoke Frantz Fanon in the novel's defence, arguing that La Guma's focus on individualistic existential violence is a preliminary 'phase' leading to communal liberation. Although convincing at a formal level, such a reading fails to historicise either the events depicted in the novel or La Guma's (left-wing) relationship to the ANC's (traditionally liberal) ideology.⁵³ By doing both these things in the following sections, I suggest that *Time of the Butcherbird* expresses a fundamental contradiction that long bedevilled the ANC: how could a predominantly urban organisation mobilise rural peoples when the time came for guerrilla insurgency and national revolution? Following the Soweto uprising of 1976 this question becomes even more vital. And while the PAC was disabled by internecine disputes from the mid 70s onwards, I suggest that La Guma finds in their earlier, reckless but more spontaneous attempts at

⁵² The PAC was formed by a breakaway group from the ANC, led by Robert Sobukwe, in 1959. Suspicious of the ANC's multi-racial ethos, and especially of the influence some felt that the South African communist party was asserting within it, the PAC was committed to mobilising Africans in nationalist resistance to both white rule and communism.

⁵³ Alex La Guma was a member of the Communist Party until it was banned, and went on to become the chairman of the South African Coloured Peoples Congress (SACPO), an affiliate of the ANC in the Congress Alliance from the mid-1950s.

uprising, their ability to harness the support of the most disaffected class of Africans, something lacking in ANC ideology. The final novel thus unwittingly exposes the extent to which the nationalist movements in the 1970s were actually able to control or direct escalating black resistance. It is the revolutionary moment that La Guma no doubt waited his life to see, but the anachronisms and geographical incongruities in the novel suggest that the nationalist movement itself had become as alienated from 'the land' as La Guma was himself.

migrant labour and historical consciousness

With *In the Fog of Seasons' End*, La Guma shows how the migrant labour system creates a historical consciousness that links the urban world to 'the land'. The narrative traces the movements and social interactions of an underground cell (Beukes and Elias Tekwane) as they attempt to publicise the work of the Movement (which we are left to presume is the ANC, or its armed wing Umkhonto we Sizwe), and recruit disaffected workers to be trained as insurgents. Throughout the novel we are given 'flashbacks' to Elias's past, recollections stimulated by his experience of isolation during torture. This memory-narrative reveals how he became alienated from his rural background, politicised as a worker in the city, and then joined the Movement when 'endorsed out'. In a vivid contrast to this abstract traversal of space and time, Beukes himself traverses the Group Areas of the stratified city, moving between his network of sympathisers, distributing subversive literature and, following the Police raid that leads to Elias's capture, also evading the security forces himself.

Where the paths around the city traced by characters in La Guma's earlier novels are primarily quotidian and without any *conscious* resistive intent, what Michel de Certeau (1984) in another context calls 'walking the city,' movements in this novel—both Beukes's passage through the city and Elias's passage through memory—indicate a *conscious* resistance to the structures of capitalist-apartheid which they encounter (see, for example, Balutansky 1990: 95). For some critics this has its pitfalls. S.O. Asein (1987) identifies a melancholy "placenessness" within the lives of the protagonists. It is "a crisis of their existence" (127) resulting from the sacrifices they make for the Movement. I would modify this point somewhat. The intimation developed through La Guma's *oeuvre* is that such sacrifices are vital. In order for the individual to realise a more profound *communal* existence—the

prerequisite for a revolutionary nationalist consciousness—they necessarily have to leave the rooted place of home, of individual belonging, in order to exploit the spatial contradictions produced by the capitalist-apartheid state.⁵⁴

In chapter 5, for example, Beukes negotiates the Pass inspections at the train station on his way to meet Elias. Unable to cross the Whites-Only bridge, he is forced to take a bus where a conversation between petrified passengers unsettles him: “‘I don’t talk about it here, hey, political stuff. You can’t open your jaw too much, according that walls got ears, *mos*.’” (*F*: 70). Longing to be reunited with his wife and *home*, to live a ‘normal’ life, he agonises over his commitment before “discarding” the thought “like a favourite coat” (*F*: 71). This passage then leads into chapter 6, transporting the narrative to the rural area of Elias’s youth through the memories which come to him as he resists his torture. At first they seem to offer a pastoral vision of rural communal life (in contrast to the fear of isolated individuals and urban degradation of previous urban scenes):

But the ploughing season was the best. It was spring; the sun began to rise early and the yellow light lay on the land like a bright, wrinkled sheet in the mornings. The sounds of life emerged with the early sunlight: the shrilling of the wheels on the ox-drawn ploughs, the pop of a whip, bird songs and the songs of the children, the hallooing of many voices. (*F*: 72)

This landscape tableau, redolent of the bucolic scenes from Peter Abrahams *Mine Boy* (1946) and Alan Paton’s *Cry The Beloved Country* (1948), is soon subverted when the material reality of life on the land for blacks becomes clear. We learn of the debt that Elias’s mother owed to “the white shopkeeper” when “the crop was poor”; his father’s death as a migrant mine-worker; the partial ‘education’ he gained via the discarded colonialist histories of the shopkeeper, Baas Wasserman; his growing discontent with the poverty he and his mother suffered on their meagre land allowance; and his rage at the Pass book laws (*F*: 74-81). In chapter 12 Elias’s story is completed with the recollections of his first trip to town (at least, to ^acoloured location). From this we

⁵⁴ The first indication of this comes at the end of La Guma’s second novel, *And a Threefold Cord* (1964), when the main character Charlie Pauls watches “a bird dart suddenly from among the patchwork roofs of the shanties and head straight into the sky.” (112) Like the bird, Charlie must fly the nest in order to educate himself and learn how to educate others against the system that oppresses his community.

learn of his subsequent alienation from the idyllic world of his childhood and the emerging political consciousness he gains in the city:

Elias saw too that the open air of the countryside, the stillness and the songs of the birds also hid the destitution ... There was ignorance in the countryside, too; in that part of the land one did not see any meetings like the ones which were held in the city. In the cities it was not easy to avoid the movement ... Elias had not returned to the countryside after that. He felt that the brown, eroded land, the little dwellings on the scrubby hillside held little for him. Besides, his blood had been spilt onto the hard grey surface of a city sidewalk and it was as if it had taken root there. (F: 132-33)

Although he becomes 'rooted' in the city, Elias's historical consciousness breaks free from 'the tyranny of place', as Es'kia Mphahlele (1981) calls it.

The narrative shifts between the urban scene and the land, touching on the plight of rural peoples and making links between their experiences of socio-spatial engineering and those of the urban dwellers. Anthony Chennells (1989) argues that by "subverting conventional attitudes to the countryside" in this way, "the text rejects the rural life as some blessed alternative to the city where most of the novel is set. Instead its poverty and dependence are seen as a creation of the city." (43) The novel's depiction of the land is thus resolutely anti-pastoral. Alienation from the land and the restless life of a migrant worker are thus Elias's dual burdens, but also the principal factors behind his politicisation. What he gains is a new sense of belonging, a 'rootedness' in the struggle itself, in the abstract fight *for* the Land.

The urban-rural connection reaches its apotheosis in the 'flashback' episodes in chapters 15 and 17 when Elias is taken to the police cells. In recalling the last time he was faced with a prison cell like the one he is in, he digresses into the time he spent in a rural transit labour camp having been endorsed out of the city for his role in a strike. The horror and abjection in the description of the camp serves as a prelude to the opening scene of forced removal in *Time of the Butcherbird*. The "displaced persons, the discarded unemployed" (F: 154) are not just relocated rural communities, but displaced workers from the towns: "surplus labour" "who no longer had permission to work in the 'White' areas," and are dumped in a denuded countryside:

All around were the bare eroded hills, like the decayed teeth of a giant, with women in tattered blankets searching the stony earth, hoping to grow something there. They had been like mechanical scarecrows on the hillside, but the birds had ignored them. (F: 154)

It is in this wretched place that he meets Mdlaka, however, an old man endorsed out for leading a “riotous assembly”, who puts him in touch with the “organization”. We also learn that Elias has spent his adult life in bachelor barracks, the ubiquitous male-only location hostels that Mahmood Mamdani (1996) cites as being the key to understanding the connection between migrant labour and the politics of citizenship in apartheid-era South Africa (‘the rural in the urban’):

If apartheid was the consolidation of indirect rule authority—institutional segregation—then the scope of the authority was not confined to rural homelands but extended to enclaves in urban areas, particularly hostels. The population that straddled both regimes was that of the migrant workers, with a home in the reserves and bed space in the hostels, for the migrant worker was a free peasant transported to an urban setting.(219)

Through Elias’s memory, then, we are shown the extent to which migrant labour provided a crucial link between town and country; between nationalist politicisation and the state’s counter-strategy of ‘separate development’ or what Mamdani more incisively calls, indirect-rule. When we return to Elias in chapter 17, undergoing the physical beating that kills him, the pastoral images of his childhood morph into the day he became involved in the strike. They are then superseded by the images of “his ancestors gathered on the misty horizon” (F: 175) preparing for battle. It is this sequence that finally unites the rural and urban worlds in the struggle against apartheid, through the narrative conceit of reproducing Elias’s historical consciousness. In this respect the novel uses similar techniques to the ones deployed in Brink and Gordimer’s novels, but from a quite different political perspective—*inside* the underground nationalist movement that they are unable to represent.

towards an agrarian revolution? anachronism and ideology in *Time of the Butcherbird* (1979)

If the historical consciousness of Elias Tekwane frames *In the Fog of Seasons' End*, there is no straightforward corollary in *Time of the Butcherbird*. The novel is focused on a number of events relayed by quite disjunctive narratives: the impending forced removal of a rural African village and the resistance galvanised against it by Mma-Tau; the political aspirations of the Afrikaner Hannes Meulen and his endorsement of the removal; Shiling Murile's victimisation and murderous revenge on the Meulen family and (coincidentally) Edgar Stopes; and the disaffection of the English white, Stopes, and his wife Maisie's infidelity. In the former novel the rural world is only present in the place of Elias' memory, segueing in and out of Beukes's narrative which itself sweeps cinematically through the segregated Areas of Cape Town. In *Time of the Butcherbird* the rural scene is related from the intimate perspectives of both Afrikaners and Africans, and is further differentiated by Stopes' laconic view of life in the dorp. These narratives are then interlaced with urban scenes of Maisie's betrayal of Stopes and the riot she witnesses at the end of the novel.

In broadening its scope in this way, the 'ground of contest' in La Guma's novel becomes very much national. The way in which he stages this broaches the problem of *universalism* central in the debate between the ANC's multi-racial nationalist vision and the PAC's more Africanist programme. Like Louis Tremaine (1994) and Chandramohan Balasubramanyan (1993), William Carpenter (1991) celebrates what he sees as a positive gesture: "By presenting his universalist ethics on the 'scene of representation' among the impassioned distortions of word and deed fostered by apartheid, La Guma places his representations of South Africa in the broadest context of human ethical development." (14-15) However, in the same journal David Maughan-Brown (1991) adopts a more critical stance. He argues that such a universalist impetus is at odds with both La Guma's political ideology and concomitant literary style. It is an inevitable problem given the writer's long exile from South Africa and "seems to owe a great deal to the liberal aesthetic imperative of "rounded" characters and giving the "whole picture" (35).

Taking up the argument with Bakhtinian narrative theory, Nahem Yousaf (2001) argues in favour of this 'liberal aesthetic'. The "separate sequences" create a complex narrative heteroglossia, he suggests, which works "to destabilize the whole". What results is the representation of a historical *crisis* that is unprecedented in La Guma's fiction. The novel reproduces the "circumstances in which the actions

and movements of separate and unequal subjects are orchestrated to depict a social breakdown.”(122) This sense of crisis, of *contest*, created by the collision of disparate narratives of different groups’ claims to ‘the land’, speaks to a revolutionary structure of feeling that also reveals itself in Gordimer and Brink’s novels. It also shares some of their problems however. In all these texts the agents or symbols of (black) nationalism are unable to claim narrative authority, despite constantly threatening to irrupt into the hegemonic narrative of white land-ownership. But if both white authors can be criticised for their ethnographic and reductive representations of black space in their fictions, the same is arguably also true of this La Guma novel.

In the figure of Madonele, an old weather-beaten African shepherd, La Guma has created the closest character in his fiction to what J.M. Coetzee (1988a) calls “Wordsworth’s shepherd”: “a person unreflectively at one with nature ... not yet at a stage of evolution at which he is afflicted with individual consciousness”(109). Murile encounters the pastoralist on his journey back to his rural home from prison:

[He] wore only a pair of trousers and the ruins of a felt hat. He had a skeleton-thin body that looked tough, nevertheless, dried and stringy looking and lasting as jerked meat, and his small, wizened face criss-crossed with wrinkles that had caught up the dust of the land so that he looked as if he had been drawn over with red lines.(BB: 17)

Their subsequent friendship provides a glimpse of how the alienated and violent younger generation might reconcile itself with the culturally rooted claim to the land that Madonele embodies. ‘Drawn over with red lines’, he is inscribed by the land; he is a character in *its* narrative. It is this unity with the land that is threatened by the impending forced removal, lighting a flame of resistance within him. This flame eclipses “the fire of contemplation” which habitually governs his relationship to the landscape he knows so intimately. Near the end of the novel he passes a Kloof imbued with local folk-lore, but is unable to “find a story being too concerned with what was to take place”(BB: 116).

Instead of dwelling with Madonele, La Guma offers a counter narrative of cultural settlement in the form of the Meulen family farm. We are given flashbacks to Oupa Meulen’s past, to the ‘Bushman’ wars when “the land was settled now except for the scanty frontiers where the restless ones ranged.”(BB: 91) “Dried out and stringy”, Oupa Meulen is also narrated *into* the landscape in an almost parallel to

Madonele: “he was as bloodless and tough as biltong, the jerked meat he lived on for most of his early years, and seemed almost stubbornly to refuse to leave this earth.”(BB: 67) Yet his nationalist ideology of land *ownership* is exactly that which Gordimer and Brink bring to crisis points in their novels:

The father loved the land: to him the country was not only a geographical entity, an anthem, celebrations of Dingane’s Day, the day of Blood River. For him country was a matter of who owned the flat, dreary red and yellow plains and the low, undulating hills, the grass and the water. This was a heritage which had been gained through the sacred blood of their ancestors and the prophetic work of God. It had come to their fathers through the musket and the Bible. (BB: 57-58)

This is perhaps the clearest example of the semantic slippage between the land and the Land in South African fiction. It constitutes a powerful historical assertion of white nationalist ideology against Madonele’s more organic and affective claim to the land. But the novel’s dialogical structure does not end with this Manichean opposition. There is Mma-Tau, for example, a political agitator recently returned from the city who usurps the indirect colonial rule exerted by her brother, the village chief Hlangeni, bringing a radical new consciousness to the likes of Madonele. We also find Hannes Meulen and his fiancée’s father, Kasper Steen, discussing the removal of the “Bantu” and the insidious threat of the “liberalistic spirit” typified by Brink and Gordimer’s protagonists (BB: 64). These other characters and their actions do indeed bring a ‘rounded’ sense of the changing historical moment to bear on the static archetypes and ‘scenes’ which the novel is grounded in.

If Maughan-Brown’s (1991) criticisms of La Guma’s portrayal of “people typical of the South African scene”, as Abrahams (1985: 117) puts it, do not adequately account for the novel’s polyphony, he nonetheless pulls it apart in his examination of its geographical inconsistency. There is an “implausible array of flora and fauna” (31) and “we are presented with an apparently Zulu-speaking community somewhere in the Karoo hundreds of miles from Natal, whose chief has a Zulu name, Hlangeni, but whose chief’s sister has a Sotho name, Mma-Tau.”(31)⁵⁵ As Mbulelo Mzamane (1983) eloquently puts it in his review of the novel:

⁵⁵ In *A Passion to Liberate: La Guma’s South Africa—“Images of District Six”* (2001) Fritz Pointer, strongly criticises La Guma for stereotypical and tendentious representations of black characters (as

Time of the Butcherbird illustrates the fate of a community inexorably moving towards tragedy, but it lack[s] the authenticity of his earlier work in its evocation of the social milieu in which his characters move, a shortcoming which a number of his African readers close to the source will immediately detect.(77)

One could counter these criticisms, however, by reiterating the possibility that the author's intention was to recreate a South African community on the land that, like Gordimer's multi-ethnic farm compound in *The Conservationist*, is profoundly marked by migrant labour patterns and, more prophetically, history itself. Indeed, though Maughan-Brown considers this final novel to be alien to the much more concretely realised urban worlds of La Guma's earlier novels, there are suggestions that La Guma may have had a specific historical context and event in mind when writing the novel. Although contextual references in the novel are incongruous, certain features—especially the riot at the end of the novel—resemble an uprising that took place in Paarl, a town 60 kilometres north-east of Cape Town, on 22nd November 1962.

The striking thing about the insurrection is that it was the only instance in which, in Lodge's (1983) words, "PAC/poqo preparations developed, albeit prematurely, into a full-scale uprising."(248) Although suppressed by the police by 5 A.M., barely three hours after it began (Maisie Stopes is taking a late breakfast when marchers clash with police in the novel), the event would have sent shockwaves through the security forces but also the ANC, who at that time were pursuing a sabotage campaign designed to incapacitate the state and terrorise white society, rather than mobilising their activists for direct confrontation. In documenting the background to the event, Lodge discusses how, since the Group Areas Act of 1950, Paarl's African population were predominantly "refugees from evictions from farms and other urban centres"; that the local Director of Bantu Administration, J.H. le Roux, and his senior clerk, Wilson Ngukuna, "manipulated the [influx control] system for their private profit, selling passes" and "setting pass offenders to work on le

opposed to the coloured characters of his 'own' community) throughout his fiction (102). His acerbic comments on La Guma's socialism, however, suggest Pointer has been seduced by a somewhat anachronistic 'PAC' Africanism.

Roux's farm"; and that there were riots in 1959 "in protest against the banning of Elizabeth Mafeking, a local trade unionist and women's leader" (1983: 248-249).⁵⁶

These three features have uncanny corollaries in the novel. It begins with a powerful image of forced removal that frames all the subsequent action: the villagers facing eviction send a deputation to plead with the corrupt Bantu Affairs Commissioner and his clerk; Mma-Tau, 'a local trade unionist and women's leader' who has been endorsed out of the city, organises the villagers in resistance to the removal. It is speculative though not implausible to suggest that La Guma uses the Paarl uprising as its background—which, in 1962 he would have witnessed close at hand—as a model for much of the action in the novel. Similarly, the discontinuity of events, places and cultural references in the novel further suggests a deliberately anachronistic strategy. Aside from Maughan-Brown's point that La Guma was physically distant from events in South Africa in the late 1970s, what other reasons for this could there be? Why, for instance, would the spontaneity and militancy more characteristic of the PAC be so directly referenced?

The incongruities of *Time of the Butcherbird*, I suggest, do not simply result from La Guma's own political position. They are perhaps better read as the symptoms of ideological tensions *within* the Congress Alliance itself. In 1972 La Guma edited a volume of speeches and articles, *Apartheid: A Collection of Writings on South African Racism by South Africans*, many of them drawn from the ANC's 1969 conference in Morogoro, Tanzania. Although the conference was not wholly successful in solving the ANC's internal problems, it did mark the official inclusion of non-Africans into the external movement, "on the basis of individual equality", according to the ANC's report 'Strategy and Tactics of the South African Revolution'. (1972: 200)⁵⁷ This report is resolutely internationalist and universalist, distancing itself from the PAC's Afrocentrism in officially recognising coloured and Indian peoples "as part of the non-White base upon which rests White privilege." (199) In a clear move away from the quiescent liberal aspects of its past, it also identifies itself within a constellation of Marxist guerrilla movements in Southern Africa (that were also anathema to the

⁵⁶ Mafeking is the English spelling of the Tswana word meaning 'place of stones'. The fact that a woman with a Tswana name—originating in the north-west of South Africa—should be a prominent local figure in an Eastern Cape town, suggests that La Guma's mixture of Zulu and Sotho names in a predominantly Xhosa locale might not be as inaccurate as some critics have suggested.

⁵⁷ Within South Africa the ANC had been committed to multi-racialism since the Congress Alliance of the 1950s, endorsing the Freedom Charter (1956) in alliance with Indian, coloured and white organisations.

PAC's right-wing inclination): FRELIMO (Mozambique), ZAPU (Zimbabwe), SWAPO (Namibia) and MPLA (Angola) (203).

In 'The Development of the South African Revolution' (1972), the then ANC stalwart Joe Matthews declares that although the "revolutionary potential of the rural masses is very great", the "urban proletariat is destined to be the vanguard of the struggle in our country." Under their guidance, "the liberation movement is calling on the people to fight for the land and to drive off the farms and plantations all those who have ruthlessly exploited the people." (171) This passionate call for a nationalist uprising across the city-country divide is tempered by the former document, which notes the changes to the political scene since the ANC was forced underground in 1961. In what seems to be an effort to further distinguish ANC ideology from that of the rival PAC, it also states that the "riot, the street fight, the outbursts of organised violence, individual terrorism; these were symptoms of the militant spirit but not pointers to revolutionary technique." (187) These 'symptoms' are *exactly* what *Time of the Butcherbird* depicts. The conclusions we can draw from this are that this kind of thinking simply didn't correspond to the reality of rural and semi-rural resistance in the 1970s; or that La Guma was among those on the left of the ANC who for several decades had wanted to see a more direct approach to the 'national democratic revolution'.

The migrant labour system provides the key for La Guma's own thinking in this respect. Mma-Tau, for example, articulates political ideals that, like Elias Tekwane in *In the Fog of Seasons' End*, she learnt in the city which expels her back into the country:

One becomes too troublesome in the city, so they send one to the countryside. Doesn't the countryside have grievances? They send home work-less men who starve in the city to starve in the country. So we will work to join the people of the country with those of the city. It is a trap they find themselves in each time, and one day the trap will snap shut eh? (BB: 81)

The suggestion here, corroborated in his non-fictional work, is that for La Guma the land and those who live on it are ineluctably tied to the same system of racist and capitalist exploitation which overdetermines the naturalistic world of his earlier urban

characters. The implications are no less than revolutionary. In a paper given in 1975 titled 'Culture and Liberation', he argues that:

South African white domination moved away from a policy of elimination or enslavement of the immediate local population to an advanced stage of capitalism and imperialism within which the black population serve as colonial serfs and a major part of the industrial working class, all within one geographical boundary.(1991: 56-57)

In this analysis the rural 'homelands' are seen as underdeveloped labour pools for both the agrarian and industrial economy. The contradictions that arise from this blow wind into La Guma's fiery vision for an ethnically inclusive nationalism based on working class solidarity:

It must be observed that the attitude of the ruling power is hopelessly contradictory. On the one hand the white ruling class has to maintain divisions, a system of apparent conservation by confinement of the indigenous population in geographic zones, or reserves called homelands or bantustans, to destroy the cultural unity of the African people; on the other hand to maintain its industrial enterprises, a working class contrary to ethnic or tribal divisions.(57)

In this light it is little surprise that the social world of La Guma's final novel, *Time of the Butcherbird*, captures the creation of just such a heterogeneous 'geographic zone' in its representation of 'the land' and the disparate groups that "converge" on it (Tremaine 1994). It reveals La Guma's long-standing debt to the revolutionary Leninist/Roy 'Native Republic' policy that the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) (of which Alex's father Jimmy La Guma was a leading member) had pursued from 1928 (cf. Bundy 1987: 261 and Drew 1996: 75-105).

Whereas Brink and Gordimer deconstruct the hegemony of white settlement, La Guma is more interested in the resistance and seeds of revolution that are produced by that hegemony. What all these texts lack, however, are insights into the unspectacular world of everyday rural life—especially where traditional relations to the land still remain. For such an insight, one that highlights the otherwise marginalised experience of women in the texts so far discussed, we must turn to Bessie Head.

Village life: storytelling between lands in Bessie Head's *The Collector of Treasures* (1977)

It was her angularity to the nation that encouraged Head to recognize other lines of geographical, historical, and cultural connection that nationalism typically obscures. Thus her writing gives voice to the distinctive experience of refugees and other embattled itinerants whose lives are often circumscribed less by nation-space than by a shuttling rural transnationalism.(Nixon 1996: 253)

Of all the authors in this chapter, Bessie Head is perhaps the most 'southern African'; the least 'circumscribed by nation-space' as Rob Nixon puts it. Born as the 'illegitimate' child of a white mother and a black father into segregated South Africa and then crossing into exile in the former British Protectorate of Bechuanaland (Botswana) in 1964, her life was dominated by exclusion and alienation, but also the drive to belong. What Nixon describes as a 'shuttling rural transnationalism' in her work, Head herself identifies as a preoccupation with "refugeeism, racialism, patterns of evil, and the ancient Southern African dialogue." (1990: 13) In the same essay Head declares the primary 'evil' of colonialism in southern Africa to be the dispossession of black history—which is, for her, concomitant with the dispossession of 'the land':

A sense of history was totally absent in me and it was as if, far back in history, thieves had stolen the land and were so anxious to cover up all traces of the theft that correspondingly, all traces of the true history have been obliterated.(12)

Head's references to 'the land', 'true history' and 'the ancient southern African dialogue', signals her somewhat romanticised interest in pre-colonial southern Africa. Being 'coloured', which is to say of mixed race, she in a sense embodies the contradictions of colonial modernity (see, for example, Farred 2000: 7) that have, to her mind, 'obliterated' that history. These contradictions, and the sense of guilt they bring, are central to her life and work. The move to Botswana was in many ways an attempt to transcend them:

It has a past history that is unequalled anywhere in Africa. It is a land that was never conquered or dominated by foreign powers and so a bit of ancient Africa, in all its quiet and assertive grandeur, has remained intact there. (ibid.)

There is an important semantic shift here. The previously romantic idea of ‘the land’ now refers to the modern nation state. Formed but never ‘conquered’ by colonialism, Botswana is vital for Head because it provides a link between colonial modernity and that which she argues has been ‘obliterated’ by it: a prelapsarian ‘ancient Africa’ where different races peacefully cohabited unalienated land. This romantic idealism runs counter to the more critical and historically incisive aspects of her novels, which offer a valuable insight into the uneven penetration of colonial modernity into this antique world.

More than any other author in this chapter, Bessie Head’s writing is driven by an almost pathological desire for social acceptance. “To intervene in the genre of communal memory” as she does with her short story collection *The Collector of Treasures* (1977), Nixon (1996) suggests, “is to intervene in the parameters of group identity.” (247) It is a narrative technique that to a large extent overcomes the problems of authority and authenticity found in the other texts discussed in this chapter. As Anne McClintock (1995) says of another text that ‘intervenes in the genre of communal memory’, Elsa Joubert’s *The Long Journey of Poppy Nongena* (1980):

We may balk at being refused identification with a single self, but through this refusal we are invited into an altogether different notion of identity, community, narrative power and political change. (327)

In the case of *The Collector of Treasures*, we might call this ‘different notion of identity, community, narrative and political change’, the ‘village’. As both an idea and a material space—relating the individual to the communal, the communal to place, place to narrative and narrative to historical discourse—it provides a vital contrast to the ‘farm’ of much South African writing and the *munashe*, the peasant homestead, in Zimbabwean literature.

Following the rise to power of the Botswanan Democratic Party (BDP) in 1966, led by the moderniser Seretse Khama, the ‘village’, became the central site of rural development. As Head’s first novel *When Rain Clouds Gathers* (1969) testifies,

however, it also enshrined the customary authority of chiefs or *kgosis* that had benefited as agents of indirect colonial rule. This meant cultural continuity but also placed limits on the role of the state in directing development. Despite modernisation and the constant pull of migrant labour, national development was slow. Eighty-Six per cent of Botswanans remained 'rural' as late as 1980 (Vaughan 2003: 138) and forty-six per cent of those still lived outside 'villages' in 1983 (Motzafi-Haller 2002: 118). Head's 'village' tales thus contribute to and intervene in a uniquely 'Botswanan' discourse of rural-national development. Serowe is the primary source for the stories in *The Collector of Treasures* but is never specifically mentioned by name in the collection (although village 'wards' are).

The village of *The Collector of Treasures* provides an important contrast to Golema Mmidi, the village setting of *When Rain Clouds Gather*. Where the former village is typical of rural Botswana, Golema Mmidi is exceptional:

It was one of the very few areas in the country where people were permanently settled on the land ... Although people on the whole had to live off crops, they paid little attention to the land. The pivot of their lives was the villages. Not so with the people of Golema Mmidi. Necessity, even in some cases, rejection and dispossession in previous circumstances, had forced them to make the land the central part of their existence. (WG: 22)

The project to encourage village women to grow cash-crops in an agricultural co-operative in *When Rain Clouds Gather* is thus relatively utopian compared with subsistence concerns of *The Collector of Treasures*. But where 'land is the central part of their existence' in the former text, focusing quite directly on agronomics and the political intrigues of rural development, similar social and economic issues in the latter emerge more subtly from the stories themselves. They construct a more rounded historical narrative of the village from different points in its past. From the pre-colonial tribal migrations into the area, fictionalised from the community's myth of origins, 'The Deep River: A Story of Ancient Tribal Migration', we move to the encroaching influence of Christianity in 'Heaven is not Closed' and 'Witchcraft'; from the draw of South African industry, migrant labour and the technologies of customary and colonial administration in 'Kgotla', we move to the class and gender changes brought (or not brought) by independence: 'Snapshot of a Wedding', 'The

Collector of Treasures' and 'Hunting'. If Bessie Head's 'village' is not the ground of contest or repossession the South African farm represents, historical dramas of similar proportions are nonetheless played out there.

In the novels of Gordimer, Brink and La Guma, the textual presence of nation and nationalism generally conforms to the pattern of white South African nationalism in crisis, staving off the violent arrival of the subterranean and inchoate forces of black nationalism through various strategies of consolidation. They are novels for which the South African National Party's rhetoric of 'a total historical onslaught' functions as the principal motif: the portentous black body repossessing the land in *The Conservationist*, or an as yet unrepresentable revolution coded as the 'rain' in *Rumours of Rain* and the 'butcherbird' in *Time of the Butcherbird*. By contrast we are told in *When Rain Clouds Gather* that the "tide of African nationalism had swept down the continent and then faltered at the northern borders of Botswana" (WG: 62). In Head's writing nationalism gives way to 'shuttling rural transnationalism' (Nixon 1996), or as Isabella Matsikidze (1996) argues, 'post-nationalism'. Any kind of "recognisable" political program—let alone revolution—is absent from the short-story collection (Nkosi 1981: 100). The politics of 'African nationalism' are dealt with in *When Rain Clouds Gather*, set on the cusp of Botswana's first democratic elections in 1966, but only to be sardonically dismissed through the corrupt figure of Joas Tsepe.

Few characters in either text are left untouched by regional geopolitics however. Almost every story in *The Collector of Treasures* features a protagonist who has either migrated between Botswana and neighbouring nations or who has been internally displaced, predominantly for work, but also for political and legal reasons. Similarly, antipathy to the neo-colonial administration of independent Botswana is in evidence in a number of them. When the aspiring youth of 'The Wind and a Boy', Friedman, is run down at the end of the story by one of the "new, rich civil-servant class", the pathos of his death is redirected into a bitterly ironic protest against the irresponsibility of the postcolonial bourgeoisie: "And thus progress, development, and a pre-occupation with status and living standards first announced themselves to the village." Having begun in a romantic vein as the story of a local boy's adolescence, the narrative ends with a damning condemnation of Botswana's national development: "It looked like being an ugly story with many decapitated bodies on the main road." (TC: 75) There are the beginnings of what we now view as a Fanonian

critique of neo-colonialism here,⁵⁸ but Head refuses to let either her own subjective opinion, or political discourse more generally, overwhelm the boundaries of local knowledge. Head's stories sediment the broader 'transnational' history of which they are constituted, but never actually leave the realm of the local in their telling.

beyond the farm: the village and the lands

If Head's writing explores the relationship between a rural society and its land, the *act* of writing negotiates her own position in that relationship (Lotlin 1998: 98). Working in a village garden co-operative in Serowe in 1971, for example, helped her emerge from a breakdown with a new sense of social identity which she was then able to interpret and express in her fiction (Eilersen 1995: 139-140). *A Question of Power* (1973), the novel that arose out of that traumatic experience, ends with Head's alter-ego Elizabeth placing "one soft hand over the land" as she falls asleep: "It was a gesture of belonging." (206) *When Rain Clouds Gather* features numerous migrants and refugees finding purpose and community in Golema Mmidi. Central among them is a disenchanted saboteur in flight from South Africa, Makhaya Masaka. It is his growing "understanding of this mental flight" that gives him a "different perspective on subsistence farming":

You had to work on those small plots and make them pay. Once they began to pay you could then begin extending production. But you had to start small, and because of this small start, co-operative marking was the only workable answer, and its principle of sharing the gains and hardships would so much lessen the blows they had to encounter on the way. (WG: 115)

A co-operative model of agriculture is depicted as pivotal for Botswana's postcolonial development, but also as the means of integrating outsiders into the community.⁵⁹ Maureen Fielding (2003) typifies Head's reluctance fully to politicise these motifs, however, suggesting that "the reclaiming of land in *When Rain Cloud's Gather* is

⁵⁸ See Frantz Fanon's chapter 'The Pitfalls of National Consciousness' from *The Wretched of the Earth* (1967).

⁵⁹ The unfortunate irony is that Head was actually forced to leave the experimental farm at Tshekedi Khama on which the novel is based. In Gillian Stead Eilersen's (1995) account of this experience it is Head's *failure* to integrate that led to her expulsion, leaving her "homeless and desperate" (85). This fact reminds us of the extent to which utopian elements are mixed with Head's own, often quite desperate and abject personal experiences in her fiction.

more subtle than the reclamation that takes place when a revolutionary or, in [post-apartheid] South Africa's case, an elected government reclaims stolen land.”(2003: 20)

This is of course in part due to the relative absence of land expropriation in Botswana's colonial past. Unlike in Namibia, Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and South Africa, there was no major expropriation of land and no militant nationalist movement that fought for its return. 'The land' of Botswana was not the alienated ground of contest it was elsewhere in southern Africa. It therefore offers a socio-cultural constant in Head's writing because of the way it remains connected to the cultural life of the village. Individuals migrate between Botswanan villages and cities in South Africa, revealing the village (and Botswana's) status as a periphery to the economic core of urban South Africa, but the village itself offers a local alternative to this model of capitalist core-periphery interdependence. The village community is dependent on the lands that surround it for both material subsistence and cultural continuity. The lands are another character in the communal memory that Head wishes to become part of.

The use of the plural in describing 'the lands' here is important. The seasonal migrations between village and cattle-grazing lands typical of Botswanan villages have been noted. In respect of this Pnina Motzafi-Haller (2002) describes the Botswanan village as being constituted by "three concentric zones": "This pattern of land use generates a seasonal migration of people between their permanent residence in the village and a second dwelling erected near to the fields in the agricultural zone, often called 'the lands.'" As she adds, living outside of this 'zone' results in ostracism: "People who do not keep their house in the village are called 'bush people'. The idiom of 'the bush' (*naga*) as the uncontrolled, dangerous, and unbounded zone is contrasted with the public social domain of the village (*motes*). (114-115) To live and work on the boundaries of this zone is thus to live within a penumbra of exclusion and prejudice. The village with its 'concentric zones' becomes, in a sense, a microcosm of the nation. Environmental crisis presents a grave challenge to the functioning of this traditional civic space however.

A period of drought lasting between 1958 and 1965, the year before independence, provides the tragic context of *When Rain Clouds Gather* and the story 'Looking for a Rain God'. In the latter the drought leads to the murder of two children by a desperate family in supplication to a rain God. 'The lands' are unambiguously

represented as a space where ancient custom and modern moral values clash in a potent fable of ill-fortune and human fallibility. From the opening we are given the sense that ‘the lands’ are a central part of treasured, idyllic village life, but also that something darker, something repressed—the *other scene* of the rural idyll—is harboured there:

It is lonely in the lands where the people go to plough. These lands are vast clearings in the bush, and the wild bush is lonely too. Nearly all the lands are within walking distance of the village. In some parts of the bush where the underground water is very close to the surface, people made little rest camps for themselves and dug shallow wells to quench their thirst while on the journey to their own lands. They experienced all kinds of things once they left the village. They could rest at shady watering places full of lush, tangled trees and delicate pale-gold and purple wild flowers springing up between soft green moss and the children could hunt for wild figs and any berries that might be in season. (TC: 57)

Despite evoking a lands of plenty image, the pastoral vision is already undermined by the narrator’s disquiet at the ‘loneliness’ experienced there. This loneliness implies a sense of isolation from the beneficent village community, and alerts us to other unspoken issues that the story passes over.⁶⁰

The family of the old man, Mokgobja, are one of many who place all their faith and resources in their land when the drought appears to come to an end. They only return there, however, following “the proclamation of the beginning of the ploughing season” by the institution of customary village authority, the *kgotla* (TC: 58). As the drought continues the crops cannot be planted and the women of the family become hysterical with worry. At his wits’ end, the old man decides to resurrect a sacrificial rain-making ceremony remembered from his youth, when “the customs of the ancestors still ruled the land”, despite the details having “been buried by years and years of prayer in a Christian Church (TC: 59). This direct appeal to the ancestors—notably the only one of its kind in the collection—indicates the residual

⁶⁰ Head diminishes the difference between ‘the lands’ and ‘the bush’ here. One such unspoken story, then, is how those people who inhabit ‘the lonely bush’ are denied full citizenship and membership of the village community. They are effectively as ‘alien’ as the nomadic Basarwa (the *bushmen*), an aspect of ‘village’ prejudice Head explores in *Maru* (1971) but which is also in evidence in her derogatory portrayal of Joas Tsepe, who by coming from a tribe of Kalahari bushmen is a ‘son of slaves’.

importance of a spiritual life that is being increasingly undermined by the Christianity of colonial modernity. Mokgobja and his son Ramedi are eventually sentenced for the ritual murder of Ramedi's two daughters:

The subtle story of strain and starvation and breakdown was inadmissible evidence at court; but all the people who lived off crops knew in their hearts that only a hair's breadth saved them from sharing a similar fate to that of the Makgobja family. They could have killed something to make the rain fall.(TC: 60)

As outsiders it is *we*, Head's readers, who have been forced to adopt an authoritative gaze and condemn the Makgobja family at 'court'. But through Head's 'subtle' framing of the tragedy, both the material and spiritual meaning of 'the lands' to the village are made abundantly clear. The social and economic crisis caused by the drought reveals a temporal as well as moral discontinuity in the villagers' connection to 'the lands'. They *remain* the lands of the ancestors, indicating an alternative conception of space and time to that of colonial modernity; they signify a landscape of cultural memory similar to that found in Chenjerai Hove's novels. Given the specific timeframe 1958-1965, however, the story also veers towards an allegory of pre-independence anxiety. It implicitly questions the wisdom of customary authority that forces the family back on to their barren lands, leading to their destruction.

The cultural importance of the lands is highlighted in 'Looking for a Rain God', but Head is equally interested in the relation between gendered relations to 'the land' as she is in the potential waywardness of customary authority. 'Snapshots of a Wedding' provides a prime example. The educated "new kind of girl" (TC, 78), Neo, refuses to condescend to customary subservience in marriage: she "would never be the kind of wife who went to the lands to plough" (TC: 80). She resists being assigned a gendered relation to the land by refusing to husband *it* when compelled to take a husband. Whilst perhaps signalling the advent of a 'new kind' of rural woman, Neo is a pariah in both her own and her bridegroom's family's eyes. They would prefer him to marry the 'well mannered'—subservient—Mathata. The story suggests that as attitudes to gender are compelled to change in the village, the residual authority of traditional gender roles continues unabated.

With *When Rain Clouds Gather* Bessie Head pioneered the enquiry into the role of gender in rural areas in southern African fiction.⁶¹ As discussed earlier in this chapter, landscapes of *The Conservationist* and *Rumours of Rain* are constructed through the patriarchal gaze of their male protagonists. In both texts a self-relexive critique of gendered representations plays handmaiden to the historical disavowals of *land ownership* that the narratives presage. Despite making the main political agent of his final novel a woman, Alex La Guma's novels are also dominated by unquestioned models of masculine disaffection and self-sacrifice. *The Collector of Treasures*, in contrast, not only casts a spotlight on the *transnational* experiences of rural women, but also explores gendered relations to land, authority and community in a spectrum of pre-colonial, colonial and neo-colonial contexts. Importantly this is not limited to the role of women, as some critics seem to suggest (cf. Nixon 1996, Fielding 2003), but also involves incisive representations of masculinity.

“It was the man who arrived at this turning point, a broken wreck with no inner resources”: the crisis of rural masculinity

There is something troubling in the sometimes uncritical way that critics point out the *liberatory* feminist potential of Head's writing.⁶² Better are those readings that stress the representation and retrieval of rural women's experience, or how the stories articulate an innovatively womanist, even “maternal” aesthetic (Daymond 1996: 236). But even these readings are limited. They neglect the questions, which are specifically asked in most of the stories in *The Collector of Treasures*, about postcolonial rural masculinity. This is particularly remiss when we consider how far Head's understanding of masculinity changes from her first novel. There she certainly focuses on the pivotal role of women in the community, especially in terms of their co-

⁶¹ As Rob Nixon (1996) notes, this aspect of Head's work again pre-empts Njabulo Ndebele's appeals to the literary field in the early 1980s: “He urges a return to rural themes, yet declines to consider a crucial connection between the imaginative construction of urban and rural spaces and gender. For there is an inextricable link between South African Literature's amnesia toward rural space and its amnesia towards women ... While the dereliction of her women is less acute than that ordinarily endured in Bantustans, many of Head's concerns assume a direct, transnational relevance and resonate directly with South African rural experience. (250-251)

⁶² Maxine Sample, for example, wheels out the *same* argument for both *The Collector of Treasures* and *Maru* (1971) in essays that are over ten years apart: “through her representation of the Botswana landscape, Head creates metaphoric spaces that suggest possibilities for change that will enable women to exercise control over their own lives.” (cf. 1991: 311; 2003a: 27)

operative work on the land, but despite that and Makhaya's occasional questioning of gender roles and stereotypes, the narrative generally reinforces the same.

Paulina Sebaso's independent spirit presents a challenge to the village's men: "wilting, effeminate shadows of men who really feared women. Things went along smoothly as long as all the women pretended to be inferior to this spineless species." (WG: 93) Where the adjective 'effeminate' is used in a pejorative sense here, to be contrasted with Makhaya's more *manly* combination of selflessness and passively aggressive individualism,⁶³ in *The Collector of Treasures* what passes for male effeminacy in the community is seen in a much more positive light.

In 'The Deep River: A story of Ancient Tribal Migration', the splitting and migration of the tribe is caused when the Chief dies and his son chooses to marry his last wife. The son, Sebembe, is described by one camp as "unmanly" (TC: 4): "A man who is influenced by a woman is no ruler. He is like one who listens to the advice of a child." (TC: 3) But it is precisely because "he has shown himself to be a man with a weakness" (TC: 6) that another group follow him into exile. While the implicitly condescending attitude to women shown here is carefully pulled apart in subsequent stories, equally interesting is the way in which the questioning of masculinity proves to be a harbinger of social progress. More often than not the seeds of a progressive future are not simply those sown by strong-willed women, but are in fact frequently those held in "unmanly" hands.

In the title story, 'The Collector of Treasures', we are informed that there are essentially two types of men: the "evil" man "in the majority in the society" who "needed little analysing as he was responsible for the complete breakdown of family life" (TC: 91); and, secondly, the model of reconstructed masculinity: "another kind of man in society with the power to create himself anew." (TC: 91) Head's own voice is barely concealed here, but as such her remarks are illuminating. She offers a brief historical analysis of the former 'evil' man "over three time-spans". Pre-colonial African man was subject to inviolate tradition and so knew no better than to perpetuate his patriarchy; migrant labour in the colonial period "broke the hold of the ancestors" (TC: 92) on this man, but also atrophied the family unit. The present era of independence is a wasted opportunity: "It provided the first occasion for family life of

⁶³ Makhaya later sees himself as "God", an image Paulina "mischievously" supports: "Will you eat food in my house, God?" (WG: 143-144). Though the tone is ironic, it is clear from Elizabeth's psychoses in *A Question of Power* that this playful masculine egotism and Paulina's acceptance of it might lead to profound problems.

a new order, above the childlike discipline of custom, the degradation of colonialism.” (TC: 92)

Throughout this invective the decadence of postcolonial masculinity is contrasted with the narrator’s desire for a just society founded on the family unit. Dikeledi’s husband, Garesego Mokopi, is symptomatic of the former trait: his salary ballooned at independence and he blows it on drinking and fornicating. In stark contrast are the neighbourly values found elsewhere in the village community. At the centre of this community lies the family, defined around the avatar of Head’s reconstructed masculinity, Paul Thebelo. He emerges from independence not “a broken wreck with no inner resources at all”, but has “turned all his resources, both material and emotional, toward his family life.” (TC: 92-93)

Like the Mokopis of ‘The Collector of Treasures’, Tholo and his wife Thato in the final story, ‘Hunting’, are “living with that uncertain story of independence” which “offered advantages to men which had not been there a few years ago.” (TC: 107) They follow the Thebelo family, however, in that “the whole rhythm and happiness of their lives was tied up in work and their involvements in the needs of other people.” (TC: 108) As such they become subject to the village’s scrutinising gaze. When the other men scorn Tholo for his munificence, it is his masculinity that is brought into question: “I don’t know whether he is a girl or what.” (TC: 105) His compassion and ability to “communicate deeply, with his wife and his work” (TC: 105) are seen as ‘unmanly’ traits by the other men in the village; but they clearly epitomise the positive qualities of rural masculinity for Head.

Thato is no less challenging to customary gender norms. She comes from an entirely matriarchal family; men are paid to do their ploughing for them. Yet, educated and strong-willed as she is, she cannot avoid being used by a man and left to bring up his child. Given the patriarchal nature of the wider society they live in, she and her family have nothing else to elevate themselves within it, other than their peasant labour: “There were so many women like her who could work and plough and life wasn’t going to offer them any spectacular rewards.” (TC: 106) On the one hand, then, their union expresses an ideal marriage of selfless masculinity, empowered femininity and a shared control of resources—especially over the land. On the other hand their interdependence suggests the limits to which even the accommodating ‘village’ can stretch its gender roles.

The idealisation of a benevolent, sometimes ‘effeminate’ form of masculinity is a persistent feature of Head’s writing. But it is always at best emergent or pre-emergent. Bessie Head’s ‘village’ remains resolutely patriarchal, frustrating a straightforward feminist reading of the collection.⁶⁴ While critics sidestep the issue by focusing on the ambivalence of Head’s prioritisation of the “maternal” (Daymond 1996), the “female condition” (Chetin 1989) or “womanist landscapes” (Sample 2003a), there is much to be learned, I suggest, from the way in which she reveals the contingency, the fragility even, of rural masculinity both before and during the colonial period, and also in the ‘uncertain story’ of independence as South African neo-colonial influence becomes increasingly pronounced.

Ultimately the sense we have in Head’s writing is that rural women can at best hope to *share* the fruits of a reconstructing, but still patriarchal, society. Like Vera’s ‘stray women’, as we shall see, they are in an abject position with regards to the political and national spheres, even if they are able to claim ‘fine spaces’ for themselves within them. What Head does, then, is to show how women capitalise on the changing and crisis-ridden forms of masculinity; to “press the limits of what is locally imaginable” (Nixon 1996: 251). She does this by illuminating the non-nationalist modes of belonging and community that she finds in her Botswanan ‘village’. She finds a transnational modernity—‘refugeeism, racialism, patterns of evil, and the ancient Southern African dialogue’—within this rural locale.

One might argue, of course, that she avoids by default the trenchant questions of revolutionary politics and land ownership, the *contest* for the land and Land that marks the other works discussed, by virtue of taking up such a peripheral dwelling. Yet at the same time it also provides an historical corollary to the refuge, shelter and habitat that Vera’s women abjectly strive for. It was of course no easy task for Head to gain acceptance into her adopted community, but it is the perspective she gains, from the margins of South(ern) African society, that makes her such a valuable commentator on it. In particular, *The Collector of Treasures* marks a transition from representing ‘the land’ as a ground of contest in writing by South African authors, to viewing ‘the lands’ as part of a more complex and discontinuous social space. From as early as 1969, *When Rain Clouds Gather* anticipates structures of feeling that are

⁶⁴ That said it is important to note how many of Head’s female narrators or protagonists, in this case Dikeledi, benefit from this masculinity—“a poem of tenderness” (TC: 93)—not as wives, but as friends.

emergent in post-apartheid fiction. Here ‘the land’ not only becomes a vital aspect of rural but also of national *development*, rather than simply liberation (black nationalism) or consolidation (white nationalism).

Chapter 3 – Reconstructions: abjection and the re-writing of cultural nationalism in Zimbabwean fiction 1989-2002

When you are trying to piece together the broken fragments of your life it hurts to think back. The worst thing is to come back and find nothing has changed. (*HT*: 243)

An hour or so after the committee had left, I stood on top of the small hill overlooking the hundred hectares of land I could now call my own. I burst into tears exactly the way I did on the day, 30 years before, when I started the journey at the railway station in Salisbury to go to war. (Kanengoni 2004: 50)

Some time in 2001, war-veteran and writer, Alexander Kanengoni, was fortunate enough to reap the rewards of his personal commitment to the liberation struggle some thirty years before, and finally be allocated his plot of land. His brief testimony, 'The long way home: one man's story,' from which the second epigraph is taken, captures something of the consternation which has gripped those who fought in or in other ways supported the guerrilla war and emerged from it to 'find nothing has changed', as a character in Shimmer Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns* puts it, with regard to their place in society. The tragedy of this story is that for the majority of Zimbabweans it remains substantively the same over twenty-five years since independence. It finds contemporary expression in the recent, brutal measures taken by Robert Mugabe's ZANU (PF) government to demolish its urban and peri-urban informal habitations and remove the urban poor and unemployed ('back') to the countryside. The reasons for operation Murambatsvina ('drive out trash' in Shona⁶⁵), instituted soon after the disputed 2005 elections and, according to early estimates displacing at least 325, 000 people and making 750, 000 unemployed nationwide (Zimbabwe Human Rights Forum NGO 2005), are still the subject of fierce debate.

Officially the project was intended to 'cleanse' the cities of what were deemed to be its morally destitute slums and exert control over the burgeoning informal economy on its streets. Unofficially, however, this attempt to 'restore order' before a reconstruction project could be undertaken would seem to be yet another means of political control; in particular, as punishment for the predominantly urban supporters

⁶⁵ This translation resonates, somewhat disturbingly, with the translation of 'Gukurahundi', the name given to the ZANU sanctioned pogrom in Matabeleland in the early 1980s. It literally translates as 'early spring rains' but was taken to mean 'sweep out the rubbish' (Alexander et al. 2000: 191).

of Morgan Tsvangirai's MDC opposition party. Whatever jaundiced reasoning lay behind its implementation it clearly and ominously signals the resilience of ZANU (PF)'s authoritarian mindset. As the compilers of the Zimbabwe Human Rights Forum NGO (2005) report suggest, the project shares a similar rationale to the fast-track land resettlement programme. Where this hasty, violent and corrupt process has effectively destroyed the nation's agricultural capacity, Operation Murambatsvina also follows the retrograde logic of "destroying in order to rebuild".

Just as the Gukurahundi massacres in Matabeleland consolidated ZANU (PF) hegemony in the aftermath of the second *chimurenga*, so Operation Murambatsvina can be seen as a similarly ruthless counterpart to the 'third' *chimurenga*. The implications of this logic are felt at both material and psychological levels, affecting the fundamental conditions of national belonging and citizenship. As Stephen Chan (2005) puts it in an article written shortly before the 2005 elections:

It is precisely because the ends, the goals of governmental policy, seem enigmatic and distant, and the interim means so brutal, that both the *polis* as a permitted plurality, and the individual as a free creature, have anchor and solace neither in the present nor in the hopes for the future. (370)

The resulting "condition of abjection" (369-370), as Chan calls it, can, I argue, have its emergence identified in several of the major novels written in English in Zimbabwe between 1989-2002. A common theme that runs through them is psychosocial as well as physical displacement: the alienation—the *expulsion*, even—of individuals and families from what constitutes *home* for them. Often this bears a direct relation to 'the land'—the homestead being its archetypal dwelling. But as Operation Murambatsvina has recently shown, for a great many it has meant less salubrious shelters in urban and peri-urban areas. And at the same time it also corresponds to broader senses of habitat and community: 'the land' as both a local place of subsistence and belonging as well as the post-colonial nation itself. When I use 'the land' in this context, then, it comes to signify a variety of rural and urban environments, habitations and communities, both in the lost/imagined rural past of the nationalist imagination, but also in the foreclosed future of Chan's '*polis* as a permitted plurality'. The inevitable questions this raises, and which I explore in these

fictions, are how did this condition arise, how has it affected people's relationships with 'the land' and how have writers responded to it?

To return to Kanengoni, some but not all of these answers can be found within the ongoing saga of land redistribution and political liberation. He does not disguise his frustration and then ire at having supported the post-colonial government when its efforts to redistribute land were stymied, first by external economic and political forces, and subsequently by its own increasingly authoritarian and kleptomaniac practices. "The intentions of the monumental land reform programme were noble, but the implementation was fraught with corruption and rampant abuse" (2004: 49-50) as he puts it. Yet through his persistence with the creaking bureaucracy of the 'Ministry of Lands', Kanengoni finally reaches the end of his own 'journey' and is 're-settled' on his hundred hectares.

The testimony is coloured with pathos, haunted, quite literally, by those family members and acquaintances of the previous thirty years who have died or suffered as the result of political events rooted in the land question.⁶⁶ We share his catharsis as he finally views his land from the newfound prospect and so appeases the memory and spirits of who and what was lost to attain it. However, I intend to argue that in relation to several important postcolonial novels such a narrative does not seem to represent adequately the structures of feeling that they give literary form to. Political economist Sam Moyo (2005) captures the ambivalence of the 2000-2003 'land reforms' when he writes, against the current academic grain, that although "the strategy of pursuing land reform through the ruling party and the state did not go far enough *within* the ruling party and the state to safeguard the peasant-worker characteristic of the movement", "the land occupation movement" nonetheless

succeeded in compelling the expropriation of over 90 per cent of commercial farmland, broadening substantially the structure of the home market, removing the racialized structure of the class struggle, and laying the necessary foundations for the next phase of the national democratic struggle. (193)

For Moyo, the economic, civil and political maelstrom that resulted from the fast-track land resettlement is down to a failure of the grassroots movement "to wrest

⁶⁶ These traumatic memories are elsewhere filtered into the remarkable and haunting story of Munashe in his novel *Echoing Silences* (1997).

control from the black elite.”(192) The underlying problem with the nationalist project is that it *has not gone far enough*.

In one sense this class critique is a welcome, radical position to take. The problem, however, is that it implicitly condones the more obviously retrograde aspects of ZANU (PF)’s narrative of the land-Land. The ongoing social and economic crises are downplayed in his article—perhaps to be accepted even—as the nation awaits ‘the next phase of the national democratic struggle’. Moreover, Moyo energetically quotes the government’s own figures for redistributed land: by 2002 “‘fast track’ land reform had compulsorily acquired some 10 million hectares of land ... and redistributed most of it to 127, 000 peasant households and 8,000 middle capitalist farmers.”(188) But he neglects to discuss how much of that land has been taken up, is actively being farmed, or how access to rural and urban land is being policed as a political tool.

By contrast, the volume in which Kanengoni’s piece appears, *Zimbabwe: The Past is the Future* (2004), is made up of more impersonal and critical analyses of Zimbabwe’s recent history. Published in the immediate wake of Zimbabwe’s plummet into economic and civil crisis in 2000, the book, like numerous others on the subject (see, for examples, Bond and Manyanya 2003; Hammer, Jensen and Raftopoulos 2003; Harold-Berry 2004; Muponde and Primorac 2005), is more concerned with the critical analysis of political mismanagement in a forlorn nation than it is with individual examples of bitter-sweet success, or that the fast-track land resettlement constitutes a historical ‘phase’ in the ‘national democratic struggle’.

In what follows I argue that all of these factors—the political, the personal, the historical—have merged to form the distinct personality of Zimbabwean fiction since 1989. One consequence of this is that the condition of abjection that Chan identifies as being a relatively recent phenomenon cannot be separated from historical relations to the land and the sullied nationalist promise of land reform. While this signals a somewhat embittered outlook in several of the novels discussed, none is without hope. They have the advantage of being able to reflect on these issues in critical—if often oblique—ways that in more recent years have all but been made impossible by state suppression of the free press in Zimbabwe (Bull-Christiansen 2004: 5).

While all of the novels discussed seem unable fully to emerge from a colonial chronotope (*pace* Primorac 2003), in the following section I argue that they are nonetheless orientated towards the future. Without necessarily reflecting his class

critique, they might well be seen to participate tangentially in what Moyo calls the 'national democratic struggle'. By redeeming (Hove, Chinodya) or reconstructing (Vera) the dominant nationalist master-narrative of 'the land', these novels anticipate a time and space where land and the social relations of those on it might be depoliticised and de-gendered, but also made available for cultural memory and the project of nation-building once more.

'Telling our story as she lived it': Chenjerai Hove's *Shadows* (1991) and *Ancestors* (1996)

The problems faced by characters in Hove's *Bones* stem from living *between* landscapes of social, cultural and economic change that colonial modernity introduced, and a traditional world of cultural memory that has become indentured to a nationalist master-narrative. Despite offering a voice to Zimbabwe's forgotten subalterns (farm workers—especially female farm workers), Hove offers a modified but still gendered form of cultural nationalism. In the following section I argue that in subsequent novels he works through these problems and in doing so begins to de-mystify the spiritual and gendered relation between the nation and 'the land.' This is achieved by focusing on the socio-cultural trauma involved in the colonial displacement of peoples between rural and urban spaces; the diffuse violence of the liberation struggle and the internecine tensions it bequeathed (*Shadows*); and by interrogating the patriarchal foundation of Shona spirit-belief and cultural memory (*Ancestors*). Despite the more critical agenda, Hove does not seek to denigrate traditional spirituality, nor indeed the central *social* role that ancestral belief, spirit mediums and spirit possession play for a great many Zimbabweans. Instead his latter two novels shows how such 'archaic' (Chan 2005) practices have been overdetermined by social and political factors from pre-colonial times to the 1980s. In this way he revises a monolithic rural-centric version of cultural nationalism in a bid to de-politicise it and distance his artistic project from the increasingly authoritarian nationalism of ZANU (PF) from the early 1980s onwards.

Shadows (1991) charts the changing fortunes of a rural Shona family both during and in the immediate aftermath of the liberation war. Fragmented and achronological, the narrative whorls between characters, times and locations. The

narrative voice is, as Sibanyoni (1995) suggests, “at once a detached observer passing through a maimed consciousness of rural people”, yet “at the same time assumes the identity of any of these characters, narrating their pain.”(71) By frustrating a chronological reading and encompassing this widespread trauma, the heteroglossic narrative *resists* the kind of ideological resonances found in *Bones*. Where the former novel uses a similar narrative technique, the politicised spirituality that it privileges is absent in the latter text.

The novel follows a family from southern Rhodesia to an alien landscape in the north-west—‘Gotami’s Lands’—where they gradually succumb to the pressures of cultural difference and political violence. With shades of Marita’s melancholy journey to the farm and then to the city in *Bones*, Johana’s father, the family patriarch, is also compelled to leave “the land of his ancestors in search of land for his children” (S: 83). Rather than suggesting that desire for land was inherently a political gesture in the mid- to late-colonial period, Hove is at pains to illustrate the stark choices facing peasant farmers during that time. The consequences imbue the novel with a pervasive sense of tragedy. Yet at the same time the voluting narrative resists the linear teleology of the nationalist discourse discussed in relation to *Bones*. This corresponds with a similarly recalcitrant sense of ‘the land’ in the later writing.

The representation of landscape in Hove’s fiction is radically different to any other writer in this study. The quasi-oral idiom of Hove’s prose places less emphasis on the descriptions of everyday life on the homestead, or indeed any location, than is found in the more realist novels. Landscape in Hove’s fiction is an abstract rather than physical representation of space. A sense of belonging in this space, of place, is conveyed through an architecture of cultural signs—as a landscape of orally transmitted cultural memory—rather than the pictorial tableaux of much colonial fiction. It is a distinctly idiosyncratic oral style. There is little in the way of the place-naming tradition of Sotho and Zulu praise-poetry discussed by Liz Gunner (1996), or found at the beginning of Samkange’s novel, for example. Instead, Hove chooses to weave fragments of archaic memory into his idiomatic narratives rather than straightforwardly transliterating from Shona.

The strongest expression of place in Hove’s fiction, then, is the inter-subjective space of communal memory. It is best realised in the story told around the fire that ends *Ancestors*, where the past and present, memory and spiritual worlds coexist. But this ‘archaic’ consciousness is still very much linked to physical,

historical space. It is the displacement of people on the land and within the colonial nation—within very material landscapes—that causes the trauma and tragedy endemic to Hove’s novels. In *Shadows* this incorporates the deaths of Johana and her lover Marko (both commit suicide); the murder of Johana’s brothers (by ‘dissidents’ at the end of the liberation war); and the related political violence which forces Johana’s father, like Janifa in *Bones*, to flee from his rural home and end up in a mental institution in the city.

At the root of these tragic individual stories lies the trauma of having left the barren land of their ancestors to settle in the Native Purchase Areas of—“Gotami’s lands”—a more fertile area in present-day North-West Matabeleland. Whilst Johana’s father’s wish to find productive land to support his family is a noble one, the subsequent events are all directly related to his collusion with the colonialist project of land apportionment in order to do so: “[t]his had been the land of other dreams, not the dreams of the new strangers who had bought the land from the white man.”(S: 16) The land is already a space of contradiction and contest, marked by migration and settlement, some pre-colonial but predominantly following the advent of colonial administration and the spatial violence of the Land Apportionment Act (1930).⁶⁷ But Johana’s father is determined to use the colonial system to his advantage. By obtaining a Master Farmer certificate he colludes with the measures of the Native Land Husbandry Act (1954), designed to control and conserve agricultural land nationally, but also to (under)develop the cash-crop economy in Native Areas and so consolidate the racial asymmetries of land distribution. Despite the tacit censure of this decision, Johana’s father is nonetheless portrayed with some sympathy. In his dreams he is seduced by the promises of capitalist-colonial modernity, of a being a “*matenganyika*, the buyer of land, the owner of his own piece of land ... his own chief, his own everything.”(S: 41).

Johana’s father is not atypical. Alexander et al. (2000) document several examples of chiefs in Lupane province in North-West Matabeleland who, through accepting the measures of the 1954 Land Husbandry Act acquiesced to indirect colonial rule, becoming Master Farmers and banning nationalist meetings (91). But

⁶⁷ There are several sections which deal with this in the novel, from Gotami’s pre-colonial conflicts with Ndebele impis (S: 57-59) to the remarks that “the people of Gotami had been moved further west, to the country of dry rivers. They moved into the land in which nothing grew. They fought with the white man, sending elders to the seat of power of the white man. But the white man would not change his mind.” (S: 63) See Alexander et al. (2000) for a detailed historical analysis of migration and conflict in this region of present-day Zimbabwe – ‘the dark forests of Matabeleland’.

the colonial mentality that Johana's father internalises is brought into dramatic conflict with the liberation war, its political goals and the violence of its wake. Choosing the 'peasant option' rather than joining the guerrilla struggle, the father feels this conflict in telluric terms, implying that self-inflicted alienation from his ancestral land, and then polluting the land he buys with the colonialists' fertilizer, effectively seals his fate: "He knew that he would die, rejected by this new land, rejected by the soil which he had poisoned with the medicines of the white man." (S: 86)

But before this unhappy retrospection, Johana's father is successful and proud, and also confident that his children can learn "the laws of the land." (S: 56) Indeed, children are important to Johana's father in the same way that they are important to Hove in both this novel and *Ancestors*. For both it is children, not women, who best represent what McClintock (1995) calls the 'conservative principle of continuity' in culture. In the latter two novels it is children who most readily feel, reproduce and so *embody* cultural memory. As a consequence they are also projected as suffering the most from the trauma of displacement:

The children missed those familiar songs and faces which they grew up seeing when they were young. They sang new songs of their yearning for the old hills which were part of their hearts. They started searching for new names for the trees and rivers of the new place far away from the land where they grew up. It was painful. I saw it on Johana's face, the pain of not knowing that this pain comes from this part or that part of the body. The pain of those who bleed to death without knowing that they had a deep wound. (S: 55-56)

Distressingly, the children suffer but do not know the causes of their trauma, their "deep wound". As their 'archaic' cultural inheritance, *pace* Chan, is lost, it nonetheless remains present to them in the form of a pain which they do not understand. This is felt acutely, we are led to believe, when they are confronted with a new, but similar, cultural landscape. Such reflection only comes after the move however. Johana's father, buoyed by the seductive promises of the colonial Land Board and in spite of his own fears about leaving his ancestral lands, recalls the optimism that he and his wife felt—that their children would be able to adapt to the sacral traditions of a 'new land', as well as to conserve those of the old:

We saw it, but we said, the wounds will heal. The children will sing new songs talking about their life here. They will sing about the waters flowing in the rivers of this place. They will hear the new echoes of their voices from the new caves of the hills of these parts. (S: 56)

In testament to the resolve of generations of African peoples compelled to migrate, adapt, assimilate and at times submit to other cultures in the space that has become Zimbabwe, he then recalls the initial, hospitable encounter with the people of Gotami's lands:

The laws of the land had to be learnt. We then knew that the land did not belong to the white man. There were people who owned the land many years before the white man came. They came to teach us the laws of their ancestors. (S: 56)

This is the point, however, at which the political significance of Johana's father's 'decision' to move becomes clear. It is only on reflection, *after* the tragic events, that Johana's father realises the iniquity of the system which he has used in order to gain land for his family. With this knowledge there comes an acknowledgement that within the Land there are different 'lands', with different ancestral histories and taboos, that have existed prior to the colonially demarcated Tribal Trust Lands and Native Purchase Areas between which the family moves: "Every land has its own laws. The rivers, the hills, the trees, the animals, they have laws which must be obeyed. The white man could not teach us those things." (S: 55-56) Whilst he rightly blames the colonialists for neglecting the sovereignty of these "spirit provinces" and their singular laws (see Lan 1995: 34), he eventually admits his own culpability in accepting and perpetuating the practices of colonial expropriation and indirect rule.

The understanding that the Land is neither an absolute space, either spiritually or politically speaking, nor indeed an amalgamation of clearly defined and commodified plots, but is, rather, a heterogeneous landscape of cultural difference, comes at a cost both to Johana's father and his family. His children's lives come to assume the hopes and burdens of accommodation in this new environment. Yet ultimately they are the primary victims of a dual transgression: one cultural the other political. Johana and Marko's deaths result from their "defilement" of "the lands of

Gotami” by defying taboo, “the laws of the land” (S: 50), and having unconsecrated sex in a river; Johana’s brothers are killed by the disaffected dissident guerrillas, the “DIZDENTS” (S: 106), for being “sell outs” – a label which they do not accept, as they “refused to join any of the groups which carried guns.” (S: 89) The family is thus hounded by the archaic laws of ‘the land’ as well as the ambient politics of the Land, even as they desperately attempt to remain neutral.

the penumbra of political violence

Political violence inhabits the penumbral margins of all the ‘shadows’ in this novel. But through Johana’s seemingly more innocent narrative of self- and sexual discovery, Hove explores the difficulties and triumphs that arise from the colonial displacements for a generation not yet fully aware of the mounting political tensions. Her relationships with ‘the boy with the civet mouth’, an Ndebele farm worker, and then Marko, provide good examples of this. As a representative of the pre-colonial Ndebele threat to Gotami’s people,⁶⁸ the former’s arrogant demeanour is the subject of both admiration and suspicion by Johana’s family.⁶⁹ Her relationship with the latter signals both hope and the hope of cultural accommodation in the new lands, but of course ends in tragedy.

Hove’s spiralling narrative incorporates this story within the public, political one which Johana’s father and his sons become embroiled in. As we are told in the prologue, for them “wars were not an interruption. Wars came and swallowed them.” But for both them and Johana, cultural and political changes have blocked the processes of mourning their loss, as they have also blocked an appreciation of the historical contradictions faced by rural peoples, torn between ameliorating their own situations and supporting political causes which draw their private lives into the

⁶⁸ Johana’s father recalls being told the story of how Gotami and other ancestors defeated the invading Ndebele impis (S: 57-59)

⁶⁹ Unfortunately there is not the space in this study for an adequate discussion, but there are grounds to suggest that Hove’s portrait of the Ndebele character conforms to a negative stereotype. He is portrayed as arrogant and unaffected by the spiritual burden of living on Gotami’s lands: “They should sing their own songs if my Ndebele songs annoyed them” (S: 65); he bullies other farmers at the dip-tank, challenging them to fight when they remonstrate with him: “If you do not know how to fight, why do you talk?” (S: 66); and his cultural difference is marked by his family’s strongly patriarchal customs (S: 67). Johana is the only Shona person who attempts to befriend him, “she wanted to see what would happen with this boy whom nobody knew how to handle” (S: 68), but her efforts are stifled when Marko arrives. The impression this leaves us is that cultural syncretisation *can* and *has* taken place on this specific ‘land’, despite a legacy of conflict and dispute, but that the barriers against it are many, and increase as political tension rises in this contradictory spaces of tradition and displacement.

penumbra of political violence. It is their historical marginalisation which unites these public and private stories, which in turn the narrative is determined to overcome: “I will tell his story, her story, Johana’s story. They converged with death in their dreams of plenty and died a death which no mouth can ever describe.”(S: 9)

In choosing to dwell with the experiences of rural people in this manner, Hove takes steps towards dismantling the nationalist myth of unconditional peasant support for the liberation war. And he does so without resorting to the kind of nationalist imagery and motifs found in *Bones*. It is also the first novel to ‘break the silence’ on the post-independence political violence in west and north-west Zimbabwe (S: 96-97).⁷⁰ In challenging what Alexander et al. (2000) call “the master-narrative of official Zimbabwean nationalism” (4), it also expresses the emergent crisis of post-colonial land redistribution:

The pain inside them told them it was the pain which said so many things which they had not thought before. It said to them, the land was now theirs, but they could not farm it. Guns stared at them all the time. Their cattle roamed like wild animals. They would be stolen by anyone who braved the land infested by guns. The pain told them that the white man was happier than before, on the lands he had stolen from their ancestors. Were there no songs they had inherited, songs to say to the white man, we have come to take away land which your fathers took from our fathers? ... What was it that made the white man, who had been threatened with death, be awarded as if he had not stolen the lands through war? (S: 98-99)

The evolving panorama of this problem is not further dealt with by Hove in his fiction however. Even in the mid 1990s when writing *Ancestors*, Hove is reluctant to engage with the government’s handling of external as well as internal interests in Zimbabwe’s land. Instead Hove chose journalism and poetry as more appropriate means for protesting these issues in the public sphere. In *Palaver Finish* (2002), a collection of his columns for the *The Zimbabwe Standard* published after he had moved into exile, he writes:

⁷⁰ Although Hove does not depict the dissident’s plight with either the same historical background, or indeed sympathy as Yvonne Vera does in *The Stone Virgins* (2002). ‘Breaking the Silence’ is the name of the report compiled by the NGO Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace into the atrocities in 1997.

I was shocked when a politician told me: 'A country never goes broke as long as it has the land.' All I could say was: 'The land becomes economic only if the owner knows how to make it produce, and people know how to turn the produce into secondary goods; fruit into jam, cotton into cloth, trees into paper, and so on.' [...] As it is, the Zimbabwean economy has collapsed. No amount of land grabbing or fast-track resettlement will revive it. (23)

This reinforces the nuanced awareness Hove shows in both *Bones* and *Shadows* toward the historical reality of economic activity on the land—for displaced farm workers in the former, and displaced, aspirant commercial farmers in the latter. With *Ancestors*, however, he renews his artistic project to rewrite the dominant narratives of 'archaic' communal memory, and once again returns to 'the land' as a primordial cultural wellspring, in order to do so.

'your father did not tell you the story of the bones of one born without words in her mouth.'

In *Ancestors*, Hove's third novel, the gendered aesthetic of remembrance that dominates *Bones* is integrated with the more historically resonant aspects of *Shadows*. Like *Bones*, the novel is focalised through an absent female presence, an ancestor, Miriro, who is born a deaf-mute in the 1850s "without a history of her own. Her story would have to be told by others while she sat there and did not even nod or listen." (A: 3) She possesses Mucha, a son in a rural family, from the 1960s-80s, and most of the novel features her first-person voice speaking through him, and occasionally also to him in the second person. Like Johana's, this family is displaced, and becomes similarly fractured in the run up to Independence and its aftermath. Notably, both the parts of Zimbabwe which the family moves between and the combination of economic necessity and colonial coercion for doing so, virtually reproduce those in *Shadows*.

Following Primorac (2003), however, the major difference here is that in "*Ancestors* as in *Shadows*, a man seeks to turn the structure of colonial space-time to material advantage through displacement", but unlike the former novel "*Ancestors* does not narrate political violence: the master-father is successful." (104) Instead, and somewhat reminiscent of *Bones*, the narrative recalls the various dislocations and

suffering that the historic female figure, as well as the family. experience. In this way Hove's novels assume a pattern of repetition but also of revision: *Ancestors* returns to and revises the temporal themes of *Bones* while also re-writing the spatial narrative of *Shadows*.

As in *Shadows*, then, the 'master-father' is taken on a speculative trip in '1963' to "Gotami's land, far away near the land of the Tonga people, near the waters of the Zambezi"(A: 38), as a precursor to the family's migration. Again, we are relayed the oral history of Gotami's people, recounting their dispossession by the colonialists but also their resistance to pre-colonial Ndebele incursions into their land. The description of this 'land' recalls the eco-holism of *Bones*, invoking a mythic paradisaal space where the human and natural worlds coalesce: "In that land, birds, monkeys, kudu, elephants, they bathe in the river with human beings." (A: 42) The father's principal interest lies in the material rather than the eco-spiritual or 'archaic' wealth of this land however. As with Johana's father he earnestly tries to accommodate the new 'laws of the land' within the horizons of that interest. What he fails to articulate, though, is the legacy of female silencing and subjugation suppressed *within* the tradition of communal memory he invokes in support of his own authority. It is a tradition whose place is the domestic world but which assumes a national allegorical meaning. As Mucha is told, "Your father did not tell you of the story of the bones of one born without words in her mouth." (A: 44)

Through the medium of Mucha/Miro's narrative, the novel bears witness to the unravelling of this contradictory heritage. From '1970' onwards, having settled in Gotami's lands, Mucha is directly possessed by Miro. But with the exception of the more complex narrative perspective that this 'possession' creates, and Mucha's gender, much of the first section ('The Hearer Hears of Fathers') repeats the scenes of anxiety and trauma which Johana and the other children experience in *Shadows*:

Here, everything is different. The sun comes out of the wrong sky. The river flows upstream ... [y]ou are afraid of yourself. It is a fear of not knowing yourself ... [a]ll the faces around you tell you of their deep fear which no one seems to be able to give words to. There are no names here. No one has name for anything." (A: 77)

While the unnamed landscape alienates Mucha, his father, like Johana's, is cultivated by the ubiquitous "white LDO ... *Makona Machena*," (Land Development Officer)

into 'Master Farmer' status. He is seduced away from his ancestral lands by the lure of cash-cropping: "you must feed the belly of the purse too, the purse ... A new religion has come upon the land." (A: 21, 24) Subsequently, he comes to represent the hubristic yet politically docile Native subject produced by colonialism:

I have worked hard for all this. Children, wives, granaries full of grain. Sheds. Machines that roar in a way my ancestors never imagined. It is mine ... I know I am alone, sweating in these lands, far away from the voices which could have praised me ... [b]ut here I own what I own. The soil. The sky above my head ... [t]he grass, the snake, the ants ... I can order them to live or die.(A: 82)

One could draw an oblique and proleptic critique of the increasingly 'sovereign' powers of the postcolonial state from this portrait—but the following chapters elide such overt criticisms in favour of exploring the patriarchal hold over traditional family life.

As the novel progresses from the 'Hearer Hears of Fathers' section to 'Women' and then to 'Children,' it becomes clear that the narrative revision of *Shadows* (which includes marginalising the political violence of that novel) remains circumscribed by a patriarchal version of cultural memory. In the subsequent sections, *herstory* unfolds from the fabric of *history* as we hear of Mucha's mother and sister Tariro's forced exiles from the family. The latter flees her marital home to an urban space, "this new land" (A: 114) of Lusaka, Zambia, unwilling to submit to the traditional role of wife and child-bearer. Mucha's mother, ironically, is banished for defying the ancestors at a ritual meant to mourn the *death* of Tariro. Though not actually dead, the absconded Tariro enters that space of absent presence, the spiritual world of cultural memory that Hove's narratives host: "She will be silence like her mother"(A: 121). By remembering such absences but also showing how women and children continue to be denied their own voice (which, in an oral culture is in many ways to be denied a social presence), the text performs a paradox: it is "one vast silence which speaks in its silence."(A: 11)

As with *Bones* and *Shadows*, Hove is reluctant to show how these cultural problems have evolved in anything other than a rural context. Lusaka is an alien and undefined "land of fear" (A: 116) for Tariro, who finds herself, as Johana's father did, unable either physically or culturally to enter *into* the city. On the other hand, Hove

broadens the scope of rural cultural experience by incorporating Mucha's mother's youthful memories. As a girl she "danced the *Jerusema* dance when, like a whirlwind, it caught the whole land." (A: 126) For the first time in a Hove novel, an emergent cultural form is admitted as other, and even antagonistic to, 'tradition'. "It was a dance which made young women abandon their husbands" (A: 127) we are told. Perhaps even more significantly, this dance not only liberated a space for women—"following the trail of the dance from village to village, abandoning their fields and families" (A: 127)—it also invokes the nation without necessarily inferring the rural: it 'catches the whole land.' Its liberatory promise is, however, fleeting.

'They were like escapees from a land of the past to the emptiness of the future'

In an important contrast to the 'stray women' of Yvonne Vera's fiction, discussed in the next section, Mucha's mother chose to look after her children rather than to "become dance itself" (A: 128) as her friend did, and the practice is eventually stopped by the colonialists when it threatens their grip on migrant labour: "when the *jerusuma* came, even the men who wanted to avoid annoying the white man had to abandon all plans to go to Jo'burg to work and raise taxes for the white man" (A: 129). But in spite of the transience, this anecdote is important in that it shows how rural space, historically, is overlaid with *different* cultural practices. It shows how these practices exerted *economic* pressure on the metropolitan colonial state, as well as *socio-cultural* pressure on the traditional rural formations to which Hove is so agonistically bound.

In the final section, 'Children,' we learn of the fragmentation of the family and the burden of responsibility which falls to Mucha and his elder brother, Jairosi. In being forced to seek refuge in a city with an older brother, Fanwell, the children's journey assumes the allegorical dimension of "journey started long ago" (A: 170):

Destination: the unknown city of cotton, the place of dwarfish ghosts ... Behind them was the place where their umbilical cords had been buried the day each of them was born. The yells of their birth were there too, with the sun which rose from above the trees and the hills they knew well, and then set behind the hills and trees they had grown up nursing [...] their hearts had now been torn away from the soil which was in their veins ... All was behind them. They were like escapees from a land of the past to the emptiness of the future. (A: 172-3)

Despite this heartfelt evocation of loss, of a traumatic amputation from the sustaining, nurturing mother-body of 'the land,' the country-city paradigm of colonial and postcolonial modernity that is invoked here is a well worn feature of Zimbabwean literature, and threatens to subsume the more differential representation of rural space and cultural memory which the novel portrays. It is as if, as Miriro suggests, the mythogenic idea of 'the land' holds a monopoly on history and refuses to admit anything other than the conservative 'backwards-looking perspective' of nationalism noted by McClintock—hence the reference to the children as 'escapees from the past to the emptiness of the future'. The "condition of abjection" that Stephen Chan ascribes to being a Zimbabwean in 2005 is already in evidence here, in a novel of the mid-1990s that speaks to us both from Zimbabwe's immediate and deep past. Every page reveals that "pain is stored in the stories of the land since the beginning of time." (A: 187)

But the novel does not apportion blame. Despite indicating the role played by men in these stories, for example, Mucha is still allowed a symbolic reconciliation with his father, 'the carver of stools', when his mother tells him that the grave of his grandfather which he had visited during the war, was in fact his father's. With this new knowledge—though not so much 'new' as a reminder of the cyclical patriarchal patterning of life—Mucha experiences a vital catharsis: "you are different" his mother tells him, "'This anger which could burn is dead now'" (A: 189). By leaving Mucha fatherless yet reconciled to his father's spirit, Hove frees him from his predetermined gender role. He is severed from the 'umbilical cord' which links him to the land of his birth, 'a land of the past,' but is also made aware of how traditional beliefs and practices have formed him and the patriarchal society to which he belongs.

By hosting the disavowed histories of his female family members and ancestors within his narrative, he becomes an exemplary postcolonial subject in the novelist's vision. Whether this enables him fully to work through the trauma that he or his siblings have experienced is not made clear. In the final pages of the novel Miriro and Tariro appear one last time to Mucha, before disappearing from even his remarkable memory. It is significant that it is the 'homestead', that locus of traditional rural culture, which they depart from:

‘Maybe the flame that burns the homestead will die after this.’ You hear Miriro’s words from far away. She is there, pointing away from the homestead, her words getting fainter and fainter, feeble like the words of a dying old man. As her voice dies, you see her face fading too. Tariro, too, is fading. She refuses to look at the place. The two walk from this land of ancestors in which they have lived with tears in their eyes and burdens in their hearts. (A: 195)

As the novel reaches its hazy, ephemeral conclusion, Hove seems to be acknowledging the limits to the archaic cultural memory that Mucha’s narrative re-constitutes. The novel’s final scene, set beside a “glowing night fire”, sees words and song merge into memory, “blown by this wind which carries away even the dreams of women, men, children and fireflies.”(A: 195) As to what the ‘wind’ might symbolise, and exactly what is implied by having the two women ‘walk from this land of ancestors’, is never made entirely clear.

Despite this, the resistance to patriarchy and rivalling of ‘official Zimbabwean nationalism’ suggests a persistently oblique, but nonetheless critical, stance towards the post-colonial government on Hove’s part. If that is indeed the case, then such an *implicit* disavowal of nationalism remains, as with Hove’s previous novels, limited in terms of the traditional socio-cultural forms it refuses, ultimately, to *dismantle* (Primorac 2003: 108). The act of telling their stories will not undo the injustices that women and rural peoples have suffered. Rather, the exclusionary trajectory is to be *remembered* by that subject in the service of the community which he is involved in establishing, as an awakening of collective responsibility to the future (see, for example, Durrant 2004). Memory in this sense is no longer conceived of as the “backward-looking” device of nationalism, an aesthetic that is “inert” and “natural,” but rather it is a presencing of the past that is orientated towards a greater understanding of the shifting cultures of past and present inequities, and one which presages a more humane future that is not dependant on patriarchal domination for cultural reproduction:

She is a dark voice full of joy and sadness, telling its story, my story, our story. I can only be a hearer shaken out of my sleep by the subdued voice of a woman of my blood, my ancestor whose tale is never told, since she was a woman. Only the story of

the men, our fathers, were told. Now she sits here, in the nest of my memory, telling our story, as she lived it.(A: 12)

Abjection, 'Stray Women' and the Land in Yvonne Vera's *Without a Name* (1994) and *Butterfly Burning* (1998)

In Hove's fiction land remains a sacred and abiding source of archaic cultural memory, despite the ongoing traumas of displacement. In Yvonne Vera's novels, by contrast, the sacral qualities of land are increasingly lost to her characters who are similarly displaced during the colonial past. The "connection to the land for the women" is, in Vera's own words, "that of the disturbance. Something negative." (Primorac: 2004 [2001], 161) What exactly is this 'disturbance', and in what ways is it 'negative'? To answer these questions I discuss Vera's second and fourth books, *Without a Name* (1994) and *Butterfly Burning* (1998), the two novels that she mentions in relation to 'the land' in her 2001 interview with Ranka Primorac.⁷¹

What the interview and close reading of the two novels suggest is that there exists a relationship between what Vera calls the women's 'disturbed' and 'negative' connection to the land, and how Stephen Chan understands contemporary Zimbabweanness: as a 'condition of abjection'. In the following section I argue two things: firstly, that this profaned relation to 'the land' manifests itself in the fiction through poetic tropes of abjection, and secondly, that the condition results from the 'disturbances' in the lives of ordinary women caused by various levels of patriarchal power—both in the private, domestic spheres of father and lover as well as the public, historical spheres of capitalist colonial modernity, nationalism and its agents. These disturbances are not confined to life on the land however; Vera's women are itinerant journeyers, they are compelled to be so, and they move between homesteads, farms and cities.

Although Vera's women are often forcibly displaced, as both the novels bear witness to, such spatial 'disturbances' offer them positive as well as 'negative'

⁷¹ I also choose not to discuss Vera's important first novel, *Nehanda* (1993), because my critique of the novel would be very similar to that of Hove's *Bones*. As Bull-Christiansen suggests, the novel rivals both colonial and postcolonial nationalist narratives of the first *chimurenga* through a rewriting of history in terms of a "feminist nationalism" (2004:81). The problem is that such rivalry nonetheless conforms to the atavistic, 'spiritual temporality' of the nationalist narrative; something which Vera clearly attempts to overcome in subsequent fiction. For relevant discussions of *Nehanda* see also Wilson-Tagoe (2002) and Daymond (2004).

opportunities. In the interview Vera argues that female independence needs to be predicated on a journey, a narrative perhaps, that opens up an intellectual space of freedom. And it is not simply one whose teleology is the redistribution of material space (land):

what some women also don't recognise is the necessity for them to have their own independence. Not just economic, or land. If you give land now, but you ignore intellectual independence, you in fact don't own that land. [Pauses] You own nothing. So ... it is a long journey. To arrive – where? At that fine space where you are completely free of that very domination, in your act and in what you say. (2004: 160)

But Vera's women, at least not until *The Stone Virgins* (2002), never quite seem to arrive in this 'fine space'. As long as the history of women's material and intellectual exclusion from the land (in terms of 'traditional' property rights and domestic and agricultural gender roles) as well as the nation (in terms of unequal citizenship) persists this, it seems, is to be their abject fate.

towards a 'fine space'? gathering 'the silence from the land into her body' in *Without a Name*

Without a Name, set in the late 1970s, opens with its tragic heroine Mazvita attempting to leave Harare on a crowded bus, back to her rural home in Mubaira. She carries a burden, a grotesque "lump" on her neck that we later learn is her own child who she has killed in "a ceremony of her freedom, a ritual of separation." (WN: 108) This burden is at once intensely private but also doubles as a marker of public anxiety, embodied shame, for the child is born of a rape committed by a soldier when Mazvita still lived in Mubaira. As Meg Samuelson argues, the baby signals a fundamental rupture with the spiritual temporality of 'the land': "Having no memory of its conception, Mazvita has no name to offer it. She is unable to give it a totem and place it on the past-present-future continuum." (2002: 94-95) Unable to speak to others of what she has experienced, her trauma is contained, poetically, within physiological symptoms: "Her neck had been broken. She felt a violent piercing like shattered glass on her tongue, where she carried fragments of her being." (WN: 8) The causes of this

shattered subjectivity are progressively revealed within a chronologically disjunctive narrative of rural and urban displacement.

As in Hove's *Shadows*, it is the penumbral violence of the liberation war that forces Mazvita to embark on her 'journey' and to leave 'the land.' The rape happens in the calm of a "violent wind" (WN: 42) that carries Mazvita to Harare. She first attempts to escape the violence in the country by moving to another rural space not yet directly affected by the guerrilla insurgency or governmental oppression: the commercial tobacco farm at Kadoma. But Nyenyedzi, her lover there and a nationalist, is also being drawn in to the conflict. So from there to the bright lights of Harare, always struggling to find a relationship with the opposite sex that is neither politicised nor oppressive. In Harare she is taken in by the more worldly Joel, with whom she experiences fleeting moments of sexual freedom. But she is never able to accommodate these with the traumatic memory of her rural past: "the past was more inventive than she was, and laid more claim on what belonged to it. The baby had chosen her, risen above its own frailty in order to hinder her." (WN: 87)

A bitter irony suffuses the city sections of the novel. The anonymity and amnesia that Mazvita desires by travelling there—from the memory of violence and violation on 'the land' she knew as home, returning to her in the metonymic form of the unwanted child—is impossible. But before finally returning to Mubaira (which has been razed in the fighting), Mazvita is forced to confront her past, to accept the reality of the dead baby's existence and her responsibility for it on the bus.

Unlike Dangarembga's female protagonists and the alienated men in Samkange's and Mungoshi's novels, then, Mazvita's journeying is not part of an educative process. It is not a *bildung* which sees her become conscious of and thus potentially able to transcend the conditions of her rural life (Primorac 2003: 178). Rather, Mazvita's 'fractured' physiognomy and melancholic journeying are indices of seemingly unassailable socio-cultural pressures: she is destined never to *leave* the land but cannot regain her pre-rape sense of belonging on it. Hence her 'negative connection' to it. Through her body she is phenomenally rooted in a world of sensuous social experience, but is able neither to understand fully nor actively change the historical factors which overdetermine that experience.

As a woman in the traditional Shona rural world, for example, she is denied even the opportunity to move from 'peasant' to 'Master Farmer' status which catalyses the migrations of Hove's latter novels. Her rural status is symptomatic of

what has been described as “aggregate inequalities in access to resources by men and women in rural communities.”(Pasura 2003: 48) Similarly, when she moves from Mubaira to Kadoma, Mazvita is too ashamed to tell Nyenyedzi of her rape in the previous place. Instead, she characterises herself as an economic migrant forced to travel in search of work. This aspect of her ‘journey’ resonates with broader social and historical trends. Her eventual arrival in the city and the ambiguous ‘freedom’ she finds there are symptomatic of female migration patterns throughout the colonial era.⁷²

In this way, *Without a Name* works Mazvita’s individual experiences into a broader narrative of gender and nation. This is the burden she unwittingly carries with her, corresponding to a condition of abjection that takes poetic form in her unwanted baby. Allegorical meaning is tempered, however, by a similar narrative strategy found in Hove’s novels. The disjunctive chapters resist incorporation into a ‘master narrative’; but they nonetheless bear a *negative* relation to it. The novel alternates between scenes of fragile poetic intimacy between Mazvita and Nyenyedzi on the land, on and around the commercial farm, with the jarring alienation and anonymity of the city.

At this stage, Mazvita’s journey to the city is the one envisioned by Vera, heading for that ‘fine space’ of material and intellectual freedom. In Harare, she is

Protected from the hills and land. Harare banished memory, encouraged hope. Mazvita had a strong desire to grow. She trusted the future and the growth of her desire. She had faith in untried realities because she trusted her own power for change, for adaptation. She welcomed each day with a strong sense of desire, of her ability to begin, of her belonging. Mazvita had a profound belief in her own reality, in the transformation new geographies promised and allowed, that Harare’s particular strangeness released and encouraged.(WN: 64, my italics)

It is ‘the land’ itself that she flees from. Initially at least, the city’s ‘particular strangeness’ proves seductive. She relishes the freedom which her anonymity in the city’s crowds bequeaths, for there “is nothing to lose between strangers, absolutely no

⁷² This point is underlined in the following section on *Butterfly Burning*. For an historical account see Suzie Jacobs’ (1995) research on gender division and ethnic formation in the Rhodesian settler society: “[w]omen migrated in order to seek economic independence, to escape unsatisfactory or violent marriages, and – at times with the consent of their guardians – to earn cash in whatever ways possible, including prostitution, so that they might send some money back to their dependent families.” (247)

risk of being contaminated by another emotion; there are no histories shared, no promises made, no hopes conjured and affirmed.”(WN: 16) Yet the *fine space* of ‘her belonging’ that she searches for in the ‘new geographies’ of Harare ultimately proves illusory and treacherous: “Mute and wounded she moved through the streets and wept ... She hated the city and its commitment to a wild and stultifying indifference” (WN: 15, 22)

Evacuated of communal memory, the resolute indifference and reified freedoms of the city promise a “shelter”, a beneficent habitat to those who, like Mazvita, have experienced the penumbral violence of the liberation struggle on the land which has “changed everything, even the idea of their own humanity.”(WN: 88) The amnesia—the state of traumatic *denial*—Mazvita lives by in the city is further exposed, however, by the interwoven narrative of her rural experiences. The subjective ambiguity of her urban experience reveals a *sublimation* of the rape, repressed in her memory, which made her flee ‘the land’ which was once home—shelter, refuge—to her. The anonymity she both craves and hates in the city is directly related to her experience of radical anonymity when raped by the faceless soldier on the land.

As Samuelson (2002) suggests, Mazvita suffers “multiple dispossessions” in the countryside: the rape happens under a broad shadow of colonial violence that violates her connection to ‘the land’: her “ancestral lands—literally ‘Mhondoro’—have been desecrated by commercial cash-crop farming and burnt by the war.” (94) The traumatic act itself is poetically, if not graphically, portrayed. The effect is to convey both the conscious and unconscious mechanisms of resistance. Most notably, this is evident when Mazvita denies the anonymous soldier the body he attempts to ‘possess’: she keeps “her body tight to close him out, to keep the parts of her body that still belonged to her, to keep them near to herself, recognizable and new.” (WN: 35) By resisting her attacker in this way, however, she brings to her body “a complete silence, of her womanhood.” (WN: 35) To deny him her body she must deny it also. She discovers in this suppression (of her sexualised, reproductive body) an emptiness which is “a redeeming silence.”(WN: 36) This process allows her to retain that which her assailant cannot physically take possession of—her name, her *social* identity: she “sheltered in the barrenness and silence of her name.”(WN: 36) This last bastion of communal identity is lost, of course, in the ‘indifferent city’.

Anonymity offers a defence against the similarly ‘faceless’ soldier. But because it is reciprocal, it is also the cause of a momentous act of symbolic transference:

...but she had not seen the man’s face ... Hate required a face against which it could be flung but searching for a face was futile. Instead she transferred the hate to the moment itself, to the morning, to the land ... She connected him only to the land. It was the land that had come toward her. He had grown from the land. She saw him grow from the land, from the mist, from the river. The land had allowed the man to grow form itself into her body.

Mazvita gathered the silence from the land into her body. (WN: 36)

Transferring her hatred from the assailant to the “moment”,⁷³ and then to ‘the land’, it is ‘the land’ itself, in all that it signifies, that Mazvita accepts as her assailant. By gathering the ‘silence from the land into her body,’ by internalising it as the profaned agent of patriarchal and political violence, her fate is to become abject before it, excluded from both its material and symbolic meanings. The historical significance of this most personal of traumas becomes clear in the following chapter in a dialogue between Mazvita and Nyenyedzi. It exposes the *cultural and political resonances* of this transference.⁷⁴ The novel does not refer to historical events or anti-colonial nationalism in specific ways, but it nonetheless becomes impossible to read this profaned relationship to ‘the land’ without also contemplating a broader politics of national belonging.

‘the land is inescapable. It is everything’

As Nyenyedzi passionately declares: “It is like that with the land. It holds its claim on you. The land is inescapable. It is everything. Without the land there is no day or night, there is no dream. *The land defines our unities.*”(WN: 39, my italics) Yet the very singularity of Mazvita’s itinerant individualism resists the nationalistic vision of

⁷³ For Vera’s comments on depicting “history in a moment”, see Bryce (2002: 223)

⁷⁴ In an essay which explores the relation between the individual experience of trauma and the emergence of the “postcolony,” Ato Quayson argues that Mazvita’s act of transference is part of “symbolization compulsion” symptomatic of such a historical moment. But somewhat problematically, he links the trauma of “historical recall” in both this novel and Marachera’s *House of Hunger* to post-apartheid South Africa (2003: 95).

the politicised freedom fighter. 'The land' is the wellspring of the nation for Nyenyedzi, but for Mazvita it is no longer the horizon of communal identity; it yields a quite different *organic* sense of belonging:

She had loved the land, saw it through passionate and intense moments of freedom, but for her the land had no fixed loyalties. She gathered from it her freedom which it delivered wholly and specially. If it yielded crop, then it could also free her, like the plants which grew upon it and let of their own blooms, their own scents, their own colour, while anchored on the land ... She could grow anywhere. (WN: 40-41)

Robert Muponde (2002) argues that this mobile connection to 'the land' makes Mazvita's dystopian fate exemplary. Despite the ecological simile used to describe her 'freedom', for Muponde her narrative cannot be reduced to nationalist tropes of belonging and martyrdom. Instead, her journey can be read as

a positive liberating vision of worthwhile possibilities that could result in the rupture of the closed circle that Zimbabwean history threatens to become, especially with the present nationalist's insistence on its interpretation of one kind of struggle: LAND. (126)

Reading the rape and Mazvita's resistance to it in such a politicised manner is thus controversial, but arguably warranted by the broader scope of Vera's fictional project. The consequences of repressing her maternal body condemn Mazvita to her itinerant fate, but also, as I have suggested, to a 'negative' relation to the allegorical one. To reiterate: the baby is depicted as a *symptom* of her historically abject condition, of her 'disturbed' and 'negative' connection to 'the land', with its manifold connotations—spiritual, material and utopian.

With due caution towards her dehistoricising inclination and eurocentric prejudices, Kristeva's (1982) theory of abjection can usefully be appropriated to engage with Vera's poetic prose at this point. Kristeva sees abjection as the (enduring) condition of primal repression, preserving "what existed in the archaism of the pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be" (10). In Kristeva's discussion, the abject is a synchronic precondition for the narcissistic process of infantile identity formation.

Diachronically, however, it returns to haunt the subject through symbols of expulsion (food, filth, waste, corpse) that repeat the trauma of the primal repression: “refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live.”(3) And so the infant corpse that Mazvita straps to her back, and later, in *Butterfly Burning*, Phephelaphi’s abortion, both correspond to diachronic symptoms of Kristevan abjection. They represent the splitting of the subject through—as—biological reproduction. The *potential* self, the baby, is ‘thrust aside’ so that the *historical* self, the adult woman, may live.

Where Kristeva dismisses the importance of “sociohistorical conditions” (207), Vera makes clear the domestic and historical experiences which leave her women on the borders of life and death, but also of local and national *belonging*. Kristeva gives voice to this psychological condition:

There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit—*cadere*, cadaver. (5)

And in the descriptions of Mazvita and her child, Vera allows us to witness the awful moments when this condition becomes reality:

If she could remove her head, and store it at a distance from the stillness on her back, then she could begin. She would be two people. She would be many. One of her would be free. One of her would protect the other. She wanted one other of her.(WN: 25-26)

Mazvita’s freedom, her journey towards the utopian *fine space*, is predicated on her expelling the baby and all that it represents: the rural past she lives in denial of; the rape but also the ‘archaism of the pre-objectal relationship’, which we might identify as her affective relationship to ‘the land’. But it seems she can never fully sever that relationship. Like the dead baby, she cannot leave ‘the land’ behind. It persists as both ‘negativity’ and ‘disturbance’.

As the urban narrative highlights the contradictory ‘freedoms’ that the city offered women during the liberation struggle, the rural narrative shows why an

idealised relationship to the pre-colonial land had also been compromised by it. 'The land' that the nationalist Nyenyedzi loves, following the symbolic transference during the rape, represents the abject for Mazvita: it is a *maternal* space which she attempts (but ultimately cannot) separate from, beginning a new existence in the city. When she suggests they go there together, he replies that you "*can forget your own mother* [in the city]. I cannot go to Harare. I like the land. I cannot leave the land and go to a strange and unwelcoming place." (WN: 30, my italics) His land is a time and space in which her vulnerability as a woman, especially during a time of conflict, is brutally exposed: there "she had lost the seasons of her motherhood." (WN: 36)

But 'the land' she knew as home has been devastated. What she finds there is not Nyenyedzi's nationalism, but rather the scorched traces of a spiritual temporality, the cultural memory of the past that she also escaped from. But by having worked through her trauma on her journey, she is now able to move towards regaining a social and cultural identity. This is captured in the novel's final tableau, where she opens herself to the traumatic memory of those she has lost, and is finally able to return her child to ancestral land:

She will carry the burning grasses with her. She will carry the voices that she remembers from this place, from the burning grass. She has not forgotten the voices. The broken huts are dark with smoke and the mist falls gently over the empty walls ... Mazvita walks in gentle footsteps that lead her to the place of her beginning. Mazvita bends forward and releases the body from her back, into her arms.

The silence is deep, hollow, and lonely. (WN: 116)

And so despite her connection to the land being 'disturbed' and 'negative', there remains the suggestion that her condition of abjection might be overcome and a route back to community might yet be found; by embracing not just the trauma of "a collective past that is deeply connected to place" (Samuelson 2002: 95), but by continuing on a utopian journey towards a specifically female space of communal memory, as represented in *Under the Tongue* (1996). At the same time, however, the loneliness of the village, abject—*laid to waste*—reinforces the novel's implicit critique of colonial violence, but also the atavistic anti-colonial nationalism that it produced.

***Butterfly Burning*: ‘stray women’ and the forgotten history of urban nationalism**

The men returned. Some. As soldiers, not heroes, blind men with mistrust and dizzied by an evident defeat which belonged only to their particular experience. From 1945 they could be seen walking down any street of Makokoba, glazed and perplexed by the events of war. Not at all proper citizens of Rhodesia. With no power to choose who would govern they witness the first Railway Strike, wondering how swiftly to trust their own stirring of pride ... They still could not walk on pavements. Not only did they wonder, they made suitable plans of their own which they pursued with ambition ... The question which needed answering was more urgent and vexed, not about numbers, that was simple, but about being human.(BB: 91)

Set in the Bulawayo township of Makokoba at the latter end of the 1940s, a period in that city’s history characterised by high levels of economic migrancy and urbanization (Yoshikini 1999: 119), *Butterfly Burning* (1998) follows Samkange’s *The Mourned One* in evoking an emergent black urban world *prior* to the advent of militant anti-colonial nationalism in the late 1960s. My epigraph illustrates that in the post-war climate political mobilisation was not a simple matter of land agitation. Rather, Vera’s fourth novel breaks the linear nationalist narrative that links the first *chimurenga* straightforwardly to the second (and more recently the ‘third’). Based around the first national strike of 1948 it focuses on broader questions of citizenship, especially how early nationalist sentiment emerged from the connections *between* urban and rural politicisation. Through ZANU (PF)’s demonisation of the opposition MDC party in recent years—whose roots are in the labour movement—this “linkage” has been “‘written out’ of official nationalism today.”(Bull-Christiansen 2004: 60) In evoking this particular urban world, the novel is another example of a narrative that rivals the ‘master-narrative of official Zimbabwean nationalism’.

Again, reminiscent of Samkange, the novel stages this historical moment as a rupture between the spaces of a colonial, capitalist urban present, and those of an idealised, spiritual African rural past. Fumbatha, the seemingly benign patriarch of the novel, is linked to the space-time of the first *chimurenga* through his dead father. He is born in 1896, when his father is killed fighting in the first *chimurenga*. “Perhaps if he had not been born”, the narrator muses, “the land would still belong to him.” (BB:

29) Once again we find a 'negative' gender inflection contained within the patrilineal memory of land dispossession.

As in *Without a Name*, the novel focuses on one woman's attempt to create a space of freedom for herself in the city. Unlike Mazvita, however, Phephelaphi has lived in the township all her life and is far from anonymous there. Whilst she has not been directly effected by male violence in her past as Mazvita and Zhizha (of *Under the Tongue*) have, she has been protected from the knowledge that her mother, Getrude, came to the city in 1920 and turned to prostitution for survival. The plot twists, intriguingly, when we learn that it is Zandile, Phephelaphi's 'aunt' and benefactor who is her real mother. Like subsequent generations of Vera's women, Zandile chose to disavow her maternal role: she gave away her baby to retain the ambiguous freedoms of urban life: "That was what the city offered, not the burden of becoming a mother." (BB: 143-4)

In uncharacteristically direct passages of narration, Vera comments on this first wave of female urbanisation, criticising the colonial state's influx controls in the 1920s and 1930s which aimed to prevent women from moving to the cities with their husbands, but also stressing that many women arrived of their own volition and "gave birth and raised children on the palm of their hands"(BB: 104). It is the same experience that Mazvita in *Without a Name* faces over 50 years later. According to Lynette Jackson's research on colonial and post-colonial medical discourse (1999), such 'stray women', as they have been categorised, have suffered a history of "criminalization". While both the novels in this section are set in the colonial past, it is worth noting the resonance of such 'stray women' in the 1990s, when the novels were written:

During the early 1990s, within the framework of the escalating HIV/AIDS crisis, the aforementioned process of criminalization was joined with pathologization. In other words, not only had young, unattached and mobile women come to signify a kind of social disorder; they began to signify a physical one as well [...] while single African women are no longer represented as the venereal filters sapping away at colonial capitalist efficiency, they are represented as angels of death in the age of HIV/AIDS.(148, 163)

Due to her periodisation, Vera is unable to reference directly the AIDS crisis that, by 1998, she as well as her readership was well aware of.⁷⁵ What she does do is to illuminate how “mobile” single women, historically and quite literally, have borne the burden for public health issues perceived as being intrinsic to the city’s ‘social disorder’. It is telling, in this respect, that Phephelaphi wants to become the first black nurse in Bulawayo. It would signal a transcendence of the ‘stray woman’ stereotype, but is prevented by her pregnancy and relationship with Fumbatha.

Fumbatha’s own story is symptomatic of the urbanisation of *male* African labour in the same period (1920s), needed to construct the colonial city. He has spent his adult life building the city in response to “the pressure of survival”: “money is needed for shelter ... and through this contact, Bulawayo is a city he understands closely.”(BB: 25) His father’s involvement (and betrayal) in the first *chimurenga* is contained within nostalgic memories of his rural childhood in the space that pre-existed the city. Fumbatha is representative of a generation of male Zimbabweans for whom urbanisation meant unavoidable complicity with the colonial project, against which their fathers had fought. The city he is forever building, the colonial space he (re)produces in his daily work, is a painful reminder of the rural world that it replaces:

Too little survives the intrusion, the trains, the buildings blocking every pathway, the labor of the hands. At the back of Fumbatha’s every dream is a sorrowful wind blowing like a hurricane. A buried song builds out of the ground like a whirlwind. The village where his mother raised him is no longer there. Fumbatha knows too little of the world of his father except that others fought on the side of the white men. (BB: 25)

The colonial city is a palimpsest, erasing—almost—the memory of the pre-colonial land it is built upon. Yet because the novel is set on the cusp of the general strike of 1948—a first indicator of mass support for African nationalism in Rhodesia (Ranger 2002: 205)—Vera’s representation of ‘the land’, filtered through Fumbatha and Phephelaphi’s urban consciousnesses, offers a vital fictionalisation of the *urban* prehistory to the rural guerrilla struggle which was to emerge two decades later.

⁷⁵ To what extent Vera’s personal experience of AIDS/HIV can be read in to this is open to debate. Vera’s untimely, tragic death in 2005 from suspected AIDS related meningitis has already prompted much re-reading of her fiction. It is not, however, the concern of this study to pursue this enquiry.

I say that the city *almost* erases the memory of an earlier space-time. This is because Vera's 'stray women', it seems, always offer men a physical connection to their past and the dispossession that marks it. When we first meet Fumbatha, for example, the closest he can come to 'the land' of his father is by sleeping near the Umgaza River, a riverine landscape sedimented with his family's past. Although the "city has swallowed the river," (BB: 24) it is from this river that the bathing Phephelaphi emerges "like a spirit." (BB: 26) In a familiar conflation of women with land, he objectifies her as his spiritual, *patrilineal* inheritance. She is 'the land' which his father was not able to pass on to him as his child. He "had never wanted to possess anything before, except the land. He wanted her like the land beneath his feet from which birth had severed him ... *The death of his father had not heralded birth.*" (BB: 29, my italics)

The prospect of Phephelaphi bearing him a child promises to undo the legacy of dispossession and emasculation he carries. It promises his own re-birth. This entails a sacrifice on her part however: the "true measure of abandon; only she could bear his children, only then would he dream new dreams and all the children be saved *from* drowning." (BB: 130) But she resists this sacrifice, *his* historical deliverance, by trying to assert her independence through her chosen career and abortion. Like Mazvita, then, abjection becomes her only recourse. Yet that also fails her and she eventually commits suicide. Neither the city nor 'the land' can provide that *fine space*, the 'refuge' she seeks. Her private tragedy thus unravels through this allegorically resonant legacy of female objectification and resistance, but also, ultimately, into a condition of abjection that cannot prevent her death. Where abjection is seen as the condition of the early 21st century Zimbabwean for Chan (2005), in Vera's fiction it seems to be the common historical experience of women under colonial rule—especially for those who desire both public and private autonomy, that fine space of one's own.

queering 'the land': a pure longing for land

And so Phephelaphi comes to view the relationship as increasingly constrictive. She wants "the sense of belonging before that kind of belonging which rested on another's wondrous claim" (BB: 81). Her love for Fumbatha is clearly sincere, but she knows that if she is to break from a cycle of dependency she cannot afford to have their child

as it would compromise her Nurse's training (a child out of wedlock proving her to be the 'stray woman' of medical discourse). With regard to this relationship, Elleke Boehmer (2004) argues that Phephelaphi mediates the stifling demands of a normative heterosexual union by exploring queer relationships with her two female benefactors/mothers, Deliwe and Zandile. But ultimately this only exacerbates Fumbatha's hold on her: he "seeks her out only after Phephelaphi has already turned away from him, directing her shapeless, urgent longings towards a largely undefined elsewhere—almost a Lawrentian beyond." (141) Boehmer's account of this 'beyond' associates a liberated identity with "sexual energy" (143) nurtured and realised in the presence of the other women. I would argue, however, that this reading does not take sufficiently in to account either the contradictions manifest in the transcendent spaces of "not-here-ness" (*BB*: 116), which Boehmer classifies as 'a largely undefined elsewhere,' or Phephelaphi's actual journey *beyond* the urban spaces of Makokoba and Bulawayo when she aborts her unborn child in chapter sixteen.

This first, abstract space of 'not-here-ness', is the product of intimate social interaction and joyous abandon. At a Shebeen on Sidojiwe E2, Phephelaphi and Fumbatha "dance with a joy that is free, that has no other urgency than the sheer truth of living, the not-being-here of this here-place." (*BB*: 86) Despite being in a small, confined room, their experience of space is expanded to sublime proportions: "As the music soars, for Fumbatha, memory has dropped below the waistline like a tide ... They sing of beautiful mountains ... hills with sharp peaks ... Butterfly valleys ... Time is inaudible." (*BB*: 86) They do indeed reach a mystical 'beyond' which Boehmer speaks of, yet although it is a sensation produced in a distinctively matriarchal and sexually subversive enclave of colonial space, it is one *shared* by Phephelaphi and Fumbatha. His later betrayal and Phephelaphi's changing relationships with Deliwe and Zandile certainly support Boehmer's argument, but Phephelaphi's journey to the land 'beyond' Bulawayo in the later chapter, in order to abort their baby, throws such momentary transcendence into contrast with the morbid reality that confronts Phephelaphi on her return.

The representation of this second space, 'beyond' the confines of township and segregated city, is pivotal to Vera's ongoing exploration of the political burden and gendered symbolism that 'the land' has accrued in the Zimbabwean national imagination. In her interview with Primorac (2004), Vera reveals how she views this

particular 'land' as being implicitly connected to the city. They are part of the same 'story':

I felt I very much wanted to write a novel about my own city. About the people here. About the land. And this story developed, when I was writing it. I wanted to incorporate into the body of the story the land itself. Elements of it. You know, how [Phephelaphi, the novel's heroine] feels. In that chapter you see that it opens with a kind of wish, a feeling which heralds the emotion of what kind of vegetation she would like to experience, that would liberate, that would give her some freedom. (161)

She refers also to the opening of chapter 16, where Phephelaphi's *pure longing for land* is voiced:

Just a pure longing for land that heaves and swells up to the sky, forming wide hills whose backs hold basins filled with a calm essence, begetting grass, singing insects and tress, land that pauses, then listens as a leaf drops, as a raindrop drops, and vanishes.(BB: 113)

In this description, the intellectual and emotional *fine space* Vera talks of is imbued within the material landscape. We find a harmonious ecosystem depicted; an image of the refuge or shelter that all Vera's protagonists seem to be searching for but that 'the land' can never seem to provide. In this context, Phephelaphi's 'queer' desire for an elsewhere, beyond the normative spaces available to her—patriarchal, colonial, nationalist—is not *only* a gesture of individual transcendence. It is also, I suggest, an implicit critique of the political and gendered meanings which 'the land' has accrued within these spaces. Her desire to belong autonomously, her 'pure longing for land', is directly contrasted to Fumbatha's historically mortgaged, *possessive* desire for the land of his nationalist father. In the interview, Vera goes on to discuss this gendered contrast in both novels:

Mazvita [in *Without a Name*], she is raped, and she sees that it as something that has come, the land has come and physically ... so she rejects it and the city is sort of landless for her. You know. It is these concrete buildings and whatever, so she is not connected to it in the way that the argument has been articulated by the men ... It is

the same with Phephelaphi. She goes deep into it, with the sand and all that, and she uses it. But it is the most extreme violation that she could make. It refuses to open up even when she is trying pick it. It refuses and refuses. So she does not feel that the harmony which [her male lover] Fumbatha has been looking for and was born into and all that. For her, [land] is not a treasure. (2004: 161)

In a desperate bid for autonomy, one that would redeem ‘the land’ of the ‘negative’ gendered determinations it holds for her, Phephelaphi ‘goes deep into it’ and ‘uses it’ to commit her abortion. The ‘harmony which Fumbatha has been looking for’ and that she earlier expresses cannot be realised however. By *using* the land in this way she successfully aborts her baby but precipitates her eventual suicide. Where abjection expresses the condition of Mazvita’s social death, for Phephelaphi it leads to her literal death. Sometime after her return to the township she finds she has become pregnant again; she cannot escape Fumbatha’s desire and her own, abject fate:

My being. My woman self tearing away. I will *not*. Now he has broken my stem with this child he has given me. I am nothing. Not here. Here is a place you belong. I no longer belong. I am not here. (BB: 145-6)

Having already ab-jected the ‘negative’ legacy of ‘the land’ in the first abortion, Phephelaphi is left alone and isolated with the inescapable burden of her body. Like Mazvita she forsakes community for individual freedom, but like so many of Vera’s ‘stray women’ up to this point, the power of social norms dictates that she is unable to live without a man.

Ultimately then, Phephelaphi is unable to reconcile her desire for a fine space of her own—her *pure longing for the land*—with her historical fate. Whereas Mazvita finds a melancholy route back to community and identity by returning to the devastated rural land of her home, where she ‘belongs,’ Phephelaphi has no other space to turn but that of her own death, where she “seeks her own refuge” (BB: 149). Despite moments of solidarity and transgression, hope and transcendence, it remains a sad, bleak story. But by focusing on the multi-layered spaces of Bulawayo’s urban history in the way it does, *Butterfly Burning* rivals the hegemonic nationalist narrative that has de-linked rural and urban histories of everyday resistance and nationalist mobilisation. The novel also further outlines a sense of ‘the land’ that moves beyond

traditional and nationalist conceptions of it. Land is presented as a *fine space*, both material and abstract, of *refuge* and *shelter*. This concept is further explored in Vera's fifth and sadly final novel, *The Stone Virgins* (2002), through the additional leitmotif of 'habitat'. And it is also in this final novel, where her characters are again forced to negotiate fraught relationships between rural and urban space in contexts of penumbral political violence, that Vera signals a way of coming to terms with the national malaise of abjection.

After violence on the land: nationalism, history and contingent communities in Shimmer Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns* (1989) and Yvonne Vera's *The Stone Virgins* (2002)

In the final concluding section of this chapter, and of the part of this thesis which looks at Zimbabwean literature, I explore two post-colonial novels which actually enter *into* the worlds of anti- and post-colonial nationalism in a way in which no other novel so far discussed has. The genre of Zimbabwean war writing, since 1980, has not been as reticent in broaching such issues (Primorac 2003: 136-138). Whilst novels such as Edward Chipamaunga's *A Fighter for Freedom* (1983) have celebrated and mythologised the liberation struggle in line with nationalist orthodoxy, two similar novels, Shimmer Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns* (1989) and Alexander Kanengoni's *Echoing Silences* (1997), have explored the contradictions within the struggle with both sympathy and censure, resisting the impetus to mythologise the freedom-fighter's experience (especially by resisting the links between the second *chimurenga* and the first).

In a contrast to *Echoing Silences* which, as Primorac (2003) notes, incorporates "all the phases of the war's spatio-temporal circle" wherein "every aspect of a just struggle is compromised" (157), Chinodya's novel favours a more tempered exploration of the conflict and its aftermath. Yet unlike some of the novels by Hove and Vera looked at in this chapter, *Harvest of Thorns* ultimately refuses to disavow the nationalist project. It offers a cautiously redemptive perspective on the disillusionment and changed social relations that the struggle brought into being. That it does so by emphasising a male freedom fighter's paternal maturation, however, is to perpetuate the gender division within nationalism that these other writers protest.

In a counterpoint to Chinodya's realism, Yvonne Vera's final novel before her death, *The Stone Virgins* (2002), explores the 'inside' experience of the liberation struggle and its aftermath through representations of post-conflict violence, trauma and healing. While 'stray women' are again at the heart of her novel, the narrative also privileges the consciousness of a freedom fighter turned 'dissident,' Sibaso, in the post-war 'conflict' in Matabeleland in the early 1980s. Shifting between Bulawayo and Kezi, between urban and rural worlds both before and immediately after independence in 1980, the novel is structured by the 'heroine' Nonceba's 'journey' towards a space which she might be able to call her own. It is this journey, firmly historicised by Vera, that I suggest provides an intimation of the kind of imagined community that the nation *could* offer its peoples. From being a personal space of abjection and tragedy in *Without a Name* and *Butterfly Burning*, we are given a tentative, utopian intimation of how 'the land' might be re-imagined as a public *habitat* in which all Zimbabweans might belong.

'If the bush could speak then it could tell your story': *Harvest of Thorns* (1989) and the contingency of nationalism.

As in numerous Zimbabwean novels before his, Shimmer Chinodya's youthful protagonist, the schoolboy turned freedom fighter, turned disaffected war veteran, Benjamin Tichafa, undergoes a journey of education (*bildung*) during the novel that takes him away from his home environment and family. Unlike many of those novels, however, his trajectory does not follow the familiar rural-urban route. He comes full circle. He moves first from the township and boarding school of his childhood to guerrilla training camps across the border in Mozambique in his youth. His returns, first as insurgent and then as demobbed soldier to an independent though in many ways unchanged Zimbabwe, allows the author to explore the contradictory experience of the freedom-fighter by juxtaposing personal emergence with the public emergence of the nation (Primorac: 2003: 143).

Where Liz Gunner reads the novel as a "kind of catharsis and expurgation from the War years" (1991: 84), Flora-Veit Wild (1992) points to the *disillusionment* of the "frame story" (told in parts one and four) of Benjamin's return from the war. Quoting from an interview with Chinodya, she argues that Benjamin returns as an "alienated" individual to a "wounded nation":

I'm not sure what they [some critics] mean by 'negative picture of independence'. If that means showing, at the end of *Harvest of Thorns*, a dejected and unemployed excombatant, a torn family and a wounded nation, then I don't think that is negative at all. That's reality.(322)

For Primorac (2003), this 'reality' of the guerrilla conflict is most evident in chapter twenty-four when, having assumed his war-identity Pasi Nema Sellout ('death to all sellouts'), Benjamin is forced to kill an old village woman, Mai Tawanda, who has betrayed his guerrilla cell. The brutal episode haunts Benjamin. Mai Tawanda was protecting her son, a Rhodesian policeman, as his mother would no doubt have done for him from the police or army. The radical morality of war rests heavy on the youth. Later in the narrative, for example, a lonely Benjamin succumbs to his desires and breaks the guerrilla's code of conduct by sleeping with a village girl. Learning that another of their number has *raped* a girl, he is filled with anguish, having "not even allowed himself to consider that Mabuna Machapera had been driven by a variation of his own despair."(*HT*: 210) With the subsequent collapse of order in the unit, the myth of collective unity on the part of the fighters is not so much shattered as exposed in both its immediate and historical contingency. The "common fate" they share is to have been "wrenched from their youth by the war and united in the bitterness of having survived together the savage bombings in the training camps." The reality of this 'common fate' is that

each comrade was really on his own ... In the face of constant danger, the differences of their backgrounds and characters blurred into insignificance. Social conversation was rare. Though he could claim certain intimacies it was futile, if not foolish, to expect friendship (*HT*: 210).

Transient and contingent, the precarious solidarity of the group throws the affinities of other more expansive forms of 'imagined community' (the 'nation' they wish to liberate, for example) into critical relief. The same is true for the other representative group in the novel: Benjamin's family. The sense conveyed by Benjamin's unhappy childhood is that his family's unity is fragile at best. The details of Benjamin's mother's urbanisation, his father's conversion to a zealous Christianity, and his own

puritanical upbringing and (non-urban) mission education, provide a vivid picture of African urban life in the 1950s and 60s (Primorac, 2003: 141). On the cusp of militant nationalism at this point in the novel, the timeframe anticipates Vera's *Butterfly Burning* but also goes beyond it by showing how the young Benjamin is drawn into the conflict through a mixture of juvenile disaffection and the influence of African nationalism,⁷⁶ first in the newspapers⁷⁷ and then in the streets.

Where Vera's urban worlds are free from the *direct* political action of the liberation struggle, Benjamin joins a march that unites the rural and urban youth against the extension of "a military draft to male black school leavers in order to counter increasing acts of sabotage in the countryside." Chinodya depicts the resulting agitation in a subtle nationalist idiom:

There was an uproar in the country. Black students at the University staged a demonstration in the capital. Many schools followed suit. Armies of teenage boys in school uniforms marched by night along farm roads and obscure routes, and trooped into the cities and towns. (*HT*: 95)

The Land is linked to 'the land' here ('uproar in the country') not by myth or ideology, but through resistance to the colonial state as the 'armies' of schoolboys 'trooped into the cities and towns.' This kind of mobilisation is evidently limited to the youths who are privileged enough to receive a colonial boarding-school education however. Hove's rural peasants and workers are not to be seen at this point. Chinodya reveals his cautionary perspective when the latent *idealism* of this nationalist moment later jars against the contradictory realities of a peasant population which is shown gratefully to accept colonial power relations (Baas-boy Msindo) or is unwilling to support the guerrillas (Mai Tawanda).

⁷⁶ Although Benjamin's politicisation is clearly evident in the text, in an interview with Ranka Primorac (as an appendix to her thesis, 2003), Chinodya stresses the importance of Benjamin's juvenile disaffection: "I think *Harvest of Thorns* is much more than a war novel ... Even Benjamin is not really, for me ... is not really a combatant. He's just a young man who gets caught up ... who runs away from school, and gets caught up. And my interest in that book was to show him becoming an adolescent. And coping with adolescence. Carrying a gun and shooting people but coping with adolescence." (135)

⁷⁷ Benjamin hears of the University students striking in the newspapers six months before taking his O levels (*HT*: 95). References to newspapers rare in Zimbabwean fiction but there is a clear suggestion here that the technologies of print media and at least a limited distribution in African communities played a role in mobilising and uniting a literate class of Africans in the nationalist struggle. This phenomenon recalls Benedict Anderson's famous observations on the role of print capitalism in the formation of 'national consciousness' in *Imagined Communities* (1991:37-46).

Despite waving a placard on the march festooned with the declaration that “THE BOYS IN THE BUSH ARE OUR BROTHERS”, Benjamin is ignorant of rural life and the history of the struggle for land. He ruminates over the implications of the phrase “child of the soil” (soon to become a marker of his ‘war’ identity): his youthful scepticism is crucial—perhaps one of the most ingenuous yet incisive critiques of anti-colonial nationalist discourse to have appeared in fiction:

He did not know what it meant. It sounded like you had a mother and father but the soil was your mother and father too. It sounded like you had another mother and father. The men had said everybody was a child of the soil. That meant that everybody had the same father and mother though they had different mothers and fathers ... Could the people who marched into the town singing and chanting be children of the soil? What about policemen and soldiers? What about sergeants and superintendents? What about thieves and robbers and murderers and rapists? What about teachers and priests and drunkards and church people? What about Overseers and Prime Ministers and Chiefs? What about white people? What about cripples and beggars and doctors and businessmen? What about mad people and people who hanged themselves?

He thought about it.

He didn’t know. (*HT*: 88-89)

This exhaustive itinerary of colonial society exposes the contradictions of the nationalist claim for *universal* rights to the land for all *Rhodesian* Africans. But at the same time it also encapsulates a very real and urgent ideal that Benjamin, understandably confused (he is both urbanised and colonially educated), later accepts. What his subsequent emergence from this doubt (which is at no point final) suggests, is that the nationalism of the liberation movement was actually experienced as a *mobile* condition of *becoming*, of emergence, rather being rooted in a static condition of *being* (i.e. to be *born* a ‘son of the soil’).

Reinforcing both the immediate and historical contingency of the freedom fighter’s unity—their “common fate” discussed above—it is therefore hard to countenance an uncritical reading of nationalism and its relation to ‘the land’ in the novel. In a paper contrasting *Harvest of Thorns* with Nyamfukudza’s *The Non-believer’s Journey*, Jo Dandy (2002) veers towards such a reading. Whilst her analysis of the tension between Benjamin’s private and Pasi Nema Sellout’s public “roles” is

incisive, her claim that as “a guerrilla, Benjamin (or Pasi) returns to his cultural roots and becomes a part of the land itself, reliant on its protection, such as for food or camouflage” (93), is in my view gravely misleading. There is, admittedly, no question that force of circumstance necessarily sees the fugitive guerrilla have a close connection to the land (or more appropriately ‘the bush’ in this context) which provides his shelter (and Dandy gives several apposite examples). However, the childhood narrative clearly shows that his ‘cultural roots’ are urban, not rural, and derived from a colonial and Christian system of education. What Dandy’s examples infer is the singular experience of an alienated child-soldier, a guerrilla who is compelled to disavow community and seek refuge *in the bush*; but at no point do they carry the ideological force that Dandy insinuates in arguing that he ‘becomes a part of the land itself’.

By using ‘the bush’ instead of ‘the land’ here, I mean to indicate that the former implies a profoundly different social and cultural experience of rural space from the latter. Benjamin the guerrilla experiences rural space in a radically different way to the peasants and farm workers that have grown up living on ‘the land.’ The killing of Ma Tawanda, the co-opting of the proud baas-boy Msindo into his white employer’s murder and the guerrilla’s flight through an inhospitable landscape following their mythologised “battle on the hill”—these all run counter to Dandy’s argument that by going to war in ‘the bush’ Benjamin in some way returns to, or becomes a part of, his archaic cultural ‘roots’ in ‘the land’.

The transience and contingency of the group’s *connection* with Sachikonye’s village, their land, is shown in chapter thirty. They are re-assigned to a different district when it becomes clear they have become dangerously compromised. On their journey they are led through “mystical hills” by a guide who invokes “the spirits of the land to give them a safe passage through that area where it was said travellers who had not heeded the laws of the soil and wandered in a trance until they were driven to death.” (HT: 214) It is not the ‘spirits of the land’ that break their unit(y), however, but an equally ephemeral ambush: a barbaric acid booby-trap sprayed by the Rhodesian military. When they finally reach a village the remaining fighters gorge themselves on the beer and food given them, enacting a gross drunken parody of Baas Die’s politically mobilising *pangwe* (village meeting) from chapter twenty-two. What these episodes illustrate is that the tactical expediencies and violent reality of fighting the guerrilla war frustrated guerrilla-peasant solidarity, even when in other circumstances,

in other 'lands', the opposite might have been equally true.⁷⁸ Benjamin flees from and returns to his township home from a space-time of experience *in* 'the bush,' not *on* 'the land.'

Whilst Dandy rightly highlights the distinction "between the busy, crowded, stifling surroundings of the township, and the freedom and expansiveness of the country" (95), her discussion of spatial representation does not consider the importance of Veit-Wild's narrative 'frame.' The novel begins and ends with Benjamin's *return* from the bush, emphasising the difficulty he finds reintegrating with *his* 'cultural roots' in the township. Representations of the two spaces (and those in between) have to be considered in light of both the particular narrative perspective used, as well as the overarching tone of critique which this frame offers.

We observe, then, that when Benjamin leaves his township on a train to the east, travelling overnight, he arrives first at *another* urban-space, "which resembled his home town, as if the two had been fashioned from the same model." The difference is that in this town the 'modelled' asymmetries of colonial space are even more in evidence: the "business section was perched on a hill like some giant concrete nest. Below him he could see shimmering township houses laid out like thousands of cardboard boxes in the valley, and the plush white suburbs on the hills slopes, out of the pall of industrial smoke." Far from fleeing to his 'cultural roots' to fight for the liberation of the land-Land, Benjamin is driven to and beyond this uncannily familiar space by a heady mix of adventure and fear.

At the bus station he asks for the bus going furthest east, and his choice aptly reflects his contradictory sense of purpose: "'Zinyamba, then,' said Benjamin, taking comfort in the fact that it began with a 'Z', *as if that last letter of the alphabet could transport him to the borders of his anxiety.*" (HT: 100, my italics) Although offering an illuminating perspective into the variegated spaces produced by the colonial capitalist state, Benjamin's journey, ultimately, does not see him escape them. By contrast, it is the familiar urban sprawl—a colonially produced space—to which he returns. His experience therefore *resists* a triumphal reading: the urban space he left remains unchanged, and the text makes no reference to the redistribution of rural or urban land following independence.

⁷⁸ David Lan, for instance, has famously written about the cooperation and political/spiritual syncretism between guerrillas, spirit mediums and rural communities in the Dande region of northern Zimbabwe in *Guns and Rain: Guerrillas and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe* (1985).

In a bar-room conversation with his sister's fiancée, Dickinson, near the end of the novel, Benjamin offhandedly talks of the "many ironies of this war" (*HT*: 242), but also of the complex experience of the freedom-fighter: "There's nothing to talk about, really. If the bush could speak then it could tell your story." It cannot, of course, without mediation by those who would re-order its many contradictions according to their particular ideology, their 'master-narrative'. Benjamin's subsequent remarks thus explain the fragmented form the novel takes:

When you are trying to piece together the broken fragments of your life it hurts to think back. The worst thing is to come back and find nothing has changed. I look at my father and mother and brother and sister, at the house in which I was born, at the township in which I grew up – people prefer to call it a suburb now – and I see the same old house, the same old street and the same old faces struggling to survive. We won the war, yes, but it's foolish to start thinking about victory ... The real battle will take a long, long time; it may never even begin. (*HT*: 243)

This passage, of which part is also used as an epigraph for this chapter, recalls a familiar motif of post-colonial deflation upon finding that little has changed with independence (the "mourning after" as Neil Lazarus has termed it (1990)), except for the nominal, but by no means substantive changes to urban space. The 'township' becomes a 'suburb' for example. But this deflation nonetheless gives way to a redemptive vision in the final chapter.

Whilst Benjamin is unable to 'connect' with the villagers on (or rather *for*) whose land he fought, in his final contact of the conflict he assumes responsibility for a girlfriend, Nkazana, whose family is killed in a Rhodesian raid on their village. Orphaned by the conflict, she returns with Benjamin to his mother's home. The final chapter sees the birth of a son to them and Benjamin's avowed wish to fully emerge from the shadow of his father's betrayals and his family's atrophy: "He's only twenty and has no job or house of his own but he tells himself he'll do all he can to raise the little bundle of humanity in the cot ... he tells himself he'll do it." (*HT*: 248)

This mantra of personal and social responsibility can be read, arguably, as a resolute and affirmative gesture towards the post-colonial nation, albeit a 'wounded nation' as Veit-Wild notes. On the other hand, Primorac (2003) argues that the sustained ambivalence of Benjamin's personal/private roles, foreclosing a

consolidated ‘national allegory,’ is typified by the naming of the new son: “‘Zvenyika’ can mean ‘about the country,’ or simply ‘politics.’ At the end of the *Harvest of Thorns*, Zvenyika’s future, and that of his land, remain unknown.” Based on her interview with Chinodya (2003), she associates the indeterminacy of this veiled allegorical technique with a form of “self-censorship” that is manifestly a feature of much Zimbabwean literature in the late 1980s and 1990s: “Withholding the articulation of public emergence in *Harvest of Thorns* may be read as a technique of political subtlety, executed in the manipulation of genre.”(147)

Whichever reading is chosen, it is clear that the kind of nationalism that Chinodya alludes to in the novel—which is to say a contradictory and unconsolidated process of *becoming* rather than a static and conservative notion of *being*—is in his artistic vision ultimately a redemptive, not a damning project. However, Benjamin’s success in traversing the variegated spaces of the Zimbabwean nation and returning to his family, and also in accepting responsibility for the next generation at the end of the novel, brings a seemingly pre-determined patriarchal dimension to the question of personal/public emergence. It is one that the likes of Hove and Vera have spent their careers attempting to rewrite. At the very least, as Gunner (1991) suggests, “Chinodya’s narrative, working in a more realist mode, shows women in secondary roles whilst it focuses on the uncertain future of the fighter figure.”(83)

***The Stone Virgins* (2002): from land to habitat**

Independence, which took place three years ago, has proved us a tenuous species, a continent with land but no habitat. We are out of bounds in our own reality. (SV: 82)

This epigraph captures the essential failure of the nationalist movement in Zimbabwe. While the political transition from white-settler to black majority rule was made in 1980, the return and redistribution of ‘lost lands’ was disabled by political and economic expediency. Despite the early promises of independence, encapsulated in the novel’s images of the female freedom fighters who return to Kezi during the cease-fire, ZANU (PF)’s desire to consolidate their political hegemony sees the return of political violence to the inhabitants of Matabeleland. And so the characters of *The Stone Virgins* are denied the right to belonging to the new nation, to *inhabit* it. What habitat they do have—the village of Kezi and the sacred landscape of the Gulati

hills—is ravaged by the post-independence violence. Yet, by the end of the novel we have moved to independent Bulawayo, a rehabilitated colonial city in which space for healing and growth, for *independence*, can be found.

By focalising the narration not only through Nonceba, a female victim of the violence, but also through Sibaso, the disaffected freedom fighter turned ‘dissident’ who *commits* that violence, Vera offers a damning but also searching appraisal of how the nationalist project has been distorted—to the point of failure. But there is also a muted utopian dimension to the novel that Vera has previously resisted in her writing. Where Mazvita and Phephelaphi’s *pure longing for land* yearned for a space, both in material and abstract terms, that might provide shelter or refuge to the individual, the emphasis in this novel is to explore how that space might be realised in terms of the communal—perhaps even the national. Nonceba’s journey, from desecrated Kezi to the *fine space* she finds in Bulawayo thus offers a discreet allegory of this process. It is a journey which re-imagines the relationship between the land and the Land, which searches for the *habitat* that neither have been able to provide.

‘history fades into the chaos of the hills, but it does not vanish’

Unlike Chinodya’s Benjamin, Sibaso is unable to return to his family or to his township community. When demobilised at the end of the war he is prevented from taking part in either a personal or a national project of reconstruction. He does return to his home in Njube township, Bulawayo, but only to learn that his father left some time ago. As the township celebrates independence, Sibaso is left dejected, ab-jected even. His only consolation is the discovery of his high school copy of Solomon Mutswairo’s *Feso*,⁷⁹ from which falls the scrawled map of his escape to ‘the bush’ in order to fight in the war as a youth. Being the only path open to him, Sibaso returns to stalk the sacred hills of Gulati, south of Bulawayo, as a ‘dissident.’ Lacking community, political leadership and with no clear ‘enemy’ to fight against, the mythic sense of history documented by *Feso* and imbued within the landscape he returns to becomes distorted. He is doomed to repeat the penumbral violence of the guerrilla war

⁷⁹ Like Benjamin’s exposure to newspapers, Mutswairo’s *Feso* (1957) is an important socio-historical detail as it was the first Shona-language novel written and published in Rhodesia. Terence Ranger discusses the importance of this text for Sibaso, indicating “an early idealistic cultural nationalism” (2002: 213) centred on Shona spirituality and Nehanda’s legacy in particular. *Feso* is the first novel in what might be called a mythogenic tradition, to which all Hove’s novels and Vera with *Nehanda* (1993) have contributed.

for which he can find no closure. In this way he is *symptomatic* of the self-destructive forces unleashed by a rushed and inadequate political settlement to the liberation struggle. He finds himself adrift in ‘a country with land but no habitat.’

Following Independence, Sibaso’s narrative is interwoven with Nonceba’s, a young woman living with her sister in the village of Kezi, south of Bulawayo. Even when he brutally attacks the sisters, decapitating Thenjiwe, raping and cutting off the lips of Nonceba, Bull-Christiansen (2004) suggests that the narrative affects a kind of “perverted” Bakhtinian “dialogue” (92-94). It is a remarkable, controversial piece of story-telling. Stephen Chan (2005) describes it as an “exquisite” “choreography” of trauma that “embraces both those who kill and those who barely survive being killed.”(274-275) Although Sibaso is the agent of unspeakable violence and death, the dialogic narration does not apportion blame to him as an individual, but rather to the condition he represents.⁸⁰

In a way similar to Mazvita and her baby, the trauma and displacement of war has left Sibaso in a psychically and socially abject condition. He also is ‘without a name’: “in a war, you discard names like old resemblances ... A part of you conceals itself, so that not everything is destroyed, only a part; the rest perishes like cloud” (SV: 82). The very fact that Nonceba learns his name after the assault as (somewhat incomprehensibly) he rationalises his actions to her through an analogy with the lives of spiders,⁸¹ indicates a shard of redemption, gesturing to the slender vestige of humanity that he might still retain: “There is a tragic innocence that knows nothing but death, that survives nothing but death.” (SV: 82)

In terms of its overt political intervention, the novel pivots on the distinction between the violence Sibaso commits and the government sponsored destruction of Kezi. Whereas the latter expresses the brutally impersonal authoritarianism of ZANU PF’s ‘official nationalism’, the former offers us an insight in to how the anti-colonial nationalism (which, in this area, meant Joshua Nkomo’s ZAPU-ZIPRA guerrillas) that preceded it was able to fall so low. Sibaso sees himself as Nehanda’s votary, protected “with her bones.”(SV: 117) He is the avatar of a cultural nationalism that has appropriated sacred spaces, memory and myth in order to support its political

⁸⁰ As Stephen Chan (2005) adds, it is a “novel that ensures its readers know of the cost of political violence.”(274)

⁸¹ Spiders are a crucial intertextual motif in this novel and *Nehanda*, discussed in length by Bull-Christiansen (2004): “Sibaso’s description of the spiders forms an incoherent and fragmented narrative of the nation, which stands in a sharp contrast to the grand narratives of the spirit of the nation’s struggle in *Nehanda*. (101)

ideology. Brutalised by war, his relationship to this culture is warped. He sees Nonceba and Thenjiwe as sacrificial—they are the ‘stone virgins’ painted in the caves that ‘shelter’ him in the hills. These images depict a ritual which ensures reincarnation for an ancient king, perpetuating his sovereignty in a spiritual temporality.

From an allegorical perspective this resonates with ZANU (PF)’s increasing obsession with sovereignty at the turn of the century. They constitute a very private tragedy, however, as Sibaso likewise sacrifices the innocent sisters to a ‘dead past’—to the spiritual temporality of a profaned cultural nationalism:

He considers the woman in his arms ... He sees her dancing heels, her hands chaste dead bone, porously thin, painted on a rock. Her neck is leaning upon a raised arrow, her mind pierced by the sun. She is a woman from very far, from long ago, from the naked caves in the hills of Gulati. She does not belong here. She bears the single solitude of flame, the shape and form of a painted memory.

He thrusts the body to the ground: a dead past.” (SV: 78)

She ‘does not belong here’, Sibaso says of Thenjiwe, thinking of the stone virgin; but neither does he. Though he claims a spiritual connection to the land, to the Gulati hills—“The rocks split open, time shifts, and I confess I am among the travellers who steal shelter from the dead”(SV: 104)—he finds his actual *refuge*, his *shelter*, in a crater full of dead and dismembered bodies: “the afterbirth of war, its umbilical presence.”(SV: 105) Like Vera’s ‘stray women’, Sibaso’s connection with the land is also ‘disturbed’ and ‘negative’. The spiritual landscape has become the *refuge* of a self-divided, self-destructive cultural nationalism.

By contrast, the social landscape of Kezi and the Thandabantu store, especially when the female freedom-fighters return during the cease-fire, represents the potentially beneficent and protean ‘habitat’ which has been denied Sibaso and successive generations of ‘stray women’: “This veranda was their abode; they transformed it, and they became the ultimate embodiment of freedom.” (SV: 130) But by also representing the Ndebele heartland Nkomo’s ZAPU party, it is ruthlessly destroyed by soldiers intent on deploying the iron fist of ZANU (PF)’s political hegemony: “Atrocious, yes, but purposeful.”(SV: 135)⁸² Independence in

⁸² See Ranger’s paper (2003) for a discussion of the novel’s engagement with the ‘Gukurahundi’ massacres in Matabeleland in the period 1982-5—a state sponsored pogrom that killed up to 20,000

Matabeleland signals the *beginning* of a new conflict in which the possibility of national unity, of a truly *communal* memory, is ‘buried’:

The war begins. A curfew is declared. A state of emergency. No movement is allowed. The ceasefire ceases. It begins in the streets, the burying of memory. The bones rising. Rising. Every Road block out of Bulawayo is covered with soldiers and police, teeming like ants. Road blocks. Bombs. Landmines. Hand-grenades. Memory is lost. Independence ends. Guns rise. Rising anew. In 1981.(SV: 65)

The mythic motif of resurrection and revolution, ‘the bones rising’, now directly indicts Shona “quasi-nationalism” (Bull-Christiansen 2004: 90) in a legacy of postcolonial violence and atrocity. Like Stephen Chan’s discussion of abjection, Brian Raftopoulos (2004) links the *dehumanising* aspect of this violence to the atavism of ZANU (PF)’s anti-colonial nationalism in the post-colonial period, of which Sibaso, Thenjiwe and Nonceba, and the people of Kezi become representative victims:

For the ruling party, violence in the post-colonial context is an extension of the liberation struggle—a necessary means to achieve a political agenda. The dehumanising and delegitimising effects of this strategy on Zimbabwean citizens have been considered essential for maintaining state power. (17)

healing and habitat

Despite the atrocities that the novel foregrounds, the social, cultural and political landscapes are not entirely desecrated and dehumanised. Through the narrative of Nonceba’s recovery and co-habitation with Cephas Dube in Bulawayo, the novel offers a discrete reconciliation of different ethnic spaces, alongside a transformation of traditional heterosexual relations. In this narrative the ethical dilemma of establishing a loving relationship from the most horrific of circumstances is closely alloyed to the nationalitarian project of creating a *differential* national space (Primorac 2003: 186). That is the utopian promise of reconciling a self-divided country (which in Vera’s fiction also means self-divided individuals). As Bull-Christiansen remarks:

Ndebeles. For the most recent and judicious account of this political repression, and the relatively diminutive violence of the so-called ‘dissidents’ between Independence in 1980 and the Unity Accord of 1987, see chapter 9 of Alexander et al (2000).

As an allegory of the national healing process, the relationship between Nonceba and Cephas outlines an ongoing process of healing, which must occur in the context of restoring history, and an articulation of the absolute claim of the dead who must be remembered. (2004: 91)

Cephas first arrives in Kezi before independence, falling in love with Thenjiwe but betraying a possessiveness which the reader of *Vera* knows to be wary of:

he places his foot where she has left an imprint in the soil, wanting to possess, already, each part of her, her weight on soft soil, her shape. He wants to preserve her in his own body, gathering her presence from the soil like perfume. (SV: 38)

This possessiveness is poetic, but once we read of Sibaso's violent and almost absolute possession of Thenjiwe's body in the murderous 'dance' (Chan), it immediately assumes an uncanny foreboding, alerting the reader to the danger inherent even in a benevolent desire 'to preserve her in his own body.' The reference to 'gathering her presence from the soil' is no less resonant. Both Ranger and Primorac identify a positive semantic relation between Thenjiwe and the Kezi landscape: "The beautiful Thenjiwe moves through and embodies the Kezi landscape" (Ranger 2002: 207); "The life-enhancing qualities of the Kezi landscape are embodied by Thenjiwe" (Primorac 2003: 181)—but neither relates it to the potential reductiveness of this trope, and of the subsequent victimisation to which she is thus bound. That said, Thenjiwe, at this point at least, displays a mastery over her connection to the landscape. She dictates the relationship with Cephas through a benign economy of ethno-ecological exchange. Envisaging their relationship as a connection between their home landscapes, she wants to bear him a child called "Mazhanje", a fruit from Chimanimani (Mashonaland) (SV: 45), and to reveal the secrets of the "Marula" tree, indigenous to Kezi (Matabeleland):

She wants to discover the shape of its roots and show them to him till these roots are no longer under the ground but become lines planted on his palms, each stroke a path for their dreaming. She knows that if she finds the shape of these roots, at least, he would know a deep truth about her land, about Kezi, about the water buried underneath their feet. (SV: 46)

Their relationship is thus defined by their cultural connections to, and an ecological experience of, *ethnic* space: 'the deep truth about her land' that Thenjiwe embodies, *pace* Ranger and Primorac. She resists the allure of their newfound intimacy, however, and they part, the dream of transcending their ethnic difference foreclosed.

When Cephas later reads of the attack and sees Nonceba's picture in the newspaper, he is drawn to her, wanting to help the uncanny double of the woman he loved. Though Nonceba initially returns to Kezi she finds it too changed, too vanquished of memory and hope to live in: "She is without shelter ... nothing can be the same ... Kezi, her place of birth, is no longer her own ... She loved every particle there, the people, the animals, the land." (SV: 90) By visiting her at the hospital and then later helping her move to the city, Cephas provides a surrogate form of 'shelter' that helps her come to terms with her trauma. In this way Nonceba's personal journey sees her emerge from the leitmotif of victimhood that all of Vera's 'stray women' seem unable to transcend. To facilitate this, however, Cephas has to resist his desire. He quite literally has to allow her 'a room of her own' in his city apartment, so that they can "live in each others solitude. In a way they live separately". (SV: 171)

The transition from the trope of *possession* to one of *shelter* is crucial here. Unlike Vera's previous urbanised characters, who have all been forced to share ubiquitously cramped rooms in poorly serviced townships, in the thriving commercial centre of 'independent' Bulawayo the racial asymmetries of private property are being redrawn. Cephas has his own flat, complete with spare room. He is able to "shelter her, shelter her in her dreams"(SV: 175). This newfound, *hospitable* private space provides Cephas and Nonceba the opportunity to nurture a platonic relationship, a *co-habitation* that allows each to respect the other's autonomy. This proves easier for Nonceba, who has experienced a radical alteration to her senses of self and otherness, as well as her home 'habitat'. It is Cephas, on the other hand, who remains most haunted by the past—a past which constitutes "the tragic circumstances of their unity" (SV: 170): "Each morning, he wakes to Thenjiwe's presence; to her absolute absence. Must he feel guilt, as he does? Must his love feel like a failure, a house collapsed?" (SV, 178)

Cephas's hospitality to Nonceba becomes exemplary. He encounters personal responsibility within the *national* memory of past violence and injustice. The metonymic association of his love with the atrophied nation of Zimbabwe—the

collapsed 'house of stone'—is clearly also intended to be instructive. Torn between the failed love of his past (Thenjiwe) and a cautious, undefined form of loving in the present (Nonceba), Cephas' newfound relation to Nonceba reconstructs gender relations in a way that rivals the implicit gendering of nationalism and points to a truly *postcolonial* condition.

As Primorac (2003) suggests, his role as a historian, "restoring kwoBulawayo, the seat of the pre-colonial Ndebele state", reinforces the allegorical dimension. By treating "the ancient seat of the Ndebele Kingdom as a nationalist symbol", it "represents the kind of new nation that understands the need to 'restore the past.'"(186) And so the final sentences of the novel promise to deliver Nonceba and Cephas from the legacy of psychic and social abjection in the act of creating a habitat for both the national and the personal; by creating a *nest* in which the traumatised memory of the past might be healed and used as a platform for the future: "His task is to learn to re-create the manner in which the tenderest branches bend, meet, and dry, the way the grass folds smoothly over this frame and weaves a nest, the way it protects the cool, liveable places within—deliverance." (SV: 154)

However, in Stephen Chan's (2005) more pessimistic reading, the historical truths Vera confronts in her final novel threaten to overwhelm this utopian dimension. In her ongoing project to depict what 'the land' as a *fine space* of freedom may look like— refuge, shelter and now a habitat—Vera's novel conjures "a conditional healing poised between a personal world that has been shattered and a public world that wills itself against healing."(380) From one perspective he is of course right. As Operation Murambatsvina has recently illustrated, for a great many Zimbabweans the possibility of finding their own *fine space* of freedom—be it in the material sense of having access to rural or urban land, or in the abstract senses of citizenship, national unity and freedom from the penumbra of political violence—is no more likely now than it was 25 years ago.

Like most post-colonial Zimbabwean novelists before her, the weight of 'official nationalism' leaves little room for Vera to engage directly with the ongoing problem of land reform. But it would be a mistake to suggest that she ignores or marginalises the politics of land. Instead, and as I have argued, her novels rival the master-narrative of 'official' history by *exploding* its conception of 'the land'. In her fiction after *Nehanda* (1993), the spiritual temporality of 'the land' is desecrated and distorted, first by patriarchal violence, associated with the liberation war as well as

traditional domestic power relations, and increasingly by a cultural nationalism that mythologises the anti-colonial struggle. At the same time Vera is chary of depicting an alternative or authentic relationship to 'the land'. By focusing instead on 'negative' and 'disturbed' relationships to both the land and the nation, her novels assume a tragic weight yet also contain a powerful immanent critique of nationalism and patriarchy. The ideas of refuge, shelter and habitat that she returns to but never renders concretely might be usefully thought of as being *contingent* in the same way that affiliations in Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns* are.

Both *Harvest of Thorns* and *The Stone Virgins* foreground the destructive contradictions that proliferate both directly and indirectly from the nationalist project. In this respect they are consistent with almost all of the Zimbabwean novels I discuss. But they also contain redemptive elements: Benjamin's reconstructed family; Nonceba and Cephas' platonic co-habitation. They are both impractical and utopian notions but nonetheless contain the imaginative kernel of far more practical propositions. At the same time it must also be recognised, in conclusion, that the authors I have focused on in this final section by no means share a perspective on what a reconstructed form of national community might entail. Chinodya would no doubt be as reluctant to celebrate the limited appropriation of *private* space on the part of the emergent black bourgeoisie, as Vera is loath to condone the continuing influence of the patriarchal family in his vision. But what both novels share, having exploded nationalist assumptions about 'the land' in different ways and in different contexts, is a commitment to community and reconstruction. These novels suggest that such a commitment must provide the vital foundation for a project of national unity if Zimbabwe is to have any hope of coming to terms with its traumatic past and recovering from its current crisis.

Chapter 4 – From Repossession to Reform: a new terrain in South African fiction of the 1990s.

Historically, the land in white English South African fiction has raised hermeneutic questions: how to read it and how to find a language to speak about it.(Nuttall 1996: 219)

In recent Zimbabwean fiction we find writers trying to reclaim meaning from a dominating, politicised vision of ‘the land’. In recent South African novels, by contrast, such an effort is subject, inevitably it would seem, to the enduring hermeneutic questions that Sarah Nuttall identifies: not just how to read ‘the land’, but how ‘to find a language to speak about it’. As J.M. Coetzee makes clear in *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (1988), these hermeneutic problems have often corresponded to racial and ideological agendas, particularly at times of political crisis and demographic change. This chapter explores how the transition to democracy in the 1990s constitutes just such a moment. In the same essay, for example, Nuttall suggests that Damon Galgut’s *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* (1991) and Elleke Boehmer’s *An Immaculate Figure* (1993) attempt to democratise received ways of thinking and writing ‘the land’, clearing “a space beyond an appropriative ownership of the land, a space for a different relation, one which might institute a less exclusivist sense of belonging.” But despite this, the novels seem to struggle against the combined weight of the history of land and the history of *writing* ‘the land’ in South Africa, so “that in each, such a space remains, as yet, largely unwritten.”(228)

The reasons for this impasse return us to the hermeneutic but also ideological problems facing South African writers, black as well as white, since the 1970s. Though ownership of the nation has been transferred to the black majority, ownership of the land is largely unchanged. It remains a space subject to contesting ideologies of belonging as it was in the 1970s. The major difference is that since the democratic transition in 1994, the possibility of ‘legally’ regaining (or indeed losing) land has become a potential reality. By relying now on reform rather than revolution—as was the case in the 1970s and 1980s—the mechanisms for doing so create the possibility

for a new form of nationhood based on the redistribution of, and cohabitation on, the land.

That, at least, is the promise of democracy in the new South Africa. But where Nuttall looks for the emergence of a corresponding structure of feeling in the representation of land in contemporary white fiction, she encounters instead the burden of history. In what follows I suggest that political changes in the 1990s compel writers of all races and ethnicities to return to such histories of dispossession and resistance in an effort to understand and explore but also, at times, to protest the new meaning that 'the land' assumes in post-apartheid political discourse: that is, as a ground of reconciliation, rather than contest.

Between Nelson Mandela's release in 1990 and the first democratic elections in 1994, the National Party and ANC negotiated a reconciliatory political settlement that few political commentators and even fewer novelists had anticipated in the preceding decade. Several white writers chose instead to experiment with prophetic allegories of social upheaval in a revolutionary or post-revolutionary future.⁸³ This contrasts with writing by black writers that, while being immersed in the gritty, urban present of black resistance also, in Michael Chapman's (2001) words, "saw amid the blood the images of painful, inevitable rebirth." (396).⁸⁴ In effect, this is similar to what the new political dispensation asks of all South Africans after 1994: to uncover the unjust, bloody history of the present and redeem it. But as questions of dispossession and reparation, atonement and forgiveness rise to the surface in fiction as a result, so to does an implicit *critique* of the political discourse of reconciliation that drives them, especially concerning rural development and the land reform process.

This chapter traces the contours of this critique as it emerges in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999) and Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* (2000), but is also 'pre-emergent' in Laurretta Ngcobo's *And They Didn't Die* (1990). These contours, expressed as or in relation to structures of feeling in the novels, are read against the

⁸³ See, for examples, Karel Schoeman *The Promised Land* (1978 [1974]), Nadine Gordimer *July's People* (1981) and J.M. Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983).

⁸⁴ Chapman is specifically referring to the 'Soweto' novels: Mongane Wally Serote's *To Every Birth It's Blood* (1981), Miriam Tlali's *Amandla* (1981), Sipho Sepamla's *A Ride on the Whirlwind* (1981) and Mbulelo Mzamane's *The Children of Soweto* (1982). We might add Mtutulezi Matshoba's *Call Me Not a Man* (1979) to that list, but Njabulo Ndebele with *Fools and Other Stories* (1983), like Bessie Head's writing in the 1970s stands apart from his peers in his dismissal of spectacle, heroism and politics in favour of a more nuanced appreciation of everyday life.

reconstructed nationalist topography of the ANC, as outlined in the 1997 [1998] Department of Land Affairs' 'White Paper on South African Land Policy'. With this seminal document, the newly elected government gave itself the mandate to finally "address the consequence" of "Our history of conquest and dispossession, of forced removals and a racially-skewed distribution of land"(1998, foreword). Derek Hanekom, Minister of Land Affairs at the time, stresses the "three key elements of the land reform programme—restitution, redistribution and tenure reform", which address pivotal requirements laid down in the 1994 constitution.⁸⁵ Though as the compilers of the White Paper subsequently acknowledge, considering "the fact that more than 3.5 million people and their descendants have been victims of racially based dispossession"(1998: 29), the task is mammoth. But as events in Zimbabwe since 2000 have proved, it is one central to ensuring the long term sustainability of democracy in South Africa (Cousins 2003).

Consequently, the "White Paper encourages the reader to view our land in this perspective: as a cornerstone in the development of our country."(1998: xv) The inclusive gesture in the refrain 'our land' 'our country', here, is central to the post-apartheid government's attempt to reconfigure the terms of South African nationalism. It does not only imply reconstructing attitudes to the land itself—as both a ground of reconciliation and a 'cornerstone' for national development—as Jennifer Wenzel (2000) points out (with reference to J.M. Coetzee's 1987 Jerusalem Prize acceptance speech⁸⁶), it is also an expression of new, equitable social relations between those cohabiting *on* the land:

This agricultural, geological, economic, social, political, historical, and ultimately post-apartheid "nationalist" definition of land offers, in effect, a new terrain, a new setting for South African history during and after land reform. The limit of South African land—its finity—is an epistemological and geographic boundary that will "bind all together" and create new relations between South African citizens concerning land. (97)

⁸⁵ Prior to the publication of the White Paper these constitutional requirements had already been acted on in a barrage of eight separate land reform laws: *The Restitution of Land Rights Act*, 22 of 1994, *The Provision of Certain Land for Settlement Act*, 126 of 1993, *The Development Facilitation Act*, 67 of 1995, *The Upgrading of Land Tenure Rights Act*, 112 of 1993, *The Land Administration Act*, 2 of 1995, *The Land Reform (Labour Tenants) Act*, 3 of 1996, *The Interim Protection of Informal Rights Act*, 31 of 1996, *The Communal Property Associations Act*, 28 of 1996 (Department of Land Affairs 1998: 35)

⁸⁶ The relevant passage refers to the endurance of white South Africans' love for the physical land, over a love for its 'other' inhabitants (Coetzee 1992: 97).

Given the preoccupation with reading 'the land' and finding a language to speak about it in white South African literature in English, we might expect, as Nuttall did in the early 1990s, that such political changes would present solutions to the hermeneutic questions she identifies. On a positive note we can say that racial distinctions in writing 'the land' and broaching the hermeneutic dilemma are slowly being overcome, notably through the work of Zoë Wicomb and Zakes Mda.⁸⁷ On the other hand, however, lies the simple fact that the 'new terrain' Wenzel speaks of has yet to materialise. As Cheryl Walker (2005) outlines, the mechanism behind the democratisation of land ownership has so far failed in its 'nationalist' aims:

a 2001 survey found 68 per cent of black respondents agreeing with the statement that 'Land must be returned to blacks in South Africa, no matter what the consequences are for the current owners and for political stability'. The inability of the state's land reform programme to transfer more than three and-a-half per cent of the country's farm land to black ownership over the past ten years is perceived not simply as a failure in land policy but, more fundamentally, as a failure to transform the very nature of society—to address black claims to full citizenship, through land ownership, and to make amends for the insults to human dignity that black people have suffered as a collectivity through dispossession in the past. (806)

Walker's subsequent argument provides a fundamental challenge to the 'allegorical' narrative that this thesis in many ways propagates: that purposeful national liberation can only be concomitant with a successful resolution to the 'land question'. Along with the 'impasse' in delivery, she argues, there is also a much overlooked 'impasse' in expectations. In many ways this is down to how the "the land question has been constructed and understood in South African history"(823) and, by extension, its literature. What is needed is a new, fundamentally more pragmatic approach: for "the limits to land reform that derive not from the politics of the past, nor from the programmatic failures of the present, but from the intersection of significant demographic, ecological and social constraints." (807)

This is a remarkable formulation. Not only does it absolve the ANC of responsibility for the flaws in the neoliberal ideology which the program has been

⁸⁷ See, for examples, Zoë Wicomb's exploration of Griqua heritage in *David's Story* (2000) and Zakes Mda's dissection of provincial life in *The Madonna of Exelsior* (2002).

indentured to, it also divorces the ‘demographic, ecological and social constraints’ of the present from their historical roots in ‘the politics of the past’. Controversial as it is then, the realpolitik of Walker’s argument can nonetheless be found in the social dramas of the three novels under discussion. They all focus on ‘the intersection of significant demographic, ecological and social constraints’ that continue to stymie successive nationalist visions of ‘the land’. At the same time, however, it must be emphasised that these writers refuse to forget ‘the politics of the past’ or to forgive the ‘programmatic failures of the present’. Mda implicates both colonial history and present political policies in his satire of rural development, as does Coetzee more implicitly in his anti-pastoral novel, and Ngcobo subtly documents the limits to black nationalism’s historical project to politicise the links between town and country.

White Writing after the White Paper: J.M Coetzee’s *Disgrace* (1999)

Numerous critics have discussed the ambiguous ways in which responsibility, redress and reconciliation are figured and foreclosed in J.M Coetzee’s remarkably self-conscious *Disgrace* (1999). Few, however, touch on the parallels between such literary motifs and the actual factors which to date have stymied the land reforms laid out in the White Paper. In the section that follows I propose to do exactly this. It is an unfashionable mode of reading Coetzee, but one that I would argue is demanded by the text itself, as well as being signalled in observations that Coetzee has made relating to the ‘land question’ outside of his fiction. One advantage of this mode of enquiry is that it rearticulates what many see as the primarily ethical dimension of the novel in terms of a more historicised meditation on the politics of citizenship. My aim is to show how the novel can be read both as proponent and prolepsis of post-apartheid land reform, and by corollary as an important intervention into contemporary political debates.

The ‘land question’, South Africa’s most fundamental “burden of history” in Walker’s (2005) estimation, is acutely *felt* in the novel.⁸⁸ Through masterful use of

⁸⁸ Inevitably, of course, it is also ironised. A book David Lurie has written on William Wordsworth is called *The Burden of History*. Nonetheless, reading and writing ‘the land’ has proved to be one of the most enduring themes in J.M. Coetzee’s oeuvre. In his fiction, historiographic parody has been a favoured mode of engagement. In relation to the colonial romance, for example, we find this in the

free-indirect narrative, Coetzee renders profoundly singular personal experiences with an almost aggressive impersonality. The careful location of *Disgrace*, between the bureaucratic hub of Cape Town and the historic 'Frontier Country' of the Eastern Cape in the mid to late 1990s, allows him to incorporate the new political imperatives—restitution, redistribution and tenure reform—within his established deconstructive style as another means of 'rivalling' (1988b) the official narratives of political discourse. In this way *Disgrace* brings the contradictions of 'white writing' to bear on the idealism and contradictions of the White Paper.

These contradictions arise from two related issues. Firstly, the property clause (section 25) in the 1994 constitution that protects the right to privately held property from the apartheid era;⁸⁹ and secondly, the government's emphasis on a neoliberal market-based redistribution regime. We find the first of these dispersed in David Lurie's anxiety at the *place* of English and of individual liberty (his place, effectively) in the new society. More obviously, it is apparent in the provocative emphasis placed on Lucy and Petrus's genial relationship, needed for the crucial transfer of land that frames the novel. This emphasis on individual liberty and the right to private property is necessary because *individual* accountability or responsibility is neither reflected in the Constitution nor in the White Paper. No law, for example, can make Lucy give her land to Petrus. The second issue is played out through the ironic figuration of pastoral motifs in the novel. Just how realistic are the prospects of the peasant farmer, the

pioneer narrative of his ancestor, Jacobus Coetzee, in *Dusklands* (1974), and his tribute to Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* with *Foe* (1986). In the context of South Africa's specific heritage of land-writing genres, it is evident in the solipsistic *plaasroman* *In The Heart of the Country* (1976), his naïve memoir of farm-life in *Boyhood* (1997), as well as, of course, *Disgrace*, the anti-pastoral farm novel (1999). More obliquely, questions of space and historical responsibility emerge in the allegory of Empire, *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) and the "maternal pastoral" (Barnard 2002) of *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983). Of his non-fiction, *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (1988) has proved to be a seminal text in the project of de-mythologizing representations of 'the land' in white South African literature.

⁸⁹ Section 25 does not legally prevent expropriation of property. It is clause 2 that has proved to be the stumbling block of land reform; whereby "Property may be expropriated only in terms of law of general application

- a. for a public purpose or in the public interest; and
- b. subject to compensation, the amount of which and the time and manner of payment of which have either been agreed to by those affected or decided or approved by a court.
(<http://www.polity.org.za/html/govdocs/constitution/saconst.html?rebookmark=25>)

'In the public interest' necessitates a lengthy legal process that is 'demand led' (Lodge 2002: 73) and 'compensation' leaves the 'willing buyer, willing seller' logic open to the distortions of the market, thereby pricing out the majority of land claimants.

novel seems to suggest, unable to buy more than a few acres of land under this system? In these two issues we find a relationship between the hermeneutic problems of how to read (Lurie) and speak about the land (the anti-pastoral genre), and the ideological problems of land ownership and historical responsibility (Lucy and Petrus's relationship).

Dismissed for the sexual harassment of one of his students, David Lurie, Romantic scholar and Professor of Communications, flees Cape Town for his daughter Lucy's smallholding near the village of Salem in the Eastern Cape. It is a pastoral-esque exile from the city, but problematised in that the area Lurie retreats to is historically overdetermined in a way that is rare in Coetzee's fiction and antithetical to the idea of pastoral itself. Initially, his interest in the land itself is detached and impersonal. It is his daughter who fulfils the pastoral conceit. She loves the land, she dwells upon it; he arrives in the country already at a linguistic remove from it, equipped with the lexicon of Euro-South African landscape: *bouervrou*, *ländliche*, peasant, *paysan*, *eingewurzelt*, *bywoner*. That is enough for him, at least to begin with.⁹⁰

As Gareth Cornwell (2003) suggests, a farm in the region that witnessed a succession of bloody conflicts over land in the early 19th century "presents itself as the most logical setting for a story concerned at its core with entitlement to the land in post-apartheid South Africa." (3) The novel stages this engagement through Lucy's co-operation with Petrus, a 'neighbourly' black farmer (we cannot, it seems, avoid the term's lingering apartheid connotations) who helps her sell her modest produce and run her kennels. He is her "new assistant. In fact, since my March, my co-proprietor" (*D*: 62)).⁹¹ He is establishing his own farm adjacent to Lucy's, assisted by a loan from the Land Affairs department, and seems to be waiting for Lucy to give up her land to

⁹⁰ As the novel progresses Lurie's mastery of language is exposed in its inadequacy to the new situation that he finds himself in. Problems of cultural translation are figured ironically through stereotypical assumptions that emanate from Lurie's consciousness. For example: "He speaks Italian, he speaks French, but Italian and French will not save him here in darkest Africa." (*D*: 95) For a different perspective on the cultural resonance of Lurie's relation to landscape, his anxiety at being able "to apprehend the African landscape" in a Romantic fashion, see Barnard (2003: 216-217).

⁹¹ Georgina Horrel (2002) bases her argument on Lucy being an exemplary land-sharer, a "white hope", on the basis of this reference, indicating that Petrus is a "co-proprietor" of Lucy's land (17). This is incorrect. The narrative suggests that, 'since' March, Petrus has been a co-proprietor of the *kennels business*. The land transfer 'party' has not yet happened. There are still boundaries between Lucy and Petrus's lands. Later in the novel Lucy explains the terms for 'transferring' her land to Petrus: she gives up the land but keeps the farmhouse (*D*: 204). In this way the transfer is undermined as an exemplary or easy vision of 'communal' ownership. Horrel argues that Lucy undergoes a "complete relinquishing of all property" (2002: 31), but then, oddly, also quotes her stating the condition that she *keeps* the farmhouse.

him. This transfer is precipitated when Lucy and Lurie are attacked on the farm by three men, one of whom, Pollox, is under the care of Petrus. Lucy is raped and, provocatively, the novel ends with her becoming both pregnant and a *bywoner*, exchanging personal freedom for dependency and ownership for tenancy by “becoming a peasant” (*D*: 217) on Petrus’s land. Symbolically, she bears a child conceived of the rapacious violence to which he will be guardian.

Focalised through Lurie’s consciousness, this narrative of abject atonement is ironised by his distinctively settler-colonial sense of historical determination. Lucy, for example, is described as “a sturdy young settler” produced as much by “history” as by her parents. She is

a Frontier farmer of the new breed. In the old days, cattle and maize. Today, dogs and daffodils. The more things change the more they remain the same. History repeating itself, though in a more modest vein. Perhaps history has learned a lesson. (*D*: 62)

As the novel unfolds, however, it becomes clear that the ‘lesson’ only really begins with the attack. Rather than simply privileging a Nietzschean transcendence of history in this image of its eternal return, much of the work of the novel is intended to undermine the narrative authority that Lurie—and by implication the colonial medium of ‘English’ itself—assumes in animating the novel’s historical consciousness. While he slowly learns to shed his Byronic self-interest for the care of and responsibility to others (through his time with Bev Shaw and her condemned dogs), Lucy is figured ever more abjectly, beholden to history. She repeatedly resists her father’s attempts to read the attack and her rape as “history speaking through them” (*D*: 156), insisting instead that it is a private matter and refusing to have charges brought against Pollox. Such denial seemingly only reinforces a reading of historical responsibility however. As Lurie unwittingly assumes a Levinasian position of being-for the other, Lucy follows a path to “private salvation” (*D*: 112) by “living as other: a process that is at once deeply personal and yet impersonalising.” (Boehmer 2002: 343) This radical sense of responsibility is vocalised in two key passages that brought both the novel and Coetzee to the national gaze:

What if ... what if *that* is the price one has to pay for staying on? Perhaps that is how they look at it; perhaps that is how I should look at it too. They see me as owing

something. They see themselves as debt collectors, tax collectors. Why should I be allowed to live here without paying? Perhaps that is what they tell themselves? (*D*: 158)⁹²

Perhaps that is what I must learn to accept. To start at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity. (*D*: 205)

These passages bring us to the core of the novel's seemingly one-sided engagement with the 'land question' and the 'burden' of responsibility and reparation it brings. They raise vital questions: how, for example, can the *individual* atone for the injustices of *national* history? How can they do so without becoming a further victim of history in this process and, perhaps most pertinent of all, how might such imperatives be reconciled without having, as Karel Schoeman's (1992) novel of the same name has it, to 'take leave and go'? Without, that is, not only having to give up private property, but also a cultural heritage. Although these questions are primarily laid before Lurie and Lucy, the novel provides its provisional answers to them in the relationship and eventual exchange of positions between Lucy and Petrus.

The novel's ambiguous resolution sets up important issues yet to be explored sufficiently in critical responses; issues which lead from the ethical to the political in the problems they raise. Recalling Cherryl Walker's comments on the practical limits to land reform, such issues concern the 'intersection of significant demographic, ecological and social constraints'. We might well question, for example, the feasibility of either Lucy's or Petrus's *peasant* aspirations? Secondly, and less easily dismissed as a tendentious realist reading of the novel: what are we to make of *Petrus*'s sense of responsibility as a fully enfranchised citizen but only partly enfranchised landowner? How does the novel represent *his* claim to land on the one hand, and his attitude of accommodation towards Lucy in their reformed roles on the other? Coetzee's manipulation of genre provides a way of approaching these questions critically.

⁹² The novel has scandalised many in its representation of 'white guilt' and disavowal, coined 'Lucy syndrome' in the media. The novel was also famously attacked by ANC representatives for what were perceived as the enduring racist stereotypes that it harbours. For discussions of *Disgrace*'s reception in the South African public sphere see Attwell (2002) and MacDonald (2002).

Pastoral and Peasantry—can a local solution be a national one?

What is pastoral? At the centre of the mode, it seems to me, lies the idea of a local solution. The pastoral defines and isolates a space in which whatever cannot be achieved in the wider world (particularly the city) can be achieved. (Coetzee 1992: 61)

Given these remarks, the questions raised above can be distilled into the following question: what kind of pastoral is *Disgrace*? In its carefully chosen local setting, what does it signal in ‘the wider world’ that ‘cannot be achieved’? In his discussion of the novel, Gareth Cornwell (2002) emphasises Coetzee’s focus in *White Writing* on the Farm Novel and *plaasroman*, as pastoral genres, representing a “conflict between peasant and capitalist modes of production.” (Coetzee 1988a: 78-79, Cornwell 2002: 8) Whilst he points to the ironic foreclosure of the pastoral in this novel, he suggests one plausible conclusion that can be drawn from this: that the novel

seems to make the utopian gesture of imagining “a return to a peasant social order” similar to that envisaged in the German *Bauernroman* of the 1930s, staging—in the “new world” of post-apartheid South Africa—the restoration of a pastoral mythology long negated by the forces of colonial capital. This certainly seems to be the dominant effect of Lurie’s last view of Lucy in the novel. (9)

Such a pastoral mythology is indeed filtered through Lurie’s educated landscape palette. Not only does the final view of Lucy reinforce it—“Field-labour; peasant tasks, immemorial [...] *das ewig Weibliche*” (*D*: 217, 218)—but so too does his earlier précis of Petrus, embodiment of the new black peasantry, ready to capitalise on the White Paper proposals: “A peasant, a *paysan*, a man of the country”, but also a man who “has a vision of the future in which people like Lucy have no place.” (*D*: 117)

In her exploration of these and other pastoral markers in the text, Rita Barnard (2002) distinguishes between a genuine attempt to rehabilitate pastoral as a narrative mode in *Life and Times of Michael K*, and the ironic exposure of its limits in *Disgrace*. Whereas the former novel

does present, albeit in anorexic form, a new pastoral fantasy: a vision of rural life without patriarchal or colonial domination [...] In *Disgrace* Coetzee has relinquished this earlier dream of a maternal and deconstructive pastoral mode. In ‘the new South Africa’ of the novel, the urge to stake one’s claim, to own, and to procreate is forcefully present.” (389)

Nonetheless Barnard sees a “muted and vulnerable utopian dimension” in the novel:

[Its] penultimate scene may invite us to imagine the farm in the Eastern Cape as a place where the difficulties of cultural translation may be overcome, wordlessly, by bodily experiences: pregnancy, field labour, the materiality of dwelling on the land. (390)

This reading is persuasive in as much as it makes recourse to Coetzee’s professed arbiter of historical truth—the suffering body that is abject before language and history.⁹³ Whether this site of atonement is or can ever be beyond the discursive authority of all that *both* Lurie (‘the difficulties of cultural translation’) and Lucy (the enduring fantasy of land as female body, *das ewig Weibliche*, ‘dwelling on the land’) represent, is a moot point.⁹⁴ As with Cornwell’s ultimately recuperative discussion of pastoral in the novel, Barnard ignores the crucial anachronism embedded in the narrative: the way that it sets up the process of atonement or reparation as a transition *from* a peasant (Ettinger, Lucy) *to* a peasant (Petrus and Lucy) mode of production.

Given how precisely the Coetzee of *White Writing* historicizes the transition from peasant to capitalist agriculture in the pastoral traditions of the first half of the 20th century, this strikes me as incongruous. Coetzee (1988a):

...as we know, trouble was brewing even in the 1880s for the white proprietors of South Africa, trouble that has not ended a century later, whose effects it has been to

⁹³ In interview with David Attwell in *Doubling the Point* (1990) Coetzee offers a Rosetta Stone to his critics when he suggests that the representative capacity of his fiction is not completely enervated by the “endlessly sceptical processes of textualisation”. He points to the irrevocable materiality of the suffering body in his fiction to make his point, a “standard erected” as a gesture towards the truth: “Not grace then, but the body.” (248)

⁹⁴ The emphasis placed on “feminine abjection” by the novel, as both Elleke Boehmer (2002: 350) and Georgina Horrel (2002: 26, 32) highlight, reinforces a historical economy of silence and subjection for women. In this way *Disgrace* reveals a similar conflation of female identity and psychosocial abjection before the *national* imperatives of land reform, to that discussed in Yvonne Vera’s novels. That Vera focuses on the processes of resistance to this marks their differing stances toward the issue, reflecting also the different historical situations in their respective countries.

drive or draw most of them to the towns and cities, leaving their farms in the hands of large landowners. Some of the reasons for this trouble were the increase of capital looking for secure investment, the growth of a transport network which opened new markets and made farming more profitable, inefficient farming on parcels of land that shrank with every generation ... (78)

Our attention is drawn to the suggestion that the causes of rural white anxiety in the 1880s, expressed in the literature of the 1920s and 1930s, remain *the same* in the late 1980s. There are shades of 'Lurie' here ("The more things change the more they remain the same. History repeating itself, though in a more modest vein"). Indeed, in a 1992 interview Coetzee suggests that what, exactly, remains *the same*, even with the new dawn of democracy approaching, is the combination of market economics and demographic pressure on the land:

Until well after 1945, South Africa was an agricultural country in every way that counted. So it is not surprising that the rather thin literature of South Africa up to 1945 concentrated on the land. Of course land ownership, particularly the ownership of farming land, is still an emotive subject today. But it has, in a sense, been taken over by demography: to feed a population of 35 million, South Africa can no longer afford to be farmed by small peasant farmers, it has to be farmed extensively. The real issue is therefore not who is to own farmland but who is to own the resources of the country; furthermore, whether ownership is to be individual or in some sense communal. (Coetzee interviewed in Begam 1992: 426)

The analyses are quantitatively very similar, the important difference being that in the second instance 'demographics' refers to quite different qualities of 'peasant' and 'land' than those referred to in *White Writing*. There, Coetzee is wary of making a false parallel between English and Dutch peasantries as comparative models for peasantries depicted in South African literature. He stresses the importance of how a peasantry is historically constituted by land rights, or rather their lack, whereby a *market based* "Freehold tenure ... is diametrically opposed to the form of familial land-ownership found in peasant society." (1988a: 77) Petrus comes from a demographic historically stripped of land rights but, since 1994 is at least nominally empowered with them. He embodies a 'new' black peasantry but, according to the

property clause (section 25) of the Constitution, can only be granted entry into this *tenured* status through the market.

By ending the novel with Lucy taking on the role of a dutiful peasant wife ready to support a new phase of ‘familial’ (Coetzee 1988a) *and* ‘communal’ (Begam 1992) *farmland*-ownership, in an era when ‘South Africa can no longer afford to be farmed by small peasant farmers’ but ‘has to be farmed extensively’ (Begam 1992), the gesture surely has to be an intentional anachronism. If the current climate is, as Coetzee suggests, a renewal of the capitalist mode of production in agriculture, then how can the novel’s final vision be anything other than scathingly ironic, an anti-pastoral in which a ‘local solution’ threatens to be scandalously inadequate to *all* concerned parties in ‘the wider world’?

We might, as Barnard and Cornwell do, ascribe this incongruity to a more ambiguous irony on the novelist’s part. Coetzee keeps the pastoral ideal alive but only as a means to imaginatively ‘rival’ history, not to ‘supplement’ it (Cornwell 2002: 12). Alternatively, we might read the anachronism as having a more sceptical relation to *history*, rather than *historical discourse*. In this reading the novel enacts critique: it refracts the contradictions that inhere in the government’s increasingly compromised stance on land reform in the late 1990s. Such a reading is arguably supported by the shift in Coetzee’s general argument, from the earlier emphasis placed on land ownership and rights (1988a), to the control and disposition of *all* national resources (1992). In his short interview statement the pragmatic view offered of how land would best serve the national interest seems unequivocal: large-scale commercial farming; industry. Whilst this view may not actually represent Coetzee’s personal opinion, whatever that might be, it remains the economic ideal that any government operating under conditions dictated by the ‘Washington consensus’ of World Bank and IMF financiers would also, ultimately, be encouraged to follow. What *Disgrace* does, then, irrelevant of Coetzee’s personal views on the matter, is to show, along the lines Cherryl Walker (2005) suggests, how compromised the economic basis of the nationalist ideal is in South Africa’s case.

To provide some context to this, Tom Lodge (2002) makes the case that the ANC’s vision for land reform initially rested on a well-intentioned return to small-scale black peasant farming—the ‘cornerstone of national development’ that is Coetzee’s Petrus (‘the rock’):

It was widely believed that white farmers had prospered mainly because they had received state support. Removal of such support would help to enlarge the land market and lower prices. A generation of historical research demonstrated that in the late nineteenth century and even later, black farmers had done well commercially until the state deprived them of land and prevented them from competing with white farmers. Given this history, it was assumed that black agriculture could be revived quite easily after the removal of apartheid barriers. After all, experience elsewhere in Africa appeared to demonstrate that transferring land from white settlers and giving it to African peasants could make for a more efficient agriculture, capable of supporting a substantial rural population in conditions of general prosperity. (70)⁹⁵

He goes on to add, however, that reform within commercial agriculture in the late 1980s meant that even with democracy looming, “white farmers were considerably less vulnerable, politically and economically, than they had been historically.”(71) Contrary to expectations, land prices remained high. Land claimants had to organise themselves into increasingly larger groups in order to compete, but as a consequence often became too many “to exploit the land productively or profitably.”(75) He then cites numerous examples that testify to the ‘failure’ of “economically sustainable smallholder agriculture”.(Ibid) Judiciously, Lodge does not ascribe explicit blame for this failure, but does go on to document how the ANC government itself turned unequivocally to the market from 1999 onwards, promoting the ‘large scale commercial farming’ that Coetzee himself seemed impersonally resigned to in the 1992 interview. With the slow pace of redistribution and tenure reform failing to enfranchise enough small farming co-operatives, it was, and very much still is, a turn to the inevitable detriment of the landless poor (2002: 79).

Given this insight into the seemingly intractable problems of the ‘wider world’, I would argue that at times we are asked to take Lurie’s anti-pastoral cynicism more seriously than we otherwise might. His reflections on Lucy’s ‘smallholding’, for example (five hectares is no ‘farm’ by South African standards): “Poor land, poor soil, he thinks. Exhausted. Good only for goats.” (*D*: 64) Lucy gets by with the little she

⁹⁵ This enthusiasm for making land available to the landless poor and promoting small-scale development is evident in the White Paper. So, also, is the initial desire to protect this group from the distortions of the market - the “willing-buyer, willing-seller” scenario: “The challenge is to find a way of redistributing land to the needy, and at the same time maintaining public confidence in the land market. The reality is that the poor and landless are not in a position to acquire land at market prices without assistance from the state.” (1997: 17)

produces and her kennels business, but she has no dependents. Would this land be productive enough to support Petrus's extended family *and* create a profitable surplus? It is highly unlikely. We might also want to consider the expropriative threat presented by the multinational SAPPI Industries that borders the land.

In a neat touch that has been passed over by critics, Coetzee has Lucy and Lurie 'beat the bounds' of her little parcel of land at several points in the text. The first of these perambulations see them come to a "gate with a sign that says 'SAPPI Industries—Trespassers will be Prosecuted'." (*D*: 69)⁹⁶ Their return from the second sees their feudalistic gesture ridiculed by the men who defy the borders of their demesne and attack them.⁹⁷ Whilst the latter incident crudely impresses upon the reader the precariousness of personal safety and the increasing vulnerability of white-owned property, the former intimates that the *real* landowners in South Africa are anonymous players in the text. The wider picture this gives us of land reform in South Africa is that it is not simply a bitter, low-intensity battle fought between landless blacks and small-scale white farmers. Rather, it is international markets, big business and the neoliberal underpinnings of the ANC's nationalist vision that dictate the debate that the novel speaks to, but which is shielded by the pastoral motifs.

The implicit scepticism towards non-commercial agricultural aspirations is by no means total though. Rather, it is offset by the determination and initiative Petrus shows in gaining his loan from the land-bank, establishing his own farmhouse and borrowing machinery to plough his land: "all very swift and businesslike; all very unlike Africa." (*D*: 151) As Lurie acknowledges throughout the novel, Petrus represents the potential future of South African agriculture. In spite of its latent cynicism, the novel leaves us pondering whether he will become an efficient peasant or a productive commercial farmer at its end. Further ambiguity arises, then, in the suggestion that a different kind of 'farm' might emerge in South Africa. It presages the dissolution of the traditional bonds between whites and their land, but also the beginning of a new narrative of 'communal' land ownership. But again, we might

⁹⁶ A leading multinational corporation based in Johannesburg, ~~SAPPI~~ is the world's largest producer of coated fine paper. Again, the presence of its land in the novel indicates a deliberately playful veracity on Coetzee's part. ~~SAPPI~~ owns Adamas Mill, a large paper mill in Port Elizabeth. According to their website "~~SAPPI~~ owns and manages 540,000 hectares of land in Southern Africa. Approximately 66% of our land is planted to trees, while significant areas of the unplanted land are managed for conservation purposes." (www.sappi.com) Some of this land could quite feasibly be in the vicinity of Salem.

⁹⁷ For a discussion of the semantics, history and politics of the 'border' in Coetzee's fiction, see Farred (2002).

well ask, how far does the novel push this intimation before undermining its own vision?

Lucy resents the ideological undertones of her father talking about “Lucy’s farm, Lucy’s patch of earth” (*D*: 197), but also refuses the nation-building imperative for disavowal, to ‘give it up’: “‘Stop calling it *the farm*, David. This is not a farm, it’s just a piece of land where I grow things—we both know that. But no, I’m not giving it up.’” (*D*: 200) It is significant, then, that there is no mention of Lucy *selling* the land to Petrus, merely its “transfer” (*D*: 124, 204). Indeed, despite the land transfer ‘party’ and Lurie’s early speculations that “Petrus would like to take over Lucy’s land. Then he would like to have Ettinger’s too, at least to run a herd on it” (*D*: 117), we are left with the impression that he and Lucy are going into partnership. But one in which Petrus wryly anticipates becoming the “*farm manager*” (*D*: 152), not its owner.

On the one hand this presents an interesting vision of what ‘communal’ (Coetzee 1992) control of resources might look like; if only more landholding South Africans felt like Lucy and Petrus, could be one reading, the White Paper vision, but is hard to countenance given Coetzee’s ironic tone. Lucy is driven by fear. Petrus remains without unqualified rights to the land that he works, for which he is now responsible. If the land transfer embodies the reconciliatory spirit espoused in the White Paper’s nationalist agenda, its figuration in the text dwells on the contradictions that foreclose the same, that see the enduring hangover of the “second class status of black land rights” (White Paper 1997: 29). In this ambiguous way the novel affirms the liberal impetus towards redistribution, but also reproduces the real failures of land *reform* in that the Lurie-Lucy skewed narrative exists in a historical moment in which there is no compulsion for *radical* alteration to property rights (outside of the bias of the market).

petrus’s story

This brings us to Petrus’s moral position, his claim to the land and how it is articulated. His interest in Lucy’s land in fact betrays no signs of being historically motivated; at least, we are not told of any grounds for a claim to it. We might well ascribe this to the monoculturalism of the narration; to how the novel speaks about ‘the land’. Being alien to Petrus’s language and culture, Lurie acknowledges his limited grasp of what his story might be, except to suggest that it is “the truth of South

Africa.”(D: 119) We learn, anecdotally, that he has another wife and family in Adelaide, another Frontier town, and that he is related to one of the attackers, Pollox. Other than that, his past is left in the dark.

This is of some significance in terms of the novel’s relation to the land reform process. Of the three areas where claims for land grants can be made—restitution, redistribution and tenure reform—we must assume that Petrus made his claim on the basis of either of the latter two. Crucially, only the first, ‘restitution’, invokes the kind of historical responsibility—reparation—which Lucy reads into her own situation. Its goal is in “returning land, or compensating victims for land rights, lost because of racially discriminatory laws, passed since July 19th 1913.” (White Paper 1998: 35) It is the only avenue of land reform that is intended to atone for *specific* instances of historical injustice. Of the others, redistribution, the most general, is conceived in a neoliberal developmental mould, “largely based on willing-buyer willing seller arrangements.” (1998: 36) Land tenure reform, the most complex and in many ways of most practical importance, “aims to bring all people occupying land under a unitary legally validated system of landholding.”(1998: 35)

Whereas restitution involves working through the fraught history of a given space, these others are both premised on an already-achieved state of reconciliation toward this history. It follows, then, that Petrus, whose interest is in *redistributed* land and *tenure reform*, exists outside of the ethical parameters of reconciliation that Lucy and Lurie stand abject before. If they are trapped by the burden of history that the novel ‘rivals’, then Petrus’s stake in land reform liberates him from it. This has significant bearing on the ethical position that *Petrus* assumes residency of in the text.

Several times after the attack Lurie confronts him, demanding he tell him what he knows of Pollox and the other attackers. When he does rise to Lurie’s challenges, Petrus refuses to acknowledge any kind of responsibility toward the crime or its victims, especially as a *violation* of individual rights, as Lurie sees it. He tries to placate Lurie by suggesting that his insurance will pay for a new car. Lurie sees this argument as a moral “dead-end [...] We can’t leave it to insurance companies to deliver justice.”(D: 138, 137) The irony here is that Lurie’s own anger at the disparity between proposed restitution (a new car) and actual justice (the attackers being caught and convicted and both Lucy and he able to continue their lives as before), is analogous to the same woeful disparity that formerly dispossessed and displaced South Africans are forced to endure in their bid for land restitution, redistribution or

tenure reform. In the cold, 'constitutional' logic of this process, Petrus is under no responsibility to Lucy. But, despite misgivings the reader may have toward the terms under which she accepts it, he nonetheless assumes that responsibility the moment she transfers her land to him.

It is arguably Petrus then, who, in line with the White Paper's vision for post-apartheid national development based on the reform of land ownership, exemplifies Coetzee's wish to see "the hereditary masters" of South Africa transfer their love for the land to a love for others (1992: 97), however conditional it may be. But this is only made possible by him not being given a history of dispossession, by having no *personal* claim to Lucy's, or any other land, vocalised in the text. This absence in itself provides the fuel for much criticism of the novel, of its monoculturalism. In his discussion, Gareth Cornwell neatly sidesteps the issue by discussing the actual land-claim filed by a black community group in 2001, called 'The History of Salem land' (2002: 10-12). Yet if the novel does 'rival' the historical record, as Cornwell also claims, then it surely only serves to perpetuate its asymmetries in respect of this actual claim. Arguably, what the novel calls for, calls *to*, with all its cynicism and narratorial asymmetry, is exactly the kind of 'supplementary' historical narrative that Cornwell provides but that Coetzee, for his well known reasons, cannot.

This supplementary history would necessarily vocalise not only Petrus's history, but also those of his wives and family (and also Lucy, see Boehmer 2002: 350). In that respect it might look something like Ngcobo's *And They Didn't Die*. This point needs clarification. I am not suggesting that Coetzee *should* provide such supplementation. One of the most important ways in which *Disgrace* constitutes itself as a white English South African novel, is in its inability to give the 'whole' story. To modify David Attwell's (1993) argument, *Disgrace* is a 'complementary' novel within the field of South African literature, precisely because it 'rivals' white historical discourse in ways that black writers have, for various reasons, been unable to do. If the reader is interested in a more representative historical consciousness of 'the land', however, *Disgrace* demands its own complement: that a novel like Ngcobo's also be read.

In conclusion, it is helpful to turn to Ampie Coetzee's (1996) discussion of the South African farm novel. He argues that in white South African writing the "repeated return to the farm novel is perhaps not a search for identity, but a commitment to its dissipation." (128) He then quotes Coetzee from the 'Farm novel and Plaasroman'

essay in *White Writing*: “To accept the farm as home is to accept a living death.”(1988: 66) In this section I have suggested that *Disgrace* can be read as an engagement with both the political idealism and the social, economic and demographic reality of post-apartheid nation building, and that it anticipates the dissolution of dominant ways of reading (Lurie), owning (Lucy), and speaking about (the anti-pastoral farm-novel genre) ‘the land’. But at the same time its ironic movement also points to certain continuities. Will Lucy’s and Petrus’s ‘communal’ farm also prove to be a ‘living death’? If not death, then surely a strange form of love. *Disgrace* suggests that ‘the farm’ and farmland cannot alone be the sites on which either private or public narratives of reconciliation can take place—let alone on which a democratic nation can be fully imagined. But nonetheless it still testifies to both the need for, and barriers to, the redistribution of resources and the rethinking of property rights on which it might.

Women, resistance and the nationalism on the land in Lauretta Ngcobo’s *And They Didn’t Die* (1990)

Now, if de Klerk’s ‘white paper’ goes into effect and the land laws are abolished, it is argued that there will be nothing to stop Africans from buying up seaside property, moving into imitation Spanish villas or sinking swimming pools in their own back yards. Nothing, that is, except terminal poverty. Meanwhile no provision is being made for the millions of people already condemned to oblivion in the Bantustans. The Freedom Charter promises that the land will belong to those who work it. Since, in South Africa, women do most of the farming, will the land therefore be given to them? Or, as in so many other postindependence countries, will property rights, the technology, the loans and aid, be given to men? When these questions are answered, perhaps we can begin to talk about a new South Africa. (McClintock 1995: 388)

In an article first published in 1991, Anne McClintock anticipates some of the major shortcomings of the land reform programme to result from the negotiated political settlement. Again, the social, demographic and economic scales of the task in hand are emphasised, but so too is the implicit but all too often marginalised gender factor. While McClintock’s assertion that ‘women do most of the farming’ holds true only for communal lands in the ‘Bantustans’, the point is that the southern African migrant

labour economy has trapped women in overcrowded and underdeveloped rural areas, and the combination of statutory and customary law has left them with minimal rights to the little land they are left to live off. This point arises, in McClintock's argument, from her discussion of Laurretta Ngcobo's *And They Didn't Die* (1990), which, as she puts it, "explores what happens when women start asking questions: about cattle and the land, about female power, about tradition, about violence, about sex." (388)

The tragedy of the novel, however, is that in spite of revealing what is gained by asking these questions, the central female protagonist seems destined to remain trapped so long as those structures remain in place. The title testifies to the fact that the women live on—questioning and resisting, but also, within the novel's historical purview, suffering. *And They Didn't Die* demands and awaits the democratisation of land and gender roles in a time after apartheid. But as the quote from McClintock suggests, its stoic realism also anticipates their foreclosure. In this way, I suggest, the contradictions of 'new South Africa' that emerge in *Disgrace* are 'pre-emergent' in this more concretely historical text.

The little lives

I'm not going to write about the famous political figures or the wide political landscape. I write about the little lives; the stories that have come to me are about ordinary people. If I write about ordinary people it will be about how ordinary people are affected by the political climate. (Ngcobo in Daymond 1992: 87)

Taken from an interview with Margaret Daymond in 1992, Ngcobo's gesture to 'write about the little lives', like Bessie Head's writing before it, anticipates Ndebele's call for a 'return to the ordinary' in South African literature in the 1990s. More directly than Head, though, she firmly places the realm of the ordinary within 'the political climate'. By focusing on the marginal lives of a rural family over a period of some thirty years, Ngcobo portrays changing patterns of life on the land from a unique perspective in South African literature. The sparsely rendered landscape of rural (Kwa-Zulu) Natal may not initially seem to offer a 'wide' political perspective, but as Brian Worsfold (1994) suggests, it allows her to place "Black South African countrywomen firmly in the centre of the stage." (115) *And They Didn't Die* not only represents an

occluded history of resistance to apartheid, it also, for many, constitutes a “political intervention” (Achmat 1992: 28) in its own right.

A danger here, overlooked by several critics, is to misread the political aspects of the novel (what Gordimer (1989) calls South African literature’s “relevance”) in terms of a simplified or didactic vision.⁹⁸ Catherine Assink (1999), for example, commendably places the novel within the context of a post-apartheid rural and feminist movement: it “has a place in this new, protracted struggle. With the new constitution offering more scope for women, Ngcobo’s novel seems to offer some effective lessons.”(6) She fails to question, however, the often ambiguous ways in which these ‘lessons’ are framed. While this kind of response is understandable, given the uniqueness of Ngcobo’s novel, it also overlooks an animating tension within it. This tension oscillates between the main protagonist, Jezile, her husband, Siyalo, and the community doctor and nationalist activist, Nosizwe. The effect is one of ambivalence and equivocation: between the conscious performance of resistance on the one hand, and on the inability or failure to think of these actions as being instrumentally ‘political’ on the other.

The effect of this tension is to resist a straightforward politicisation of ‘the land’ through the novel’s representation of historical consciousness. In contrast to this view, Cherry Clayton (2000) argues that *And They Didn’t Die* participates in the “anti-modernist discourse and ... radical politics of the PAC”, where “everything is reduced to a question of repossession”, but that it “feminizes this discourse and offers a critique of liberal discourse and earlier women’s writing in South Africa by revisioning key tropes.”(123) She seems to base this reading on the premise that the novel begins in 1959, the year that Robert Sobukwe broke away from the ANC to form the PAC, and that Ngcobo had close ties to the organisation through her husband Abednego, one of its early leaders. But despite recognising the complex relationship between social structures and subjectivity in the novel, Clayton still argues that “Jezile is politicised by multiple forms of gender and racial oppression to the point of militancy and an act of violence.”(123)

After 30 years of living with apartheid Jezile does finally turn to violence. But the extent to which it she is on the ‘point of militancy’, and the exact form of politicisation she experiences, are open to question. The revolutionary trajectory of

⁹⁸ Though such aspects are more readily identifiable in *Cross of Gold* (1981), Ngcobo’s first novel.

her first novel, *Cross of Gold* (1981), and her interview with Robert Bush (1984) which discusses that novel and from which Clayton takes much of her argument, are tempered in *And They Didn't Die* through a more subtle consideration of history and handling of literary form. As with the later Alex la Guma, there is also some confusion over *which* nationalism is being focused on in the novel. Where Clayton implies that Nosizwe is a PAC activist, Margaret Daymond (1997, 2004) uses Govan Mbeki's *South Africa: The Peasants' Revolt* (1973: 130) and Tom Lodge's *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945* (1983: 290) to suggest that the novel is more concerned with the relative failure of the ANC to organise rural resistance against Betterment programmes and the co-option of local chiefs. And so despite Ngcobo's connections to the PAC, the representations of resistance in the novel cannot conclusively be said to correspond to a singular nationalist vision.

The novel charts the fraught growth of Jezile's and Siyalo's family from the late 1950s to the 1980s. An organiser in the rural resistance that swept through Kwa-Zulu Natal in the late 1950s (though not attached to a specific political group), Jezile compromises this role in accepting a pass that enables her to travel to Durban. There she is able to become pregnant by Siyalo, fulfilling the burden of traditional social expectation that consumes her daily thoughts. During this time she is also caught up in the Cato Manor riots of June 1959. Her understanding of these events, and the relative isolation of the rural area she heralds from, is deepened through exposure to the *national* impact of the events in newspapers, and in conversations with another woman (Fazakile) who has become politicised in the city. Akin to the protagonists of La Guma's later novels,⁹⁹ Jezile's time in the city makes her realise that despite their apparent mutual isolation, there are moments when rural resistance in the country is linked to that taking place in the city; that "the whole country was in a ferment." (*AD*: 35) Her time in the city would thus seem to provide all of the formative elements of a nationalist consciousness. This is not quite the case however.

On her return home she is racked with guilt at having 'sold-out' by accepting a pass. Although she is able to communicate her experiences in the city to the community in Sigageni, it is Nosizwe, a less organic social but also *narrative* presence, who provides the most rousing political critique of the system which holds

⁹⁹ In a 1980 interview with Itala Vivan (1993) Lauretta Ngcobo claims that Alex La Guma is her favourite of the "black and coloured South African writers of the preceding generations" (Vivan's prompt): "because I share his own idea of society and appreciate his writing." (108)

them in subjection: “so, we here, as women, serve to produce migrant labour—our children are the labour resource of this government.”(AT: 46) Despite these rousing words and her experience in the city, Jezile is unable to motivate herself as she did before. From this point onwards she embodies a sense of doubt, of an emerging “hybrid subjectivity” (Farred 1993) whereby she “contemplates a decidedly modern individualism in order to fulfil the role that custom dictates.” (Daymond 1997: 15) This amounts to equivocation in the face of immediate necessity, as she attempts to reconcile her own desires for individual and social liberation with the demands made upon her by family and custom, and imposed upon her by apartheid laws.

Her personal struggle sees her leave Sigageni to work in the home of a white family, the Potgieters, in Bloemfontein. She returns a year later bearing a ‘coloured’ baby having been raped by her employer. This precipitates the breakdown of her relationship with Siyalo, but also signals the beginning of new social relations in the rural community: Jezile has to learn to seek alternative relationships with other ‘pariah’ women in the village in order to survive a drought. After being endorsed out of Durban for his political activism and unable to find work in Sigageni, Siyalo also has to reconfigure his domestic role. As Margaret Daymond (2004) suggests, Jezile and Siyalo are compelled to “alternate” in performing the “conventionally gendered responsibilities of the family”(149). This leads to a potentially productive destabilisation of the traditional rural family, but one that is prevented by Ngcobo’s fidelity to historical circumstances:

At the same time, Siyalo’s despair when he is unable to act either as the customary hierarchy expects of a man (earning money) or as a surrogate mother (providing milk) is being used to figure afresh the impossibility of a rural family’s functioning as an economic, let alone a cultural, unit under apartheid. (Daymond 2004: 150)

The animating tension of the novel is thus not confined to Jezile’s personal or political development. In selfless desperation, Siyalo refuses to let their baby starve and steals milk from an adjacent white commercial farm. Commenting on his subsequent prosecution under the Stock Theft Act, Nosizwe insists on politicising the act:

The reason why Siyalo has no job is political; the reason why he could not make use of the land to raise crops to feed his family is political; the reason why all your cows

have died in the drought is political. We have no grass when Collett has so much—that is political; the reason why he has such a large farm and hundreds of cows is political [...] Do you suppose all these people would have come from Durban and Pietermaritzburg if Siyalo were a common thief? Never! Siyalo is a hero.(AD: 154)

By instrumentalising Siyalo's actions, by making him a 'hero', she also condemns him to a jail sentence under the same logic used by the prosecutors. Whereas his counsel had pleaded for leniency under mitigating circumstances, "the human instinct to save one's child," the prosecution "swayed the facts to show that he was driven by his political views."(AD: 153) It is understandable that Nosizwe emphasises the political grounds of his case. But unlike his activity in the city and that of the women who burnt their passes and destroyed the cattle dips in 1959-60, Siyalo shows no awareness that his theft constitutes an act of *political* resistance. The family tragedy that this leads to captures the ambivalent politics of resistance and repossession staged in the novel. At times the tension between different narrative voices, different sensibilities, resists the radical political consciousness embodied by Nosizwe.

'we want the land to live on and cultivate to raise food crops for our children; we want clinics for our sick children, not beer halls to kill off our men.'

And They Didn't Die does narrativise a nationalist claim for 'the land'. But it is not simply for land itself, nor is it advanced through coded representations of the landscape. Rather, in Nosizwe's words, the novel's vocal demand for land is tantamount to a greater claim for representation, rights and services, 'clinics for our sick children, not beer halls to kill off our men'. But this claim rarely enters the narrative as part of the rural people's own symbolic landscape, their own consciousness. Whenever land is invoked it is invariably either as reference to the family's communal plot, their means of material subsistence, or invoked as 'the land' in the political discourse of Nosizwe. Only occasionally does it enter the focalising narration that takes Jezile's perspective. Which is not to say that the rural people are completely blind to their dispossession and subjugation. On the contrary and quite ironically, Ngcobo's narrative is at pains to express the extent to which white

(indirect) rule¹⁰⁰ and the white presence in the landscape have been *naturalised* by them:

The people of Sabalweni should have known that things could not stay the same between them and the white people in the dorp and the surrounding farms. That relationship had always been subject to the African people's taciturn acceptance of their subjugation, whether they acknowledged it or not. *But for the Africans that dorp and those farms were part of the landscape, like hills and valleys and streams.* Struggles break out everywhere in the world, but people never dream that they would alter the landscape. (AD: 177 my italics)

The people are passively figured—in a state of political slumber but about to be woken with the rural uprisings of 1959-60. It is not until Jezile's children reach adulthood and become politically active in the 1980s, however, that this waking consciousness once more has a historical correlative of political action. The interim period sees Siyalo and Jezile attempting to understand their ever-changing world through what Daymond (1999) describes as a shift, on Ngcobo's part, from "utilizing a rural consciousness to forging a rural sensibility."

I agree with Daymond when she suggests that Ngcobo foregrounds "a sensibility which goes out to meet the events through an already formed mode of understanding the world" (269). To develop this analysis, it is the seeming naivety of this sensibility that provides the crucial tension with the more monological political voices within the text. That said, the novel rarely indulges in the kind of symbolic work that usually sees 'sensibility' emerge from the matrix of character, narrative and landscape. This is particularly evident in Ngcobo's reluctance to offer pictorial descriptions of the landscape.¹⁰¹ When they do occur, however, they are invariably significant.

¹⁰⁰ Their 'consciousness' of this is aptly displayed when they refuse to accept the government appointed chief, Siyapi, and burn down his house, killing him and his family (AD: 173). Jezile learns of their intent "from the many conversations that went on all at once just how angry people were with chief Siyapi." (AD: 170)

¹⁰¹ I would thus take a mediatory position between what Daymond argues, and what she criticises Eva Hunter (1993) for suggesting. Namely that Jezile's is the sole or principal consciousness in the novel, which itself is presented as a limited sensibility: "Avoidance of the excessively 'personal' is reflected in Ngcobo's use of a heterodiegetic narrator and the absence of features such as an interior monologue and the analysis and representation of consciousness, such choices marking a difference from the emphasis upon consciousness found in much western writing." (100-101)

‘no man’s land’

For most of the novel the narrated landscape is blandly descriptive, save for the two occasions when Jezile travels *away* from Sigageni.¹⁰² On the Durban trip the Natal coastal area is evoked with wonder: “the greenness, the lushness, the over-abundance of trees and flowers of every kind that nature had to offer.” But, reflecting her pressing concern to consummate her marriage with Siyalo, “all these were temporary distractions.”(AD: 21) Her experience in Durban awakens Jezile to a sexuality that has been stifled at home, but neither her sexuality nor its repression is symbolically connected to or conflated with the landscape at this point (Harris 2001). The sole occasion on which Ngcobo intentionally sexualises nature or the landscape is during Jezile’s second journey, over the shoulders of the Drakensberg range to Bloemfontein. Her initial sensations are of sublime awe, but are quickly internalised:

As the train drew nearer the mountains, they seemed to confront her with their awesome beauty. The jagged tops were oppressively close. They stood there defiantly stressing their permanence against the transience all around. Jezile lost herself in the beauty, stretching her arms to touch, if not to pick, the blossoms of every description of every kind of shrub which grew profusely tantalisingly near, all along the railway line. (AD: 191)

The passage captures a new sense of selfhood, one that emerges from the experience of autonomy and cultural difference that her journey from her home in Natal to the Free-State, initially at least, promises. The sensation soon gives way to a renewed feeling of isolation, however, when Jezile realises that she cannot understand the seSotho spoken in her new environs. Before this isolation is completed at the Potgieter’s home, some succulent-looking peaches catch her attention from the train window:

¹⁰² It is somewhat ironic that in McClintock’s (1995) discussion of the novel, the landscape she portrays is more ‘literary’ than that found in the novel itself: “Impossibly hot in summer, wretchedly cold in winter, the black reserve of Sigageni lies in the long corridor running down from the snows of the Drakensberg mountains. A vast, bleak valley strewn with mudhuts and shanties, the ruined land is burdened with too many people, too many cattle and goats and can no longer support the basic needs of life. In summer, aloes bleed on the hills and the heat torches and shrivels the crops. In winter, winds knife down the corridor, tearing at the women’s flimsy cotton wrappings and buffeting the shivering herds”. (386)

They were large enough to fill the cup of her hand—the size of a good orange, and she found herself gently caressing them in their rich yellow fruitiness. Then a feeling she had managed to banish deftly for months took hold of her. Her body throbbed and ached inwardly, awash with longing, while she sat there oblivious of the bustling scene on the railway platform. She turned her thoughts voraciously on her self, squeezing her body greedily as she wondered why she had not allowed herself the privilege of these deliciously painful and unfaithful thoughts. (AD: 192-3)

Allowing herself to contemplate the seductive thought of adultery, “Released from communal supervision”, the object of Jezile’s desire is neither another person, nor in fact the peach that *stimulates* her longing. Rather, the object of her desire is the realisation of her own freedom: an autonomous subjectivity. Her thoughts turn ‘voraciously on her self’. In perhaps the most revealing use of symbolism in the book, the passage concludes:

[She] wondered what devil possessed that scorching patch of earth. Or was it the peaches? Then she looked ahead and it soon became apparent where the women got the peaches from. All along the railway line there were rows and rows of peach trees. No man’s land. It was surprising to see such succulent fruit growing where the land looked so dry and barren. (AD: 193)

The source of her desire, and by implication her route to autonomy and freedom, lies in ‘no man’s land’. In this brief, epiphanic moment of self-realisation, the narrative refuses to assign this transient glimpse of freedom either political or patrimonial currency. By abstracting Jezile’s sense of autonomy and desire from the relentless grind of history and suggesting the possibility of another space, beyond both ‘the land’ and the city, we are reminded here of a similar strategy in Yvonne Vera’s *Butterfly Burning*. Just as her inevitable return to the city condemns Vera’s Phephelaphi, however, so too must Jezile continue on her ill-fated journey.

Indentured to history

Tantalising moments of freedom come for Jezile from questioning the boundaries of home; from questioning the authority wrought by family and community as well as the state and its agents. But so long as these boundaries remain subject to both the

direct and indirect dominion of apartheid, they cannot be transcended. Jezile only once commands agency: by killing the soldier threatening to rape her daughter at the end of the novel. Again, it is a liberation that stands abject before the history of apartheid and so cannot, in my view, be read in terms of a given political—in other words *nationalist*—agenda. Despite her final reunion with Siyalo, Jezile will be imprisoned; she and her family will suffer for her momentary freedom. Like the majority of Vera's characters and Dikeledi in Head's 'The Collector of Treasures', Ngcobo refuses to let Jezile escape history. The point being made, however, is that Jezile's is not the 'whole' story. What survives is not only her personal story but also the dignity and memory of all those who live on the land, whom Jezile represents. The main structure of feeling the novel displays therefore is one of accommodation and adaptation: of the reconstructed bonds between Jezile and Siyalo, between them as outcasts in their traditional world, and in their selfless commitment to others. It is commitment to the future, embodied in the paths forged by their children (doctor, political activist).

This compelling narrative might be called 'supplementary' from a Coetzeean perspective, but in no straightforward way is it politically instrumental. In its relentless portrayal of the injustices of apartheid's rural politics, it humanises resistance to the same in a way that few other novels have managed. Therein lies its own source of critical 'complementarity' (Daymond 2004). While it clearly augurs for political action and liberation in its denouement, it in no way simplifies the relation between that and *resistance*. If the story Ngcobo tells in *And They Didn't Die* is, as Clayton (2000) suggests, "the story of what cannot afford to be forgotten in the construction of a democratic South Africa" (126)—then it is imperative that its nuanced historical consciousness is focused on. The organisational role of nationalism (both in ANC and PAC forms) is thus problematised, but the novel nonetheless provides a rare fictionalisation of the confluences between rural and urban resistance, and of the vital role played by women in that, over a period of three decades.

The novel's ending displaces the land question to the immediate future, into the hands of Jezile's children. It is to be taken up by a politics that will emerge *from* the experience of rural poverty and from the conscientising process of shuttling across the borders of rural homes and far-off cities. Though Ngcobo shows no signs of having anticipated a peaceful transition to democracy, as McClintock's epigraph to this section suggests *And They Didn't Die* does anticipate how a long history of rural

underdevelopment, and especially its consequence for rural gender relations, might have a detrimental effect on post-apartheid rural development. It is this uneasy narrative that Zakes Mda takes up in his novel *The Heart of Redness* (2000).

“What is land compared to civilisation?” the irony of neoliberal development in Zakes Mda’s *The Heart of Redness* (2000)

“What is land compared to civilisation?” Dalton asks impatiently.

“Land is a small price to pay for a gift that will last you a lifetime ... that will be enjoyed by your future generations. The gift of British civilisation!” (HR: 123)
colonial narrative

“Well, how will you stop progress and development?” asks Mr Smith, chuckling triumphantly.

“Yes! How will he stop civilisation?” asks Xoliswa Ximiya.

For a while Camagu does not know how to answer this. Then in an inspired moment he suddenly shouts, “How will I stop you? I will tell you how I will stop you! I will have this village declared a national heritage site. Then no one will touch it. The wonders of Nongqawuse that led to the cattle-killing movement of the amaXhosa happened here. On that basis, this can be declared a national heritage site!” (HR: 201) *post-apartheid narrative*

Zakes Mda’s *The Heart of Redness* (2000) is a comic and humane novel, but one that has some serious and emotive issues at its core. As the above epigraphs suggest, the harbingers of ‘progress and development’ in rural post-apartheid South Africa are made to resonate with an ugly colonial forbear: the enlightenment discourse of ‘civilisation’ that legitimised the expropriation of land from the amaXhosa and their assimilation through indirect colonial rule. The novel thus tells two stories simultaneously, narratives that, as David Attwell (2005) remarks, chart “the relationships that black humanity in South Africa has forged with modernity at various points in its history.”(9) Temporally, the first of these returns to the catastrophic cattle-killing movement of the 1850s that effectively ended Xhosa resistance to British colonial expansion in 1857. The framing narrative (c.1994-2000) follows the descendants of two families who survived the episode, but are forever

divided by its politics. With the advent of democracy in 1994 they now face the challenge of how best to use their available resources to develop their community out of the dependency and poverty bequeathed by 'civilising' colonial rule.

Although the novel has a local regional setting, it uses this specificity to ask searching questions of the ANC's post-apartheid development agenda. The 'elite transition' (Bond 2000) of the government's black empowerment initiatives—dubbed the 'Aristocrats of the Revolution' in the novel—is its principal target. Mda frames his critique by championing cultural and ecological conservation in a small rural-coastal village in the Eastern Cape. With wry humour the novel thus pits the local against the global, but not unreservedly so. The world of Believers and Unbelievers that Mda creates, playing on the 'red' and 'school' ethnic factions found in the region, represent contradictory aspects of tradition and modernity that both do and do not have analogues within these actual social formations (see, for examples, Bank 2002). Despite seeming to favour the proponents of conservation, the crucial intervention that the novel's cosmopolitan protagonist, Camagu, makes in the ecological and economic debate in the village, would seem to perpetuate the dependency logic inherent in the historical *underdevelopment* of South Africa's rural margins that Mda has excoriated in his non-fiction work on the issue.¹⁰³

What, then, of the land question? If land ownership and its turbulent history provide interpretive frames for Ngcobo's *And They Didn't Die* and Coetzee's *Disgrace*, what happens to the issue in a similarly rural, or even pastoral novel, *The Heart of Redness*? The colonial narrative charts the tragic loss of the amaXhosa livelihood as the Believers slaughter their cattle and destroy their crops. It also records the concomitant loss of their land, as the British annex it in their wake and assimilate the Unbelieving faction through military protection, religious conversion and economic coercion. In the post-apartheid narrative, by contrast, the residual conflict between Believers and Unbelievers is dictated by how best to use the land left to them after 150 years of human displacement and economic underdevelopment, firstly through British indirect rule and later through the apartheid government's 'homelands' policy. There is, however, no mention of land redistribution, restitution

¹⁰³ In *When People Play People: Development Communication Through Theatre* (1993), Mda analyses the causes of structural dependency in Lesotho since the 1870s, and that have been perpetuated by migrant labour remittances and foreign aid ever since: "Self-reliance, self-employment, income generation and employment in the rural sector are not a reality as yet, because of this increased dependency on aid programmes and South African consumer goods. (56)

or tenure reform. Neither the villagers nor their champions, Camagu and the autochthonous white trader, John Dalton, question the 'customary' authority of Chief Xikixa who administers the village's communal lands. The only hint that the novel is partly set in a time of rural reform is through conversations between the few English whites who bribed land from Xikixa for their holiday cottages. Sensing the winds of change they prepare to migrate. But as one slyly remarks: "I don't think where we're going we'll get such beautiful land for a bottle of brandy." (HR: 139)

By locating the novel in a former 'homeland', Mda is partially able to elide the volatile issue of land reform. As critics stress, the novel is more concerned to highlight positive aspects of cultural *renewal* (Bell 2002: 3, Lloyd 2001: 34, Van der Merwe 2001: 4, Woodward 2003: 173), rather than simply politicising cultural *recovery* or, indeed, material *redistribution*. By learning to become local as he falls in love with Qukezwa, daughter of the Unbeliever leader Zim, Camagu embodies exactly the kind of *unlearning* of Western education and privilege that Coetzee's pastoral anti-hero Lurie ultimately cannot. Moreover, this process is also reciprocal. Camagu puts his business and development communication skills into the service of the village.¹⁰⁴

Unlike Dalton, with his plans to market Qolorha as 'cultural village' kitsch, Camagu's aim is for the village to exploit its resources but retain its cultural integrity. He is "interested in the culture of the amaXhosa as they live it today, not yesterday. The amaXhosa people are not a museum piece. Like all cultures, theirs is dynamic." (HR: 248) Several women gain financial independence from the seafood and clothing co-operatives that he initiates, and without having to prostitute their indigenous identity as exotica. Instead, they continue their existing livelihoods but on a commercial scale. In this way Mda is able to link the projects of ecological conservation and local, small-scale economic regeneration. *The Heart of Redness* illuminates potential avenues of rural development that might tackle the gender iniquities concomitant with a history of rural underdevelopment, as seen in Ngcobo's *And They Didn't Die*.

This complex narrative of renewal is complemented by the dual narration, which in David Attwell's (2005: 10) reading de-privileges the binarism of oppression

¹⁰⁴ These skills mean that Camagu not only embodies 'development', but that he is also in part a self-parody on Mda's part. Like Mda, Camagu has a doctorate in communication development; like Mda he spent many years working in America only to return to post-apartheid South Africa and become by turns optimistic and frustrated with the new government.

and resistance that marks the intervening years of ‘struggle’. Moreover, as J.U. Jacobs (2002) suggests, the relation between narrative and mode of narration refuses to consolidate cultural identities statically enshrined in the historical record. The narration pays homage to traditional Xhosa culture but, like Camagu himself, articulates it in a ‘dynamic’, hybrid and reflexive way. Cultural references in Xhosa create a “diglossia” (229) that unsettles the discursive authority of English in the novel, and the dual narrative mimics the traditional split-tone singing of Qukezwa:

The Heart of Redness succeeds in imaginatively expanding and focusing the overtones of nineteenth century historical discourse into a fictional narrative; it also succeeds in developing the realism of its late-twentieth century fictional discourse into a uniquely South African—or more correctly Xhosa—kind of magical realism with oral undertones [...] The two stories blend into a seamless narrative of the past and present, and the two voices combine into a single, split-tone song.(235-6)

To achieve all of the above with a novel whose principal idiom is humour is, as Wendy Woodward likewise argues (2003), no mean feat. In what follows, however, I argue that Mda’s novel, like *Disgrace*, can be productively read—indeed, *asks* to the read—against the grain of the author’s ostensible political position. Central to this reading are a number of lacunae in the dual-narrative. These emerge from the tension between colonial land expropriation and post-apartheid national development, as signalled by my two epigraphs. Alongside the absence of land reform, the most obvious of these gaps is the missing narrative of ‘the Middle Generations’: the 150 intervening years of cultural ‘dynamism’, but also of ‘struggle’. A related and equally glaring “omission”, as Norman Rush (2003) argues in his review of the novel, is that of the AIDS pandemic that by 2000 poses a monumental danger to rural and national development, let alone the “lethal shadow” it would cast over “prospects for fruitful marriages and general prosperity in that community” (9).

If we are to give any kind of credence to Margaret Mervis’s (1998) suggestion that Mda’s novels can be read as “fiction for development”, then we need to unpack and contrast his ironic representations of ‘bad’ development (colonial ‘civilisation’) with his more earnest representations of ‘good’ development: “people ... doing things for themselves, without any handouts from the government.”(*HR*: 172) The double irony here, however, is that the contradictory figures of Camagu and Dalton and the

narrative gaps noted above suggest that the vision of 'good' development that the novel presents is contradictory at best.

Camagu's return to the land: localising the nation

Camagu's return to the country from several unproductive years in Johannesburg is, as Woodward (2003) suggests, a parodic inversion of the Jim-goes-to-Jo'burg trope found in much black writing of the apartheid years. As it inverts that trope, however, it also invokes—perhaps even claims—a more familiar feature of white writing: the pastoral conceit of a romantic return to the country. What is exceptional about the return in Mda's novel, however, is that it signifies both a return to a rural locale *and* a return to the nation itself. Camagu initially returns to South Africa from exile in America as an aspirant nation-builder, "to contribute to the development of his country." (*HR*: 29) Disaffected with the cronyism in government and the City he is drawn to Qolorha by chance, but is soon "romancing the indigenous" as Vital (2005: 310) aptly puts it. By appropriating this motif Mda wants not so much to present the local as being distinct from the national, but as being, crucially, constitutive *of* it.

In response to the developers from a black-empowerment initiative company, who insist that a capital-intense Sun City-like development on the Wild Coast is of "national importance" (200), Camagu declares that he will petition for the village to become a "national heritage site" (201). In this way a culturally and ecologically local—yet also national—heritage (as in the heritage of the pre-colonial amaXhosa 'nation') is cultivated as a viable site of autonomous peripheral development. It presents a counter-narrative of national development. It is predicated on the capacity of rural communities to manage their own resources and develop along lines of their own choosing, retarding—possibly even reversing the flows of labour, knowledge and products between the rural peripheries and urban cores. As such it is a utopian and exemplary postcolonial vision. It is also progressive, or 'civilised' in the liberal sense, in that it articulates the familiar nationalist imperative of a return *to* the land, but by focusing on 'development' rather than restitution, redistribution and reform, it avoids the concomitant demand for a return *of* the land. However, this liberalism—this neoliberalism—is ironic in a way that Mda might not have anticipated. It is exactly this resistance to the nationalist imperative for development, where land reform *is* the

issue that it isn't in *The Heart of Redness*, that marks its weakness as 'fiction for development'.

In a paper that focuses on the prioritisation of ecology in Mda's allegory of rural development, Anthony Vital (2005) raises some important points, worth quoting at length:

Building co-operatives in rural areas with a long history of settlement is a crucial step in South Africa's development, and deploying ecology to protect traditional ways of interacting with nature surely has value. But because the narrative turns its back so decidedly on the country's capitalist, industrial nexus, the value it assigns ecology can have little relevance to the majority of South Africans. By rejecting Johannesburg and romancing the indigenous, Mda's novel is unable to address, even by implication, the environmental issues faced by people in South Africa's urbanised and commercial agricultural areas. Nor can it address issues confronting those who are landless for having been dispossessed and displaced. By choosing to set the novel in a region of continuous settlement, Mda can bypass the difficult issues associated with land ownership, of restitution and reform, which will inevitably complicate a South African deployment of ecological knowledge. (310)

To modify Vital's argument: the absence of land agitation in the novel is in several senses understandable. On the one hand, it might simply be a case of what Mda perceives to be an accurate, if somewhat cynical, reflection of attitudes to land reform in that area. More cannily, perhaps, in choosing the historic, overpopulated coastal location in the former 'homeland', Mda is able to de-privilege the heavily politicised agrarian question that posits the reform and redistribution of white-owned commercial farmland as a mainstay of national development. In light of this there may be real critical purpose behind the novel's elision of land reform.

The problem is that both these possibilities remain incongruous, given that expropriation is such an incessant feature of the colonial narrative. We might consider, then, whether its absence is, like that of HIV-AIDS and the narrative of the 'middle generations', a compound irony on Mda's part: an implicit criticism of the myopia, amnesia and misconceived priorities held by neoliberal 'developers', as well as marginalised and introverted rural communities. If this is the case, then Mda's emphasis on ecological conservation-as-resistance to an imperial hangover of (neo)liberal 'development', can be read as a strong, critical engagement with *southern*

African nationalism, rather than a weak engagement with the policies of the post-apartheid ANC.

The Heart of Redness is not the first novel by a black writer from southern Africa to explore ecological relations to 'the land'. Charles Mungoshi shows how precarious an ecosystem the Zimbabwean peasant homestead is in the underdeveloped Tribal Trust Lands of the 1960s and 70s in *Waiting for the Rain* (1975); the forced removal in La Guma's *Time of the Butcherbird* (1979) is ironically contrasted with the Afrikaner's project to conserve and transplant veld plant-life; the gendered ecology of cultural nationalism has been discussed in relation to Chenjerai Hove's three novels. But whereas Hove's use of ecology is heavily anthropomorphic and mythogenic, and Mungoshi and La Guma's are cuttingly ironic—all of them arising in the context of anti-colonial nationalism—Mda's use of ecology is more *ecocritical*.¹⁰⁵ Throughout his novel Mda emphasises traditional relations to the local environment, to nature, rather than politicised spiritual relations to 'the land'. But, as ever, he does so through a comic mode.

Where Bhonco and his Unbelievers 'steal' a trance-ritual from the abaThwa in order to mourn "the sad time of our forefathers" (*HR*: 188), Zim has merely to "commune" with nature: his ubiquitous fig tree "is directly linked to the ancestors" (*HR*: 38). In this novel it is courtship rather than urbanisation and alienation that functions as a conscientising process: Qukezwa seduces Camagu while teaching him about the local environment, its resources and social history (*HR*: 90-106). As David Lloyd (2001) argues, of Khoi descent, Qukezwa is "most visibly imbued with the spirit of the place." (36) As in his earlier novel, *She Plays with the Darkness* (1995), the residual cultural markers of the Khoi and San people are used to problematise the authenticity of "cultural recovery" (Jacobs 2000: 70). The Qukezwa of the colonial narrative is "proudly" described by Twin as "the original owner of this land" (*HR*: 108) when they are forced from it. This invocation of the indigenous implicitly disallows any straightforward claim to 'the land' by either of the post-apartheid factions. By cutting down aggressive species of foreign trees—"not the tress of our forefathers" (*HR*: 215)—the present-day Qukezwa challenges the patriarchal 'customary' authority that might make this claim on the one hand, whilst conserving

¹⁰⁵ By partially italicising 'ecocritical' here I want to stress that *The Heart of Redness* does not ascribe to nature a value and autonomy distinct from human relations and critical of human arrogation of nature. Rather, it uses autochthonous ecological knowledge as means to critique the more tendentious associations made between certain social groups and 'the land'.

an indigenous eco-social identity on the other. This is only possible, she asserts, because “in the new South Africa, where there is no discrimination, it [customary law] does not work.” (*HR*: 213)

In the novel we therefore find a complex ‘indigenous’ sensibility married, quite literally, to the democratic promise of the new era. Dalton, in a further example, chastises Bhonco for his lack of ecological and cultural awareness, invoking the legacy of the Paramount Chief Sarhili:

“Perhaps you need to learn more from your forefathers ... King Sarhili himself was a very strong conservationist. He created Manyibe, a conservation area where people were not allowed to hunt or chop trees. He wanted to preserve things for future generations.” (*HR*: 165)

In these ways *The Heart of Redness* is the first English novel from southern Africa to bring an eco-critical perspective to bear on the historical relations between ethnicity, land and nationality. But, as Vital suggests, this perspective threatens to lose its potential force because of the context and form in which Mda mobilises it: a context in which the complex history of land ownership seems to have become inconsequential.

If Mda really is interested in satirising the discourse of ‘civilisation’ that links ‘bad’ neoliberal development to a history of imperialist expansion and assimilation, then his choice of setting remains paradoxical. On the one hand the novel speaks to the nation: demanding a redefinition of the terms of postcolonial, post-apartheid national development. On the other, it is unwilling to speak *for* the nation. The historic locality of the novel refuses the burden of national allegory, but also invokes it, simultaneously, in order to conserve itself. The tragic history of the amaXhosa ‘nation’ is assimilated into the imaginary of the new South Africa when Nongqawuse’s valley is declared a national heritage site. This paradox resonates with Hove’s latter two novels, *Shadows* and *Ancestors*, where the distinct histories of different ethnic groups’ ‘lands’ within the colonial and postcolonial nation are made clear, but are continually under threat from government policy in both eras. But where Hove actually depicts the traumas of different individuals and families being compelled to migrate between those lands, the absence of a ‘middle’ narrative in

Mda's novel means we have only a piecemeal story of the dispossessed after their loss of land.

In terms of the novel's formal structure, this seems incongruous. In the wake of the cattle-killing the colonial narrative points towards the kind of displacement, trauma and fostering of ethnic enmity that we find represented in Hove's novels:

The Man Who Named Ten Rivers' [Sir George Grey] opposition to indiscriminate charity extended to the amaMfengu. He could not tolerate their humanity toward the amafaca, the emaciated ones, and instructed their chief to expel those amaXhosa who had found refuge among his people. Twin and Qukezwa were among the thousands of people who were driven out of the land of the amaMfengu. Two thousand of these refugees were handed over to the colonial labor offices. Twin was too weak to attract the attention of anyone at the labor market ... Meanwhile, Qukezwa wandered from village to village with Heitsi, begging for scraps of food. She hoped that one day she would locate her Khoikhoi people and would be welcomed into their warm bosom. (HR: 258)

We know that Qukezwa returns to live as a beggar with her son, Zim's ancestor Heitsi, in Qolorha; that when "Pacified men return, their homesteads have been moved elsewhere, and crammed into tiny pacified villages. Their pacified fields have become rich settler farmlands." (HR: 272) But we are given no clues as to subsequent life and work on the farms, or to how the labour market is affected by industrialisation from the 1870s onwards.¹⁰⁶ Nor are we given any idea of where the farms stop and the overpopulated Native areas and 'homelands' begin.¹⁰⁷ What we are given, interestingly, is a brief snapshot of Camagu's past. His Mpondomise family¹⁰⁸ were dispossessed and displaced within his memory and given "only small plots and no compensation." The "vague memories of his home village" are sentimental and brought into a familiar contrast with the urban world that his family eventually moved to: there "it was a different life, devoid of the song of the amagqiyazana." For him to

¹⁰⁶ There are frequent references throughout the novel to men who work in the mines and cities, but with the exception of Twin's funeral in Hillbrow where Camagu meets NomaRussia, these are not expanded on.

¹⁰⁷ Although I am being critical of this omission, I concede that there is an argument to be made for Mda's conscious refusal to provide the kind of 'supplementary' apartheid narrative that Coetzee has consistently also refused. In this discussion, however, I take this omission to be a contradiction internal to the text itself.

¹⁰⁸ The Mpondomise are another Xhosa speaking ethnic group but are also, like the amaMfengu, distinct from the amaXhosa proper.

return nostalgically to a *different* land, not “up in the mountains in distant inland parts of the country” (HR: 59), is therefore a subtle gesture of ethnic reconciliation, another aspect of Mda’s ‘soft’ nationalism. But the brief picture it gives us of apartheid-era ‘black spot’ removals and urbanisation does not tally with the missing narrative of the dispossessed, and, crucially, how that story evolves from the colonial period to Mda’s post-apartheid narrative of cultural renewal and development.

From David Attwell’s (2005) brief reading of the novel, it is clear that he sees its value in the way that it *frames* these issues, rather than in its historical fidelity or political consistency. The post-apartheid and colonial narratives juxtapose “moments of choice ... [which] ... represent high water marks in the definition of agency in black historical and cultural identity.”(9) If this framing device emphasises choice, as Attwell suggests, then who, we might well ask, acts on those choices in the novel? Who holds ‘agency’ in Qolorha? Dalton and Camagu, Xoliswa Ximiya and the developers provide the choices, but it is also Camagu and Dalton who surely hold the most influence in the village, who make the most decisions.

Dalton is responsible for the communal water tap initiative, for example, but is later scorned by Bhonco and NoPetticoat as being no better than the “ruling party”, who impose leadership from above, when people are cut off for not being able to pay (HR: 164). Of the two proposed alternatives to the resort, Dalton sponsors the cultural village while Camagu funds and founds the co-operatives, championing low-impact eco-tourism. The villagers interpret their debates as a power struggle, and sure enough Dalton is despotically jubilant when he—and not Camagu—wins a reprieve for the village by getting it declared a national heritage site. He celebrates winning “his people back from the clutches of this overeager stranger from Johannesburg.” (HR: 270) Six years later the village has ‘developed’ through an amalgamation of Dalton and Camagu’s projects, with a holiday camp prospering alongside the cultural village. The novel ends, however, with the suggestion that it is just a matter of time before the village is turned into a gambling complex.

Clearly the question of ‘choice’ is heavily circumscribed. If we ask similar questions of the ‘choice’ repeatedly proffered in the colonial narrative—‘what is land compared to civilization?’—then either Attwell’s reading misses Mda’s irony, or that irony is less consistent than I read it to be. The local people may be given choices in both epochs, but true to the contradictory spirit of liberal and neoliberal democracy, they are not choices at all. They are ultimatums. Given this, it becomes hard to see

how Mda's juxtaposition of choices is anything other than a scathingly *ironic* reflection on the trajectory of black agency in South African modernity.¹⁰⁹ More to the point, we might say that in the later narrative Mda can only attribute agency to those in certain privileged social positions. In the colonial narrative the question is more complex. The more egalitarian nature of traditional Xhosa society means that a greater variety of opinions and positions are heard and held. That a ten year old girl can precipitate internecine debate and conflict—that are beyond the power of the *nation's* leader to control—is a case in point. But this is only true in so far as we consider choice and agency to be factors solely internal to the amaXhosa. Clearly they are not. As the historian Jeff Peires (1989)—Mda's acknowledged historical authority—stresses:

the Cattle Killing was a logical and rational response, by a nation driven to desperation *by pressures that people today can barely imagine ...[it] ... would not have been so fatal an error had it not been for the measures of Governor Grey, which first encouraged and then capitalized on the movement.* (x my italics)

So, if the question of black agency is fraught from the onset of colonial modernity, does the art of Mda's novel merely bear abject testimony to its endurance (as Coetzee's *Disgrace* arguably does)? I would suggest not. At least not entirely. Unlike Coetzee's resolutely ambiguous depiction of the land transfer, Mda clearly wants to model *viable* alternatives to the government's corrupt development scheme. His problem is that in the bid for a playful narrative able to mediate between the local and the national, to satirise Red ('traditional') and School ('modern') identities, the novel becomes mired in its own ironies.

Mda's critique of neoliberal development, most frequently vocalised through Camagu and Dalton, is itself ironic in that both characters perpetuate the cycle of dependency that is criticised. But Mda seems determined to show that their interventions into village affairs are essential if the village is to realise its own capacity for autonomous development. If we leave aside, momentarily, land reform and HIV-AIDS, Mda's sardonic representation of rural development in *The Heart of Redness* is in several ways consistent with his sober non-fiction treatise on

¹⁰⁹ In fairness to Attwell's brief engagement with the text, it is quite possible that he also reads 'agency' in ironic terms, but does not have space to develop his argument.

‘development communication’, *When People Play People: Development Communication through Theatre* (1993).

Discussing how his travelling theatre might conscientise people out of a dependency mentality, Mda clearly infers that intervention is a necessary evil for people to come to a level of awareness whereby they can challenge local and regional leadership that has been imposed from the top down and continues to fail them:

The observation that community participation may not necessarily lead to conscientisation means that there is an essential variable that must operate within the process of participation in order to get conscientisation. That variable is intervention. (165)

Mda develops this concept of intervention from the literal perspective of a dramatic process, involving both the community and development experts (“catalysts”). The macro-developmental analogy to be drawn from this local project is clear:

Optimal intervention is the ideal balance between intervention and participation that engenders the highest level of conscientisation ...The study concludes that for catalysts to play an effective interventionist role they must have a higher level of critical awareness than the villagers. (186)

This conclusion helps explain some of the text’s contradictions. Why, that is, the novel testifies to the ongoing dependency of the peoples of the Eastern Cape to ‘outsider’ intervention, but at the same time tries to imagine a path out of that dependency.

The unspoken secret in *The Heart of Redness*

Mda’s interventionist conceit does not explain other, pressing contradictions within the novel. Namely, why does a novel that allegorises development, be it ironically or with some degree of conviction, not have a single direct allusion to the two major factors influencing development in South Africa—land reform and HIV-AIDS? I earlier suggested that such lacunae in the post-apartheid ‘narrative’ might represent a compound irony. For a long time HIV-AIDS remained a public secret in South Africa.

Mda's novel reflects the myopia, amnesia and mislaid priorities of those in power, as well as the marginalised communities themselves. But by doing this it assumes a terrible burden. The secret remains unspoken.

The subplot of NomaRussia's illness clearly illustrates this point. Forced to flee the village for Johannesburg following an affair with Zim, NomaRussia returns after the death of his wife, NoEngland, to seek forgiveness. We are told she suffers from "an incurable disease" (HR: 90) by Qukezwa, and that she herself believes it to be a curse that only NoEngland can lift (HR: 251). What better opportunity to introduce the question of traditional and modern responses to HIV-AIDS? Instead, she is diagnosed with cervical cancer. She is first seen at the beginning of the novel at a wake in Hillbrow, mourning Tukwila's brother, Twin. He dies "drunk and frustrated" (HR: 266); an artist destroyed by the commercial pressures of the city. Again, there is no mention of HIV-AIDS, which, tragically, could quite conceivably have hastened his death.

Unlike Phaswane Mpe, who in *Welcome To Our Hillbrow* (2001) has written about the many difficulties and prejudices encountered by young rural blacks migrating to South Africa's cities, Mda ostensibly avoids the issue of HIV-AIDS. Given the contexts described above, this *has* to be intentional. To what extent Mda's satire is directed at the government's denial of the pandemic in the late 1990s, and to what extent this is intentional satire, remain questions that the text cannot answer. There are potential answers available outside it though. In an article published in the *Mail and Guardian* and the British *Guardian* in July 2004, Mda makes a partial defence of what he calls Thabo Mbeki's "unorthodoxies". He claims authority on the matter as "someone who has been involved in Aids education for the past decade" with his theatre and other work. So, if the absence of HIV-AIDS *is* ironic, as this would suggest, then so too, we must assume, is that of land reform. If this is the case, then, Mda's novel arguably provides as muddled an allegory of 'good' and 'bad' development as the government itself. But then perhaps this as the author desired it. To quote Pierre Macherey (1966), in "its every particle, the work *manifests*, uncovers, what it cannot say. This silence gives it life." (Macherey 2004: 704)

Mda invests in the ecological and indigenous, but qualifies this by emphasising the dynamic heritage of cultural hybridity and all the contradictions that colonial modernity—progress and development *qua* 'civilization'—brings to such ideas. With the dual narrative and 'split-tone' narration, the 'tragic history of the

amaXhosa nation' is playfully foregrounded in order to *localise* the question of post-apartheid development. This gives Mda a great platform to satirise the 'nationalism' of the post-apartheid government and comprador bourgeoisie. Despite these contradictions, then, the novel shares an affinity with those postcolonial Zimbabwean writers trying, at an imaginative level, to wrest 'the land' back from those in power who continue to read it solely in terms of its economic and political capital. Where that literature struggles to free itself from the political, ethnic and patriarchal overdetermination of 'the land', rooted in the discourse of anti-colonial struggle, his relative freedom emboldens Mda to marginalise the pitfalls of that nationalism, once so vital, also, to 'the middle generations' in South Africa. Now, whilst land redistribution has subsequently taken a radical but corrupt course in Zimbabwe, in South Africa the government, fearful of similar 'land-invasions,'¹¹⁰ continues to fail the needs of the landless and marginalised. The reality for the majority of rural South Africans is still better captured in *And They Didn't Die* than it is in *Disgrace*. The humour of Mda's novel offers a channel between the stoicism of the former and the latent cynicism of the latter. What all three convey, however, is the ongoing importance of 'the land' in personal as well as public narratives.

Without claiming that these three novels are in any general way representative of South African fiction in the 1990s, I would maintain that their particular engagements with 'the land' express the emergence and pre-emergence of structures of feeling within a national cultural imagination.¹¹¹ Where these writers are now able to be more direct in their engagement with the politics of land, the classic South African dilemma of 'speaking about it', as Mda's novel shows, is still very much bound to an economy of silence and anticipation. This no doubt reflects the still unresolved status of the land question. For so long as land redistribution remains tied to the political project of nation-building, it seems that this will continue to be the case.

¹¹⁰ In 'Land Occupations in South Africa' (2005), Mfaniseni Fana Sihlongonyane argues that so-called 'illegal' occupation of land is historically justifiable. He excoriates the terms 'invasion', 'squatting' and 'land seizure' as "racist" concepts, "born of apartheid that sought to despise the efforts by dispossessed blacks to acquire land." (142)

¹¹¹ In making such a speculation I am wary of David Attwell's (2005) recent criticisms of "the stringent narrative" of certain historicist readings that allegorise black South Africa writing "as representing particular phases and periods, like coloured pins on a battle map." (11) My hope is that by reading comparatively, with attention to the historical singularity of each novel and, often 'against the grain', this study avoids such a tendency.

Conclusion

Before offering a summative conclusion, it is important to reprise the aims and intentions, but also the limitations of this thesis. The selective nature of the literary readings, along with the specific thematic and political concerns that drive them means that the conclusions the thesis reaches can only be partially representative of broader literary, cultural and historical fields. But as such it also opens numerous avenues of further research. Different nations, periods, genres and languages might all be looked at to offer a broader (or indeed narrower) sense of how ‘the land’ has been represented, and for what reasons and to what purposes, in literature from southern Africa. The potential scope of this project is delimited in this thesis in order to broach questions and themes that are often taken up in historical accounts and political economy, but rarely pursued from a literary perspective. What I hope this study has achieved in its comparative emphasis is an insight into the changing structures of feeling in literature from two intimately connected nations.

In the introduction I suggested that the principal change from the 1970s to the 1990s was from a pervasive sense of repossession in the literature to one of reform. While this observation certainly holds true for South Africa, it is not necessarily the case in Zimbabwean fiction. The symbols and agents of anti-colonial nationalism exert palpable pressure in novels published between 1975-1988—a time, in theory, of the repossession of land, sovereignty and culture—yet they are largely refused narrative authority. As the anthropologist David Lan (1985) notes, peasant resistance was by no means always tantamount to nationalist feeling: there was a readiness to accept the loss of land “provided they were able to exercise ‘the peasant option.’” (122) The novels are therefore dominated by tropes of possession—by a ‘lost’ rural past, by the ancestors, by maintaining cultural continuity and by nationalism itself—rather than repossession.

Similarly, in novels published between 1989–2000, a period in which we might expect to see the re- or pre-emergence of repossession, the main structure of feeling is abjection, but we also find the promise of redemption in tropes of reconstruction. In particular, the abject condition found in recent Zimbabwean writing demonstrates what happens when ‘the land’ comes to dominate political life and the project of repossession is chronically mishandled. South African fiction, by contrast,

is more given to ideas of reconciliation—hence land *reform*—for the reason that post-colonial nation-building there has been tempered by political and economic constraints not dissimilar to those in Zimbabwe in the early 1980s. In her 1996 essay Sarah Nuttall looked for the emergence of *reconstructed* relations to land in recent South African fiction. What the Zimbabwean comparison suggests, however, is that such a structure of feeling is more likely to emerge at a moment when the open wound that is the ‘land question’ in South Africa approaches a crisis point. Are the signs of reconstructing attitudes to land in *Disgrace* and *The Heart of Redness* the harbingers of such a crisis? For the great numbers of displaced people who live on or who have been trying to return to the land since 1994, the situation has arguably been nothing *but* crisis.

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