Tales of the Nation

Feminist Nationalism or Patriotic History?
Defining National History and Identity
in Zimbabwe

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Contents

1. Introduction

> In Zimbabwe today, it almost goes without saying that a critical history of nationalism is essential: many of the fundamental issues which affect Zimbabwean society arise out of the promises, the disputed character and the failures of nationalism. (Alexander et al. 2000:83)

In the face of a strong emphasis on history in the contemporary political mobilisation in Zimbabwe, the above quotation calls for an analysis of the Zimbabwean nationalist discourses which emphasise the anti-colonial struggle as the iterative *raison d'être* of the Zimbabwean nation. The anti-colonial wars in 1896-1897 and 1965–1980 are in the nationalist discourses today continuously repeated in what can best be described as government propaganda on radio, television and in the government-controlled press. The atrocities of Zimbabwe's colonial history and the heroism of the liberation war are inscribed into a narrative of the ruling party ZANU (PF), in which its role in the anti-colonial struggle is afforded a privileged position that ascribes the party a 'natural' right to rule (Ranger 2004). In ZANU (PF)'s current political discourses this narrative of heroism in the struggle against colonial oppression is being used as a rhetorical weapon against the opposition as well as the critical press, critical intellectuals and human rights NGOs who criticise the government. ZANU (PF)'s nationalist discourses define any critique against the ruling party and/or the government as neo-imperialist (mainly British) 'mouthpiecing' (McGreal 2002). Under this flag, the chairman of the Information Commission Professor Tafataona Mahoso and the Information Minister Jonathan Moyo have led a crusade against the independent media in order to silence the critical independent voices in the Zimbabwean press. Mahoso has claimed that the independent newspapers *"are writing lies"* (Mahoso in Chimtete 2003), and he is seconded by Moyo who has stated that *"Mercenaries of any kind, whether carrying the sword or the pen, must and will be exposed, and will suffer the full consequence of the law"* (Moyo in Reuters 2004).

The crack-down on the independent media has been ascribed to a wider political strategy of the government, which aims at stifling the opposition by any available means. As such, the opposition has been persecuted through the legal system and changes have been made to the electoral process, just as members of the opposition

party MDC are the victims of organised political violence (Raftopoulos 2002:416, Zimbabwe Institute 2004:6–11, Coltart 2004). When considering the coerciveness of the government, the editor of the now banned independent newspaper *The Daily News*, Nqobile Nyathi, has commented that *"many Zimbabweans* [are currently] *at the mercy of the government's self-serving propaganda* […] *the people of Zimbabwe are force-fed Zanu PF's view of the world"* (Nyathi 2003). In this political environment a critical rewriting of the government's 'master narratives' of national history (as in the quotation above), through which it legitimises its increasingly violent rule, is still called for by a number of Zimbabweans.

Such critical rewritings of national history have most prominently appeared in the works of human rights NGOs, for example in the report *Breaking the Silence* (1997) compiled by The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, in which the aftermath of the liberation war and the Matabeleland genocide (1980–1988) are documented.[1] Likewise, historians and social scientists have added to this critical rewriting,[2] especially the historian Terence Ranger has in his later works critically evaluated the liberation war and the political crisis after independence. These accounts have mainly caused debate in diasporic intellectual networks, on the internet, and in the independent media (Alexander & McGregor 1999). For example, the author and political commentator Chenjerai Hove has as a columnist in the independent newspaper *The Zimbabwe Standard* contributed to a critique of the government's use of history in its political propaganda (Hove 2002:22), and he is one of several Zimbabwean authors who have re-evaluated the past in a critical light in their literary accounts of the liberation war.[3] One of the latest contributions to this critical rewriting is Yvonne Vera's novel *The Stone Virgins* (2002), which focuses on the liberation war and the Matabeleland genocide.

Vera is today one of Zimbabwe's most respected authors both in Zimbabwe and internationally. Her first novel *Nehanda* (1993) received the Zimbabwe Publisher's Literary Award in 1994, just as her subsequent novels have won this and a number of international literary awards. Her writing has been praised for its feminist breaking of the taboos of a male dominated society,[4] and in that respect it has been said that she *"gives voice to previously suppressed narratives and brings into focus fissures in the nationalist discourses of power"* (Muponde & Taruvinga 2002:xi). This point has especially been made in reference to the novel *Nehanda*, in which Vera rewrites the his-

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1. Contemporary human rights violations have been the focus of a number of recent reports. See for example: Amnesty International (2003), Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum (2001), Solidarity Peace Trust (2003a & 2003b) and Zimbabwe Institute (2004).

2. See for example: Alexander, McGregor, and Ranger (2000), Alexander and McGregor (1999 and 2001), Moore (1995), Raftopoulos (2000 and 2002) and Ranger (1999a, 2002a and 2003a).

3. See for example: Hove (1991), Dangarembga (1988), Chinodya (1989) and Kanengoni (1997).

4. See for example the essay collection *Sign and Taboo* (2002) edited by Muponde & Taruvinga, Wilson-Tagoe (2002 & 2003) and Primorac (2001, 2002 & 2003).

torical accounts of the first anti-colonial wars in 1896–1897 from a female point of view (Wilson-Tagoe 2002:161). Vera's preoccupation with the nation's past has mainly been analysed through the perspective of feminist rewritings of history. Here however, a slightly different perspective is adopted because her novels are analysed in relation to contemporary political discourses of history and national identity. In those discourses the liberation war and the myth of the spirit Nehanda are the cornerstones in a narrative of the birth of Zimbabwe. The analysis therefore mainly focuses on the novels *Nehanda* and *The Stone Virgins*, which in different ways work their way through the war torn landscapes that form the backdrop of the narrative of the nation. As such, these two novels represent narratives of the events which are being afforded signifying positions in the current political discourses. They are therefore viewed as adding to a discursive field of symbols of national identity.

Thus, I seek to integrate an analysis of the political discourse of Zimbabwean national history, in which history is being politicised as a sign of national identity, with an analysis of Vera's novels *Nehanda* and *The Stone Virgins*, which focuses on the ways in which these novels can be analysed in relation to the political discourses. This overall analytical aim is 'unorthodox' both in regard to political discourse analysis and in regard to literary analysis because it seeks to integrate the two into one discursive field, which is defined by different articulations of national history and national identity. To include the imagined cultural space of the literary works in the political discourse analysis and therefore also involve the political implications of the imagined cultural space in the literary analysis enables a joint analysis of the interaction between literary narratives of the nation and political narrative strategies. The purpose is to show how these different articulations of the nation's history and national identity are dialogical, and how they over time form master narratives and counter-narratives, which are not stable articulations of national identity, but evolve over time in a dialogical process.

2. Field of interest

The nationalist discourse of ZANU (PF) particularly emphasises a 'patriotic history' of the liberation war as a point of identification for the Zimbabwean people (Ranger 2004:218–220). This patriotic history is articulated as driven by a unifying spirit, which brings the nation together in a defining struggle against colonialism and neo-colonialism. Alexander, McGregor & Ranger call this discourse *"the master-narrative of official Zimbabwean nationalism"* (Alexander et al. 2000:4). This narrative of official Zimbabwean nationalism is in this context analysed contemporarily in relation to the novels *Nehanda* and *The Stone Virgins*. However, both the literary narratives in the novels and the nationalist discourse of ZANU (PF) are also analysed as deriving from a number of different articulations within a discursive field of national identity over time; articulations that all define the nation as a temporal and spatial agent; that is as an 'imagined community'.

Benedict Anderson has argued that literature can function as a mediator of the imagined community of the nation as a temporal and spatial agent because literature can narrate the national space and time with reference to a specific national community (Anderson 1991:26–32). However, the South African author André Brink has argued that literary narratives of the nation may not always correlate with the official master-narratives of national identity even if, as Anderson describes, they narrate the nation as a temporal and spatial agent. Narration of a distant past as well as narration of politically potent contemporary events can in literature be turned against, what he calls, *"a canon of received wisdom"* (Brink 1996:137). Literature has qualities that make it instrumental in support of hegemonic versions of national identity as well as in opposition to them. Brink finds that when history becomes associated with the official interpretations of the world, literature can mediate disrupting imaginings of 'the real'. Accordingly, he proposes that a symbiosis exists between political discourses and literature because they both rely on a narrative discursive structure and both add to a symbolic field of national identity (Brink 1996:143–144).

Inspired by this, the nationalist discourses of ZANU (PF) and of the novels *Nehanda* and *The Stone Virgins* are analysed with a focus on the ways in which narratives of national history and national identity are articulated by drawing on a field of symbols of national identity. Here it is proposed that Zimbabwean national history

is being put into discourse by a number of different agents within a discursive field of Zimbabwean national identity. That is, the political discourses of ZANU (PF) and the discourses of other agents such as the opposition, intellectuals, civil society groups and authors etc. are seen as occupying a discursive field, in which national history is politicised as a sign of national identity. For the purpose of the analysis at hand the discursive field is therefore viewed as mapping out the nation's imagined space and the nation's imagined community. Furthermore, throughout this analysis this discursive field is viewed as having been defined over time by different agents. In this respect the investigation of different articulations of discourses of national history and national identity incorporates the temporal aspect of this discursive field as well as the different discursive positions, through which agents have articulated the discursive field over time.

2.1. Problem definition

▲ How is the Zimbabwean nation represented in Yvonne Vera's novels *Nehanda* (1993) and *The Stone Virgins* (2002), and how can this representation be analysed in relation to nationalist discourses of Zimbabwe's history and national identity?

2.2. Method

The problem definition is aimed at facilitating a broad analytical framework, which views the literary works and the political discourses as parts of the discursive field, within which national history is being articulated in different ways as a sign of national identity. Therefore, the analyses of the political discourses and the novels are subdivided into themes as they are analysed as discursive formations.

The problem definition is inspired by a postcolonial theoretical approach to literary and political discourse analysis. As such, a critical approach to nationalism is inherent in my analytical framework. It also follows that the analysis is focused on describing how a certain articulation of national identity becomes a master narrative, and how opposing articulations can split, fragment or destabilise this master narrative.

2.2.1. Theories

My theoretical framework has mainly been inspired by Homi Bhabha's theories of the nation. His theories draw on a number of influences from the postmodern and postcolonial theoretical fields. Consequently theoreticians of these fields are also drawn upon in the analysis. They are mainly Mikhail Bakhtin, Benedict Anderson and Michel Foucault although the analysis also draws upon selected aspects of the theories of Frantz Fanon, Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak, just as general influences from the fields of postmodern and postcolonial theories are the background for the overall analytical approach.

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Bhabha has been chosen as the primary theoretician because of his questioning of the relation between the modern power relations and the articulation of the nation in a colonial and neo-colonial context. This can also be viewed as a question of the relation between modernity and colonialism and between postmodernism and postcolonial theory. Below, this relation is therefore explored further as a background for the general framework of the analysis.

2.2.1.1. The postcolonial and postmodern theoretical fields

As mentioned, the fields of theory used as stepping stones in this analysis are the 'post-something' fields, which for some time now have been highly debated, namely the postmodernist and postcolonial de-constructive theoretical perspectives. The grouping together of such large and substantial reference points is on the one hand both the most straightforward way of reading these overlapping, intertwined, and highly dialectical fields. Their interconnectedness derives from a common questioning of representations within relations of power between centre and margin, both locally and globally. Postcolonial theory and postcolonial studies[1] set off by reading colonial texts through the lens of critical theory, which is grounded in the study of the relation between language, world and consciousness mainly represented by postmodern thinkers such as Lacan, Derrida, Barthes and Foucault (Spivak 1987:77–78). On the other hand this postmodern relation has led critics of postcolonial theory to conclude that postcolonial theory is nothing but one of the 'post-somethings' that are de-constructive of the idea of linear historical progress and yet have been named within this exact thinking. The 'post' in postcolonial theory could be (and has been) taken as alluding to a 'post-ness' of the colonial period and therefore signifying a theory of the entire range of so called postcolonial societies (McClintock 1994:254–258).

In the context of this analysis it is important to stress that the term 'postcolonial' is used in its theoretical sense. That is, it does not refer to postcolonial societies as being 'once colonised' but now liberated. When referring to the Zimbabwean 'postcolonial state' the neo-colonial power relations, which are discussed below, are therefore the background for the use of 'postcolonial'. Neither does the term signify 'postcolonial literature', which could be understood as literature from the former colonies that have only this in common that the countries they (at some level) derive from at one point have been colonised. Nor does it ascribe to a notion of postcoloniality, which could be taken as meaning: 'a theory about postcolonial culture and society', which can be applied at any time and to anything that relates to the so called postcolonial societies. Consequently, here the term postcolonial is used in the sense of a critical perspective, which takes into consideration different aspects of the colonial and the neo-colonial projects (in the plural). This critique, which informs

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1. 'Postcolonial studies' is the study of literature from the former colonies.

the struggles of marginalised voices, is critical of forces of colonialism and neo-colonialism, and it forms a tool which helps undermine global power relations by way of an epistemological critique that is in tune with 'the post-something' theoretical fields. As such, postcolonial theory and postmodern theories of power relations critically engage the modern power relations from different points of view. Postmodern theories of power relations cannot serve as a direct model for the analysis at hand because they analyse the specific *European* relations of power. However, these theories have served as inspiration for some of the 'pioneers' of the postcolonial theoretical field such as Bhabha, Said and Spivak because of the shared critical perspective on colonialism and Western civilisation (Gandhi 1998:25–26). Colonial and neo-colonial power relations are thus seen in light of this critical analysis.

Here contemporary Zimbabwean nationalism is analysed as part of the colonial and neo-colonial power relation in a world, which is interconnected and has been formed through processes of integration and relations of power on a global scale throughout the colonial period and thereafter. These processes have been critically evaluated by Partha Chatterjee who (when referring to India) claims that the modern modes of exercise of power in the colonies have formed unique state formations, in which older forms of power have also persisted, creating a new form of power relation in the former colonies:

> When one looks at regimes of power in the so called backward countries of the world today, not only does the dominance of the characteristically 'modern' modes of exercise of power seem limited and qualified by the persistence of older modes, by the fact of their combination in a particular state and formation, but it seems to open up at the same time an entirely new range of possibilities for the ruling classes to exercise their domination. (Chatterjee quoted in Spivak 1987:209)

The power relations in contemporary Zimbabwean society are not analysed as working through the same mechanisms as the power relations in European societies, but nevertheless they are analysed as interconnected with the global power relations. Likewise, contemporary Zimbabwean power relations are not viewed as similar to European power relations, they are, however, viewed as influenced by the same political project namely imperialism.[1]

Postmodernist theories are therefore here read through a postcolonial perspective. This is inspired by Bhabha's appropriation of Foucault's notion of power-

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1. Here imperialism refers to *"the practice, theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory"* (Said in: Aschroft et al. 1998:122) as opposed to colonialism, which refers to the process of implanting settlements on a distant territory. In reference to Rhodesian nationalism and the creation of the Zimbabwean nation-state the term colonialism is preferred here because the Rhodesian state was the product of a settler colonialism. See section 4.3. However, as this settler colonialism was part of British imperialism, the two cannot entirely be separated analytically from each other in the Zimbabwean context.

knowledge. Foucault's theories are read as supplying methodological tools and principles that inform an analysis into any society, which has been shaped by the modern enterprise of Enlightenment, of which imperialism was an integral part. This was, however, not taken into account by Foucault in his analysis of modern power relations. As such, Bhabha's theories are inspired by the foucauldian analysis of power relations, but he focuses on the specific colonial and neo-colonial relations of power, which were left out of Foucault's perspective. Bhabha uses the foucauldian analysis to point out the strategic nature of discourses and to undermine the notions in postcolonial theory of binary antagonisms of colonised and coloniser, which could be subverted by being inverted (Bhabha 1994:72). Bhabha instead uses Foucault's theories of power to underline his own focus on difference:

> Foucault insists that the relation of knowledge and power within the apparatus is always a strategic response to *an urgent need* at a given historical moment. The force of colonial and postcolonial discourse as a theoretical and cultural intervention in our contemporary moment represents the urgent need to contest singularities of difference and to articulate diverse 'subjects' of differentiation. (Bhabha 1994:73–74) [original italics]

The postcolonial connection between postmodern theories such as Bhabha's appropriation of Foucault's theories is used here not only as a tool for understanding colonial discourses, but also as a means to understand the contemporary political discourses and literary narrative strategies within the discursive field of Zimbabwean national identity. These are seen as strategic articulations that are formed by an apparatus of power which has been shaped by the Rhodesian colonial project. Thus, they bear a resemblance to the modern relations of power as analysed by Foucault, but are specific in their response to the colonial condition under which the Zimbabwean nation-state has been formed.

2.2.1.2. Literary text analysis and discourse analysis
The approach to literary text analysis is inspired by Bakhtin's dialogism because his theories provide a framework through which different discursive positions can be outlined. Bakhtin's literary theories are developed in reference to a literary theoretical field, but his dialogical world-view describes how human consciousness comes into being in language and in discourse. Bakhtin's 'dialogism', which signifies his focus on dialogue in every aspect of human life, defines the individual as polyphonic by nature. From Bakhtin's point of view, consciousness comes into being by reflecting and integrating the many different voices (languages) that surround the individual. Therefore, the consciousness of the individual is socially constructed as multi-'lingual' and dialogical (Holquist 2002:15, Booth 1984:xxi). Through dialogue the consciousnesses of several individuals come together affecting and creating each other. This is not a dialectic process of thesis, antithesis and hypothesis since each

individual consciousness will have its own point of view on the dialogue (Bakhtin 1984:15–18, Holquist 2002:163–167). Ideas are likewise for Bakhtin always contained in human consciousness, and can only be analysed and described as a part of the human consciousness which contains them (Bakhtin 1984:78–79).

Accordingly, Bakhtin's dialogism is not exclusive to literary works; rather, it highlights literature's ability to *"serve as a metaphor for other aspects of existence"* (Holquist 2002:107). Therefore, Bakhtin's literary theory corresponds with the postmodern theoretical field. Bakhtin sees literary works and political discourses as dialogical in as much as they are bound to the same dialogical context, and that literary works are intertextual by nature, and therefore relate not only to other literary texts but also to other utterances such as political discourse. Bakhtin's theories are focused on literary text analysis, and as such they function on another level than Bhabha's theories, which describe the discursive articulations of the nation both in political discourse and in literature. For Bakhtin, the context of literary production serves as a 'source of representation' for literary works, which are ideally representations of a dialogue between different points of view on the world (Bakhtin 1984:7–8). Discourses are in the bakhtinian ideal novel (which is the dostoevskian novel) embodied in individual human conciousnesses, which are not carriers of ideas. Rather, in Bakhtin's reading of Dostoevsky human consciousnesses are explorations of ideas, which are explored by being displayed in dialogue with other consciousnesses. For Bakhtin, this dialogical world-view dictates a novelistic form, which expresses the polyphonic nature of human existence:

> *The polyphonic novel is dialogic through and through.* Dialogic relationships exists among all elements of novelistic structure; that is, they are juxtaposed contrapuntally. And this is so because dialogic relationships are a much broader phenomenon than mere rejoinders in a dialogue, laid out compositionally in the text; they are an almost universal phenomenon, permeating all human speech and all relationships and manifestations of human life – in general, everything that has meaning and significance. (Bakhtin 1984:40) [original italics]

The opposing subject positions, which Dostoevsky's novels are praised for displaying, are for Bakhtin not only discursive formations but also individual positions in society, which literature can explore and describe through the staging of interaction between different opposing human consciousnesses.

In the sense that postcolonial theory can be seen as writing against colonialism, Bakhtin can likewise be said to write 'against' the monolithic Stalinist discourse of the Soviet Union which was his dialogical context. In relation to postcolonial theory Bakhtin's dialogism has been used to explain the recurrent need for essentialist cultural identity in the postmodern era because he makes a distinction between conscious and unconscious heteroglossia and subsequently cultural hybridisation. This distinction is used to explain the (hybrid) process of cultural change within the per-

ceived homogeneous national culture and the othering and marginalisation of other forms of cultural hybridity. As such, Bakhtin's heteroglossia inspired postcolonial theorists in their formulation of cultural hybridity, and his polyphonic world-view has also found its way into postcolonial studies as a means of describing the voicing of minority discourses in literature (Werbner 1997:4–5, Ashcroft et al. 1998:118–121). Bakhtin's insistence on the dialogical nature of texts and speech acts and his subsequent dismissal of 'pure ideology' (Bakhtin 1984:78–79) has, when taken up by Bhabha, been used to underline a similar concept of agency. In Bhabha's definition of agency it works dialogically and socially, in as much as agency reflects the agency of other individuals and anticipates other agents' actions, just like Bakhtin's speech acts simultaneously involve and anticipate other speech acts in each articulation (Moore-Gilbert 1997:137).

Hence, the literary analysis draws upon both Bakhtin and Bhabha when describing how political discourses and literature can be related to each other. The novels are read through the dialogical perspective in order to outline both the way in which the novels display dialogue internally, but also how they can be read dialogically in relation to each other and in relation to the discursive field of Zimbabwean national identity. Bakhtin does not share Bhabha's concern with the power relations which discourse for Bhabha entails. Rather, it has been pointed out that Bakhtin's dialogical world-view is overly focused on the openendedness of dialogue (Emerson 1984:xxxix), while Bhabha's theories are preoccupied with the attempted closure of the master narrative and the attempted opening by discourses of difference. This difference between Bhabha and Bakhtin designates a specific reading and use of Bakhtin's theories because my analytical aim is to explore the workings of a certain master narrative. Bhabha's focus on the strategic nature of discourse is thus the general framework for understanding discursive formations. Bakhtin's dialogical world-view is used to describe how the novels can be read as articulations of polyphonic versions of Zimbabwe's history and national identity, opposing the master narrative in its monologic articulation of Zimbabwe's history and national identity.

2.2.2. My enunciative position

Non-western postcolonial feminist critiques have from time to time taken issue with white Western feminists such as myself, who engage in issues which have to do with the rights of third world women. They claim that Western feminists have attained a hegemonic position from which a definition of 'third world women' can be articulated authoritatively as 'oppressed third world women', which in effect is in contrast to the identity of the Western feminists in whose work they appear (Mohanty 1991:71, Minh-ha 1989:82–83). Their argument reaches out of the realm of feminist debate because it articulates the unequal power relations of academic productions, which I, as a Western academic, am writing myself into. These relations can be said to be in my favour, as a result of which I am likely to view my subject of analysis

from a certain perspective or at least with a number of 'blind spots'. This would be a (hopefully quite subtle) form of eurocentrism, and as such my enunciative position is challenging, as it is my aim to work against the grain of the eurocentric form of representation outlined above.

This problem of representation touches upon the issue of essentialist identity, as it works both ways in respect to any analysis that addresses issues to which the analyst is not indigenous. Spivak critically evaluates the 'essentialist argument' as claiming that *"people who have never had a foot in the house should not knock the father's mansion as the favoured sons do"* (Spivak in Landry & McClean 1996:26). Identity is in this argument stable and unchanging. According to Spivak, undertaking a deconstructive analysis questions this 'privileging of identity', which deems some holders of the truth and others unable to represent it because a deconstructive analysis focuses on how this truth is produced rather than asserting it (Spivak in Landry & McClean 1996:26). As such, the argument does not take into consideration the deliberate 'de-colonisation' of the mind, which is inherent in the deconstructive postcolonial theoretical perspective (Spivak 1994:148).

Bhabha argues that the postcolonial theoretical perspective provides a 'third space' for this kind of analysis. Taking on this theoretical perspective, means finding an enunciative position, which is neither eurocentric nor indigenous. In asserting 'cultural difference' instead of 'cultural purity' Bhabha argues that this third space enunciative position:

> […] may open the way to conceptualizing an *inter*national culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity*. To that end we should remember that it is the 'inter' – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. It makes it possible to begin envisaging national, anti-nationalistic histories of the 'people'. And by exploiting this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves. (Bhabha in Childs & Williams 1997:142) [original italics]

This critical postcolonial enunciative position involves a critical reflection on articulations of binary oppositions in cultural representation. In order to undertake the analysis outlined above my enunciative position can be described as an attempt at reaching a theoretical point of departure, which informs my analysis in such a way that the potential eurocentric perspective and blind spots of my 'positioning in Western academia' are effectively challenged in the theoretical framework of the analysis.

2.2.3. Structure

The analysis is structured into four chapters, which are described below. The theoretical framework, which has been briefly introduced above, is described in detail as a specific framework for the analysis in the last three of these chapters.

CHAPTER 3 is an introduction to Vera's writings, which focuses on the two most important themes in her writings, feminism and history, followed by a description of her positioning within the Zimbabwean literary tradition. This chapter functions as a point of reference for the further analysis of Vera's novels, and it introduces different articulations of Zimbabwean history and national identity in the Zimbabwean literary tradition and in Vera's works.

CHAPTER 4 consists of three sections that focus on different discourses of history. In the first section the reader is, through an analysis of the novel *Nehanda*, introduced to my central analytical interest, namely Vera's representation of the nation's history and national identity. The theme of the analysis in this section is Vera's articulation of what will here be termed a 'spiritual history' of the first anti-colonial wars; the first 'Chimurenga'. This analysis of the novel highlights Vera's narration of the nation as a temporal agent, and her critical rewriting of the colonial encounter, which is here termed a 'feminist nationalism'.

The second section of this chapter outlines the colonialist discourses that were articulated in the Rhodesian settler community in the time between Rhodes' occupation in 1890 and the first democratic election in 1980. This analysis enables the following analysis in the third section to trace back different discourses of history and identity, to themes and narrative schemas that were formed in the settler discourses.

The third section of this chapter contains an analysis of the different ways in which the Zimbabwean nationalist movement has defined itself over time. This analysis begins by exploring early nationalism and describes how nationalism was subsequently articulated and rearticulated in the different nationalist parties during the liberation war, and how an official nationalism was articulated after independence. This part of the overall analysis also aims at describing what can be (with caution) termed a 'political culture' within the nationalist movement.

CHAPTER 5 presents an analysis of ZANU (PF)'s political discourse of patriotic history and an analysis of Vera's *Nehanda*, which focuses on its articulation of the national struggle against colonial oppression. The ZANU (PF) analysis focuses on how the discourse of patriotic history articulates the anti-colonial struggle as a point of reference for contemporary politics, and how this discourse operates with a definition of nationalism and Africanism that excludes those opposing the ZANU (PF) government from the 'national we', as they are cast as adhering to a neo-colonial treacherous alignment with the 'enemies of the Zimbabwean people'; namely the former British colonial masters. The *Nehanda* analysis is concentrated on how the

temporal schema, which was outlined in the initial analysis of *Nehanda* in Chapter 4, can be read in relation to the way the discourse of patriotic history articulates a national temporality into which the so called third Chimurenga is narrated. This leads to a discussion of Vera's use of the spiritual narrative framework in the novel.

CHAPTER 6 analyses the novel *The Stone Virgins*. This analysis takes its point of departure in the attempts ZANU (PF) has made to silence versions of its own role in the liberation war that oppose ZANU (PF)'s master narrative of official history and the history of the Matabeleland genocide. The discourse of unity, through which ZANU (PF) has attempted to silence these opposing versions of the nation's history, is viewed as an attempt to define the violent rule of the government as 'prevailing guardians' of the nation's unity. In three subsequent sections, *The Stone Virgins* is analysed in order to show how Vera, through this novel, attempts not only to represent opposing narratives of the nation's history in a way that disrupts ZANU (PF)'s monologic version, but also to enter into a dialogue with her own feminist nationalism in *Nehanda*. As such, the first section describes how Vera represents the atrocities of the Matabeleland genocide. The second section focuses on how she depicts different opposing subject positions by representing independent voices who speak from different sides of the Matabeleland conflict. The third section focuses on the intertextuality between the novels *Nehanda* and *The Stone Virgins*. This part analyses the different narratives of the nation which are represented in the two novels, and describes how *The Stone Virgins* can be read as a commentary on the national narrative represented in *Nehanda*.

3. Yvonne Vera

Yvonne Vera grew up in Matabeleland's capital city Bulawayo. The population in this region is predominantly Ndebele speaking, but the city is a multi-cultural centre, where a number of so called ethnic groups and speakers of different languages live together.[1] Vera is Shona, she speaks both Ndebele and Shona, and as such she is in a position to view the Zimbabwean cultural heritage with a broad perspective.[2] The city of Bulawayo plays an important role in her novels. It is always at some level present in the landscape that forms the backdrop of her stories, and portraying the city and its surrounding landscapes has been one of the driving forces behind her writing. However, Vera's writing career began when she was living in Toronto where she had completed her doctoral thesis in comparative literature, and to which she has now returned.[3] Her first book, a collection of short stories entitled *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals?* (1992) was written in Toronto before she returned to Zimbabwe where she wrote her first novel *Nehanda* which was published in 1993 (Vera in Mutandwa 2002 and Vera in Bryce 2000:223). As an internationally renowned author, Vera has published her novels both locally in Zimbabwe and in the United States. As such, her novels can be viewed as belonging both to a Zimbabwean literary field and an international postcolonial literary field. Vera has chosen to write her novels in English rather than in either Shona or Ndebele, and her works are directed both to Zimbabwean and international readers (Vera in Bryce 2000:223).

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1. Located close to the South African and the Botswana borders Bulawayo is a centre in the region where a great number of ethnic groups and languages mix. As such, there are groups in Bulawayo and the surrounding areas, which speak Sindebele, Chishona, Kalanga, Tswana, Venda, Toga etc. (Ethnologue 2004). The Ndebele speaking group is comprised *mainly* of Kalanga and Ndebele descendants, while the Shona speaking group is more culturally homogeneous (Ranger 2001). The complex relation between ethnic identification and language in Zimbabwe will be further explored in the course of my analysis. See for example section 4.3.3.1.

2. After the Matabeleland genocide in the 1980s, tensions between members of the two largest language groups, Shona and Ndebele, have persisted in Zimbabwe. There is, however, not much evidence in Vera's writings which suggests that she adheres to any specific ethnic identification.

3. After having moved to Toronto in 2004, Vera was awarded the Swedish PEN 'Tusholsky Prize', which supports writers who are threatened or in exile.

Unlike a number other of Zimbabwean writers, Vera's personal involvement in Zimbabwean society has not been of a political nature.[1] From 1997 to 2003 Vera was the director of the National Gallery in Bulawayo, and as director she was a supporter of new and marginal art forms as well as photography and cinematic productions (Vera in Mutandwa 2002 and Contemporary Africa Database 2003). Vera's novels *Nehanda* (1993), *Without a Name* (1994), *Under the Tongue* (1996), *Butterfly Burning* (1998), and *The Stone Virgins* (2002) have received a number of prestigious Zimbabwean and international literary awards and earned Vera a name as one of Africa's foremost feminist writers (Primorac 2002:101). In addition to her novels, Vera has acted as a literary critic and has edited an anthology of contemporary African women's writing: *Opening Spaces* (1999). Vera has described her feminist commitment as a concern with giving voice to women who are politically limited and oppressed (Vera in Stephensen 1998). It is therefore not surprising that international postcolonial feminist critics have read her novels predominantly from a feminist perspective. They praise her novels for their ability to challenge male dominated discourses of patriarchy both in the private sphere as well as in the narratives of national history.[2]

3.1. A feminist writer

Of feminists writing in Africa Vera says in the preface of the anthology *Opening Spaces* that:

> The women, without power to govern, often have no platform for expressing their disapproval. […] Like pods, some of these women merely explode. Words become weapons. […] If speaking is still difficult to negotiate, then writing has created a free space for most women – much freer than speech. (Vera 1999:2–3)

The feminist approach to the mythical Nehanda figure in Vera's first novel has set the agenda for her following novels. In those novels Vera negotiates male dominated discourses of sexuality by voicing women's experiences with cultural taboos such as incest, rape, abortion and violence. These 'explosions of words' are both controlled and specific. The poetic style of her writing is centred on the intimate and the momentary, and it speaks of the taboos of women's experiences from women's own perspective. In doing so Vera's novels appear to be negotiations of conditions, boundaries, and catastrophes in individual women's lives. Her characters are written with an intimacy which puts their personal experience at the centre of the narration. This intimate approach to her characters' experiences with violence has led some readers to speculate upon a connection between Vera's stories and her personal experiences. However, Vera finds this sort of analysis crude:

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1. See section 3.3.1.
2. See for example Wilson-Tagoe (2002 & 2003), Primorac (2002), Boehmer (2003) and Samuelson (2002).

> Sometimes the events I write about are believed to have happened to me. When people look at me as though I have just been raped, then it is hard to return the gaze with anything else but an impatience for the moment to pass. I also wonder if all the people who say these things have met me or if they are looking at a bad picture in a magazine (Vera in Mutandwa 2002).

In another interview Vera has explained how she finds that her focus on the intimate and the momentary is an exploration into women's memories and the ways in which history is made out of people/women who live with memories of violence:

> I hope that I am telling stories which are more than stories. I also want to capture a history, but history is in a moment. A woman is in the forest, she's alone, the ground is bare. What is her relationship to this landscape, and who is she in this moment? She's endured all these other things, but at this moment, her mind is collapsing. How does she endure this moment? And not only this moment, but everything else she has gone through. I try and connect these two things, so that an individual is not isolated – though they are offered in isolation. I use the isolated individual to explore how they are connected to everything else. (Vera in Bryce 2000:223)

Therefore, Vera writes of women and their experiences in the style of a personal memory, structured in flashbacks and recurrent scenes which are narrated closer and closer to the core of 'the memory', as the novel works its way through the memories of the characters. The novels represent her characters' attempts at constructing personal narratives of their lives and their experiences. This style of writing and the focus on women's experiences are traits that bind Vera's writings together. Despite this, Vera's concern with the personal level of narration does not hinder her writing from representing collectivity. Rather, Vera's intimate narratives can be read as being condensed from her imagining of many such intimate narratives. The stories of these women are centred on the question of the character's relationship with 'her world':

> I always need to be anchored in such a way that I am inside a character, seeing this fragmented or fractured world, and how – usually a woman – is trying to bring the pieces together in her mind, to choreograph her life. Because, that moment I described is choreographed – but how does she then endure, how does she perceive her reality, how does she survive it? (Vera in Bryce 2000:219)

Vera aims at representing oppressed women in a way that ascribes an agency to them, which she finds that they lack in other representations and she voices issues which are covered up in patriarchal cultural discourses.

3.2. A writer of history

Analyses of Vera's novels, which are concerned with her narration of Zimbabwean history, have especially focused on the novels *Nehanda*, *Butterfly Burning*, and *The Stone Virgins*. These three novels deal with the nation's history in different settings and times. Vera uses the first Chimurenga as the historical setting for her first novel *Nehanda* and she portrays the mythical figure of the spirit medium Nehanda. The setting in *Butterfly Burning* is Bulawayo in the 1940s. The novel portrays lives in the townships as well as the segregation of the town of Bulawayo. Vera's latest novel to date *The Stone Virgins* is set partly during the liberation war and partly after independence. The novel describes the political crisis in Matabeleland after 1980 and the political violence experienced by the rural population.

There has been (and still is) a mutual inspiration and friendship between Vera and Terence Ranger. Vera dedicated *Butterfly Burning* to Ranger, and Ranger has in turn announced that he is writing a book entitled *Bulawayo Burning* as a conscious response to her novel, just as he has commented on her novels several times (Ranger 2002a:204, Ranger 1999b, Palmberg 2002). This mutual inspiration is especially relevant to my analysis in relation to *The Stone Virgins*, which Vera has compared with Ranger's *Violence & Memory* (2000).[1] In Vera's description of their relationship, she stresses that *The Stone Virgins* is the product of Ranger's influence, but also that her concern with history and especially the Matabeleland genocide in the 1980s is just as much a concern with telling and 'liberating stories':

> I didn't want to write a novel about those six years at all. But (British historian) Terence Ranger is a huge influence on me […] We have a very close friendship, even though I'm a novelist and he's a historian and we come from different traditions and all that. We have the same commitment to telling stories, and we have had an influence on each other. His latest book, launched last month, is *Violence and Memory,* and the novel I'm writing now [The Stone Virgins] is also on the theme of violence and memory, though it's fiction. You'll recognize the same historical events depicted in Ranger's book. We talk a lot about things, and eventually I say, Ah, OK, I'll do a novel on it. So he has influenced me in regard to this novel, in that I want to show that space and time. As a writer, you don't want to suppress the history, you want to be one of the people liberating stories, setting them off. (Vera in Bryce 2000:225–226) [original italics]

It will be suggested in the following analysis that *Nehanda* and *The Stone Virgins* can be read in relation to what Vera in *The Stone Virgins* calls 'restoring the past' (Vera 2002:165). Of the historical distortions in *Nehanda* Ranger has said that *"It's all abso-*

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1. *Violence & Memory* is written in co-operation between Jocelyn Alexander, JoAnn McGregor and Terence Ranger, and is elsewhere in my analysis referred to as Alexander et al. (2000).

lutely wrong and I love it" (Ranger 2002a:203) because they are part of a deliberate narrative strategy, which defies male dominated historicist history *"by deploying a matrilineal mode of history-telling."* (Ranger 2002a:205). This leads to a reading of *Nehanda*, which sees the novel as a feminist re-writing of the history of colonial occupation and anti-colonial resistance. *The Stone Virgins*, however, follows a linear historical narrative of Matabeleland history more closely. The historian's account of this development in Vera's writings in this novel is that:

> The Stone Virgins reveals a different attitude to History [compared to her earlier novels]. […] It is a book of what – unfortunately – happens. It is not a book in which narratives are compressed into a private tragedy. It is a book about people caught up in and destroyed by a public disaster (Ranger 2002a:206).

Vera herself also foregrounds the historic elements in *Nehanda* and *The Stone Virgins*. She finds that the writing of *Nehanda*, though it was predominantly a spiritual experience, was important because it defies European historical narratives of Nehanda:

> History begins in 1896 when the Europeans came here, and it continues like this: the spirit medium Nehanda did this, in such and such a year, in such and such a year she was hanged on 27 April … And I realized, No, no, no! Our oral history does not even accept that she was hanged, even though the photographs are there to show it, because she refused that, she surpassed the moment when they took her body, and when they put a noose upon it, she had already departed. Her refusals and her utterances are what we believe to be history. (Vera in Bryce 2000:221)

In Vera's view, *Nehanda* is a form of spiritual counter-history, which links together the two liberation wars in the identity formation of her people. Therefore, spiritually, *Nehanda* is in Vera's own account, her most important book. She says that:

> […] there *are* alternatives to 'history' and that in fact we *had* constructed it very differently in our lives, in our discussions, in our beliefs. When we went to fight in the liberation war it was because we believed that this woman was somewhere else, but nobody would openly – in a classroom, for example – acknowledge that. And I thought I'd better write about it, since that's where I can see a concentration of all our beliefs and what makes up our identity as a people, how we create legends and even how we recreate history. (Vera in Bryce 2000:221)

The Stone Virgins is in contrast not a recreation, but rather an account of what happened in her region. Her literary representation of the atrocities, which took place during the six year period of political violence in Matabeleland, is not only an exploration of the experience with violence, rather: *"These scenes of intimidation which we witnessed were part of a political strategy. Why we're revisiting the horror of this is to ask how it was possible."* (Vera in Bryce 2000:225). Vera's approach to the social reality of this violent period is compressing rather than reinventing. The violent scenes in the novel repre-

sent the many violent scenes which she could have chosen to write about (Vera in Bryce 2000:224–226).

3.3. A Zimbabwean writer

Vera is writing within a socially and politically engaged African literary tradition, and as such she shares with other Zimbabwean writers what Flora Veit-Wild has described as: *"a specific quality in Zimbabwean literature"* (Veit-Wild 1992a:1). This tradition is born out of the Zimbabwean colonial condition, which dragged on for a long time after other African countries had gained their independence. The construction of a 'cultural nationalism' went on alongside writings of disillusionment and social frustration both before and after independence (Kaarsholm 2004:6–9). Vera belongs to a generation of Zimbabwean writers who grew up during the liberation war and who use this background in their literature, and she also grew up with access to reading the first Zimbabwean nationalist writings. As such, Vera's novels share features with those of the writers who came before her. This is especially evident in *Nehanda* that celebrates the spirit medium Nehanda as 'the death defying mother of the nation' just like the poems, plays and songs, which were used in support of the liberation armies during the liberation war (Ngara 1989:64).

3.3.1. Cultural nationalism

> *Our ancestor Nehanda died*
> *With these words on her lips,*
> *'I'm dying for this country'*
> *She left us one word of advice*
> *'Take up arms and*
> *Liberate yourselves'*
> (from Pongweni (1982) in Gunner 1991:80)

Especially ZANLA and ZANU[1] used songs, plays and poems like the poem above to create cultural identifications between themselves and the mythical heroes of the first Chimurenga and as a pedagogical tool in their relations to their constituency (Kaarsholm 1989b:141 and Gunner 1991:80–82). Many of the 'songs that won the liberation war'[2] were written by guerrillas or political leaders who were engaged in the struggle for independence (Veit-Wild 1992a:115, 139 & 313). This ideologically charged poetry drew upon an imagery which derives from traditional beliefs in

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1. ZANLA; Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army was the armed wing of ZANU, which only after independence in 1980 adopted the name the Patriotic Front (PF). Patriotic Front was the name under which ZANU and ZANLA and their counterparts ZIPRA, Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army, that was the armed wing of ZAPU, Zimbabwe African People's Union, had negotiated jointly during the Lancaster House negotiations that ended the civil war. See section 4.4.2.1.
2. This refers to the title of Alec Pongweni's collection of poems and songs: *Songs That Won the Liberation War* (1982) from which the poem above has been quoted by Liz Gunner.

ancestral spirits and upon the oral tradition of historical narration. So do the nationalist novels which it can be argued that *Nehanda belongs to*. However, while songs, plays and poems played a role in the cultural resistance during the war, nationalist novels which supported the liberation forces were predominantly written after independence in the euphoria over the newly won freedom from oppression (Ngara 1990:110 and Veit-Wild 1992a:340–341).

The ideologically charged cultural nationalist novels such as Stanlake Samkange's *Year of the Uprising* (1976), Solomon Mutswairo's *Soldier of Zimbabwe* (1978) and Edmund Chipamaunga's *A Fighter for Freedom* (1983) drew on the idea of a connection between the first and second Chimurengas that had been formed in popular consciousness during the liberation war. As such, they praised the liberation forces as belonging to a long tradition of nationalist resistance against the white occupation. For the most part this kind of literature has been criticised mainly for its poor quality and its blatantly propagandistic nature. The social and temporal closeness with the liberation war and the political scene does, however, to a certain extent explain this trait in the early nationalist literature (Kaarsholm 1989a:34–36 & 1989c:192).

3.3.2. Traditionalist nationalism

While the majority of Vera's writings can be read as displaying what Veit-Wild calls 'postcolonial disillusionment' (Veit-Wild 1992a:1), *Nehanda* stands out in Vera's writings in its celebration of what will here be termed 'traditionalist nationalism'. This trend shares its imagery with cultural nationalism. However, *Nehanda* and novels such as Chenjerai Hove's *Bones* (1988) that were written some years after independence do not share the euphoria of the early nationalist literature. *Bones* is rather critical of the impacts, which the liberation war had on society, and uses the voice of Nehanda in a manner of 'magical realism' rather than as a sociological fact. The voice of Nehanda appears in *Bones* as a source of inspiration and historical linkage to tradition for the peasants who do not themselves participate in the struggle (Gunner 1991:79). Hove and Vera use mythological imagery which derives from the traditional ancestral beliefs. This is worked into the poetic fabric of the novels through dreams and visions. An example of this is their shared use of the metaphor of birds and feathers which can be read as a reference to the Zimbabwe Bird. This national symbol first appeared as stone sculptures at the Great Zimbabwe ruin and has later been used in connection with ZANU (PF)'s symbol: the rooster (Kaarsholm 1989b:133). Vera's version of the Nehanda myth is, however, distinctive in its completely religiously centred narration of history. Vera's spirit Nehanda is not at any level represented as secondary to the narration of history. In her account, the spiritual level of the novel is the driving force; not a supporting element.

Both Vera and Hove have played important roles in Zimbabwean public life. As mentioned earlier, Hove has played a significant role in Zimbabwean cultural life as

a literary critic, publisher, political commentator and human rights activist before he was forced into exile in France where he lives today (Veit-Wild 1992a:113–114, Hove 2002, Autodafe 2004). Vera shares his involvement in Zimbabwean public life, and she has expressed that: *"I would like to be remembered as a writer who had no fear for words and who had an intense love for her nation."* (Vera in Mutandwa 2002). However, Vera's involvement in society has mainly been in the arts and as a literary critic. And the political potential in her writings does not have a straightforward personal explanation, since she has kept her political sentiments out of the public debate.

3.3.3. Cultural disillusionment

Writers who were critical towards the cultural nationalism of the liberation struggle already wrote novels which were critical of nationalism before 1980. Novels such as Charles Mungoshi's *Waiting for the Rain* (1975) and Stanley Nyamfukudza's *The Non-Believer's Journey* (1980) describe the colonial situation and the ambiguities of the educated Africans in a mode, which is not politically biased toward either party in the war, but is critical of traditionalism as well as colonial oppression (Kaarsholm 1989a:33, 37–40 and Veit-Wild 1992a:287–297, 255–258). Vera's *Without a Name* can be compared to these two novels because of its bleak outlook on life during the liberation war. Modernism as well as traditionalism is viewed from a critical perspective in Vera's descriptions of the war torn landscapes and cityscapes in this novel. The protagonist Mazvita feels betrayed by nature and the spirits which inhabit it, and in an act of transference she wipes the memory of the guerrilla soldier who has raped her in the bush from her mind and replaces it with the moment itself:

> Hate required a face against which it could be flung but searching for the face was futile. Instead, she transferred the hatred to the moment itself, to the morning, to the land, to the dew-covered grass that she had felt graze tenderly against her naked elbow in that horrible moment of his approach, transferred it to the prolonged forlorn call of the strange bird she had heard cry a shrill cry in the distance, so shrill and loud that she had to suppress her own cry which had risen to her lips. The unknown bird had silenced her when she needed to tell of her own suffering. (Vera 1994:36)

Here, Vera uses the image of the bird as a metaphor for the spirits of the anti-colonial struggle. When read in relation to her use of birds in *Nehanda* (Vera 1993:19), the lone guerrilla soldier who rapes Mazvita represents the spirit of the liberation war, and displays how women would come to hate the liberators although they did long for freedom. Mazvita instead seeks freedom in the city. This does not, however, live up to her expectations of a better future. The city does not offer freedom; on the contrary, she experiences emotional decay and spiritual poverty. The city is a place which lacks memory. Vera's description of the city can be termed an 'urban dystopia' (Bonnevie 2001:27–28), and her dismal account of Harare can be compared to Dambudzo Marechera's city literature (Caute 1989:64 and Bryce 2002:40).

Like Vera, Marechera is occupied with violence. He describes this as an integral part of growing up in his childhood township outside Harare:

> I am not talking about violence as something one suddenly notices when one has grown up a bit, but violence which surrounds you from birth. From the time you are almost a baby and not able to understand anything you already have all those violent visual images around you. As you get to be two or three or four years old you take it to be the normal way of life. (Marechera in Petersen 1988:28)

Like Vera, Marechera was educated in the West, and the experience of homesickness and loneliness compelled them both to write (Vera in Mutandwa 2002 and Caute 1989:66). However, it is Marechera's city literature which appears to have had an influence on Vera's writing. The poverty, violence and despair of his own childhood and that of children who grew up during the liberation war were the themes of some of his latest writings.[1] In the novellas *When Rainwords Spit Fire (1984)* and *The Concentration Camp* (1986) he focuses on a child's view of life during the liberation war (Veit-Wild 1994:xiii–xiv). Vera similarly uses the child's perspective in *Under the Tongue*. Like Marechera, Vera focuses on the child's experience of the liberation war and life in the townships that were not directly part of the war but still were affected by it.

The 'non-believers' (as Veit-Wild terms this group of writers) issued a critique of traditional ways of life as well as the failed modernity of the white regime (Veit-Wild 1992a:263–265). Vera cannot entirely be categorised among the 'non-believers'. Vera shares their ambivalence towards the hopes of the liberation war, but she does not share the disillusionment with the traditional spiritual beliefs. On the contrary, her novels have a spiritual quality, and they often offer traditional spirituality as the escape from a meaningless and hurtful existence. An example of this spiritual escape can be found in *Under the Tongue*, in which the child protagonist is offered consolation in her grandmother's spirituality as she attempts to recover from sexual abuse.

3.3.4. Re-writing the liberation war

The generation of Zimbabwean writers that Vera belongs to, have predominantly been preoccupied with portraying the traumas they experienced while they were growing up during the liberation war. These writers have, compared to their predecessors, had a chance for a better education as well as better publishing opportunities. Vera is no exception; like many other writers of her generation, she has published her books at Irene Staunton's Zimbabwean publishing house Baobab Books (Ranger 1999b:695–697 and Veit-Wild 1992a:304–306). They have depicted

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1. A number of his last works went unpublished until 1994 (after Vera had written both *Without a Name* (1994) and *Under the Tongue* (1996)). They were published posthumously as a collection of plays and short stories *Scrapiron Blues* (1994) edited by Flora Veit-Wild.

the liberation war in critical terms. The first euphoria of liberation soon turned into a critical investigation of the ways in which the war had affected society, the traumatic experiences of ex-guerrillas and painful memories of the political turmoil during the war. This was often depicted through the personal tragedies caused by the war. A disappointment in the lack of changes in society after independence also influenced their writing (Kaarsholm 2004:9–17). Vera's novels *Without a Name* and *Under the Tongue* reflect this trend, especially on the level of the personal destinies of women during the war. These two novels from the mid-1990s have an overall feminist approach and they are concerned with investigating the individual as part of a collectivity. This approach is shared by other women of her generation. An example of this is Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988):

> Quietly, unobtrusively and extremely fitfully, something in my mind began to assert itself, to question things and refuse to be brainwashed, bringing me to this time when I can set down this story. It was a long and painful process for me, that process of expansion. It was a process whose events stretched over many years and would fill another volume, but the story I have told here, is my own story, the story of four women whom I loved, and our men, this story is how it all began. (Dangarembga 1988:204)

The feminist perspective in this novel is focused on the ambivalence of educated women who are caught between their traditional rural background and the modernising tendencies in society. They try to gain an independent female identity but are caught between two worlds. The novel can according to Dangarembga be read as partly autobiographical (see: the above quotation and Aegerter 1996:234). The two female protagonists' identities are depicted as connected and strengthened by their individuality, which they gain through their collective female experiences (Aegerter 1996:235). Vera accentuates this collective female strength in *Nehanda*, *Under the Tongue,* and in *The Stone Virgins*, in which it is the female communities that the protagonists draw strength and identity from. An example of this is the birth scene in *Nehanda*:

> The circle of women asserted their strength through their calm postures, waiting. They looked upon their presence in this enclosure as a gift; this was not a chance for them to fail or to succeed; it was a time to rejoice, or else to mourn. They knew that the birth of the child, for whom they all waited, was something that they did not have the power to control. They were here to accompany the mother, and the child, on their separate journeys. No one is allowed to make a journey alone. (Vera 1993:4)

Unlike Dangarembga's partly autobiographical style, Vera's intimate narrative style offers the reader a chance to 'accompany the women on their journeys' along with Vera. Her portrayal of the solitude of women who are separated from their commu-

nity, can be read as an attempt at describing the individual 'out of its natural element' which is the female community.

The personal life stories that are depicted in the post-independence novels, can also be viewed as reflecting a movement away from the grand national narratives of the political 'unity discourses'[1]; a political critique subdued in the personalised narration of society and the events of the war. A critical view on war politics and a rewriting of the heroic status of the guerrilla soldiers and the leaders of the guerrilla movement can be found in Shimmer Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns (*1989) and in Alexander Kanengoni's *Echoing Silences* (1997) (Gunner 1991:77 and Veit-Wild 1992a:306). Their re-evaluations of the liberation war are written from different standpoints; Kanevgoni writes out of his own experience as a guerrilla soldier while Chinodya has an intellectual approach to the subject. Chinodya's concern though, is still the dilemma of describing the grotesque reality of the guerrilla soldiers in the bush:

> If the bush could speak then it could tell the story. When you are trying to piece together the broken fragments of your life it hurts to think back… We won the war, yes, but it's foolish to start talking about victory. […] a guerrilla is only a hero while the war is raging. (Chinodya quoted in Gunner 1991:78)

Likewise, Vera depicts the dissident guerrilla soldier Sibaso in *The Stone Virgins*. The de-humanising effect that experiences in the war had on the guerrilla soldiers comes out in Vera's description of Sibaso who is separated from his community and only enters other people's lives as a predator (Vera 2002:62). This is also the theme of Chinodya's and Kanengoni's novels. Their recollections and rewritings of the history of the liberation war and its 'heroes' focus on the soldiers and their own disillusionment with the struggle: *"Nothing can any longer shame me. My friend, I am not a hero and I don't want to be one. I am just a poor ordinary person who wants to live."* (Kanengoni 1997:38). For Kanengoni, telling these stories from a particular perspective has what Preben Kaarsholm calls: *"the function of de-silencing, and thereby helping to remove the fears and mental distortions which continue to make people un-free, many years after the war of liberation ended"* (Kaarsholm 2004:17). A similar function seems to be ascribed to Vera's *The Stone Virgins*, in which not only the voice of the dissident Sibaso is depicted, but also different sides of the political crises are being 'voiced'.

The political crisis in Matabeleland after the election in 1980, which is the main theme of Vera's novel *The Stone Virgins*, was already touched upon in Chenjerai Hove's novel *Shadows* (1991). Hove, like Vera, describes both the violence of the government and the violence that the rural population were subject to at the hands

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1. See section 4.4.4.

of the so called 'dissidents'.[1] Though not focused specifically on the post-independence period, *Shadows* depicts the sufferings of the rural population of Matabeleland and questions the government's post-independence policies. Hove's intellectual involvement in contemporary political debate in Zimbabwe is evident in this novel. The beginning of his preface to the novel thus reads as follows:

> For those looking for fiction, go elsewhere, there is none here. For those looking for tall tales, find the story-tellers of the land to tell you the cock-and-bull stories. For those in search of history, go to the liars of the land. For those in search of politics, open the book of unfulfilled promises and console yourselves. This is surely no place for neither fiction nor tall tales nor lies. (Hove 1991:9)

The novel proceeds to tell the story of a family that is forcefully removed from their land as part of the so called 'resettlement schemes' of the 1950s.[2] Their experiences during and after the liberation war are marked by fear of the government(s) and the guerrillas and later the dissidents. Hove depicts the confusion and disbelieve of the older generation, as 'the young' (the guerrillas, the new government and the dissidents) after independence fight each other and drag the civilian population into their conflict:

> The young men went round, even during the day, asking for the people to cook for them as it was before the white man was defeated. They began to sleep in houses, expelling the owners of the houses. They too did not want to suffer the bite of the many mosquitoes which sang hymns at night, searching for the blood of the farmers. Sometimes they took the women to dark places making them pregnant.

> The old men and women were sad with the new rulers. They could not understand how it was that people who had fought the same enemy could become greedy when the enemy ran away. (Hove 1991:100)

At the end of the novel, Hove voices a critique of the government, which is directed against the political violence with which the government oppressed its political opponents after the liberation war. He also criticises the lack of land distribution policies after the war:

> They wanted the big people to talk, to sit down with gentle words in their mouths, not guns. No one eats guns, they said. These guns must be locked away so that people can talk properly. 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

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1. A number of ex-guerrillas mainly ex-ZIPRA deserted from the newly merged Zimbabwean army (for reasons which will be explored in the following chapters). President Mugabe therefore dubbed them 'dissidents', and argued that they were forming a resistance army in the bush, which would try to overthrow the government (Alexander et al. 2000:180–189).
2. The land act of 1930, which allowed for the removal of the black population in order to facilitate white commercial farming, was to a large extent only executed in the late 1940s and the 1950s (Ranger 2003a).

theirs, but they could not farm it. Guns stared at them all the time. […] The pain told them that the white man was happier than before, on the lands which he had stolen from their ancestors. Were there no songs which 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? (Hove 1991:101)

The government soldiers are not, however, the only perpetrators of violence in the novel. The head of the family is killed by the dissidents in the final pages of the novel for his alleged 'selling-out'. The issue of dissident violence in *Shadows* connects the novel with Vera's *The Stone Virgins*. Like Hove, Vera depicts both the violence of the government and of the dissidents and in doing so they both portray the complex political situation of post-independence Zimbabwe. Even though Hove does claim that we have to look elsewhere for politics and history, *Shadows* like *The Stone Virgins* must be read as a political commentary, which points towards a rewriting of Zimbabwe's liberation war history. Only in the last few pages of *Shadows* does the novel touch upon the political violence of the government. However, this was the first literary voicing of the problems which Vera in *The Stone Virgins* voices more fully.

3.4. Summing up

Vera's writings can be viewed as a 'micro-cosmos' of the Zimbabwean literary tradition. Her novels follow themes and trends in the literary tradition almost chronologically, and her contributions to these themes and trends are written in a distinct poetic style and with the clarity of hindsight. It is not only a female voice, which contributes to the Zimbabwean literary tradition, Vera also poses a feminist critique of the male dominated society by breaking the silence, which surrounds the taboos of power. This critique has earned her a place in the international postcolonial literary field, where she is being praised for her ability to represent female voices both historically and contemporarily. The women who Vera represents in her novels are depicted with a focus on their personal tragedies, which are interwoven with the social chaos that is the backdrop of their stories. Vera's novels can in this sense be viewed as depicting Zimbabwean society and histories as well as posing a critique of the positions women are ascribed in society and in history.

My analysis of Vera's novels, which focuses on different articulations of Zimbabwean history within the discursive field of Zimbabwean national identity, is mainly focused on how *Nehanda* and *The Stone Virgins* represent Zimbabwean history. This can be seen as an analysis of the 'backdrop' of Vera's writings; namely how she depicts society and history, as opposed to how she writes of women's lives. However, as her writings also portray the way in which women's lives are interwoven with the societal chaos of particular times and places in Zimbabwean history, her writings can also be interpreted as articulations of history.

4. Discourses of national history

This chapter contains an analysis of different discourses of history in relation to articulations of national identity. This approach to Zimbabwean history has been chosen because it highlights the political nature writing of history has had and still has in Zimbabwe. *Writing* of history (as opposed to oral narration of history) in Zimbabwe was instituted along with the arrival of the first white settlers, and Cecil Rhodes' British South Africa Company (BSAC). Already at this early stage writing a history of the area was central in the political strategies of the occupiers as a means of justifying their violent appropriation of land (Kaarsholm 1989b:127). Subsequent political powers have relied on historical narratives, which supported their rule. A discursive field of historical narration has been formed, within which history and the definition of a related national identity have been the central elements. In this chapter a selection of discourses, which have been formed within this discursive field over time, is analysed. This chapter investigates the nation's imagined temporal space and is focused on how national identity has been articulated into certain narrative schemas, through which different agents have defined the imagined community of the nation in different ways over time.

4.1. Analytical framework

The different discourse analyses that are performed in this chapter are inspired by Bhabha's appropriation of Foucault's discourse analysis. They draw on Bhabha's theories of nationalism in order to analyse how the different nationalist discourses of history outline relations between history, the nation and the people. Hence, different ways of representing the 'inside-outside' of the national community are also drawn upon in the analyses, primarily Bhabha's developments of Fanon's theories of stereotypes and Said's theories of othering. Nationalist discourses are read from both political and literary narratives of the nation. This is the reason theories of the role of literature in national narratives are also drawn upon in the analyses as a general framework for understanding the discursive field of national identity.

4.1.1. Literature

As has been described earlier, literature can provide symbolic points of identification for the nation by narrating the history of the nation and thus provide symbolic support of the existing power structures of the nation-state, or it can reverse these symbols as an oppositional narrative strategy which aims at subverting the existing hegemony. This process has had a special significance in the African context because of the role European historicism has played in depriving the Africans of historical narratives by which they could articulate 'historical roots'. African writers have according to Abiola Irele perceived it as their vocation to create an African 'place in history' that challenges the link between European historicism and imperialism (Wilson-Tagoe 1999:156):

> [it] is not only a secure sense of being-in-history that is no longer available to the African, but also a proper sense of belonging in the world: both have, therefore, to be constructed, striven for – in other words, *imagined*. Narrative, in the form of the novel, has afforded a privileged mode for this process of reconstruction. (Irele in Wilson-Tagoe 1999:156) [original italics]

The role of history in the colonialist enterprise of othering has had the remarkable effect of creating a need for history in African culture. There is, so to speak, a need in African fiction to restore the past. This has led to a number of rewritings of African history, which foreground African agency and indigenous culture and tradition. This need for historical restoration can, however, lead African writers to reinforce traditionalist world-views. According to Wilson-Tagoe this does not lead to cultural transformation but rather creates an imaginary space for yet another essentialist ideology (Wilson-Tagoe 1999:165). In the context of the following analysis, literature is analysed as part of the discursive field of national identity. The nationalist discourses, which are analysed in this chapter, are viewed as made up of a number of discursive symbols of the nation, some of which are derived from literature, and the literary works are analysed in order to describe their contribution to the discursive field of national identity.

4.1.2. Discourse

The analytical use of the term 'discourses of history' in the following analysis is derived from Foucault's theories. For Foucault, discourses are inseparable from power; they are the effects of power as well as the channels of power. Discourses are strategical and they generate power by ways of definition and naturalisation. That is, discourses function by articulations or 'putting into discourse' different phenomena such as the biological, the social and the metaphysical. Discourses are made up of what is said and done, and they are sustained by and sustain the power-knowledge installations in society e.g. discourses entail power because they define the way we view ourselves, the world and our own place in the world (Heede 1997:121–125).

Discourses are made up of speech acts and practices over time; they are dialogical, and they are also historical:

> The fact is that in our culture, at least for several centuries now, discourses are linked in a historical fashion: we acknowledge things that were said as coming from a past in which they were succeeded, opposed, influenced, replaced, engendered, and accumulated by others. (Foucault 1967:292)

The vocation of traditional historicism was according to Foucault to construct a permanence of the past and an invocation of eternal truths and laws of essence which formed the basics for formulation of eternal necessities. The idea of a civilising 'rule of law', which historicism installs as an eternal guiding spirit of historical progression, is such an idea. Foucault, however, claims that rather than being a movement towards rule of law historicism installs 'law' as a consequence of violent domination. Thus, civilisation is itself a consequence of violent struggles for domination (Foucault 1971:85–86). Foucault proposes instead of historicism that historical enquiry should take the form of 'genealogy'. He does this in order to underline an ideal of knowledge as perspective (Foucault 1971:90–93). Genealogy searches for the 'herkunft' or 'descent' (borrowing from Nietzsche)[1] of such naturalisations of discourses:

> the [...] numberless beginnings, whose faint traces and hints of colour are readily seen by a historical eye. The analysis of descent permits the dissociation of the self, its recognition and displacement as an empty synthesis, in liberating a profusion of lost events. (Foucault 1971:81)

Accordingly, the descent of the idea of the nation would in foucauldian terms be the genealogy of the nation. Such a historical inquiry would search out the birth of the idea of the nation in time and in language.

4.1.3. Othering

Foucault's critique of European historiography has generated a number of different new readings of Western historical narratives. Said was one of the first intellectuals to question the way in which power-knowledge installations in Western academia had worked in sync with colonisation in producing evolutionary narratives of civilisation. In *Orientalism* (1995) Said stated that the production of knowledge about the Orient as Europe's 'other' depended on the colonial power relations:

> The Orient was Orientalized not only because it was discovered to be "Oriental" in all those ways considered commonplace by an average nineteenth-century Euro-

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1. Foucault refers to Nietzsche's use of 'herkunft', which he uses as 'to descend from'. For Foucault, the word 'descent' has affiliations to 'group – bound by blood or tradition', which Foucault uses as a tool to trace where an idea derives from (Foucault 1971: 81–83).

pean, but also because it *could be* – that is, submitted to being – *made* Oriental. (Said 1995:5–6)

Said found that historical analyses must point out how identities are constructed through the maintenance and development of definitions of otherness. Discourses of othering maintain and are maintained by a relation of power. This is done by constructing identities which are: *"bound up with the disposition of power and powerlessness in each society"* (Said 1995:332). Likewise, the discourses of othering of the colonised peoples support 'the idea of civilisation', which is installed in European historicism. This was a self-reinforcing motion in which the idea of civilisation as an eternal truth became an imperative in its own right. Said shows this by means of a quotation from Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*:

> The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea – something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer sacrifice to… (Conrad in Said 1995:199)

The *idea* of civilisation, to which the coloniser must submit in order to accept the 'not pretty thing' of colonialism itself, functions as the sign of othering in colonialist discourses. This idea, 'the white man's burden', represents the colonised as 'others' because it must be mirrored in something 'uncivilised' in order to justify the violent 'mission' it entails.

4.1.4. Nationalism

A similar function is ascribed to the idea of the nation in Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1991) because like the idea of civilisation, the idea of the nation entails domination (Anderson 1991:200–201). Anderson focuses on the process of naturalisation of the idea of the nation and of the imagined community which forms the basis of this idea. Anderson states that because nations themselves allow people to be naturalised into them this hints at the very origins of nations:

> For it shows that from the start, the nation was conceived in language, not in blood, and that one could be 'invited into' the imagined community. Thus today, even the most insular nations accept the principle of naturalization (wonderful word), no matter how difficult in practice they may make it. (Anderson 1991:145)

Anderson defines the nation as: *"[…] an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."* (Anderson 1991:6). This definition takes into account the constructedness of national identity. It claims that national identity is being imagined by the 'the people' as a collective of 'deep comradeship' with an

eternal history that can be told in linear time. As such, the nation is a narrative strategy, which calls on 'the nation's people' to 'remember and forget' in one simultaneous motion; rewriting the internal antagonisms of the past into a narrative of the triumph of the national spirit (Anderson 1991:26, 200–205). He outlines different styles of nationalism (variations over a theme), which have characteristics that differ according to time and space. Like Said, Anderson describes how colonial racism in imperialist nationalism was important in constructing a superiority, with which the colonisers could justify their domination and subsequently strengthen national pride in the imperial homeland (Anderson 1991:150–152, 180). In ex-settler colonies this superiority was still important because these nations saw themselves as parallels to the old nations, not in opposition to, but as a renewal of the original spirit of the old nation (Anderson 1991:191). Revolutionary nationalisms obviously define national identity in opposition to the previous powers of domination. However, ex-colonies inherited both the arbitrary national boundaries and the colonial structures of governance from the old regimes. They likewise inherited the style of nationalism, which had supported the previous rulers. The significance of this style of nationalism is *"that it is* official – *i.e. something emanating from the state, and serving the interest of the state first and foremost"* (Anderson 1991:159). Basil Davidson goes so far as to call this sort of nationalism 'nation-stateism' (Davidson 1992:10), and although these nationalisms differ in their interpretations, they still share traits of the original model.

Narration of a national history is a common trait in these imagined communities. Homi Bhabha calls this narration 'the pedagogical' or 'to encounter the nation as it is written'. Because the narration of the nation is similar to the process of writing, Bhabha (like Brink) finds it important to examine literary creations of nationness:

> To encounter the nation *as it is written* displays a temporality of culture and social consciousness more in tune with the partial, overdetermined process by which textual meaning is produced through the articulation of difference in language; more in keeping with the problem of closure which plays enigmatically on the discourse of the sign. Such an approach contests the traditional authority of those national objects of knowledge – Tradition, People, the reason of State, High Culture, for instance – whose pedagogical value often relies on their representation as holistic concepts located within an evolutionary narrative of historical continuity. (Bhabha 1990:2–3) [original italics]

The narrative of a historical continuity of the nation depends on a national pedagogy which triggers the imagination of a community of historical and cultural comradeship. Among these pedagogical tools, literature functions by creating a field of symbols and meanings that can be associated with national life. One such tool is the 'national allegory'. National culture is narrated allegorically through a narrative of 'the one out of many', one individual acting out the life of the collective. The

romanticised guerrilla figure has for example had this function in Zimbabwean nationalist literature. Descriptions of 'typical' national landscapes likewise provide the national imaginary community with an imagined 'locality of the nation' (Bhabha 1994:140–144 and Gunner 1991:78–82). Likewise, Anderson points out that literature is instrumental in narrating the temporality of the nation as well as the socio-scapes of the horizontal community of the nation (Anderson 1991:24–27).

4.1.5. Stereotype

In the following sections is analysed how Rhodesian nationalist discourses have outlined a number of cultural symbols, which have had an impact on the ways in which Zimbabwean nationalism has been articulated. In order to facilitate this analysis Bhabha's concepts of colonial discourse and stereotype are explored here. Colonial discourse as viewed by Bhabha is an apparatus of power; a discourse which works through certain strategies of subjectification and surveillance. The racial stereotype is an integral part of the power relations of colonial discourse because it is the primary point of subjectification:

> The subjects of the discourse are constructed within an apparatus of power which *contains*, in both senses of the word, an 'other' knowledge – a knowledge that is arrested and fetishistic and circulates through colonial discourse as that limited form of otherness that I have called the stereotype. (Bhabha 1994:77–78) [original italics]

Bhabha sees the colonial setting as a space which is created for the subject peoples. This creation works through the production of knowledge about these peoples and the governance of them. This knowledge is authorised by a stereotypyfication of both the coloniser and the colonised where the colonised are objectified:

> The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction. (Bhabha 1994:70)

This form of governmentality produces the colonised as a social reality where they are both 'the other' and yet entirely knowable. This process is on the one hand learning and discovery (a production of knowledge) and on the other hand a site of dreams, fantasies, myths, and obsessions (a production of othering) (Bhabha 1994:70–71). This doubling between fetish and horror within the colonial racial discourse inscribes the black body as the site of both fascination and of othering, which for Bhabha signifies an important split in the discourse. This enables the discourse to gain endurance over time because the doubling enables the colonial discourse to re-inscribe itself over and over again (Bhabha 1994:67). However, the doubling for Bhabha also constitutes the site of postcolonial agency because it offers the colonial subjects a space for self re-inscription and resistance as the dis-

course is never closed. In the ambivalence in the colonial discourse between fascination and othering, lies the possibility of formulating difference outside the racial stereotype (Bhabha 1994:81).

The following analysis draws on literary narratives of history and it draws attention to positions within the imaginary national landscape of these discourses. The analysis of Zimbabwean discourses of history foregrounds the discursive and temporal intertextuality of these discourses. The aim of this analysis is to outline how the different articulations of history in Zimbabwe have been turned into signs of national identity.

4.2. A discourse of spiritual history

> *'My bones will rise' to win back freedom from the Europeans*
> (Nehanda in Lan 1985:6)[1]

Vera's novel *Nehanda* that forms a narrative of the mythical figure of the spirit medium Nehanda, who participated in the 1896–1897 rebellion against the European settlers, is in this context analysed in order to establish how Vera's narrative framework of traditional spirituality in the novel represents Zimbabwean history. As *Nehanda* was published in 1993, the novel is here analysed as a historical narrative that represents the mythical figure Nehanda in a discourse of spirituality which articulates a representation of the nation's temporality. In addition, the novel is also analysed as a representation of the religious encounter between the African religious traditions and Christianity in a way that poses a philosophical critique of colonialism.

Even though there has been considerable debate surrounding the extent to which spirit mediums and religious beliefs were incorporated into guerrilla ideology and strategy during the first and the second Chimurenga (Bhebe & Ranger 1996:8–10), the significance of this historical discourse has been considerable in the nationalist literature during the liberation war and after independence. *Nehanda* is a continuation of this literary tradition. As mentioned earlier Vera finds that spiritually, *Nehanda* is her most important novel and the integration of history and spirituality in *Nehanda* is her own central reasoning behind writing the novel[2] (Vera in Bryce 2000:221). The spiritual self understanding of the African community, where she was born, was very different from the historical accounts of Nehanda represented in the history books when Vera was a child. For Vera, *Nehanda* is an African reclaiming of a lost narrative space (Vera in Bryce 2000:221). In that respect, Vera partici-

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1. David Lan, whose anthropological study of the role of spirit mediums in the liberation war in *Guns and Rain* (1985) has been highly influential in the study of Zimbabwean traditional spirituality (Kriger 1992:129–133), here quotes Nehanda's statement, as it has been handed down in Zimbabwean oral history.
2. See section 3.2.

pates in the African literary tradition of solidarity with a traditional world-view, which she for the purpose of her feminist narrative partly invents in order to form a narrative framework for the feminist rewriting of the myths of Nehanda (Wilson-Tagoe 2002:161–163, Vera in Bryce 2002:42). Her historical narrative is operating in a spiritual discursive space which this section of the analysis will explore. First and foremost, this is an analysis of *Nehanda* which focuses on the construction of a 'feminist nationalism', which is facilitated by a spiritual temporality that forms a national space-time relation in Vera's fictional universe. This relation is viewed as a discourse that enters into a dialogue with colonialist historicism and male dominated narratives of Zimbabwean history (Wilson-Tagoe 1999:157). Nana Wilson-Tagoe has called this 'a re-invention of Nehanda', which constitutes "*a subversive act and that imagines the possibility of rupture in the social order*" (Wilson-Tagoe, 2002:162). This is, according to Wilson-Tagoe, potentially revolutionary because it *"paves the way for a possible re-construction of leadership, authority and the social order"* (Wilson-Tagoe, 2002:163). Here this re-construction is termed 'feminist nationalism'.

4.2.1. Spatial spirituality

Nehanda articulates the relationship between the Africans and the colonial occupiers in sharp contrast to the stereotypes of the settler discourses which will be explored in the following section. In *Nehanda* the settlers are comically out of place compared to the Africans who have an intimate indigenous knowledge of the land, and from the African point of view, the settlers have no comprehension of the place they are 'visiting':

> You say this place was on the hill? […] A visitor to a strange land must be humble enough not to choose the highest ground to build his home. These people could not know our custom. (Vera 1993:11)

The Africans are depicted as having a close relationship with nature, but the Africans do not see nature as something which can or should be mastered. On the contrary, the land is the spiritual link between the living and the dead. The land is sacred because it is the property of the ancestors of the Africans. Vera creates a narrative in which the European invasion is looked upon as something that disturbs the relationship between the Africans and their ancestors. The Africans are the custodians of the land, and they are at a loss as to how they should react to the strangers who trespass on and tarnish the sacredness of the land. There is a close relationship between the African nature and the Africans, and Vera represents the settlers as intruders who break the sacredness of the land. It is, however, implied in *Nehanda* that if the settlers had followed the customs of the land, they might not have been in conflict with the Africans at all. This would not have been up to the Africans themselves to decide, as the spiritual reality of the ancestors is the governing force in the novel. Ancestral foresight appears as guiding the choices of the Africans, who in

return for their obedience receive protection from the ancestors by way of signs, dreams, visions and mediums advising them.

The spirit medium Nehanda is a liminal figure that mediates between the ancestors, the land and the Africans. Nehanda restores the relationship between the Africans and their ancestors and she personifies the relationship itself through her own identification with nature. Vera represents Nehanda as a creature of nature, of the spiritual realm and as a human being. An example of this narrative style is the way that Vera likens Nehanda to a spider that weaves its legs into the future:

> The spider weaves silence out of patience. Sending spindly legs into the future, it weaves all of them into its hungering belly. The sun sends rays through the spider's disappearing feet, and the air dare not move. […] Weaving riddles into the air, the spider claims its space from branch to branch, in the armpit of the solid trunk.

> Nehanda walks through the forest absorbing chaos out of the empty air. […] The threat of the white men follows persistently on her trail, but she is at home in this orbit full of welcoming ancient secret spaces. (Vera 1993:89–90)

The spider signifies the turning of time, knowledge of the past and the future which is being woven into one in the spider's web. Here, Vera draws on well known associations of the spider with time, as in the ancient Greek myth of the spider woman Arachne who weaves the web of life, or the Hindu association of the spider's web with the wheel of fate. The spider Nehanda is represented as is one with spiritual force who fights the real spiritual battle in the spiritual realm. As such, Nehanda personifies the spiritual force that intervenes in the battle between the Africans and the intruding settlers. Vera draws out a spatial schema between the Africans and the spiritual reality of the ancestors who inhabit nature.

4.2.2. Spiritual temporality

Nehanda operates both in the present and in the future. The Africans inhabit the land in the present but, it is only an interlude in the spatio-temporal relationship in the spiritual realm between the ancestors and the Africans. Also in the temporal schema of Vera's narrative, Nehanda is represented as a liminal figure. Nehanda signifies ancestral agency both in the Chimurenga and in the spiritual realm:

> The people listen to the voice of their ancestors. They listen to the unmasking of their destiny. Their song changes to agony. They too feel the warm rays of the sun, and the white shadows in their midst. She spreads the words like water over their heads, and they bow down before her. […] "I am among you. I carry the message of retribution. The land must be cleansed with your blood. You must fight for what belongs to us, and for your departed." (Vera 1993:61)

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> The people clap their hands in unison, showing their submission to Nehanda's spirit and truth. It has been a long wait. Now the truth is among them, and they succumb. (...) "The dead are not gone. The dead are among us, guiding us to clearings in the future where we shall all triumph." (Vera 1993:63)

Nehanda's role in the rebellion is emphasised in Vera's version of the Chimurenga. Her spiritual leadership is ascribed the principal role in the rebellion because the real battle occurs in the spiritual realm. Because of this, Nehanda's liminal position is of great importance for the struggle. In Vera's narrative of Nehanda, the spiritual experiences are not primarily put to use in the plot, and this feature can be read as Vera's spiritual interpretation of the Nehanda myth. Especially chapter 25 reads as a prophecy rather than a part of the general plot of the novel. This chapter contains an account of Nehanda's liminality; she possesses a dead and a living part. Her dead part is seeing and has knowledge of the past, present and future of her people – the nation:

> She has travelled long distances through time to meet this vision for the future: She knows that her own death is inevitable, but sees its significance to the future of her people. (Vera 1993:111)

Her living part will die, but this death is the stepping-stone for the return of a stronger and more powerful spirit of war. In this second coming the nation gains hope. In Vera's description of the first Chimurenga and the spiritual reality, in which the Chimurenga is but an interval, the birth of the nation is eternalised in the spirit of struggle against oppression:

> In the future, the whirling centre of the wind, which is also herself, has collapsed, but that is only the beginning of another dimension of time. The collapse of the wind, which is also her own death, is also part of the beginning, and from the spiralling centre of the wind's superimposed circles another wind rises, larger and stronger. Hope for the nation is born out of the intensity of newly created memory. The suffusing light dispels all uncertainty, and the young move out of the darkness of their trepidation, into the glory of dawn. The trembling wind asserts its eternal fury, and it will not be dominated, or destroyed. (Vera 1993:111)

The role of the people in this image of a brighter future is, however, not without problems. At first, the valley is filled with life, with rain and bright birds. There is a cyclical rebirth of the nation, which is generated from the spiritual realm, signified by the wind:

> The birds fly out of the trees bearing signs that send new hope to the ground. It is always in a state of creation, and of being born: the legend-creating wind gives new tongues with which to praise it, and new languages with which to cross the boundaries of time. (Vera 1993:112–113)

However, the young cannot claim their inheritance. Their souls are free and they have clear sight: *"But those to whom they speak have filled their ears with insects"* (Vera 1993:113). This causes the sky to open, and send them spears with which they can continue the fight.

As a historical narrative, *Nehanda* installs a spiritual temporality as the catalyst in national history. The spiritual realm is afforded primary agency. This type of spiritual-temporal imagery can be recognised from other religious thinking, for example the Judeo-Christian temporality, which through prophesies designates the same kind of separation between 'earthly' history and 'spiritual history', where the spiritual realm is not only the site of foresight but also the primary force of history.[1] Vera's description of the legendary Nehanda figure as a religious temporal schema affords the national symbol an eternity that is also ascribed to the nation, which the spirit represents. In this religious narrative, there is only one force which leads to the destruction of settler rule. Vera's version of the myth of the first Chimurenga and the spiritual temporality of the second Chimurenga offers no role for other agents such as the different churches and other civil society groups, which participated in the struggle on the side of the Africans (Bhebe & Ranger 1996:14–18), as they are silenced or 'written out'. Similarly the Marxist aversion towards all kinds of religious practice, which caused difficulties in the co-operation between the liberation army and the spirit mediums (and the Christian churches) (Bhebe & Ranger 1996:7, 12–13), is also written out of Vera's spiritual narrative.

4.2.3. The religious encounter

Though certainly drawing on Négritude,[2] *Nehanda* represents a positive African self-image but the novel does not attempt to essentialise this image. Vera's position towards polarised dichotomies is clearly defined in the following quotation, which is taken from her introduction to the anthology *Images of the West* (1996) that functioned as an African counterpart to the Danish Association for International Cocorporation festival *Images of Africa* in 1996:

> [This] rescues this anthology from an otherwise polarized racial dichotomy, and inserts it into a more ambiguous margin.
>
> The anthology shows that a margin such as this is useful as it yields necessary discoveries toward defining identities, be they African or Western. […] rather than depend on an often repeated now-tired essentialism, the writers attempt a polemic that fore-

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1. An example of this is the prophecies in the Book of Daniel (chapters 2, 7, 8, 11–12) which install spiritual reality as the primary force in world history.
2. The theory of the distinctiveness of African personality and culture, which was developed by African Francophone writers in the 1940s; Négritude, had a profound impact on early African writings because it was the first articulation of a critique of the colonial stereotypes of the Africans. However, its essentialist representation of a positive African self-identification has largely been abandoned since. (Ashcroft et al. 1998:161–162)

grounds intricacies within the debate; the least decidable elements become the most challenging and indispensable. The middle-space from which these writers argue is not a peripheral zone, but emerges as a source for the most vital energy – a place of resistance rather than complacency (Vera 1996b:5).

Given the spiritual superstructure of *Nehanda*, Vera's refraining from polarised racial dichotomies is essential in the following analysis of her account of the religious encounter between the world-view of the spiritual leaders Nehanda and Kaguvi and Christianity. Her account of this encounter amounts to a philosophical discussion, which turns colonial stereotypes around by way of argument rather than a counter-discourse or a strategic essentialism.

Vera's account of the historical facts surrounding the hanging of Nehanda and Kaguvi has been analysed in relation to Ranger's historical account of these events in *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia 1896–7* (1979) (Wilson-Tagoe 2002:161). This reference is especially interesting here because Vera's version differs from Ranger's on a number of issues, and importantly in this context on one account; namely Ranger's description of Kaguvi as repentant to the extent that he converted to Catholicism before his death (Ranger 1979:309). In Vera's version no such conversion took place. While Kaguvi did try to understand, he did not submit. That taken into account, the different encounters between the Christian priest and Kaguvi, and Nehanda and the administrator Mr. Browning can be interpreted as philosophical discussions staged by Vera.

As the following section will illustrate, the settler community perceived the belief system and religious organisation of the Shona as nothing but 'mumbo jumbo' superstitions and despotism on the part of the religious leadership.[1] Vera stages a missionary conversation between the medium Kaguvi and a priest. This scene is focused on Kaguvi's attempt at understanding the priest who tries to convince him of the folly of his heathen beliefs, but his description of heaven and eternal happiness puts off Kaguvi entirely:

> "That is my God too, he is in the sky. But my God is the true God. He is the way to eternal happiness." He points to the roof of the prison, which is very low.

> Kaguvi is confused. He has never entertained such an improbable idea as eternal happiness. If a man harvests his crops, that is happiness. If a man marries and has children, that is happiness. If a man talks to his neighbours and they respect him, that too is happiness. (Vera 1993:105)

The notion of eternal happiness in heaven, a place where one can lie about all day and not work, does not appeal to him at all. Where Christianity defines work as a plague from God, to Kaguvi *"It is not punishment for a man to do all he can for a good har-*

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1. See section 4.3.

vest. For a man not to labour is laziness." (Vera 1993:105). For him happiness cannot be separated from his life and pushed into the future. Within Vera's representation the philosophical background of the priest cannot match the rich spirituality with which the novel describes the African world-view. What Vera does is to approach the discrepancies of the settler discourses by turning the signs of inferiority around. Vera points out that laziness, which for the settlers was the mark *par excellence* of the primitive nature of the African, can ironically also be described as the spiritual longing of the Europeans. Finally, she poses a critique of the eurocentric world-view of the Christian missionaries. While Kaguvi in Vera's version makes an attempt to understand the priest's position, the priest in turn must conclude that this heathen is influenced by pure evil:

> "Your god is an evil god," the priest appeals to him. "I am here to save you from the eternal flames." The arrogance of the priest was shocking. (Vera 1993:106)

As Kaguvi makes an attempt to deduct whether the priest is sincere, which he to his amazement finds that he must be, the priest persistently tries to convert Kaguvi. Vera does not show how or if the priest actually in the end believes that he has converted Kaguvi, but after their conversation Kaguvi's spirit leaves him.

In *Nehanda* the world-view of the Africans does not break down, as it for example does in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1959). The strongest evidence of this is Nehanda's refusal to speak to the administrator Mr. Browning who has taken it upon himself to convert her. Nehanda retires to the spirited side of her being and acts in such a way that the administrator believes her to be insane. Here, are two different accounts of the encounter; first in Ranger's words, and then in Vera's:

> The Nehanda medium, however, 'began to dance, to laugh and talk so that the warders were obliged to tie her hands and watch her continually, as she threatened to kill herself'. Next day he made an attempt to talk to her about religion 'but she refused, called for her people and wanted to go back to her own country – the Mazoe – and die there'. (Ranger 1979:309)

> She dances against Mr Browning and his God, she dances the faces of her people, the betrayal of time, the growth of wisdom, the glory of their survival […] She dances in harmony with the departed who protect the soil from the feet of strangers. […] Then she lets out a scream that sends Mr Browning across the other side of the room. (Vera 1993:116)

In Vera's account the encounter between Nehanda and the administrator's attempt at conversion is represented as an act of violence, against which the spiritual leader Nehanda defends herself by refusing to communicate. Vera skips the formalities of the narrative, and focuses on Nehanda in her spiritual capacity. As such, the hanging

scene is written as a spiritual experience, in which the dead spirited part of Nehanda departs from the living part which is being killed:

> Words and bones. Words fall into dreaming, into night. She hears the bones fall in the silence. She is surrounded by a turmoil of echoes which ascends night and sky. In the morning, a horizon of rock, of dry bones, grows into day. (Vera 1993:1)

> […] She gasps as she feels another part of her depart in a graceless trickling of yellow liquid. […] Words and bones. Yellow becomes crimson. She follows the crimson path that forms a meandering shape in the distance, in the world of dreams. She travels to the faraway place where her body turns to smoke. (Vera 1993:2)

Nehanda's death at the hands of the Europeans is not a spiritual death. In Vera's representation, Nehanda surpasses the moment of her own death. As a contrast to Achebe's account of the religious encounter between African spirituality and Christianity, Vera refuses to let her protagonist succumb to or break down as a result of the pressure of Christianity. Rather, the spirit of Nehanda is the driving force behind the greater battle of the 'second Chimurenga' i.e. the liberation war which Nehanda in her spiritual capacity has already foreseen and participated in. In other words, in Vera's spiritual history Nehanda's bones rose to win back freedom from the oppressors.

4.3. Rhodesian settler discourses

Colonialist discourses in Rhodesia relied on historical narratives in order to create an imaginary national Rhodesian space for the settler colony, which followed BSAC in the years after its first occupation in 1880. The process of nation-building which this settler colony and BSAC instigated was signified by narratives of origins and justification, namely a racial stereotypyfication of the black population and a myth of an ancient white civilisation in the area.

The myth of an ancient white civilisation had been created from the accounts of Portuguese merchants, who in the 16th and 17th centuries had encountered great stone buildings which presumably were the centre for trade in gold. These buildings and especially the largest monument south of Masvingo in central Zimbabwe, which is known as Great Zimbabwe,[1] had been the site of amateur archaeologist and geologist excavations previous to Rhodes' invasion. The conclusion of these investigations had been that Great Zimbabwe was the abandoned remains of what had once been a great civilisation. The racist evolutionist ideology which persisted at the time made it impossible to imagine that these impressive monuments had been built by Africans. Their discovery was therefore interpreted as evidence of a white civilisa-

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1. The word 'Zimbabwe' means 'house of stone'.

tion which had lived there presumably in biblical times[1] (Garlake 1983:2 and Kaarsholm 1989b:127–129). Hence, white settlement was not violent occupation. Rather, the Europeans were reclaiming lost space.

Racial stereotypes were produced primarily from the racist evolutionism, which deemed the white race superior by definition. In addition to this ideology, the settler community was very quickly forced to create an explanatory system for their presence. In 1893 and in 1896–1897 different groups of Africans organised violent resistance towards the occupation. A clear-cut distinction between friend and foe/ inside and outside of the social group became necessary, as well as a discursive appropriation of the land, which had been taken and was now the issue of conflict. Anthony Chennells describes this process as a discursive 'mapping out' of the new space (Chennells 1996:102). The Africans were made part of the imaginary space of the settlers who now defined themselves as Rhodesians. As such, the Africans were perceived as part of the natural environment along with wild animals and other natural obstacles on the way towards a developed society. The African's primitive nature as perceived by the Rhodesians was that of a cruel child, who had to be mastered in order to be in harmony with the nature of which the African was part. The Rhodesians saw themselves as the natural masters of this space (Kaarsholm 1989a:25) and as the embodiment of a true English identity:

> Rhodesia, as a space, defines an English race that discovers through the process of conquest and appropriation the nature of its own civilisation. The English become a race only through relation to their empire; Rhodesians as spokespeople of the discourses of empire are also naming their own identity. […] It is in his struggle to discipline both the perceived unruliness of African nature and the nature of the Africans that the Englishman becomes his true self, and the Rhodesian who in turn has appropriated that discourse becomes his or her true self. (Chennells 1996:103)

In order to 'close' the discourse of supremacy, the Rhodesians defined the Africans not only as part of a primitive nature but also incapable of progress. Any attempt to elevate them from their primitive stage would inevitably have led to disturbance of the delicate harmony between the African nature and its natural masters – the progressive Rhodesians. The imaginary space of the settler community therefore had to be strenuously separated from the primitive and static African space. If either community was 'penetrated' by the other this would have led to the contamination of both, and the certain destruction of the settler community (Chennells 1996:104 and McCulloch 2000:82). Literary narratives, which focused on the natural differences between the two groups, were thus created within the settler community. In these

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1. The biblical explanations claimed that Great Zimbabwe was in fact the residence of the Queen of Sheba and the site of King Solomon's gold mines. The myth of King Solomon's mines provided imaginative leverage to a whole range of literature.

narratives, the myth of the ancient white civilisation, which had apparently been defeated by hordes of black savages, became instrumental as an allegory of the settler community itself and as an assurance of the African inability to progress (Kaarsholm 1989b:131).

In these ways, narratives of the ancient white civilisation were part of a historical narrative, which portrayed the Africans not only as savages but also as non-indigenous and therefore without natural ownership. The time in between the present and the imagined downfall of the ancient white civilisation was accounted for in terms of social chaos and war. In this discourse a differentiation between the Ndebele and the Shona emerged after the anti-colonial resistance. It was worked into the discursive framework of the settler community by way of a schema which represented four black and white stereotypical identities: namely the stereotypes of the Ndebele and the Shona, and two types of whites. The Shona, who had arguably inhabited the land for a longer period, were lazy, childlike and disorganised, while the Ndebele, who had migrated from the south and taken the land from the Shona by force, were represented as fierce warriors of noble heritage who had an organised social community (Kaarsholm 1989a:28). These stereotypes were the product of an interpretation of Rhodes' failure to negotiate peace with the Shona, as he had done with the Ndebele in order to stop their uprising (Ranger 1979:245–261, 305–309). Hence, the Ndebele were cast as noble savages and accorded a more favourable relationship with the administration after the war. The Shona, who were defeated in battle, and who had not surrendered before the spiritual leaders had been captured and hanged, were perceived as treacherous and impossible to reason with. The religious convictions of the Shona were taken for superstition and their spiritual leadership taken for witchdoctors. As a result the social organisation of the Shona was thought to be ruled by whatever superstitious nonsense these witchdoctors could come up with (Kaarsholm 1989b:136).

The Rhodesian settler community in the cities had a notion of being constantly in danger, struggling to keep the barbarians out. Accordingly, anyone within the community, who was perceived as opening up the imagined white space, was considered dangerous to the survival of the community. Thus, missionaries, who worked among the Africans to convert and educate them, were not only going out of their own space (mainly the cities), they were also contaminating the Africans by affording them a means to develop into something other than the natural beasts of the countryside. This, of course, was dangerous for the maintenance of the discourse of an essential difference between black and white because the ability of development was attributed to the white identity. Merchants, who dealt with the Africans, were also discredited on the same account. The settlers themselves were contrasted to these either naively idealistic or greedily foolish and certainly dangerous types. The settlers perceived themselves as honest hardworking folks, who were in touch with nature and therefore had a natural understanding of the true order of

things. They saw themselves as very different from the naive missionaries who, they felt, did not understand the hard handling that the natives required in order to be kept in place. Likewise, the settlers were convinced that the merchants were blinded by their greed, and they tried to prohibit them from affording the natives a way into the white domain (Kaarsholm 1989a:28–30, 1989b:136, 1989c:181, Chennells 1996:103–104, 107 and Ranger 1982).

The semi-scientific explanatory systems as to the historic development of the African community; both the thesis of the white origins of Great Zimbabwe and racist evolutionism were proven faulty by archaeologists and biologists at approximately the time when Rhodes occupied Zimbabwe. The ideas were, however, not easily eradicated from the settler discourses. They were persistently brought into discourse in situations of crisis or when the social structure of the settler community seemed threatened. The black stereotypes would be used in situations of black peril[1] or in labour crises to strengthen the case against the administration, which was under attack from the settlers for failing to produce either safety or a steady supply of labour. In these situations, the Africans would be depicted as either lazy or sexually out of control according to the situation (Ranger 1982 and McCulloch 2000:75, 82–83).

The liberation war was also narrated into this schema by the settler community. Both the myths of Great Zimbabwe and the traditional religious beliefs of the Africans were appropriated to the discourse of the white community. Now established as only an amateur theory in historical science, the myth of a white origin of Great Zimbabwe was difficult for the settler community to maintain outside of the fictional space of literature. An attempt was, however, launched in 1970 when the African nationalists had begun utilising Great Zimbabwe in their political discourses. The Rhodesian government dictated that museums and other national heritage sites were not allowed to represent an African origin as the only plausible explanation for the existence of Great Zimbabwe (Kaarsholm 1989b:132). In addition, an apartheid modelled language policy was created in an attempt to eradicate the educated Africans from the discursive realm of the settler community. Written languages were thus developed from the different dialects of Ndebele and Shona in order to produce a literature of traditionality within the African community (Kaarsholm 1989c:181). Finally, the war itself became a reference point of the symbolic order. The Africans would be used as a metonym for the natural primitivism of the African nature. The guerrilla warriors in the bush were represented as wild beasts, savages or 'creatures of the night' all belonging to the African nature, that the Rhodesians had to control in order to protect their civilisation. Even the Marxist ideology of the guerrillas was cast as a part of this savagery (Chennells 1996:105–106).

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1. Black peril was the term used for the perceived sexual threat of black males towards white women (see McCulloch 2000).

A number of novels of this time operated within this imagined discursive space. An example of this is Wilbur Smith's *The Sunbird* (1972) in which the allegory of Great Zimbabwe is utilised to illustrate the brutality of Africa and consequently the Africans:

> A great civilisation, a nation which held dominion over an area the size of Europe, a people who built great cities of stone and sent their ships to trade to the limits of the known world. All that remained of them were a few poor relics we had so laboriously gleaned. No other continent was so fickle in the succour it gave to men … A cruel land, a savage and merciless land. (Smith in Chennells 1996:115–116)

The ruined state of Great Zimbabwe was important in invoking a sense of emergency in the Rhodesians. The urgency of self-defence was illustrated by the shortcomings of the ancient civilisation, which did not realise in time the danger it was in. In novels which used contemporary symbols, the missionaries were quite often the mediators of an opening up of the respective imagined spaces of the Rhodesians and the Africans. As such, the missionaries symbolised the depravation of the nature of the primitive Africans because educated Africans were represented as dangerous misfits. As a consequence of their education Rhodesian space became open for them because they could now pass as civilised; write themselves as acting subjects into the discourse and infiltrate Rhodesian society, only to prove themselves savages at heart. This danger, which was posed by educated Africans, was articulated in the Rhodesian settler discourses as a direct consequence of the naiveté of the missionaries who were perceived as inadvertently subversive to the Rhodesian state (Chennells 1996:107).

The narrative strategy of Rhodesian settler discourses was designed to keep the Africans in a static position, from which their limited worth could be utilised (along with other natural resources) to the greater good of the progressive Rhodesian civilisation. However, the very symbols of the Rhodesian settler discourses, Great Zimbabwe and the African nature, were also utilised in the subversive African counter-discourses, which will be explored in the following sections.

4.4. Zimbabwean nationalist discourses

> Our votes must go with our guns. After all, any vote we shall have, shall have been the product of the gun. The gun which produces the vote should remain its security officer – its guarantor. The people's votes and the people's guns are always inseparable twins. (Mugabe 1976 in Meredith 2002)

This section focuses on the ZANU (PF) government's discourse of history that derives from a discursive development within the nationalist movement. It is here argued that this discourse can be termed 'patriotic history', and that its key elements

are the struggle against colonial and neo-colonial oppression and a cultural and ideological nationalism. These two elements are the key points of reference in an 'inside-outside' dichotomy, which can be traced back through the discursive developments within the Zimbabwean nationalist movement. The following section outlines how groups and ideas have been put into the discourse according to this schema, and how struggles for power within the nationalist movement have worked through articulations of othering according to this schema.

4.4.1. Early nationalism

As was shown in the previous section, the Rhodesian settler discourses worked through an 'inside-outside' schema, which tried to depict the Africans as part of the natural landscape of the countryside, while the settlers themselves were civilised urban dwellers. This rough outline survived the settler discourses, and worked its way into early analyses of the Zimbabwean nationalist movement, which focused on the rural side of the early nationalist movement (Raftopoulos 1999:129). The early nationalism has been described as a rural indigenous response to the colonial occupation of African land. Africans were being evicted from their land to make way for white owned commercial farms. This caused the Africans to organise themselves in defence of their indigenous rights to this land. Nationalism has as such been described as emanating from the issue of African rights to African land. The evictions opened up for an African nationalist discourse because the different groups of people, who came to live together as a consequence of the evictions, fostered not only local or tribal ideas of rights to land, but came to see themselves mainly as African. Their articulation of an African nationalism was therefore a reply to the racist spatial discourse, which they were subject to under colonial rule, rather than local or tribal requests (Alexander 1996:176, Alexander et al. 2000:84–85). This picture has been somewhat rectified by Brian Raftopoulos who finds that the early nationalist movement grew out of a dialectic between social movements in the rural areas and the urban centres due to the migratory patterns of urban and rural labour mainly in the 1950s (Raftopoulos 1999:131–133). A number of the rural based Africans migrated to and from the urban centres in order to supplement their income. They travelled with their notions of struggle against oppression to and from the cities, creating a dialectic between the rural and the urban nationalist movements.

The urban nationalist movement was a mixed social landscape of workers and a growing African petty-bourgeois who organised themselves around clusters of issues such as rights to housing, trade unions, African businesses, women's rights and participation in local government. The nationalist movement was divided along the lines of a growing educated African elite and the labour movement. The elite felt the constraints of colonial rule towards their social ascent, and while their definition of nationalism included communism and the labour movement, this was not the corner-stone in their organisation, which to a large extent tried to negotiate its way

towards improvement of rights. This early nationalism was therefore broadly defined as a struggle against oppression and for social justice which was the common denominator of these diverse groups (Raftopoulos 1999:133–137 and 2000:24). As the number of evictions grew during the early 1950s, the number of Africans, who migrated permanently to the cities, grew accordingly. At the same time the economic boom died off leaving many Africans unemployed. This became the basis for a development in the articulation of nationalism and an organisational shift in the nationalist movement. The broad base which had included both women's activists and co-operation with liberal whites etc. was abandoned in a shift in discourse, which identified with other African radical movements and acted more confrontationally through strikes and boycotts. It was in the wake of this movement that the first nation-wide nationalist organisation, the African National Congress led by Joshua Nkomo, was formed in 1957. This movement united the different rural movements and the different movements in the cities in one centrally controlled organisation. Raftopoulous notes that this was the first time the plurality of different interest groups was overwritten by a discourse of unity (Raftopoulos 1999:136–139 and 2000:25). Faced with a settler community, which saw itself as being under attack, the radicalism in African nationalism was met with intolerance from the regime. This alienated the African elite, which had earlier on been the advocates of negotiated rights. Therefore, when the ANC was banned in 1959, many educated Africans turned towards the nationalist movement wanting to form the 'spearhead of African development' within the movement. Under their influence, the emphasis on unity and centralised leadership became central to the organisation. An articulation of African cultural identity also began to emerge as a key point of identification in the movement along with an emphasis on revolutionary socialism, which subordinated the struggles of the labour movement and women's rights struggles.

The nationalism of this earlier period can be described as frustration over a disappointed promise of modernisation, which the Africans had been led to expect through the activities of missionaries and mission schools. Many Africans who had received education in the mission schools or had been converted to Christianity had begun to organise their lives according to modern principles. They were beginning to see themselves as modern subjects who were going to develop their lives further (Alexander et al. 2000:50–54). Consequently, their response to added pressure from the regime was in the beginning to organise themselves as interest groups around specific rights issues. The common nationalist cause became a viable option, when the promises of an African modernity were let down by the regime that strove to uphold the black vs. white divide.

4.4.2. Party nationalism

The united nationalist movement did not last long. Fractions within the new leadership in 1963 led to a division of the organisation into two organisations: ZAPU and

ZANU.[1] Raftopoulos notes that it may not have been the prime factor, but during the split ethnicity was introduced for the first time as a political parameter among the Africans themselves. Even though the two parties were still claiming nation-wide authority, a Shona cultural identity was from this point on incorporated in the ZANU rhetoric (Meredith 2002:30–33, Raftopoulos 1999:141–144).

Early nationalism, which had covered a broad coalition of interests, had by this time developed into a socialist anti-colonial revolutionary idea and an African cultural nationalism within both parties. These key issues were authoritatively articulated by the leadership of the two parties. Activists received schooling in anti-colonial revolutionary ideology and nationalist consciousness, which they put to use in their local areas (Alexander et al. 2000:114). Mobilisation through the political networks in the rural and urban party divisions was mainly focused on a socialist revolutionary nationalist rhetoric. This rhetoric was aimed at relieving the people of false consciousness. As such, the nationalist movement was very critical towards all forms of religion (Bhebe & Ranger 1996:14–16). However, as the liberation war increasingly demanded the support of the whole African community, party attitudes towards religion became more sympathetic.

Resistance was not only advocated by the nationalists. The settler views on missionaries and mission schools had not been entirely wrong. Some of these played an active role in advocating for African rights, as most of the educated elite of the nationalist movement had received mission school education. Therefore, an ambivalent relationship between the different churches and the nationalists persisted throughout the liberation war. At some times and in some places the churches were seen as allies (or at least as a constituency) by the nationalists, at other times and in other places the churches were perceived as part of the colonial establishment (Raftopoulos 2000:27–28, Bhebe & Ranger 1996:17–19). African religious practices were in some cases also met with scepticism. However, considerable attention has been directed towards the interaction between the nationalists and spirit mediums[2]

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1. The nationalist movement had changed its name from ANC to the National Democratic Party, which was, however, also banned in 1961, which was the reason that the nationalists formed the Zimbabwean African People's Union (ZAPU) the same year. The reasons for the split between ZAPU and ZANU became the issue of intellectual debate in the 1980s. While some claimed that ethnicity was the main factor, others claimed that interpretations of Marxism in the petty-bourgeois elite on the one hand and the workers and peasants on the other had caused the split, yet others found that the fractions were the consequence of internal power struggles in the party elite. See Ranger (1980) and Sithole (1984).

2. Lan's study of the connections between ZANLA (the militant wing of ZANU) guerrillas and spirit mediums during the liberation war, concludes that the popular mobilisation of the peasant community in support of the guerrillas was only possible because the guerrillas *"by following certain ritual prohibitions […] gained acceptance as autochthons, the warriors of the past returned in new guise"* (Lan 1985:225). The approval of the ancestors, Lan claims, was instrumental in the nationalists gaining access to the hearts and minds of the people. Only then could they begin to educate them in the socialist revolutionary ideology. Lan's study is an example of the great importance ascribed to religious beliefs in certain academic works of that time.

(Ranger & Ncube 1996:35–36). On the organisational level, the leaders of the nationalist movement have been said to be inspired by the organisation of the 1896–97 rebellions in respect to their use of the religious networks of the Mwari cult and the Chaminuka (Nehanda and Kaguvi) spirit mediums as described in Ranger's account of the first Chimurenga in *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia 1896–7 (*1967)[1] (Kaarsholm 1989b:141). The cultural nationalism of the nationalist movement was, however, rather complex and at times ambivalent especially towards traditional religion. At one level religion was viewed as a part of the cultural heritage of the Africans and therefore important as a symbol of the people's indigenous rights. At this level national icons such as Nehanda and Kaguvi were articulated as historical heroes and symbols of the continued struggle against colonial oppression. At another level, though often used in mobilisation strategies, traditional religion was considered incompatible with Marxism by most nationalist leaders. It has also been noted that the division between ZAPU and ZANU opened up for a Shona cultural nationalism on the part of ZANU, which did not have a ZAPU counterpart (Bhebe & Ranger 1996:7–13, Kaarsholm 1989b:141–142, Peel & Ranger 1983:v).

The settler discourses of cultural supremacy were increasingly being challenged by cultural nationalist versions of colonial and pre-colonial history. As such, the symbolism attached to the African heritage in the settler discourses was turned around in the articulation of African nationalism not only within party lines. The Great Zimbabwe ruins were being advocated as a symbol of national pride and lent their name to the nation. A new Great Zimbabwe myth emerged in these historical discourses; the people who had inhabited Great Zimbabwe were seen as highly skilled, socially advanced and governed by socialist principles without coercion. This society had been peaceful and united (Garlake 1983:14). Solomon Mutswairo's novel *Feso* (1956) describes this idyllic pre-colonial golden age as a time of prosperity when the Africans lived in harmony with nature and the ancestral spirits. This version of pre-historical Zimbabwe functioned as an articulation of a societal utopia towards which the nationalist movement would work (Kaarsholm 1989a:34 & 2004:5). Likewise, the notions of the first Chimurenga began to gain mythological status as the origin of the current struggle. The mythical figures of Nehanda and Kaguvi were praised in the so called Chimurenga songs, which were used in guerrilla camps and to mobilise the African community (Kaarsholm 1989b:141–143, 1989c:184–185). The colonial occupation was cast as a disturbance of the natural balance between the Africans and their natural environment. It was upsetting the natural order under which the Africans had lived in peace with the ancestors on their inherited land:

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1. Ranger (1967) was the first edition of *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia* and is elsewhere in my analysis referred to as (Ranger 1979). His account of the first Chimurenga has later been discarded as romanticising the 1896–97 rebellions and putting too much emphasis on the agency of the spirit mediums and Mwari priesthood (Kaarsholm 1989b:142).

[…] the main aim is to present the colonial period as a continuous process of destruction of a rich African cultural heritage and a progressive demolition of African self respect. Faced with this, the main objective of a revolutionary culture policy has to be the resurrection of what has been broken, the re-establishment of a proud tradition and through this the creation of a new form of African dignity. (Kaarsholm 1989c:185)

The Africans were indigenous and the Europeans were alien. These romanticised versions of pre-colonial society, however, needed to incorporate the overall Marxist discourse in order to be accepted by the nationalist parties and the guerrilla armies. The revolutionary potential in these historical discourses had to be underlined, and as a consequence the revolution was presented as a re-construction of the lost harmony, just as the lost society was described as somewhat socialist.

The relative strengths of Africanist ideology and socialist ideology in the nationalist movement have been debated, as some analysts claim that religion and the Africanist mythology were the predominant forces in the mobilisation strategies of the nationalist parties, while other analysts claim that the Africanist mythology was nothing but a pretext (Lan 1985: 226–228, Kriger 1992:129–135, Bhebe & Ranger 1996:9–13). Officially there was a proclamation of Marxist-Leninist and Maoist ideology in ZANU (Mugabe 1983:38, 56), which would rule out any religious affiliations, but when referring to the nationalist struggle of the first Chimurenga, such religious affiliations were not discarded:

Nehanda Nyakasikana, appears in our war annals of postcolonial Zimbabwe as the first heroine and martyr. She did not lead just a battalion of a regional army but a national army in a national struggle for the overthrow of Company rule and recovery of the fatherland. […] Nehanda was obviously a distinct and exceptional character who rose to revolutionary ascendance, not by mere display of leadership qualities […], but principally by her spiritual power as a spirit medium. Our society has always feared and respected women possessed by spirits or medicinal power. […] It was indeed in those circumstances that Nehanda was able to demonstrate her powers and command the respect of men. (Mugabe 1983:73)

When addressing the First Zimbabwe Women's Seminar on the issue of women's roles in society, Mugabe insists in the above quotation that Nehanda's strength and position in the nationalist struggle derived from her spiritual powers. Likewise, on the issue of ZANU's relationship with the African churches Mugabe said that: *"Our Party accommodates all kinds of religious views whether they be Christian or traditional African religious beliefs"* (Mugabe 1983:154).[1] The party's position on the issue of religion

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1. This comment was made in an interview with Janice McLaughlin, and has no relation to his comments at the First Zimbabwean Women's Seminar.

therefore clearly seemed benevolent. However, a rather complex relationship between the nationalist parties, their associated guerrilla armies and the traditional religious leaders of the African peasantry and the different Christian churches during the war has been described later. That is, in a number of places, the traditional religious leaders and the Christian churches were persecuted by the guerrilla armies and in other places they were seen as allies. Their relationship depended equally on the parties' popular bases which existed in specific areas prior to the war, on the specific ideological training the guerrillas had received and also on the level of cohesion with which the guerrillas dealt with the civilians in general (Bhebe & Ranger 1996:8–13).

4.4.2.1. Two parties – different politics?

ZAPU and ZANU both operated largely within the ideological discourse outlined above. Their articulations of difference were consequently targeted towards the legitimate leadership of the nationalist movement, as centralised leadership was important to both organisations. To a certain extent, ZANU developed a more traditionalist nationalist discourse than did ZAPU, which was at times quite critical towards religion. As such, the ZANU nationalist discourse mostly propagated Shona superiority. In a version of the Great Zimbabwe myth, it was claimed that the tribe which had inhabited Great Zimbabwe had in fact migrated from Ethiopia to form this great community. Through this rewriting of the white settler myth, the Shona claimed ethnic superiority over the remaining peoples in Zimbabwe, mainly the Ndebele (Garlake 1983:15).

Various attempts to establish co-operation or unity between the two armies and political parties during and after the liberation war were unsuccessful until the unity-accord of 1987, where a defeated ZAPU let itself be absorbed by ZANU (PF)[1] (Moore 1995:381–396, Meredith 2002:39–73, Sylvester 2003:34). The most successful attempt at unity was the Zimbabwean People's Army (ZIPA, also named vashandi)[2], which was a Marxist oriented group of young army commanders from the two armies, who set up a joint army under their own leadership, while the 'old guard' leaders were either imprisoned or in exile. The mobilisation strategies of the army during their rule were directed towards socialist training of the civil population. This movement was very critical of any form of religious input to the nationalist cause, just as they were critical towards the power struggles of the old party leaders, which they saw as the main reason for the division of the nationalist move-

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1. As mentioned earlier ZAPU and ZANU operated jointly under the name 'The Patriotic Front' during the peace negotiations at Lancaster House in 1979. The co-operation between the two parties did, however, not last, and in the subsequent elections ZANU and ZAPU ran separately. ZANU had by then adopted the (PF) and has since been known as ZANU (PF).
2. As a Marxist oriented group ZIPA also adopted the name 'Vashandi' which means worker (Moore 1995:381).

ment. When 'the old guard' returned from prison or exile, this led to renewed power struggles where Robert Mugabe showed himself to be striving for total personal control over the movement. The young commanders lost control, and the armies were once again divided along geographical and ethnic lines (Moore 1995:381–396, Sithole 1984:120–122). After this effort to unite the two armies, the nationalist articulations of each organisation remained partially split between Marxism and traditionalist nationalism.

4.4.3. Official ZANU nationalist history

The first elections after independence were won by ZANU. The rival ZAPU was forced to enter into a coalition government, which was, however, dominated by ZANU under the leadership of Robert Mugabe who became the Prime Minister. Zimbabwean nationalism now became official policy. The writing of a new history of Zimbabwe became one of the main objectives of the new state: *"Independence will bestow on us a new … perspective, and indeed, a new history and a new past"* (Mugabe in Garlake 1983:15). This new history of the past was put into a new perspective. The nation's imagined space had to be rewritten in literature, in the schools and in the national heritage sites. The mythologies of Great Zimbabwe and the first Chimurenga were now afforded the privilege of being the official discourse of the state. Nehanda and Kaguvi were now elevated to national heroes, as they were articulated as the official forerunners of the liberation struggle, which was now called the 'second Chimurenga'. The continuity of the struggle against colonial oppression was established through a focus on a continuity of co-operation between the resistance movements and the spirit mediums. Likewise, liberation war heroes were being celebrated as Nehanda's bones risen, quoting her famous statement that her bones would rise to rid the nation of the oppressors (Bhebe & Ranger 1996:24–26). Intellectual cultural nationalism aligned itself with the government in praise of the heroics of the liberation war, whose input to the discourse helped create a symbolic field, on which the government could base its articulations of legitimacy (Kaarsholm 1989c:192).

The government was focusing its efforts on securing its power base both militarily and discursively. It therefore adopted a pragmatic policy in which the socialist ideals of the liberation war were rewritten to accommodate the preservation of the government. The approach to the land issue is an example of this strategy. The peace settlement afforded the white land-owners a 10-year period of protection from eviction. The original issue of African rights to land therefore became rearticulated by the government as African rights to self-governance. The white minority (no longer a physical threat) was perceived as a necessary partner in the quest for economic growth and national development. Reconciliation was therefore installed in the nationalist discourse, which now focused its future visions on modernisation

and indigenous rule as the key signs of the socialist revolution (Alexander 1996:325–326).

ZANU's hegemonic status was effectively supported by the state institutions, and the state controlled media, which the government had inherited from the Rhodesian state. Its only perceived threat was ZAPU. Even though ZAPU was part of the government, the party and its leader Jonathan Nkomo were ostracised by Robert Mugabe. Therefore, ZAPU had to be written out of liberation war history as enemies of the Zimbabwean revolution. In order to do this Mugabe used continued in-fighting between the two liberation armies as a pretext for the elimination of the political power base of his opponents (Sylvester 2003:34).

4.4.3.1. The ethnic other

> The nationalist struggle [had] fed and in turn was fed by the antithesis, the polarization of two quasi-nations or super-tribes […] The catastrophe of quasi-nationalism is that it can capture the might of the nation state and bring authorized violence down ruthlessly against the people who seem to stand in the way of the nation being united and pure as one body … It is as if quasi-nationalism's victims, by being of an opposed quasi-nation, put themselves outside the nation, indeed beyond the pale of humanity. (Werbner 1996:197)

Conflicts in the encampments, originally formed to disarm and unite the two liberation armies with the former Rhodesian army now under the control of the new government, resulted in a number of ex-guerrillas deserting the camps. These were a mixed group of ex-ZANLA and ex-ZIPRA combatants. However, Mugabe chose to focus on the ex-ZIPRA dissidents. This was an opportunity to root out their efforts in the liberation war, and represent ZAPU and ZIPRA as enemies of the state. Accordingly, their desertion was articulated as an organised ZAPU attempt to overthrow the government or at least to secede the Ndebele-speaking areas from the Zimbabwean state. This charge was, however, vigorously denied by ZAPU (Alexander et al. 2000:180–181, Meredith 2002:60–64).

In the 'Gukurahundi' a campaign to 'sweep out the rubbish'[1] from the newly created Zimbabwean state, a Korean trained unit, the '5th. Brigade', was deployed in Matabeleland in order to wipe out this enemy and its civilian supporters. The campaign was described by Mugabe as an act of self-defence on the part of the Zimbwean people. This people was by now apparently Shona, since the entire Ndebele-speaking part of the population was seen as the constituency of the enemy. Thus

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1. The name 'Gukurahundi' was associated to the campaign in which the government deployed the 5th. Brigade. The word 'gukurahundi' means 'early spring rains' and had earlier been used by ZANU in their electoral campaign under the slogan 'The Year of the People's Storm' or 'Gore reGukurahundi'. In the way it was used by Mugabe in relation to the 5th. Brigade, it was taken as meaning to 'sweep out the rubbish' (Alexander et al. 2000:191).

written out of the nation as enemies, the population of Matabeleland (which was only predominantly Ndebele-speaking) became subject to a reign of terror, which was aimed at supporters of ZAPU, but in practice targeted the whole population (CCJP/LRF 1997, Alexander & McGregor 2001:513, Alexander et al. 2000:189–203, Alexander & McGregor 1999:244–254, Sylvester 2003:34).

In order to naturalise this discourse, the colonial stereotypes of Shona vs. Ndebele became instrumental in the elimination of the Ndebele from Zimbabwean national identity. In a reverse movement the Ndebele, who had been cast as 'noble savages' in the settler discourses because of their forceful occupation of Matabeleland and their compliance with the British dominance, were now represented as an ancient enemy because of their forceful occupation by and their compliance with the British (Meredith 2002:70, Werbner 1996:197–199). Zimbabwean nationalism was hence not only the assertion of African heritage and indigenous rights, but moreover it was an assertion of Shona heritage and indigenous rights. The new history of Zimbabwe was therefore largely cast as Shona history both in the new schoolbooks, in research and in official history writing (Kaarsholm 1989b:144). As a result of this discourse, which was especially articulated in the attacks on Matabeleland civilians, ethnic sentiments were kindled among the population in Matabeleland. The persecutions under the Gukurahundi, and their apparent origin in ethnic antagonism created a need for cultural identity, which was found in the ethnic stereotypes of the Ndebele as proud warriors (Werbner 1996:200–205, Alexander et al. 2000:235–236).

4.4.4. United history
Nkomo gave up political opposition to ZANU (PF) rule in 1987 and signed a unity accord, which in practice dissolved ZAPU in a merger with ZANU (PF). Opposition towards the ruling party was now left in the hands of civil society organisations and the independent media, which tried to keep Mugabe accountable for the atrocities of the Gukurahundi (Meredith 2002:73–76, Alexander & McGregor 1999:254–257). However, in a remarkable act of reinscription, the people of Matabeleland were being called to forget the antagonisms, which the state had propagandised only months before. The Ndebele became part of the Zimbabwean people once more, as unity was now the key signifier of the postcolonial national identity. Zimbabwe was now under ZANU (PF) rule, and as such importance was placed on remembering the liberation war, independence and ZANU (PF)'s role as one. ZANU (PF) history was the history of the nation. Accordingly, any other versions of history, be it the achievements of ZAPU and ZIPRA during the war or accounts of the Gukurahundi, were anti-national (Sylvester 2003:35). The ethnic antagonisms were represented as neo-colonial manipulations as divisions in the national unity were perceived as the work of outside forces. Pressure from churches, human rights NGOs and the independent media for Mugabe to acknowledge the actions, which

the government was responsible for during the Gukurahundi, was therefore represented as dangerous lies intended on splitting the nation: *"if we dig up history, then we wreck the nation* […] *and we tear our people apart into factions, into tribes"* (Mugabe in Alexander & McGregor 1999:256). Ethnic antagonism was in this sense part of the colonial legacy, which united Zimbabweans should not adhere to. Mugabe likewise scolded the church leaders, who presented him with the *Breaking the Silence* rapport for being *"mischief makers wearing religious garb"* (Mugabe in Meredith 2002:74), and he accused Amnesty International of spreading lies (Meredith 2002:73). When he finally did acknowledge that violence had occurred, it was described as a common act of insanity, and it was underlined that the antagonisms of the past had to be remembered in such a way that the memory could prevent future divisions of the national unity (Alexander et al. 2000:258): *"The* [historical] *register or record will remind us what never to do, if they went against the sacred tenets of humanity, we must never repeat it."* (Mugabe in Alexander & McGregor 1999:257). In other words, if ZANU (PF)'s hegemony was challenged this was considered anti-nationalist because ZANU (PF) formed the legitimate nobility of the liberation war: *"the centrepiece of all Zimbabwean memory and action"* (Sylvester 2003:35). Therefore, the people had to be educated in order to *"sublimate* […] *inferior and divisive energies into a superior and transcendent spirit* […] *a nobler social outlook"* (Mugabe in Sylvester 2003:35).

4.4.5. The third Chimurenga

While the 'ethnic enemy' of the 1980s had effectively been turned into a productive memory, new agents, who were perceived as threatening the unity of the nation, emerged in the discourses of ZANU (PF) during the 1990s. The government's socialist rhetoric was turned around in a move to reconcile the expectations of social justice with new policies of structural adjustment. This was, however, challenged by the labour movement and a number of NGOs. Along with the independent media they began to challenge the hegemony of ZANU (PF) by criticising the monopoly power concentrated in the party. The government therefore increasingly relied on liberation war history for popular support. ZANU (PF) was articulated as impersonating the spirit of the anti-colonial struggle; they were veterans of war, and therefore the genuine heirs to the governance of Zimbabwe (Raftopoulos 2000:30, Sylvester 2003:36–38). At this time, the War Veterans Association began to claim that genuine war veterans were not being adequately compensated for their efforts during the liberation war. This constituted an attack on the heart of ZANU (PF)'s own discursive strategy. Along with the challenges from the labour movement and the NGO community, the demands of the war veterans formed a 'two front attack' on the government's discursive strategies: the economy was declining, and the labour movement was attacking government's structural adjustment policies, while the war veterans were demanding compensation. Therefore, the government, though under economic pressure, resorted to enlarging the compensation awarded

to war veterans, and chose to challenge the labour movement directly accusing them of being backed by the British who intended to bring down the Zimbabwean government (Sylvester 2003:38–41).

The past glories of the liberation war were thus rearticulated so as to accommodate the attacks of the war veterans, and a revival of the land issue became instrumental in turning the unruly war veterans into allies of ZANU (PF). This issue had not been paid much attention after independence as a consequence of the policy of reconciliation, which the government had been forced to resort to after the peace settlement. Funds for redistribution of land under the rule of law had been available from international donors, but a resettlement programme had not been effective in redistributing land to landless Africans, land had rather been handed out to party supporters. The widespread social unrest therefore had to be directed towards demands for land rather than a reversing of the structural adjustment policies (Sylvester 2003:39–40):

> By the 1990s a politics of remembering land was possible and ZANU (PF) began to orchestrate it as a way both of managing unruly war veterans and preserving the myth it had created about itself as the champion of rural Zimbabweans. (Sylvester 2003:39)

The divide between rural and urban Zimbabwe became instrumental once again. ZANU (PF)'s power base was in the rural areas, while the labour movement and its political counterpart the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) were predominantly urban based. The colonial stereotypes were again deployed in an articulation of 'true Zimbabwe', which was 'rural Zimbabwe', while the urban population was perceived with increasing suspicion. Thus, Mugabe sided with the war veterans and supported their violent take-overs of white owned commercial farms in what he called a fast track resettlement programme. This programme was depicted as a continuation of the anti-colonial struggle, as the violent take-overs were the fulfilment of the spirit of the first and second Chimurengas (Meredith 2002:195–197, Sylvester 2003:42–43). The campaign of the war veterans, who included a number of younger people, who were too young to be actual veterans of the war, was turned into a renewed quest to rid the land of whites and the forces who, backed by the whites and Western powers, tried to resist this final struggle against oppression. A whole range of different oppositional groups could be termed enemies of the 'third Chimurenga' and thus excluded from 'the national we'. The labour movement, the MDC, African farm workers, who defended their employers, the independent media, human rights NGOs and churches were in turn proclaimed agents of the neo-colonial British enemy (Raftopolous 2000:38–46, Meredith 2002:191–193, Sylvester 2003:41–43).

Christine Sylvester terms this discourse 'inappropriating the now' because the discourse works by making the present state of the nation inappropriate to the polit-

ical discourses, as the present is but a step towards the fulfilment of a visionary future. This visionary future is a rearticulation of the past glory of the African people as it recalls the romanticised versions of pre-colonial African society and claims to strive to rectify the damage which the colonial invasion and the damaging neo-colonial powers have caused. In this discourse, land becomes the key signifier of true Zimbabwean identity because it is the link between the past, present and future as an anti-colonial symbol of continued struggle for freedom from oppression (Sylvester 2003:44–46). This discourse rearticulates social tensions in society as external interference in the unity of the Zimbabwean people, just as counter-memories, which challenge the hegemonic status of ZANU (PF) in national history are dismissed as attempts to divide the nation.

4.5. Summing up

Vera's articulation of a spiritual temporality represents a version of national history, which focuses on the initial colonial encounter. Her narrative offers a spiritual connection between the initial anti-colonial struggle and the liberation war. There is a connection between the different discourses of history, which have been analysed in this chapter. An example of this is the colonial mapping out of the spatial divisions between the urban and the rural space, which has persisted in different articulations of national identity both during the liberation war and in the third Chimurenga discourse. Thus, the way in which early nationalism was forged in the linkage between rural and urban in anti-colonial resistance has been 'written out' of official nationalism today. The political culture, which was formed in the liberation armies and the political parties during the liberation war, has marked the way national history has been made a symbol of national identity in different periods. The Gukurahundi can be viewed as a pretext for elite struggles for power over the postcolonial government; struggles which had already been instituted in the early nationalist movement. The manner of the Gukurahundi also forms a linkage to the violence of the third Chimurenga, just as the articulations of an enemy who is being written out of the nation's self-image are – not only the oldest trick in the book, but also a recurrent political strategy of ZANU (PF). Thus, the analysis in this chapter of the nationalist discourse forms the background for the further analysis of contemporary articulations of national history as a means of defining national identity.

5. Nationalism and Africanism

Zimbabwean nationalism was formulated in the early nationalist movement and drew on both a Marxist and an Africanist critique of the colonial state. As was shown in the previous chapter these two ideologies went hand in hand in the guerrilla campaigns to win public support, while they were quite often the cause of internal tension in the political parties and the armies (Lan 1985:207–209, Ranger 1983:38, Ranger & Ncube 1996:36, 44–52). After independence the official ZANU (PF) nationalism has rearticulated the Marxist discourses in a merger with the Africanist critique of the global power relations into an anti-(neo)imperialist discourse. An example of this shift in the nationalist discourse is the discursive exclusion of the socialist labour movements, which played an important role in the articulation of early nationalist discourses. They have been excluded in the current nationalist discourses and are being persecuted because they form the popular base of the opposition (Raftopoulos 1999:135–144). This chapter will show that the discursive field, which official nationalism has drawn upon, has been narrowed down by delimiting socialist ideology to the field of anti-imperialist critique of the global power relations and the Western economic hegemony. This is posed as an Africanist critique of neo-imperialism, and it is articulated as both national and Pan-African. The articulation of this official 'Africanist nationalism' is based on distinctly Zimbabwean historical narratives, which are offered as being 'in tune with' other African national histories as both distinctly Zimbabwean and distinctly African.

This chapter is an investigation into how the ZANU (PF) government's official nationalist discourses represent national history by drawing on the mythological narratives of African heritage that were outlined in the previous chapter. The nationalist discourses of the ZANU (PF) government are analysed in order to describe how the nationalist narratives that these discourses are based on create a notion of national identity, which can function as a means of inclusion and exclusion, whereby the government can authorise its rule. This discursive articulation of the nation's history is viewed as operating within the discursive field of national history and identity that *Nehanda* is analysed in relation to in this chapter. This analysis of the novel examines the novel's narrative framework in order to show how an articulation of a spiritual temporality in the novel can be read in relation to the

ZANU (PF) government's discourses of national history, and it considers the novel's articulation of a national spirit in the form of the Nehanda figure who is guiding the anti-colonial struggle. This analysis is based on Homi Bhabha's theories of national identity and Mahmood Mamdani and Frantz Fanon's theories of postcolonial governmentality.

5.1. Analytical framework

This section describes how Mamdani and Fanon in their theories have outlined how postcolonial Africa nation-states have produced a form of governmentality, in which a certain power relation forges a nationalism that articulates collective national identity in a way that is distinct for postcolonial African nation-states. Postmodern theories of collective identity are in this connection also explored in order to facilitate a description of Bhabha's theories of national identity, which outlines how the nation as a narrative strategy works by calling on the nation's people to 'remember and forget' the nation's history in order to maintain the nation's unity.

5.1.1. Postcolonial African nation-states

An analysis of nationalism within a theoretical framework of governmentality gives rise to at least two challenges when situated in the Zimbabwean nation-state. Firstly, the theoretical approaches to an analysis of state formation and governmentality, which relies on state formation in Europe, need to be re-evaluated in order to have significance in the Zimbabwean context. A critical approach to theories of modern African and modern European forms of governmentality can benefit from an approach to the nation-state that views it as an idea of political order that is imagined and has gained a hegemonic status in global power relations and thus structured international relations after 1945. Secondly, the theoretical approach to such an analysis must rely on the specificity of the context of the analysis, that is, one must abandon essentialist notions of a typical African nation-state formation and instead approach the specific context of the analysis in light of how this particular state comes to be imagined as a mythology which has gained historical weight (Hansen & Stepputat 2001:10–14). The nation-states in Africa, which all were formed under colonial rule, have been labelled a curse because they share an alienation between the arbitrary geographical entities they represent and the people who supposedly should imagine themselves as subjects of these nation-states (Davidson 1992:10–11, 294–295). Mamdani has argued that this alienation, apart from being the product of the arbitrary distribution of land between the different colonial powers, derives from the colonial forms of governmentality rather than an appropriation of the European nation-state model to the African colonies. Drawing on Fanon, Mamdani finds that the single-party regimes of the postcolonial African states were critical of democracy and its base in civil society because democracy and

civil society organisations were urban multiparty projects, which threatened their rural based hegemony. As Fanon already pointed out in his political manifesto *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) this single-party policy on the part of the nationalist bourgeoisie, which governed the postcolonial nation-states in Africa, constituted a modern form of bourgeoisie dictatorship. This was a form of governmentality that continued to gear the nation's economy towards the enrichment of a small bourgeoisie who were acting as middlemen in the neo-colonial economic world order (Fanon 1963:142). The single party acting on the part of the bourgeoisie elite took hold of the state apparatus in order to ensure this hegemonic status, relying more on coercion than on persuasion. For Mamdani as for Fanon this represented a continuation of the colonial governmental rationale and techniques of power (Fanon 1963:132, Mamdani 1996:290–291).[1]

In the hands of the bourgeoisie elites of the nationalist parties in the postcolonial states, Fanon claims that nationalism and nationalist history functioned as tranquilisers that covered up the treachery of a kleptocratic government and the single party (Fanon 1963:133–138,165). Fanon stated that lacking the means for genuine social change, the nationalist elites forged nationalism and the heroics of the political leader as a braking power against the dissatisfaction of the oppressed people of the nation:

> The leader, because he refuses to break up the national bourgeoisie, asks the people to fall back into the past and to become drunk on the remembrance of the epoch which led up to independence. The leader, seen objectively, brings the people to a halt and persists in either expelling them from history or preventing them from taking root in it. (Fanon 1963:135–136)

The battle cry of 'African Unity', which had effectively mobilised the masses against the colonial masters, was in the discourses of the nationalist elites turned into an Africanist chauvinism, which took the place of the racism of the former European colonial bourgeoisie (Fanon 1963:125–129).

Fanon's analysis of the postcolonial African nation-states, formulated nearly 20 years before Zimbabwean independence, almost prophetically resembles the analysis below of the discourses of Zimbabwean nationalism. As this analysis will illustrate, Fanon's analytical framework affords an understanding of the power relations that the Zimbabwean national narratives are working through. In itself it articulates a critical political counter-narrative, being as it is a political manifesto for the resto-

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1. Although Mamdani's theories of African colonial governmentality have been dissociated from the Rhodesian mode of governmentality because a strategy of rule and divide was not deployed in Rhodesia (Alexander et al. 2000:5), his theory of a single-party bias in the postcolonial states can still, based on the analysis in Chapter 4, be argued as relevant for an analysis of Zimbabwean nationalism.

ration of the revolutionary potential in the postcolonial nation-states of the 1960s. In the postcolonial nation-state, Fanon claims that nationalist history, which 'naturalises' the community of the nation-people is not only arbitrary, but that the process of naturalisation is caught in an imaginative dialectic, which moves back and forth between articulations of modern, colonial, postcolonial and 'native' national culture. For Bhabha this constitutes a question of how the sign of history in political or literary discourses comes to designate the people 'as one', as a national culture which can become the object of psychic identification (Bhabha 1994:152–153). This question of collective identity formation has been articulated in different ways in the so called 'family of theories', which understand collective identities as constructed in relational networks of negation (Frello 1999:1, 5–6). Consequently, the notion of collective identity is discussed below, before Bhabha's theories of the nation are described.

5.1.2. Collective identity

As Bhabha has pointed out, the Western institutions of critical theory that fostered the theories of collective identity need to be historicised in order to appropriate them to a postcolonial theoretical context. Bhabha locates the theories of the modern subject, the distinction between the sign and the signifier and the discursive construction of the social reality in the institutionally powered European academia. However, for the purpose of utilising its critical potential in a colonial and neo-colonial context, Bhabha draws on Foucault's critique of the modern subject and Fanon's appropriation of Lacan's theories of the other; he does so because these theories themselves are critical of the modern enterprise (Bhabha 1994:31–32): *"They constitute no less than a deconstruction of the moment of the modern, its legal values, its literary tastes, its philosophical and political categorical imperatives"* (Bhabha 1994:32). Bhabha proposes a translation of these theories to the particular contexts in which they can be applied; a translation that always occurs whether it is intentional or not, and which enables Bhabha to utilise these theories in order to *"conceptualize the tension and disturbance within colonial discourse"* (Moore-Gilbert 1997:118).

The understanding of collective identity as constructed in relational networks of negation, which relies on the postmodern understanding of the subject, is situated in the context of a poststructuralist critique of the modern enterprise in European academia. Here the postmodern subject is seen as having no pre-existence, it is created in inter-subjectivity. The postmodern subject is therefore striving to exclude elements which it sees as obstructing a completeness of its individuality. However, the postmodern *"subject never achieves the completion or wholeness toward which it strives."* (Edkins & Pin-Fat 1999:1). Foucault outlines this process in an analysis into the human condition that is based on a systemic dissociation of identity. The self is seen as a plurality. The self rather than containing *one* immortal soul contains *many* mortal ones made up of a complex system of distinct and multiple elements which cannot

be mastered by a synthesis (Foucault 1971:94). Foucault outlines three modes by which human beings are objectified, and thereby turned into subjects by the power-knowledge installations in modern society: scientifically through grammar, economics and biology, through dissociations that separate subjects from each other as well as internally (a process which turns the subject into both an object for itself and an object for others), and through the way human beings turn themselves into subjects, by recognising themselves as subjects (Foucault 1983:208). Other postmodern theorists such as Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida have been drawn upon by Jenny Edkins and Véronique Pin-Fat in their description of how processes of subjectivity form the basis of collective identity. They have used the connection between the identity formation of the subject and the 'social order' to argue that when identity becomes a mirroring process between the subject in search of meaning and the social order, the social order in return simultaneously comes into being in the subject's imagining of it (Edkins & Pin-Fat 1999:4–9). The significance of this process is that it is imagined, and that it is never complete. The subjects cannot imagine the completeness of the real because the social order involves a lack of meaning, which can be contained in the question: 'Why does the social order desire me to take on this particular subject position?' The social order cannot answer this question because like the specific subject position, it is imagined. Slavoj Zizek calls this: *"a crack in the ontological edifice of the universe"* (Zizek 1997 in Edkins & Pin-Fat 1999:8). A 'master signifier', like the 'nation', can fill this crack in the subject's imagining of the real, creating an illusion of meaning. This, however, is a 'violent' act because like everything else the master signifier is arbitrary, and therefore decided upon. A 'naturalisation' of the master signifier therefore becomes necessary (Edkins & Pin-Fat 1999:8–9).

5.1.3. The nation and the people

Homi Bhabha has drawn on Anderson as well as the postmodern theoretical tradition in his analysis of nations and nationalism, and he defines the nation as:

> […] an obscure and ubiquitous form of living the *locality* of culture. This locality is more *around* temporality than *about* historicity: a form of living that is more complex than 'community'; more symbolic than 'society'; more connotative than 'country'; less patriotic than *patrie*; more rhetorical than the reason of State; more mythological than ideology; less homogeneous than hegemony; less centred than the citizen; more collective than the cultural differences and identifications than can be represented in any hierarchical or binary structuring of social antagonism. (Bhabha 1994:140) [original italics]

Bhabha defines the nation as a narrative strategy. This strategy deploys the elements 'the people' and 'the nation' in a linear historical narrative of events, ideas, and cultural traits. The nation writes itself through historical narratives, political narratives,

and literary narratives as a homogenous entity that can function as a point of identi-
fication (Bhabha 1994:140). For Bhabha 'the people' as a narrative strategy can be
defined as both totalising and liberating:

> The people are neither the beginning nor the end of the national narrative; they rep-
> resent the cutting edge between the totalizing powers of the 'social' as homoge-
> neous, consensual community, and the forces that signify the more specific address
> to contentious, unequal interests and identities within the population. (Bhabha
> 1994:146)

The narration of the 'eternity of the nation' is bound up with the idea of the people.
The tension in the above quotation between the homogeneous and the unequal
interests of the people is at the heart of Bhabha's theory of the nation. The people
are for Bhabha both the historical *objects* of the nationalist pedagogy and the *subjects*
of a process of signification. Bhabha calls this 'a double narrative moment' within
the discourse of nationalism. There is a doubleness, an ambivalence within the dis-
course, which is a splitting process in which the narration of the nation splits
between the pedagogical and the performative. The pedagogical is an accumulative
temporality, that Anderson (borrowing from Walter Benjamin) calls 'homogeneous
empty time', which is signified by a defining moment, from which time is ascribed
meaning. The performative is a recurrent strategy of signification, which defines the
nation's temporality a series of events, which shape the nation (Bhabha 1994:145,
Bojsen & Larsen 2003:3–4):

> […] the people are the historical 'objects' of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the dis-
> course an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin *in
> the past*; the people are also the 'subjects' of a process of signification that must erase
> any prior or originary presence of the nation-people. (Bhabha 1994:145)

> To be obliged to forget – in the construction of the national present – is not a ques-
> tion of historical memory; it is the construction of a discourse in society that per-
> forms the problem of totalizing the people and unifying the national will. (Bhabha
> 1994:160–161)

This process is similar to the process, which Anderson terms 'remembering and for-
getting'. However, for Bhabha this means that the people are at once the closing and
the opening of the discourse, and that this constitutes an ambivalence of the narra-
tive of the nation, both as a temporal agent and a horizontal community. As such,
the narration of the nation must be viewed in light of an *"ambivalence that haunts the
idea of the nation"* (Bhabha 1990:1). The ambivalence occurs when the pedagogical is
contested by articulations which disturb essentialist identity that is associated with
the idea of one out of many. In Bhabha's view postcolonial and feminist writers
form an example of such a contestation, as they attempt to question the way in

which the narratives of national consciousness are constructed and because they try to form a temporality in which different identifications can be articulated:

> [They] seek to redefine the symbolic processes through which the social imaginary – nation, culture or community – becomes the subject of discourse, and the object of psychic identification. These feminist and postcolonial temporalities force us to rethink the sign of history *within* those languages, political or literary, which designate the people 'as one'. (Bhabha 1994:153)

They are confronting the national sign of unity by way of 'a supplementary movement of writing' or 'a supplementary space of doubling' that signifies the ambivalent movement between the pedagogical and the performative in the national narrative. These writers aim at non-pluralistic politics of difference[1] from the margins, and they pose strategies of disturbance in the narrative of the people as one, that is, political strategies of difference that can take the form of 'a metonymic interruption' in the representation of the people as one. This can become the basis for a renegotiation of the terms by which a contemporary interpretation can be turned into the sign of history (Bhabha 1994:153–155).

In Bhabha's analysis the cultural practice of nationality and the meaning ascribed to the past in the narrative of the nation are seen as having to align themselves in the nation's temporal space. If the practice of nationality and the significance ascribed to the temporality of the nation do not correlate, Bhabha calls this 'disjunctive temporality' (Bojsen & Larsen 2003:4). This disturbs the ideological manoeuvring of the imagined community in the national space by insisting on positions of marginality in the people. For Bhabha the ambivalence creates space for marginal 'counter narratives' which enable them to challenge the homogenising nature of the pedagogical (Bhabha 1994:149). Bhabha argues that this ambivalence questions the mythic metaphor of homogenous progress. Hence, he questions the notion of holistic community and culture, and the notion of unitary collective experiences (Bhabha 1994:142). It is the unevenness of the nation 'both progression and regression' that makes a 'tipping' of the discourse of nationness possible. In self-defence the discourse installs 'the will to nationhood'. This will is not dependent on prior identities (roots), territory or language, but it depends on a will to unify the national history through the process of remembering and forgetting. The will to forget the violence in the past by inscribing it into the narrative of the ideologically told past thus constitutes an *obligation* to forget (Bhabha 1994:160–161, Anderson 1991:199–200).

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1. By 'pluralistic discourses of difference' it must be assumed that Bhabha is referring to discourses of multiculturalism because these discourses involve a danger of tipping back into discourses of 'development along separate lines'.

5.2. Patriotic history

> During the struggle for liberation the leader awakened the people and promised them a forward march, heroic and unmitigated. Today, he uses every means to put them to sleep, and three or four times a year asks them to remember the colonial period and to look back on the long way they have come since then. (Fanon 1963:136)

The motion of 'remembering and forgetting', which Fanon underlines as the primary discursive tool of the corrupted post-independence national elites, has, as was pointed out in the previous chapter, also been one of the characteristics of ZANU (PF)'s strategies of governmentality (Melber 2002:67, Sylvester 2003). After a brief period in the 1990s, where the government's discursive strategies appeared to attempt to include as many groups as possible in the 'national we', this inclusiveness was changed as the government failed to secure majority support in the constitutional referendum in 2000 (Dorman 2003:854–856). After its defeat in the constitutional referendum the government came under pressure from a number of civic groups and from the opposition, and in the campaigning up to the following parliamentary elections in 2002 the government as a result resorted to a discursive strategy of exclusion, which rendered these groups as agents of the former colonial masters; namely the British (Raftopoulos 2002:414 and Dorman 2003:856–860). This discursive strategy is here termed 'patriotic history' and it is seen as ZANU (PF)'s response to the added pressure from the opposition.

ZANU (PF)'s appropriation of liberation war history into patriotic history is by professional historians described as a mindless wrecking open of the archives and putting the suffering of the Zimbabwean people on display as propaganda. Colonial oppression and the heroics of the liberation war are propagandised as entertainment, taught in schools and in President Mugabe's so called National Youth Service Training Programme, otherwise known as the youth militia training camps. This appropriation of history is articulated as a national heritage and it is aimed at affording the young Zimbabweans a revolutionary awareness. ZANU (PF)'s patriotic history is taught in the youth militia camps in order to prepare the Zimbabwean youth to join the 'older veterans' in the fight for Zimbabwe's liberation from the oppression of the imperialist world order in the third Chimurenga (Hammar 2003:129, Raftopoulos 2003:234). This is according to President Mugabe the duty of every Zimbabwean:

> I am happy there is growing awareness that we are our own liberators. Already, the Third Chimurenga has yielded a new war veteran: those young men and women who slugged it out on the farms in support of their elder veterans, the same young men and women whom our detractors have vilified as impostors of real war veterans. Our National Youth Service Programme must firmly focus on building a patriotic cadreship that loves and is prepared to defend our sovereignty and interests. We are not

apologetic about our National Youth Service Programme and we shall get on with the job of training our youth. It is mandatory; it is national; it links to the politics and defence of our country; […] As a Zimbabwean, you cannot choose to love your country or to defend it. You have a duty to love and defend it! And the National Youth Service Programme is the way to demonstrate your commitment to love and defend this country once called upon to do so. That duty is mandatory! (Mugabe 2002a)

The government persistently describes the camps as a job-training programme, while human rights NGOs have produced evidence that the camps are forced training of ZANU (PF) loyal militias who are being trained in violently oppressing the opposition (Solidarity Peace Trust 2003a:10–11, Ranger 2003a, BBC1 2004).

The discursive motion of forgetting and remembering in the articulation of patriotic history is an attempt to rewrite national history as the legitimisation of ZANU (PF) rule. The narrative strategy, through which this is attempted, rests on linking widely acknowledged critiques of global trade and eurocentrism to the renewed Zimbabwean anti-imperialist struggle by claiming that Zimbabwean sovereignty is being threatened by manipulative Western backed claims for good governance, the rule of law and human rights (Hammar & Raftopoulos 2003:26):

In Zimbabwe, we have, with clear mind and vision, resolved to bring to an end this neo-liberal model. For us in Zimbabwe, the agenda for sustainable development has to be reasserted, with a vigorous, democratic and progressive interventionist State and public sector capable of playing a full and responsible developmental role. […] we join our brothers and sisters in the Third World in rejecting completely, manipulative and intimidatory attempts by some countries and regional blocks that are bent on subordinating our sovereignty to their hegemonic ambitions and imperial interests, falsely presented as matters of rule of law, democracy and good governance. (Mugabe 2002b)

Opposing the West and in particular the former colonial master, the British, is defined by President Mugabe as democratic because the West by 'virtue' of being the former colonial master has forfeited its claim to democracy:

We ask the so called Free World these questions: Do democracies enslave; do democracies colonise; do democracies discriminate, massacre, plunder and expropriate? Do democracies wait for bloody revolutions to understand and appreciate social justice; to relinquish the spoils of ill-gotten colonial plunder; do they wait for The Third Chimurenga and gallant acts of defiance to agree to share with those to whom the land belongs? (Mugabe 2002a)

To be patriotic therefore entails a critical stance towards anything that can be presented as neo-imperialist, and in the patriotic history discourse patriotism melts

down to an anti-colonial stance towards anything it can depict as non-indigenous. By installing itself as the only legitimate representatives of the Zimbabwean anti-colonial struggle, ZANU (PF) attempts to equate itself with democracy, patriotism and Africanism, thereby narrowing the discursive field of national identity down to those who support ZANU (PF) (Raftopoulos 2002:413, Alexander & McGregor 2001:511).

Patriotism is in this context defined as unity in defiance of the neo-colonial threat, which has its most prominent representative in the British prime minister called 'Tony B-liar' by President Mugabe (Ranger 2004:221). Any claim, which questions the legitimacy of the government, is by definition neo-colonial. And because the government articulates itself as the nation's liberator, a glorification of the heroes of the liberation war is put up as a yardstick against which contemporary politics should be measured:

> If Joshua Nkomo were to rise this hour, would you be fit to hold his hand and walk in step with him down the path that emanates from this very sacred shrine [the Heroes Acre] and ends in a great future for our country? […] Would he [Nyangombe] invoke the Spirits' blessings for your pursuits in his profound communion with the dear departed? What is your cause today? Does it derive from and connect with the lofty ideals of these men and women we honour today? Or are you, through your actions today, a willing traitor and second executor of these heroes; willing posthumous betrayer of their cause, indeed the eager butcher of our revolution, our heritage and the future of our children? (Mugabe 2002a)[1]

In this discourse the traitors to the heritage of the Zimbabwean people, therefore, find their foremost representative in the leader of the opposition, Morgan Tsvangirai, who is depicted as *"a puppet of Britain"* (Mugabe in Chan 2003:178). In one of his milder warnings Mugabe accordingly asserts that MDC should abide by his superiority and act as 'brothers of the soil' who do not seek outside support:

> I am a big brother and you will listen to a person who is bigger. A person who is bigger is bigger, and there is nothing you can do. […] We sort things out in our own house, not […] Blair's house. (Mugabe in Latham 2003)

As mentioned earlier a number of different groups are perceived as neo-colonial agents alongside the MDC. Under this characterisation the independent media have also been targeted. The campaign against them has been led by Information Minister Jonathan Moyo and the chairman of the Information Commission Tafataona

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1. Even though Mugabe and Nkomo were rivals in life, Mugabe has after Nkomo's death elevated him to a sainthood status calling him 'Father Zimbabwe' despite their disagreements during the Matabeleland conflict in the 1980s. The unity accord, which in effect dissolved ZAPU as an opposition party, was thus described by Mugabe as an act of magnanimity and humility on Nkomo's behalf at Nkomo's funeral (AFP 1999).

Mahoso who both underline that the independent press represents foreign interference, which threatens the sovereignty of the Zimbabwean people:

> This publication presents clear testimony to the threat Zimbabwe's sovereignty faces. Government is obliged to defend itself from this subversion. Necessarily there is an obligation on the part of government to weed out subversion whenever it masquerades in our midst as free press (Moyo in Moyo 2003).[1]

> It is important to develop further the full political and economic context of the apparent bankruptcy of journalism in Zimbabwe. Walter Kansteiner, when he was an assistant secretary of state in the Bush administration of the USA, announced that the US government was working with journalists from the private media in Zimbabwe, working with NGOs and Zimbabwe's neighbours, to overthrow the Government of Zimbabwe. […] the NGOs and journalists did not deny the charge […] these journalists saw their collaboration with imperialism against their own people as "trying to eke out a living from the other side [the imperialist side] of the media divide". (Mahoso 2004)

To prevent the spreading of the lies of these neo-imperialist 'sell-outs', two bills were passed through the parliament in 2002. The first bill prevented the opposition from holding rallies and the other bill was directed towards the free press. The bill banned foreign journalists and enforced a registration of local journalists (Chan 2002:176–177), and has been proved to have served its purpose, as it resulted in the close-down of Zimbabwe's leading independent newspaper *The Daily News* in October 2003. The government claims that these bills protect the people from neo-imperialist propaganda and secure peace and order which are being disturbed by the troublemakers and terrorists of the MDC and the British 'mouthpieces' of the independent media (McGreal 2002, Moyo 2003). In the bid to control the media Mugabe has lashed out at the internet, which is one of the few media that is still out of his government's control, calling it a tool of the hegemonic Western powers who *"challenge our sovereignty through hostile and malicious broadcasts calculated to foment instability and destroy the state through divisions"* (Mugabe in Fleck & La Guardia 2003).

The reversal into the vocabulary of the liberation war (sell-outs, mouthpieces, collaborators etc.) is part of the narrative strategy, which depicts the current political environment as a battle between internal and external forces and the notion of a war of liberation as ongoing. This, in turn, supports ZANU (PF)'s self-image as the recurrent liberator of the Zimbabwean people and the guardian of Zimbabwean national independence and sovereignty. Furthermore, the political opposition posed by MDC is being written into a temporal schema of progression and regression, in which Zimbabwean sovereignty is in progress, and the opposition is represented as aiming at a reversal of independence:

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1. Jonathan Moyo is here referring to the now closed independent newspaper *The Daily News.*

> Zimbabweans have come of the age that they do not believe in change from something to nothing. They do not believe in moving from independence and sovereignty to new colonialism, they do not believe in the discourse of human rights to deepen inequality. (Moyo in Melber 2002:67)

As such, the return of colonialism is a permanent threat in the discourse of patriotic history because critique of the government is depicted as subverting the liberty of the Zimbabwean people. External interference from the former colonial masters is represented as not just a reversal to colonial times; it is also a re-enactment of the first colonial occupation. In the following section *Nehanda* is analysed in relation to this discourse with a focus on the way in which the discourse of patriotic history draws on the temporal schema within which the novel operates.

5.2.1. Indigenous temporality

As was shown in Chapter 4, Zimbabwean nationalism drew on three important points of identification namely; indigenous rights to the land, the historical myths of Great Zimbabwe and the mythic status ascribed to the first Chimurenga. A narrative of deep historical comradeship is established as meaning and identification is drawn from the 'ancestral land', the greatness of the past and the spiritual temporality of the first and the second Chimurenga. *Nehanda* operates within this narrative framework. It narrates the nation as a people, who have cultural 'roots' in the land that they occupy and in their original struggle to protect the sacredness of the land. The mythical figure of Nehanda was Vera's choice for the novel because this highlighted the female side of the national struggle (Vera in Bryce 2000:222). The main protagonist is not just 'one out of many' as in the homogeneous pedagogical narrative. Nehanda personifies the national history; she is an icon. The analysis of a spiritual temporality in *Nehanda*, which was described in Chapter 4, is here used to show how *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 discourses of the ZANU (PF) government. As such, the spiritual history of the first Chimurenga which is the narrative framework of *Nehanda* can in some respect be seen as a pedagogical narrative of the nation.

Vera's Nehanda was inspired by a well-known photograph of the mediums Kaguvi and Nehanda that was taken before they were hanged:

> We had a school textbook which had a photograph of Nehanda and Kaguvi standing against a wall … we were taught that they were rebels who deserved to be hanged … But the image from that photograph stayed with me: without quite knowing whether this was the version of things that one should know. (Vera in Bryce 2002:41)

It has been noted that Vera's representation of Nehanda differs significantly from other literary narratives of the myth of Nehanda because of its inscription of the

female voice into the narrative. This female voice is significantly different from the elevated 'African Woman' of nationalist rhetoric[1] (Primorac 2001:78,83). The novel has been described as a feminist renewal of the language of historical narration as it subverts the social order of patriarchal dominance (Wilson-Tagoe 2002:161–162). These readings of the novel correspond to the critical postcolonial theoretical point of view which particularly engages Western male appropriations of African history. Nana Wilson-Tagoe has in relation to the connection between Ranger's *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia 1896–7* (1979) and Laurence Vambe's *An Ill-Fated People* (1972) pointed out that:

> To explore Vera's *Nehanda* in relation to these texts is to recognize how the novel can engage with the past in radical ways and envision new possibilities in the present and future. These narrative possibilities are what make the conjunction of history and the novel a crucial source of new perceptions, particularly in the African postcolonial condition. As Simon Gikandi so aptly observes (1991, 3): *[if] the African novel has become a formal instrument of invention and reinvention of African cultures, it is surely because this form has sought to evoke worlds beyond colonial and neo-colonial reification.* […]. (Wilson-Tagoe 2002:161) [original italics and brackets]

Rather than analysing *Nehanda* in light of the African postcolonial discursive field described above, the novel is here analysed in relation to the discourse of patriotic history. Accordingly, the novel is here analysed as a spiritual narrative of the nation, which narrates a temporal symbolism that forms the narrative framework for Vera's 'feminist nationalism'.

Seen from the point of view of nationalism Vera's rewriting of the history of the colonial encounter revitalises the idea that even though the spirit medium Nehanda was killed, the spirit Nehanda did not die; it is living as the whirling wind of the Zimbabwean anti-colonial struggle:

> In the future, the whirling centre of the wind, which is also herself, has collapsed, but that is only the beginning of an other dimension of time. The collapse of the wind, which is also her own death, is also part of the beginning, and from the spiralling centre of the wind's superimposed circles another wind rises, larger and stronger. Hope for the nation is borne out of the intensity of newly created memory. (Vera 1993:111)

Thus, when we re-read the above quotation, we see that the national struggle of the 1970s was to Vera spiritually connected to the struggle of the first Chimurenga. The

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1. Feminist critics have pointed out the gap between the elevated iconic representation of 'Mother Africa' or 'The African Woman' in male nationalist rhetoric and the continuation of male dominance in society. Because this representation of women as powerful cultural symbols is completely detached from the lives of women in Africa in general, feminist writers in Africa (like Vera) have made it their vocation to correct this representation (Nasta 1991:xiv).

affirmation of national identity in relation to this spirituality is also used widely in the nationalist discourses of the government. As was pointed out earlier, the ZANU (PF) government claims through the discourse of patriotic history that 'colonial occupation' is a recurrent threat, and it therefore points to Tony Blair as the principal enemy of the state. Mahoso has gone so far as to state that Tony Blair is a spirit medium for the evil spirit of the coloniser Cecil Rhodes (Mahoso in Ranger 2004:223). Thus, a spiritual temporality is also utilised in the political discourses, drawing on the symbolic field offered in the spiritual narratives of the first and second Chimurenga. This pedagogical narration of the nation also institutes a breakaway from the homogeneous linear historical narratives of Western nationalism. In this narrative strategy the spiritual temporality functions as an affirmation of the structures of power, as Nehanda is described as a leader solely through her spiritual connection with the ancestral memory and the spiritual reality, in the same way that President Mugabe describes the historical Nehanda.[1] Likewise, President Mugabe is by Mahoso claimed to have spiritual gifts, which enable him to identify the 'true spiritual identity' of his opponents. In this capacity he is being aligned with Nehanda:

> So, old Mugabe is not the person of Robert Mugabe. Rather it is the powerful, elemental African memory going back to the first Nehanda […] The Zimbabwean opposition and their British, European and North American sponsors have exposed themselves as forces opposed to Mugabe as Pan-African memory, Mugabe is the reclaimer of African space, Mugabe as the African power of remembering the African legacy and African heritage... (Mahoso in Ranger 2004:222)

There is a difference between the 'one out of many' pedagogical installation in Western national narration, and the Zimbabwean narrative reclaiming of African space, African legacy and African heritage. It is evident, however, that the nationalist (Africanist) power of remembering, rather than dismantling nationalist pedagogy enforces it. The relationship that is established between President Mugabe and the royal spirit of Nehanda can be likened to the medieval relationship between the church and the crown. The Sovereign is ordained by the spiritual power and thus gains authority through the connection with the higher spiritual reality. So, even though this installation cannot function like the medieval spiritual authority because African spiritual authority is plural whereas the Christian one is singular, Mahoso's description of President Mugabe's spiritual authority installs President Mugabe in the already existing narrative strategy of a spiritual connection between the first, second and third Chimurenga. It ascribes him an authority as not just a hero from the liberation war, but as a metonymy for the very spirit of the struggle. This narrative strategy is aimed at dismantling discourses, which oppose President Mugabe's con-

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1. See section 4.4.2.

temporary political authority by claiming that he was indeed a liberation war hero, but he is not fit to lead the country now. By declaring a renewed struggle against colonial oppression and installing President Mugabe as an eternal spiritual leader, his contemporary authority is restored. Therefore, the notion of a spiritual temporality is essential because it serves as the link between past, present and future and makes it possible to deem the government's present mismanagement of the country irrelevant to political discourses.

5.2.2. The third Chimurenga discourse

> It is a hard thing to see strangers on your land. It is even harder to find a stranger dancing on your sacred ground. What mouth can carry a sight such as that? We were afraid only of our ancestors who had been offended. How would we cleanse the soil? (Vera 1993:23)

The colonial occupation of African land, which is one of the issues in *Nehanda*, has been a recurring issue in post-independence politics in Zimbabwe because a redistribution of land has not taken place after independence. This problem has been especially pressing because a number of people, who themselves had been dispossessed during Rhodesian settler rule, were still alive to remember their dispossession at the time of independence. These people were not compensated after the war, even though during the war the land issue had been predominant in the nationalist mobilisation (Ranger 2004). The obvious injustice of the division of land was therefore a strong justifying factor when (as shown in the previous chapter) the land issue in the guise of a third Chimurenga became instrumental in ZANU (PF)'s discursive strategies during the 1990s (Alexander & McGregor 2001:510–511).

In this section the third Chimurenga discourse is read in relation to Vera's representation of the connection between the land and the people in *Nehanda*. The novel emphasises the spiritual connection the Africans have with their land, in which the occupation by strangers of their sacred sites is not just an offence; it disturbs their relationship with the ancestral spirits. Even though the arrival of the settlers is described as a sign of death, the Africans do not immediately engage the aggressor.

> We allow him to dig for gold, but the land is not his. The land cannot be owned. We cannot give him any land because the land does not belong to the living. (Vera 1993:42–43)

The relative calm ascribed to the Africans in this quotation is depicted as a function of their relationship with the ancestors. The Africans do not own the land, it belongs to the ancestors, and the Africans do not attack the white aggressors before they have been cautioned by a spiritual messenger:

"I am among you. I carry the message of retribution. The land must be cleansed with your blood. You must fight for what belongs to us, and for your departed." […] She tells them what those who had gone before have said, and what the future holds for them (Vera 1993:61).

"Can we defeat an enemy whose god is already in our midst? Rise up, I say. Rise up and fight." […] "Spread yourselves through the forest and fight till the stranger decides to leave. Let us fight till the battle is decided. Is death not better than this submission? There is no future till we have regained our lands and our birth." (Vera 1993:66)

The message of retribution, which is carried by Nehanda to the Zimbabwean people in Vera's representation of the first Chimurenga, is the same message that President Mugabe claims the glorious departed in the Heroes Acre today carry to the Zimbabwean people in the third Chimurenga:

Each grave here speaks to our Nation through the undying, immanent spirit of the heroic man or woman whose transient remains it keeps. Each one of these lives will tell you a tale of fortitude; will chastise you when your courage and endurance weaken, reminding you that there is no life too precious to be laid down for this Nation; no battle too hard to be fought for this land, indeed no enemy too big, too powerful, too awesome to be fought and vanquished for this land. Each one of these lives will remind you with the harshest of languages that there is no price big enough to fetch this Nation; no gold, no silver, precious enough, to buy its sovereignty. We are not for sale; Zimbabwe is for Zimbabweans; we are not for the highest bidder, indeed, we are not for the British bidder. Those who lie here struggled and died for a cause and that cause is fundamentally the land which must come back; which is coming back and, for the peasant, which has come back in significant quantities. This is the land which until now was being held by the sons of our colonial oppressors at our expense. This is the land which our victorious heroes could never desire to see remaining in the hands of the people they defeated. (Mugabe 2002a)

Here, President Mugabe represents the heroes of the liberation war as active agents in the current political discourses because their lives and deaths command action. When read in relation to the discourse of spirituality in Mahoso's representation of President Mugabe, Mugabe's invoking of the discourses of the glorious departed in the Heroes Acre speaks not only of an ideological heritage but also of a defence of the very soul of the nation. President Mugabe claims that the land is too precious a heritage of the liberation struggle to be kept in the hands of the sons of the former colonial masters because the land is inextricably bound to the undying immanent spirits of those who died defending it. The spirits of the glorious departed can only rest when reassured that their fight is not forgotten, and while President Mugabe lays to rest Bernard Chidzero[1] he reassures him that: *"Through our land reforms we are*

close to the equity you wished for our society. We are in the middle of a second transitional march" (Mugabe 2002a). There is no call for a reassessment of the country's present state because the colonial master has not yet been defeated. Thus, in President Mugabe's representation the third Chimurenga it is not only a matter of social justice; it is a matter of the nation's spirit of struggle. This is a spirit of self-defence, which is defined through the opposition between a peace seeking African and Zimbabwean identity and an aggressive English and European identity:

> We are threatening no one. And therefore, the operations by Mr (Tony) Blair are artificial, completely uncalled for, and an interference in our domestic affairs. But, we say this as Zimbabweans, we have fought for our land, we have fought for our sovereignty, small as we are. We have won our independence and we are prepared to shed our blood in defence of that independence, sustenance, maintenance and protection. Having said that, we wish no to harm to anyone. We are Zimbabweans, we are Africans, we are not English. We are not Europeans. We love Africa, We love Zimbabwe, we love our independence. We are working together in our region to improve the lot of our people. Let no one interfere with our processes. Let no one who is negative want to spoil what we are doing for ourselves in order to unite Africa. We belong to this continent. (Mugabe 2002b)

The peaceful Zimbabwean nation must defend itself from the impositions of the neo-imperialist forces that threaten it, and continue the struggle for the lost African land, which the third Chimurenga will bring back into indigenous possession. The third Chimurenga is here represented as the fulfilment of the quest of the glorious departed whose spirits call for the restoration of the relationship between the Zimbabweans and the land of their ancestors; here represented by the departed heroes of the liberation war.

Nehanda is also depicted by Vera as restoring the connection between the ancestors and the people, and in doing so also establishing the people as a nation that is one with the land. Nehanda provides for the people the ability to strike back against the colonial oppressors, and she reconnects the people with their spiritual birth. This birth of the nation occurs in the spiritual realm and Nehanda forms a connection between the birth of the nation in the battle against the oppressors and the future. In the spiritual realm several historically separate occurrences can be one with the original spiritual birth. This installs an eternity of the nation in Vera's description of the first Chimurenga, which connects it to the second. President Mugabe is now claiming the authority of this circular birth and rebirth of the nation as the guiding spirit behind his third Chimurenga.

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1. Bernard Chidzero was the former Finance Minister. This quotation is taken from the speech that Mugabe gave at his funeral in 2002.

This analysis of *Nehanda* and the nationalist discourses is more in tune with Bhabha's narration of the nation than with Anderson's imagined community because of the importance of the spiritual temporality. In Anderson's analysis of the 'herkunft' of the Western nations the nations are born out of the death of spiritual temporality in the Enlightenment (Anderson 1991:19–24). Bhabha, however, approaches the nation as a narrative strategy in which temporality is a part. Homogeneous empty time is a feature of the modern nations. It can therefore be argued that the particular narrative strategy of the ZANU (PF) government is to articulate a spiritual connection between the people and the Sovereign which is neither medieval (as in Anderson) nor entirely modern. Rather, it is a narrative strategy, which is based on an articulation of the people as an eternal entity, which like the Sovereign is identified through a spiritual birth in the struggle against the external enemy – the British. The external enemy is accordingly interpreted in light of the spiritual reality. This is a narrative strategy which ascribes the external enemy the same eternal nature:

> The earth cannot be saved without authentic life rituals. Such life rituals were imposed in the presence of two evil spirits whom most youngsters could neither identify nor recognise. The most aggressive demon was that of apartheid founder Cecil John Rhodes. It appeared in the most aggressive, photogenic, restless and boyish body of British Prime Minister, Tony Blair. In place of Rhodes's vision of capturing and controlling Africa 'from Cape to Cairo' it now brought the new slogan of 'the conscience of the world'. (Mahoso in Ranger 2004:223)

According to Mahoso, the Zimbabwean people benefit from the 'fact' that President Mugabe, in his identity as 'authentic African ancestral memory' (like Nehanda), is able to recognise this evil spirit that has possessed the British Prime Minister and protect the people from the external aggressor (Ranger 2004:222–224). The third Chimurenga discourse works by excluding a number of different groups in society from the national community because they are agents of this eternal enemy. 'We the people' is articulated as a function of patriotism, which in turn is articulated as adherence to the anti-imperialist struggle that is narrowly defined as loyalty towards ZANU (PF). The participation in the third Chimurenga of young people, who are not veterans of the liberation war, but who are being called war veterans by President Mugabe nonetheless, is articulated as a participation in the ancient struggle for the liberation of their inherited land, as he states that: *"they are the new war veterans … not impostors but genuine fighters for their land"* (Mugabe in Hammar 2003:129) [original emphasis]. Therefore, as mentioned earlier historical awareness is a key element in the ideology taught in the youth militia camps. As the political editor of the government controlled weekly *The Sunday Mail,* Munyaradzi Huni, has expressed it:

> Now *after* independence, the British government made sure that the education that the majority of the people received was that kind of education that made blacks look

to the West for salvation, an education that made the blacks content to be workers and not employers and an education that made blacks think that putting on a suit and tie was the best expression to show one's achievements. (Huni 2004) [my italics]

Huni finds that young people are in danger of becoming agents of the British, hence, patriotic history must be taught in the camps in order to rectify the colonisation of their minds. Thus, the training in the youth militia camps is defended against documented internal and external terror (Solidarity Peace Trust 2003a, BBC1 2004) by Youth Minister Ambrose Mutinhiri who states that: *"The programme focuses on mental decolonisation of our youths and brings back their dignity as a people."* (Mutinhiri in News24: 2004). Their violent oppression of political opponents is justified as self-defence against neo-colonial aggressors in the ongoing struggle to de-colonise the country (Raftopoulos 2002:418) because the opposition and those who support it are 'blacks' who have been 'turned against themselves' by the British (Huni 2004).

Taking land is accordingly articulated as restoring the Zimbabweans to their true African identity as farmers. A focus on the economic potential of the agricultural sector and the importance of farmers in national development is therefore in focus. In that way the land redistribution programme, the third Chimurenga, can be offered as an indigenous African response to the economic crisis:

> [Concerning] President Mugabe, it is important that we reflect on his legacy and also reflect on the economic challenges ahead of us as Zimbabweans. The President's call for land reform has surely brought us closer to the Pan-African dream, and this is no small achievement. As we all know, there can be no proper economic growth and total independence if there is no total ownership and control of the means of production. The call to return to the soil, therefore, becomes of paramount importance. (wa Mirii 2004)[1]

President Mugabe is presented as the 'voice that cries out in the desert' while imperialists disrupt the Pan-African dream of independence. Ironically, this discourse rearticulates the colonial spatial divide between rural Africans and European cities claiming that true African strength lies in indigenous agricultural production. Accordingly, education should be directed towards agriculture and industrial production should accommodate this primal economic force in society (wa Mirii 2004). The rural-urban divide rearticulated in this manner also excludes those rural dwellers who do not support the violent farm occupations of the third Chimurenga, and, therefore, workers on commercial farms have also been targeted as unpatriotic agents of their 'white masters':

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1. The Kenyan Ngugi wa Mirii is the Co-ordinator of the Zimbabwean Association of Community Theatre and a staunch supporter of the ZANU (PF) government.

Some people are opposed to the land reform because they are for the opposition, which has been associated with the politics of imperialism, and commercial farmers from whom the land is being repossessed. For obvious reasons these commercial farmers would have liked Africans and their generations to remain disposed. The question is: Who would surely want to remain a beggar in his or her own motherland? (wa Mirii 2004)

The third Chimurenga articulated as a final de-colonisation is discursively linked to the pre-colonial myths of a society of peace and equality, to the connection between the people and the land which can be read from *Nehanda*, and to neo-Marxist critiques of the global economic inequalities, which can be termed neo-imperialism.

5.3. Discussion

The ZANU (PF) discourse of patriotic history draws on the imaginary archive of Zimbabwean cultural heritage which it has to a large extent promoted and sponsored during its time as the governing force in Zimbabwe. This archive is made up of a specific interpretation of liberation war history and of narratives of the primary resistance movements which link them together. Through his discourse the government represents itself as an indigenous African response to colonialism and neo-imperialism and connects itself to a Pan-African (and Third World) critical position towards the existing inequalities in the global power relations. This discourse is also connected to a critique of the former colonial powers, which remain in a hegemonic position, and therefore rightfully can be termed neo-imperialist. In the ZANU (PF) government discourses this critical perspective on global power relations is, however, appropriated to scapegoat the country's white commercial farmers who are represented as the symbol of continued colonial oppression and the opposition who are represented as agents of the neo-imperialist aspirations of the British government. The narrative strategy of ZANU (PF) consists of 'inappropriating the now' by stating that the country is in transition, and that this transition, the third Chimurenga, is a continuation of the glorious fight against the Rhodesian and British colonial and neo-imperialist forces that aim at dispossessing the Zimbabweans in a re-enactment of the original colonial occupation. In naming this continuation of the fight in the spiritual language of the first anti-colonial wars of the 1890s the third Chimurenga is represented as spiritually connected to the eternal struggle against oppression. Therefore, references to the discursive field of symbols of national identity such as the spirit of Nehanda and the spirits of the gloriously departed, who are said to call for a final decolonisation of their sacred land, are constantly made in the rhetoric of the government. In this scenario the sole responsibility of the ZANU (PF) government is to defend the nation against a regression into the state of colonial rule, this rule, however, is articulated as not yet entirely gone. It is represented as still present in the shape of neo-imperialist agents; blacks who have been

turned against themselves and the sons of former white colonial oppressors, who still occupy the Zimbabwean land which is the most sacred heritage of the Zimbabwean people. The third Chimurenga is thus narrated as a movement towards the fulfilment of the vision of a restoration of the pre-colonial utopia which was destroyed during the colonial occupation.

Vera's *Nehanda* is one of the most recent additions to the imaginary pre-colonial space and to the imaginary spiritual connection between the African resistance against colonial occupation. The above analysis outlines how the novel adds to the discursive field of Zimbabwean national identity by posing a critique of the colonial occupation, by reasserting African cultural pride and by writing in solidarity with the world-view, which Vera imagines the Africans had at that time. Within this world-view, Vera represents Nehanda as endowed with the spirit of the anti-colonial struggle, and she connects the first Chimurenga spiritually to the second by narrating the nation's history as a cyclical birth and rebirth.

The appropriation that the narrative strategy of ZANU (PF) makes of the Pan-African critique of the unequal global power relations termed neo-imperialism and the representation of the nation's history as patriotic history thus draws on the symbolic field of national identity, to which the novel *Nehanda* adds. Their appropriation of the national symbols of identity the spirit of the anti-colonial struggle, the significance of the Nehanda figure and the nation's imagined temporal space is aimed at inappropriating the political and economic crisis the country is in, by turning those who oppose their rule into scapegoats. In this way *Nehanda* can be read as 'prone for appropriation' in respect of the way the discursive strategy of ZANU (PF) relies on national symbols of identity which are depicted in the novel.

Spiritual authority is appropriated by the ZANU (PF) discourse of patriotic history because it provides a framework for inappropriating the present state of the nation. Hence, by narrating the nation's temporal space as a cyclical birth and rebirth in the spiritual realm, Vera's narrative framework in *Nehanda* opens the imaginative narrative space of national identity for numerous rearticulations of this spiritual birth and rebirth of the nation, as it is, in fact, articulated in the third Chimurenga discourse.

5.3.1. Strategic essentialism

The novel *Nehanda* has generally been read as engaging colonialist and patriarchal history of the Nehanda myth. Vera's feminist nationalism in *Nehanda*, marked by what has here been termed spiritual temporality, is working through what Gayatri Spivak has termed 'strategic essentialism' (Landry & MacLean 1996:204) by Vera 'scrupulously aligning' herself with a spiritual account of events which connect them to the present:

Yet even in *Nehanda* narrative in the novel works to deflate history's subservience to pastness. Constructed in the fluid immediacy of recounted stories, the novel integrates the past into a living imagined reality, giving itself the leeway to enlarge the specific into wider issues beyond its contexts, to suggest not only how things were but how they could be. Its bold collapsing of time derives from a mythic schema within a novelistic form in which temporal entanglements make history a concern of past, present and future times. (Wilson-Tagoe 2002:160–161)

Nehanda rearticulates the mythic schema in order to inscribe female agency and voice into both past and present. In Bhabha's terms this disrupts the patriarchal and colonialist accounts of Nehanda, as Wilson-Tagoe notes (Wilson-Tagoe 2002:161). In the context of the above analysis the question is therefore: Does *Nehanda* also disrupt nationalist narratives of cultural heritage and national identity? In *Nehanda* the feminist nationalist rearticulation of the mythic schema does not break away from the spiritual 'reality' of the schema, rather, Vera remains faithful to her 'invented' traditional world-view when talking about the novel as a personal spiritual experience. The spiritual temporality of the novel can therefore be read as articulating past, present and future as one in the spirit of anti-colonial struggle. The novel therefore adds to the discursive field of nationalism a mythical schema within which Nehanda's spirit of retribution is eternal.

In *Nehanda* the narrative strategy of strategic essentialism is dependent on the context of a postcolonial feminist critique of the structures imposed by colonialism that are continued under the patriarchal power relations in modern African societies. Her nationalist narrative framework in *Nehanda* has therefore in light of this postcolonial feminist critique been analysed as opposing the male definitions of female agency in the first Chimurenga because *Nehanda* performs a splitting of the hegemonic discourses by inscribing female agency into the narrative. However, as an allegory of a feminist deflation of patriarchal dominance, the anti-colonial struggle, which in *Nehanda* is triumphant, can be argued as 'cutting both ways' in respect to articulations of contemporary power relations because Vera's strategically applied essentialist narrative does not deflate the nationalist temporal and spiritual imagery.

6. Matabeleland and National Unity

The struggles for dominance within the nationalist elite, which were described in Chapter 4, have been ascribed a significant role in the division between the nationalist parties in the 1960s, and these power struggles are said to have paved the way for struggles for domination over the postcolonial government. However, as was also described in Chapter 4 the unity of the nation was installed as an important element in the government's discourses of national identity after the unity accord in 1987. The discursive appropriation of Africanist discourses and of symbols of the nation's cultural heritage, which was described in Chapter 5, supports the discourse of national unity by narrating the nation as one in the spirit of the struggle against neo-imperialist forces. Thus, after the unity accord the nationalist discourses of the ZANU (PF) government revived a dichotomy between black and white and between Zimbabwe and the West (Ranger 2004:228–230, Raftopoulos 1999:144).

In this chapter it is suggested that a silencing of the divisions, which was instituted under the Gukurahundi along the lines of ethnicity[1], is maintained under the sign of unity, and that remembering and forgetting the time of divisions and internal violence is demanded of the Zimbabwean people in order to establish the current key signifier: unity. The discourse obliges the people do so because it narrates the people as one: united and patriotic. In this context the recurrent memories of the ethnic antagonism of the Gukurahundi constitutes, what Bhabha calls the uneven interests of the people. This means that the narrative of the homogeneous unity of the nation cannot be stabilised when the discourse of unity is challenged by narratives that define unity as a sign of violent domination.

The novel *Nehanda* was analysed in Chapter 5 in relation to the nationalist discourses of the ZANU (PF) government. In this chapter a similar approach is adopted in the analysis of the novel *The Stone Virgins*. As described in Chapter 3, accounts of the Matabeleland atrocities that question the unity version of liberation war history, which praises the heroics of the guerrilla soldiers, by voicing less heroic accounts of the guerrillas and questioning the official silencing of the Gukurahundi, have emerged in Zimbabwean literature. *The Stone Virgins* is read as participating in

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1. See section 4.4.3.1.

this critical rewriting of the nation's recent history by inscribing the discourses of those who are silenced under the unity discourse into the narrative of the nation by representing a number of different voices from and stories of the liberation war and the Gukurahundi. It is suggested throughout this analysis that *The Stone Virgins* is entering into a dialogue with the nationalist discourses, and that through this, Vera is also entering into dialogue with her own representation of the national spirit of struggle in *Nehanda*. As was described in the previous chapters, the discursive field of national identity in Zimbabwe has been institutionally monopolised by the government through a display of force, which has attempted to prohibit oppositional discourses from entering into public debate. It is argued through the analysis that *The Stone Virgins* inscribes ambivalence in the narrative of the nation by representing discourses of the nation's history, which are prohibited from informing public debate on a larger scale, through a polyphonic narrative strategy and through a dialogical rewriting of the narrative framework of *Nehanda*.

6.1. Analytical framework

The theoretical approach to the analysis in this chapter draws on the theoretical framework already set forth in Chapters 4 and 5. However, for the purpose of the analysis of *The Stone Virgins* Bakhtin's theories of polyphony are here explored. Bakhtin's dialogism is applied to the analysis in light of Bhabha's wider interpretation of dialogism,[1] as the analytical focus still follows Bhabha's focus on the unequal power relations in the articulation of national identity. Therefore, the analysis draws on Bakhtin's dialogism as a point of reference for Vera's articulation of the unequal power relations under which Zimbabwean national history is articulated within the discursive field of national identity.

Bakhtin's theoretical approach to the polyphonic novel, is in this context used to analyse *The Stone Virgins* as an attempt to write a specific kind of polyphonic novel, e.g. not the dostoevskian polyphonic novel, which Bakhtin describes as the ideal model of a polyphonic novel, but a novel that, when analysed through a dialogical perspective, can be argued to introduce the possibility of a non-dialogical narrative space within a polyphonic novel.

6.1.1. The polyphonic novel

The relation in literature between the 'cultural environment' in which a novel emerges and the time-space relation which forms the narrative framework in the novel is, for Bakhtin, an opportunity for 'opening narrative spaces' for articulation of 'chronotopes'. Bakhtin deploys the term chronotope in order to describe the time-space relation in literature, and as an analytical tool it is a means of studying the

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1. See section 2.2.1.2.

world–text relation in literary works by analysing the relation between the chrono-tope of the text and the context out of which the literary work emerges (Holquist 2002:109–113). Bakhtin ascribes literature a role of reflecting the dialogism of texts and of the world in the best possible way. As such, the polyphonic novel is, for Bakhtin, the best medium for reflecting dialogism: *"the novel is the great book of life, because it celebrates the grotesque body of the world"* (Holquist 2002:90). The author of a polyphonic novel must have certain qualifications, and he/she must be a medium for autonomous voices, who he/she must represent 'objectively' in the sense that he/she must be faithful to the integrity of the characters not overruling their con-sciousnesses, but bringing them into dialogue with each other. In Bakhtin's own account, only Dostoevsky can measure up to these standards (Bakhtin 1984:7–13). The autonomy of Dostoevsky's characters is, according to Bakhtin, ensured by the artistic design of the polyphonic novel, which depends on a generic structure that Bakhtin calls 'carnivalisation'. This structure enables a time-space conception, which unifies the dialogical meeting of opposites in an event: the 'great dialogue' of the scandal and/or the catastrophe, which brings the great dialogue into the open. This is the setting in which a great many autonomous characters, 'explorations of ideas', enter into dialogue for the purpose of testing the ideas in men (Bakhtin 1984:156, 175–179).

6.1.2. The hero

In the creative process the author (Dostoevsky) orchestrates a great polyphonic dia-logue and separates himself from the characters – especially his hero – in order to portray a particular 'point of view'. The author limits the narrative to the characters' field of vision thereby following the characters' struggle for a closure of identity without finalising this closure, leaving the characters to contemplate this through internal and external dialogue (Bakhtin 1984:48–53). Thus restricted, the author's own consciousness must limit its active creative role in the novel in order not to: *"transform others' consciousnesses (that is the consciousnesses of the characters) into objects"* (Bakhtin 1984:68). Rather:

> It [the author's consciousness] reflects and re-creates not a world of objects, but pre-cisely these other consciousnesses with their worlds, re-creates them in their authen-tic *unfinalizability* (which is, after all, their essence). (Bakhtin 1984:68) [original italics]

According to Bakhtin, the dostoevskian hero is an exploration into another con-sciousness and another point of view on the world, which is depicted through the hero's own introspection on himself and the world (Bakhtin 1984:47). The author is afforded the (necessary) creative role, but it is the author's prerogative to afford the hero (and all other characters) autonomous consciousness within the framework of the polyphonic novel (Bakhtin 1984:64–65).

In light of this theoretical perspective *The Stone Virgins* is analysed with a focus on how Vera depicts her characters' points of view and how she represents these points of view as belonging to a particular context which is reflected in the characters consciousnesses.

6.2. Ugly history

The Matabeleland genocide, the Gukurahundi, during the 1980s was said by President Mugabe at that time to resolve ethnic tensions between the Shona and the Ndebele. However, as has already been stated in Chapter 4, the ethnic discourse can also be explained as instrumental in providing public support for the Gukurahundi, and has by a number of observers been viewed as a pretext for the elimination of the opposition. This has been described as a discourse of ethnic dominance that worked both by installing Shona cultural heritage as the cultural heritage of the whole nation and by antagonising the Ndebele speaking population in Matabeleland (Ranger 1993:100, 2000:5–7). Alexander, McGregor and Ranger concluded in *Violence & Memory* (2000) that although ethnicity had indeed been a key signifier in the rhetoric of the Gukurahundi, a specific Ndebele ethnicity had not been the predominant signifier of the Ndebele speaking population of Matabeleland before independence. However, the ethnic persecutions that were perpetrated in the Gukurahundi sparked an ethnic antagonism that had earlier been overwritten by a Zimbabwean nationalist identification (Alexander et al. 2000:218–224). After the unity accord in 1987, these antagonisms were deemed subversive to the state by the ZANU (PF) government. This can be described as a discursive turn that was ascribed to the dominant position ZANU (PF) had established through the Gukurahundi. The ethnic antagonism, which had been installed during the Gukurahundi, was thus overwritten by a discourse of unity.

President Mugabe had not at any stage been prepared to discuss the methods deployed by the 5th. Brigade. The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace already presented him with an account of the 5th. Brigade's violations of the civilian population in Matabeleland in 1983,[1] but President Mugabe was not prepared to enter into dialogue with them. Quite the contrary, Martin Meredith has quoted President Mugabe's rebuttal of the priests who presented him with the report:

> He described the Catholic bishops as "sanctimonious prelates" who were "playing to the international gallery". He queried whether they were their own masters or

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1. This report was followed up by the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in the report *Breaking the Silence* (1997), which is still controversial because it highlights the violence of the 5th. Brigade by describing, how bodies were still to be found in mass graves in Matabeleland years after the 'reunion' of ZANU and ZAPU. These disclosures brought to light the 'ethnic' wounds, which the report stated, were far from healed in the unity process (CCPJ/LRF 1997).

"megaphonic agents of their external manipulative masters", adding: "In those circumstances, their allegiance and loyalty to Zimbabwe becomes extremely questionable." He continued: "The Church of Zimbabwe […]" should "attune itself to the realities of the new Zimbabwe." (Meredith 2002:68)

After the unity accord, President Mugabe began to refer to the recurrent memories of the Gukurahundi as 'ugly history'. Ugly history, which is the opposite of patriotic history, was articulated into the 'inside-outside' schema of official nationalism. Those who aired ugly history were dismissed as agents of the external enemy because true Zimbabweans were said to be able to distinguish 'real differences' from historical divisions that were overcome by the unity accord:

> Whatever remains were historical differences. These remain as history of our country and we can't bring ugly history into the present affairs and rewrite that ugly history. No. (Mugabe in Ranger 2003c:20)

In accordance with this, the nationalist discourses of ZANU (PF) install unity as the sign by which memories of the violent past are turned into an obligation to forget. By the sign of unity, the violence of the past is commemorated as having been overcome by the spirit of unity and forgotten because it is overcome. This rests on a narrative strategy of the progression of the nation. The violence of the past is perceived as a stepping-stone on the way to unity and is therefore both remembered and forgotten. The narrative strategy of articulating the Zimbabwean nation as united is connected to the fight against the common enemy. Unity thus becomes the sign of struggle against colonial oppression. In this way any opposition, which can be interpreted as instigating a threat towards this unity, must be inscribed into a narrative of internal and external relations. This narrative inscribes the national leaders as ambassadors of unity who defend the nation from the external enemy, who threatens the sovereignty of the nation as well as the internal enemy who is not obeying the obligation to forget. Therefore, President Mugabe dismisses claims for official commemoration and compensation for the victims of the Gukurahundi because the nation's people are obliged to forget the violence and go along with the progressiveness of unity.

6.2.1. Refusing to forget

The Stone Virgins has by several critics been considered significantly different from Vera's earlier novels because of the politically potent issues the novel raises.[1] This analysis of the novel focuses on how it can be read as inscribing ambivalence into the narrative of the nation, which can offer space for the inscription of a polyphony of histories into the discourse. Seen in this light, *The Stone Virgins* appears to be a

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1. See for example Palmberg (2002), Ranger (2002a) and Wilson-Tagoe (2003).

ground-breaking project, if one considers Hove's *Shadows* only to be 'a warning'.[1] It puts forth issues, which Vera as a Zimbabwean is obliged by the government to forget, and it does so by describing differences that are being silenced under the sign of unity. This is a development in Vera's writing that moves away from her usual focus on personal tragedy and turns towards the public suffering and the political emergency in Matabeleland. Ranger has described this development in her writing: *"the book does represent a development of her ideas about the weight of the past and how to bear it"* (Ranger 2002a:204), and further:

> It is a book about what – unfortunately – happens. It is not a book in which narratives are compressed into private tragedy. It is a book about people caught up in and destroyed by a public disaster. (Ranger 2002a:206)

The most public of these tragedies is the violations perpetrated by the 5th. Brigade. Vera's fictional account of the atrocities committed by the 5th. Brigade is far from being fictional in regard to the cruelty or the extent to which these things happened (Ranger 2002a:206–208). She chooses a few stories, which are fictionally narrated, but could have, and probably have, occurred approximately in the same way they are depicted in the novel. The story of the torture and murder of the Kesi storekeeper Mahlathini is one example:

> Mahlathini, long the storekeeper of Thandabantu Store has died. Those who claim to know inch by inch what happened to Mahlathini say that plastic bags of Roller ground meal were lit, and let drop bit by bit over him till his skin peeled off from his knees to his hair, till his mind collapsed, peeled off, and he died of the pain in his own voice. […] the soldiers had walked into Thandabantu towards sunset and found over twenty local men there, and children buying candles, and the old men who should have been at that ancient Umthetho rock dying peacefully but preferred the hubbub at Thandabantu and therefore went each day, all these. The soldiers shot them, without preamble – they walked in and raised AK rifles: every shot was fatal. (Vera 2002:121)

This straightforward account of a public occurrence highlights the arbitrary way in which the violence of the 5th. Brigade was perpetrated. Vera also describes the calculated punishment of a so called sell-out family:

> She has killed her husband. Two soldiers walked into her house and sat her husband on a stone. They handed her an axe. These men were pointing guns at her two grown sons, threatening to shoot them if she did not listen. She fell on her knees and begged them to let her sons go. […] Her husband raised his voice towards her and said … Kill me … Kill me. He pleaded. He was desperate to die and to save his two sons. She stood up, silently repeating what her husband had said, with her own lips,

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1. See section 3.3.4.

with her own arms. She opened her eyes and raised the axe above her shoulders till he was dead. (Vera 2002:80–81)

Counter-insurgency punishments as they are described above had been instituted by the Rhodesian forces and guerrilla soldiers during the liberation war in order to secure support from the civilian population (Werbner 1996:194, Moore 1995:376–379). The continuance of this kind of violence after the liberation war complied with already existing ways of dealing with a civilian population, which was believed to support the enemy. Likewise, Vera's literary account in *The Stone Virgins* follows the literary path laid out by authors such as Chinodya, Kanengoni and Hove who have depicted counter-insurgency violence against civilians during the liberation war.[1]

The Stone Virgins is divided into two parts: 1950–1980 and 1981–1986 i.e. before and after independence. The first part depicts society before and during the war in terms of the differences in, but also the interaction between, Bulawayo and rural Kezi by describing the Kezi–Bulawayo bus. Vera lets the characters move to and from Bulawayo and Kezi via the bus describing the integration of spaces which the route represents. This can be read as Vera's attempt to refute the rural-urban divide, which has persisted in history writing and is being maintained in the current political discourses of ZANU (PF). The love story of Thenjiwe from Kezi and Cephas from Bulawayo can likewise be read as an attempt to breach the imagined social gap between the city and the countryside by depicting the complex social relations that connect places.

The first part of the novel also describes the hopes attached to independence in Matabeleland:

A burden lifts as a new day appears. This new day. A place to start again, to plant hope and banish despair, to be restored. Everything has changed. Day is light, not heavy; light as a leaf. […] They sing earth songs that leave the morning pulsating. […] Voices rise to the surface, beyond the dust shadows which break and glow, and lengthen. They will not drown from a dance in the soaring dust – the memories of anger and pain. […] All that is bright among them is brighter still: the sky, the altars in Gulati, hope. A wind sweeps through the hills, their voices, their bodies in chorus. (Vera 2002:45–46)

During the ceasefire young female soldiers, who break every social code and take over the porch of the village store (usually the domain of the elders), become the ultimate symbol of freedom and a promise of change: *"They define the world differently"* (Vera 2002:49). Yet these hopes are devastated in the second part of the novel which starts off in Bulawayo:

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1. See section 3.3.4.

> 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 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. (Vera 2002:59)

Vera describes this renewal of war as 'bones rising', which refers both to the myths of Nehanda and to Vera's own description of the myth in *Nehanda*. This signifies a break away from her narrative framework in *Nehanda* because in Bulawayo after independence the bones that rise represent Shona 'quasi-nationalism'. This short passage therefore alludes to a change from *Nehanda* to *The Stone Virgins* in Vera's use of the historical narratives of the connection between the first and the second Chimurenga. Independence, which should have been the signifying moment in Zimbabwean history, is in Vera's account turned into an interim period where the hopes and dreams of the people of Matabeleland are articulated but immediately shattered. Instead, the unequal interests of the Zimbabwean people become obvious. Vera inscribes a disjunctive moment in the pedagogical narrative of the nation by iterating the divisions of the past, which the nation's people are obliged to forget. Vera rearticulates the significance of independence not as a moment of release, but as a moment of anticipation and instead installs 1981, when the war begins again, as a defining moment in the national narrative. The unison of the ceasefire is represented as an illusion, as the nation does not progress from the moment of independence but rather regresses into war. The two periods into which the novel is divided, therefore, represent the narrative of the nation as divided into a united and a divided period. Before 1981 the national hopes and dreams were still intact, the 'rain'– the spirit of the liberation war – was opening the eyes of the people (Vera 2002:40–41), but after 1981 the rain does not come (Vera 2002:117–118).

6.2.1.1. Learning to live with the wounds of war

In a theme of healing Vera ends the novel on the personal level by letting Nonceba and Thenjiwe's ex-lover, the historian Cephas, slowly find a way to live together, and through his work as a historian, Cephas endeavours to 'restore the new nation's past':

> He should stick to restorations of ancient kingdoms, circular structures, bee-hive huts, stone knives, broken pottery, herringbone walls, the vanished pillars in an old world. A new nation needs to restore the past. (Vera 2002:165)

In this way Vera outlines a way to restore relationships within the nation, as time and healing must go hand in hand. However, this is not an 'instant fix' as articulated in the remembering and forgetting of the unity discourse. Rather, the process of remembering and forgetting, which Vera outlines, is both eternal and also occurs outside of time:

> She [Thenjiwe] has a lot to forget so this is all right. She has no idea now, or ever, that some of the harm she has to forget is in the future, not in the past, and that she would not have enough time in the future to forget any of the hurt. Time is necessary for remembering as it is for forgetting. Even the smallest embrace of pain needs time larger than a pause, the greatest pause requires an eternity, the greatest hurt a lifetime. A lifetime is longer than eternity: an eternity can exist without human presence. (Vera 2002:31–32)

The temporal process of forgetting and remembering the hurt in order to heal thus involves not only the living but also the dead. The harm inflicted on Thenjiwe must be healed outside of time, but it is also slowly healed in the minds of Nonceba and Cephas. As their relationship evolves into more than a friendship, they leave it to time to remember and forget their loss of Thenjiwe:

> The mind is buried in its own despair, but they survive, day to day, in their friendship. The past for them is so much heavier than the present; it exists with an absolute claim. To sip some tea, to pass the sugar, their fingers meet: memory. A delicate act of forgiveness; to be alive at all seems a betrayal. They should have saved her, even by their will alone. This is their preoccupation, and they acknowledge it, and live within it, somehow. (Vera 2002:155)

The unity they establish is guilty, and living only in the absolute claim of the memory of the dead. As a discourse of remembering and forgetting, Vera's ending of *The Stone Virgins* states the impossibility of forgetting because the death of Thenjiwe never leaves their minds. Their relationship is based on a healing process, which is marked not by forgetting but by learning to live with the memories. 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.

6.3. Rape: A perversion of dialogue

This section focuses on the two characters Nonceba and Sibaso and the way Vera represents them in the rape scene, which is situated in the post-independence part of the novel in Chapters 6 and 7. The scene can be likened to the rape scene in the novel *Without a Name,*[1] in which the protagonist Mazvita is raped by a guerrilla solider. This rape scene occurs during the war, and as such, it creates a link between Vera's writing of the war and her writing of the post-war context in *The Stone Virgins,* which puts the dissident violence that the rape in *The Stone Virgins* depicts into perspective as a practice that was instituted during the liberation war.

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1. See section 3.3.3.

Vera depicts the post-independence period in Matabeleland from different points of view through Nonceba and Sibaso's monologues. The victim and the dissident are not brought into dialogue as in the bakhtinian dialogical novel. Their interaction is represented as a parody of a dialogue, in which the catastrophical rape scene is set in a non-dialogical space, where the interaction between points of view is impossible. The rape scene is, seen in that way, a perversion of dialogue in which the context of the characters' actions and points of view distorts the possibility of a meeting of minds in dialogue. The individual voices ascribed to Nonceba and Sibaso are rather than dialogically represented, depicted as monologues that occur in the same time and space when read closely. This can be viewed as the greater aim of the novel as Vera creates an opening up of the narrative space, where a number of different voices, which cannot possibly enter into dialogue with each other because of their antagonistic points of view, can be imagined. Vera can be seen as attempting to dismantle the unison articulation of history in the government's unity discourse by opening the narrative space for a polyphony of different points of view; points of view that cannot enter into dialogue because of their context.

6.3.1. Nonceba's voice

Nonceba and Sibaso as the victim and the assailant are represented in the rape scene in Chapter 6. While Nonceba has first been introduced through the account of her sister Thenjiwe, Sibaso is first introduced from Nonceba's point of view in the rape scene. The rape scene is described in Vera's usual style of 'private catastrophe', in which the narrative is in the form of a chaotic stream of thought, impressions and thoughts in momentary action and in flashbacks.[1] Nonceba's thoughts of herself and her attacker form a narrative of the murder of her sister Thenjiwe and her own rape, which is centred on Nonceba's experience of the emotional space that is created between her and Sibaso. Nonceba sees Sibaso as the object of her fear, as he has taken control over her life. She sees how professionally he kills her sister, and concludes that he is a trained killer; she hears his voice speak of the war and concludes that this man cannot harbour feelings that can save her; he rapes her and she concludes that he is a predator. The tension between her fear and his desire is through Nonceba's internal dialogue depicted with an intimacy of momentary actions, which could lead the reader to mistake Nonceba's fear for sexual tension:

> The man places his hand over her left shoulder. Her thoughts turn blind, ashes stirred by a small wind. He presses his hand down, on her limp arm. He turns her body towards himself, looking for something in her he can still break, but there is nothing in her that can still be broken. For Nonceba, there is only the scent of this man, the cruel embrace of his arms, the blood brown of his shoes, the length of his

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1. See section 3.1.

neck, and the gaze bending close. The distance in her mind is infinite. No … no … no …

[…] A knee lifts up to touch the bottom of her legs, from behind her, then slides to her thighs, moving sideways. Sit here, on my knee. He moves away briefly, carefully, then returns his touch to her body. He returns his touch as though it were something he has taken away without permission, guiltily, yet, like a kind act. (Vera 2002:61)

In the opening of the rape scene there is an ambivalence, which functions as a parody of a love scene. The reader is left in doubt about the nature of act, and the violence which the scene depicts is from the beginning fraught with sexual tension. This sexual tension is a feature that underlines the perversion of the non-dialogical scene, the perversion of a dialogue depicted through the perversion of lovemaking: rape.

The momentary and fragmented narrative underlines Nonceba's experience of the event; there is no broad view of the scene as the reader is presented with Nonceba's flashbacks and immediate observations. In Chapter 6 (and partially in Chapter 7) Sibaso's voice is reflected in Nonceba's mind. The assault, though physically dominated by Sibaso, is represented as Nonceba's story. In her mind Nonceba questions Sibaso, as she attempts to listen to his voice because she finds that her life depends on understanding it:

His name is Sibaso, a flint to start a flame. Him. Sibaso. I follow him closely. My life depends on it. I follow the shape of his body. I follow his arms. He has killed Thenjiwe. He is in the midst of that death.

I listen, unsure of any of his words, what he means, what he needs, claims, pardons, affirms, but the rise of his voice could mean anything, and silence, an assertion of death.

Is there anyone here beside yourself? Who else lives here? Do you expect someone? Are you with someone?

He whispers in my ear as though someone else will hear his deep secret and uncover his camouflage.

I dare not move. Is he asleep? Is he in an embrace of his past? He knows how to sleep in the midst of any reality, of several realities. He can inflict harm as easily as he can retrieve it. He has lived to tell many illicit versions of the war, to recreate the war. Here he is. Him. (Vera 2002:73)

Nonceba's 'dialogue' with Sibaso is distorted by their different points of view, and by the context of the catastrophe, which is unfolding between them. Nonceba does not understand Sibaso; all she understands is to fear him and his ability to inflict harm. In Chapter 7 Sibaso's voice is represented as the words he speaks to Nonceba

during the rape, but Nonceba is not part of this 'dialogue'. Her mind is focused on surviving because she feels that however much she tries to understand his words she cannot focus his attention on her point of view, and so she remains silent.

6.3.2. The dissident's voice

Vera has chosen to represent the dissident Sibaso in a manner that resembles a dostoevskian hero, as she ascribes him the narrative space which is afforded the hero in the dostoevskian novel. Sibaso's role will therefore in the following analysis be viewed as Vera's investigation of Sibaso's point of view, as she in his consciousness explores the idea of desecration and violation of kindness. In Chapter 7, which represents a shift in the narrative point of view as Sibaso's voice is singled out, Vera accordingly represents how his actions are explained from his world-view.

Sibaso's life story is that of a destroyed man who has lost his humanity and gained only a need for destruction:

> My name is Sibaso. I have crossed many rivers with that name no longer on my lips, forgotten. […] During a war we are lifeless beings. We are envoys, our lives intervals of despair, a part of you conceals itself, so that not everything is destroyed, only a part. The rest perishes like a cloud. […] He [himself] has to crouch, and his body soon assumes a defensive attitude; the desire to attack. If he loses an enemy, he invents another. He is almost clean. He seems to have a will, an idea which only he can execute. Of course, this idea involves desecration, the violation of kindness (Vera 2002:74).

The way in which Sibaso has violated Thenjiwe and Nonceba is from his point of view described as a 'natural' pattern of action that is a consequence of the war. During the war Sibaso has lost a determining part of his being, his name, and he has become a lifeless envoy of desecration and violation of kindness. Seen in this way, his murder of Thenjiwe and rape of Nonceba appear as the result of a world that is distorted and in chaos. During the war, he has been taught to behave a certain way which he repeats after the war. He is a dissident, hunted by the government forces and feared by the civilians. He is in hiding and he is attempting to restore his world-view which has been irrevocably distorted both during the war and in the following social chaos of the Gukurahundi. As he hides out in the sacred caves in the Gulati hills, he speaks of the war and of an independence, which he does not belong to:

> Independence is the compromise to which I could not belong. I am a man who is set free, Sibaso, one who remembers harm. They remember nothing. They never speak of it now, at least I do not hear of it. (Vera 2002:89)

> During the ceasefire I lived with four thousand soldiers in one camp. I can tell the difference between each man, whose fear is the greatest. Four thousand soldiers with their ammunition down. I do not surrender. I do not fight to please another. I have

dug a pit and covered it with grass. I live within it but how long can a man be buried before he turns blind? (Vera 2002:129)

His independence is *"the afterbirth of war, its umbilical presence"* (Vera 2002:96); a time where he is hunted in his solitude. Vera represents him as disillusioned with independence, and as he has to survive in his refuge in the hills he contemplates the struggle he was part of and the limbo between life and death, between independence and war, he now inhabits.

6.3.2.1. The sacrifice of the Stone Virgins

The non-dialogical set up of the rape scene is underlined by a number of shifts in point of view between Nonceba and Sibaso. One of these shifts is a short interval in Nonceba's stream of thought in Chapter 6, where Vera interrupts Nonceba's narrative with an insight into Sibaso's view on the rape scene:

> He thinks of scars inflicted before dying, betrayals before a war, after war, during war. Him. Sibaso. He considers the woman in his arms.
>
> He sees her dancing heels, her hands chaste dead bone, porous thin, painted on 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 a flame, the shape and form of a painted memory.
>
> He thrusts the body to the ground: a dead past. (Vera 2002:71)

This insight into Sibaso's stream of thought, alien as it is to Nonceba, is an insight into his reasoning behind the assault, as it bears a resemblance to his narrative in Chapter 9 where he describes his refuge in a shrine in the Gulati hills. Like Nehanda, Vera depicts Sibaso as residing in the sacred caves, which are holy places in the traditional religious beliefs (Ranger 1999a:209). Here, Sibaso contemplates the ancient cave paintings of two virgins who he believes were offered as a sacrifice to 'serve the lives of the rulers':

> I place my hand on the rocks, where antelopes and long-breasted women stand together. Tall women bend like tightened bows beneath a stampede of buffalo while the rest spread their legs outward to the sun. Even now, as I speak, they are there hunting something else beyond the buffalo, something eternal. What is it that they hunt? They move past the lonely herds. Are their arrows raised against time, these keepers of time? Beyond the rock there is nothing but light. The women raise their arms against the light. Perhaps their arms welcome the light falling from the curve of the rock, a light indelible, each stroke carries a thousand years of disbelief.
>
> Disembodied beings. Their legs branch from their bodies like roots. The women float, away from the stone. Their thighs are empty, too fragile, too thin to have

already carried a child. They are the virgins who walk into their own graves before the burial of a king. They die untouched. Their ecstasy is in the afterlife. Is this a suicide or a sacrifice, or both? Suicide, a willing, but surely, a private matter? Sacrifice means the loss of life, of lives, so that one may be saved. The life of rulers is served, not saved. […] Perhaps they have been saved from life's embrace. Not dead. I place my hand over the waist of the tall woman, on an inch of bone, yet forty thousand years gather in my memory like a wild wind. (Vera 2002:94–95)

To Sibaso, Thenjiwe and Nonceba appear to be 'the stone virgins'. His description of the stone virgins in the shrine in the Gulati hills creates a connection between Vera's representation of Nehanda and her representation of the two women, as they, like Nehanda, are depicted as the keepers of time. Sibaso's interpretation of the cave painting and his likening of Thenjiwe and Nonceba to the stone virgins of the shrine form a re-enactment of the virgin sacrifice in the defining act in the novel: the murder and rape of Thenjiwe and rape of Nonceba. Not only is his refuge in the sacred shrine a profanity against the gods who dwell in the shrine, his sacrifice of the two sisters is set in the context of a perversion of dialogue, in which his act is depicted not only from his own point of view, but also from this victim point of view. As such, Sibaso's crime/sacrifice can be read as Vera's desecration of the traditional religious world-view in *Nehanda*, as it is her 'hero' Sibaso who resides in the holy caves, not the spirit medium Nehanda. The guerrilla soldier, who supposedly carries the spirit of retribution during the war, is also the murderer and rapist who represents the 'idea of desecration and violation of kindness'.

6.3.3. Summing up

The perversion of dialogue of the rape scene displays violence as a 'language', which was instituted in the difficult interactions between the guerrillas and the civilian population during the liberation war. This can be described as a culture of violence, which is an ultimate discursive perversion that is outside the realm of a dialogical world-view, because as the rape scene displays the monologues of the characters do not interact, the interaction in the scene is that of violence and desecration.

However, even in this non-dialogical narrative, Vera leaves the narrative space of dissident violence in Matabeleland to the two characters' points of view, thereby depicting their points of view as part of a number of different subject positions; voices that have different versions of the events depicted in the novel. As such, Vera's representation of dissident violence is not an authoritative or closed articulation of history; rather the narratives are personal and represent individual points of view. The unison voicing of national identity, which the unity discourse of the ZANU (PF) government represents, is fragmented in *The Stone Virgins* by the direct descriptions of the atrocities of the Matabeleland genocide and through Vera's insistence on the integrity of the individual point of view on history.

The sacrifice of the stone virgins, which Sibaso reenacts in his assault on Thenjiwe and Nonceba, represents a desecration of the world-view which is the narrative framework in *Nehanda*. This theme is the subject of the analysis in the following section, where Sibaso's world-view is read in relation to the spiritual history of *Nehanda*.

6.4. The spirit of national history

As implied earlier there is a richness of intertextuality between *The Stone Virgins* and Vera's first novel *Nehanda* which is far beyond the scope of this analysis to describe fully. However, in relation to the analysis of Vera's representation of Zimbabwean history this section focuses on the way in which Vera returns to the imagery of *Nehanda* in Sibaso's narrative. Here it is argued that the symbols, which in *Nehanda* were used to signify the spirited nature of the anti-colonial struggle,[1] are rearticulated in *The Stone Virgins*. As was demonstrated in the above analysis, Sibaso violates the sacredness of the shrine in the Gulati hills as he uses it for shelter both during the war and as a dissident. His world-view, which bears witness to the distorted reality of the liberation war and the Gukurahundi, is analysed in this section with a focus on how his narrative can be read in relation to the narrative framework of *Nehanda*.

In *Nehanda* the spirit Nehanda is likened to a spider as a symbol of the turning of time, and as knowledge of the past and the future, which is being woven into the spider's web as Nehanda moves through the forest and resides in her caves (Vera 1993:89–93). The spider stretches its legs into the future and resembles Nehanda's role as a spatio-temporal liminal figure that resides both in the future and in the immediate struggle.

> The spider weaves silence out of patience. Sending spindly legs into the future, it weaves all of time into its hungering belly. […] The spider moves gently through the insect-filled air. Weaving riddles into the air, the spider claims its space from branch to branch, in the armpit of the solid trunk. (Vera 1993:89)

The spider-Nehanda signifies the anti-colonial struggle. As she resides in the forest, resisting the colonial occupation, she spins her web and guides the struggle with her knowledge of the future and the past here represented by the spider's legs that stretch into the future. In *The Stone Virgins* spiders appear in Sibaso's narrative of his role in the liberation struggle, as in the following quotation in which Sibaso's words are represented through Nonceba's narrative:

> Spider legs, he insists. In my fear of him I envy this kind of perfect truth which sounds exactly like a well-constructed lie. While he closes his eyes I have the sensation that I am drowning, and see a multitude of spider legs stretch into the darkness.

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1. See section 4.2.1.

That is the other strange fact about spiders, their ability to walk on water while humans drown, he says. (Vera 2002:73)

Nonceba associates the spider's legs with darkness and drowning, but while she is 'drowning' in Sibaso's assault, his narrative of spiders forms his version of a truth; a truth which does not represent a grand narrative of history, but rather Sibaso's considerations of the connection between past, present and future. In his monologue he does not articulate one single narrative of this connection; instead he describes numerous encounters with spiders during and after the war. These spiders are different from each other and stand in contrast to Vera's use of the spider in *Nehanda*. Sibaso's spiders offer no coherent vision of the narrative of the nation. Vera deliberately blurs Sibaso's 'perfect truth' as it remains a multiplicity of versions of the connection between past, present and future in the nation's history of struggle. It distorts the single grand narrative of *Nehanda* as it operates within the same imagery but cannot be appropriated to a coherent world-view or ideological discourse. It remains a narrative of disillusionment and distortion of meaning.

6.4.1. The crushed dreams

At independence, three years prior to his assault on Nonceba, Sibaso is confronted with the dreams of the future which he harboured before the war. He is confronted with this when he finds his old copy of Solomon Mutswairo's novel *Feso*, as he seeks out his home in Bulawayo (Vera 2002:109). Sibaso's copy of *Feso,* in which Mutswairo articulated the utopia of the pre-colonial golden age that the nationalist movement saw as a social utopia for their own struggle,[1] has miraculously survived the war. This book had originally inspired Sibaso to join the struggle, but he had left it in his father's house, and upon his return the book is all that is left of his former life. When he opens it, he finds a spider that has been weighed down by time:

Held between the old pages is a folded map. Creased. There is a single arrow on it. My escape. Those many years ago. Between the map and the first page of the book I find a crushed spider weighed down by time. (Vera 2002:110)

This discovery leads Sibaso into a stream of thought where he considers his experiences with spiders during and after the war and the nature of spiders in general:

Spider webs. I have seen spider webs in the rain, in Gulati. There is more that one rainbow in a web. The most complex web carries many rainbows. No matter how heavy a rainbow is, a rainbow cannot break the back of a spider: a spider's web does not break. It stretches, just like time. (Vera 2002:111)

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1. See section 4.3.2.

In contrast to these spiders the spider found inside *Feso* is broken, and Sibaso believes that its web has been broken by a rainbow. This is apparently contrary to the nature of spiders and spiders' webs that like time can bend and stretch, just like the spider's legs in *Nehanda*. However, this spider is different from the one Vera described in *Nehanda*: The spider's legs, which were spindly and pointing to the future, are here associated with the past, and the web of this particular spider is broken; representing the broken vision in *Feso*:

> For this spider, a rainbow has broken its web. In war, time weaves into a single thread. This thread is a bond. Not all bonds are sacred. The present is negotiable, the past, spider legs which were once needles. [...] I lift the sheet and this shape falls off the web of words, a fossil floating in noon light, perforated like a dry leaf. I wonder if spiders bleed before dying, before dying.

> The crushed spider is an outline, the shape alone a faint sketch in charcoal – all its bones raised to the surface, with shape after being crushed between pages; possible to be held between pages; cannot merge with words. [...] Of all continents, only Africa has known the crushed solitude of a dead spider. Charcoal perfect. (Vera 2002:111)

The dead, dried up and transparent spider falls out of the 'web of words'; it has been crushed under the weight of the pages of the book, which is a dream of a pre-colonial utopia and the associated dreams for a renewal of its indigenous African harmony. Sibaso's spider that held his vision of the past and the future has been crushed, and to Sibaso, the dream has died, and is preserved as a fossil – a perfect vision without vitality. What remains of his vision of the past and the future is but a crushed, dried and transparent outline.

6.4.2. The ungraceful arm of history

> Independence, which took place three years ago, has proved us a tenuous species, a continent which has succumbed to a violent wind, a country with land but no habitat. We are out of bounds in our own reality. (Vera 2002:74)

Three years after independence Sibaso is disillusioned. The liberation war and the wars of the African continent are a wind, which has swept over the land as in *Nehanda*, but which has not brought with it the social utopia of Nehanda's vision of the ripe valley in the future (Vera 1993:112) or the pre-historic utopia of *Feso*. The way in which Vera uses the wind as a symbol of the spirit of war has changed in *The Stone Virgins*. Whereas in *Nehanda* the wind signified Nehanda's role as the liberator of the Zimbabwean people,[1] it is disturbingly violent in *The Stone Virgins* and it hurts Sibaso who associates the wind only with death:

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1. See section 4.2.2.

> Everything I fear has already happened. I do not fear what has already happened; not the ungraceful arm of history, not recent and touchable deaths. […] In the darkness a wind builds, whipping through the trees. It moves against my cheek and throws wild dust into my eyes, hard and sharp grains like bits of ground bone. If I close my eyes I can tolerate this rough exposure, it is a merciful burial. (Vera 2002:97)

As Sibaso hides out in a bomb crater among dead dissident guerrillas, his internal monologue reflects the way in which the war and the wind have hardened his mind. This wind is a burial; not a birth as one would expect in relation to Vera's use of the wind in *Nehanda*. In Sibaso's narrative of the liberation war and its aftermath the spirit of the liberation war is associated with dying, and even though he describes his ancestor Nehanda as a protector in his mind, she is also associated with death: *"I count each nameless ancestor on my dead fingers. The one buried in a noose, Nehanda, the female one. She protects me with her bones. I embrace death, a flame"* (Vera 2002:107). The wind of history blinds Sibaso as it throws 'grains like bits of ground bone' into his eyes. If he remains unseeing with his eyes closed, he can tolerate the wind of history. This blinded 'hero' stands in contrast to the seeing Nehanda who asserted the eternal fury of the nation in *Nehanda*.

The association between the spirit of the liberation war and death in Sibaso's narrative is mirrored with his view on the connection between past, present and future and his crushed dreams of the future. In Sibaso's mind the spirit of the war has fostered a number of spiders. During the rape scene, his mind wanders and his thoughts form a narrative of these spiders. Nonceba describes this narrative as a *"perfect truth which sounds exactly like a well-constructed lie"* (Vera 2002:73), a truth that can be held in Sibaso's hand like the spider's legs; like predictions, visions and hopes for the future. As he has harvested the dead dreams during the war, he has also learned to articulate his own truth as a balm for the wounds of war:

> I have harvested handfuls of spider legs while they remained interlocking like promises, weightless, harmless needles. Time's shadow: life's residue. I blow life's remains off my hand like a prediction. On my hand is a dark melody, shapes which curl and twist into thin marks, like tiny words on a page, a hand written-pamphlet, some spilled ink on ancient rock. I wipe my palm clean. Our country needs this kind of hero who has a balm for his own wounds carried between lip and tongue, between thumb and forefinger, between the earth and the soles of his feet, who is in flight toward an immaculate truth. (Vera 2002:75)

This version of the truth, which belongs to the hero Sibaso, is articulated in the context of his 'sacrifice' of the sisters Thenjiwe and Nonceba. His narrative leads him to contemplate a number of different articulations of the nation's history and the connection between past, present and future. Thus situated in the context of the rape

scene, which represents the perverted reality of the war, Sibaso's description of spiders forms an incoherent and fragmented narrative of the nation, which stands in a sharp contrast to the grand narrative of the spirit of the nation's struggle in *Nehanda*.

6.4.2.1. Different truths of the nation

The spiders that Sibaso has encountered during and after the war bear little resemblance to the spider-Nehanda in *Nehanda*, and they do not resemble the spider which he found in *Feso*. One is like a crane fly, another is a venomous spider and a third devours its partner during mating. The venomous spider visits Sibaso in his refuge in the hills of Gulati after liberation. This is a spider that threatens his safety, a confidant spider that weighs down on Sibaso and makes him fear its venom (Vera 2002:76–77):

> Yes. I am asleep. I feign death, as I did in the bushes of Gulati when a dangerous looking spider crept over my arm. I would watch it, holding my breath, remaining as still as rock. There was no mistaking a poisonous spider, all the evidence was there, the legs ferocious, hairy pincers. It had a deadly weight about it, on your arm. A confident weight. It strolled all over your arm like a deranged dancer. Outrageous in its design and colouration. […] A spider never wastes its venom. […] It made an art out of inflicting harm and approached you in daylight. (Vera 2002:76–77)

Sibaso thought that he had left this kind of spider in the bush where it belongs, but the death it inflicts has moved into the open daylight where it strolls confidently because of its capacity to kill. The legs of this venomous spider do not stretch into the future, they press down on Sibaso. In Sibaso's narrative this spider replaces a 'post-war spider', which is its opposite. They occupy the same post-war temporal space yet their differences are striking. The thin post-war spider has long legs that are so thin that they are ready to disappear, and it inhabits the margins, creeps in corners and it dies outside of time. This is a ghostly figure that makes Sibaso aware of his own broken image, and it is fragile like the membrane around dreams:

> There is a spider with long, long legs that are terrifyingly thin, ready-to-disappear. This spider is almost transparent, its legs wisps of a dancing dark light, like pencil strokes. The legs keep it high off the ground, and there is nothing to it really, just a pale body. An apparition. I saw it walk across a mirror one morning. Then it stopped moving. The mirror looked cracked. I could see my own broken face behind it. This is a post-war spider, a hungry spider. It is fragile like the membrane around dreams.

> When this spider passes by, it seems as though you could blow its awkward legs with a whisper. The joints upon its legs are mere full stops, abbreviations for a death. Its outline is a parenthesis. […] It has no predators. It lives off starvation. Whoever would hunt it would have to lick its invisibility off the ground, like spilt salt. It knows how to live on a margin, brittle, like a shard of glass. Who would eat such an already

dead thing? In the future there will be no trace of it. It dies outside of time. (Vera 2002:76)

It appears that Sibaso's narrative of these two spiders is directed towards specific articulations of the connection between past, present and future after the liberation war, just as the spider, which Sibaso found inside *Feso*, represented a specific vision of the nation. The narrative is, however, deliberately blurred and incoherent with no references to specific actors, ideologies or discourses of history. It represents images of the war, of death and of surviving in the post-war chaos that Sibaso now inhabits. His elaborate narrative of these spiders outlines his attempt at tracing out meaning in a meaningless existence.

Even though the imagery of *Nehanda* is rearticulated in Sibaso's narrative, his point of view is not broad, he remains bound by his own experiences, fears and reasoning. In contrast to the impersonation of the spirit of the anti-colonial struggle as 'Nehanda's bones' Vera describes the ex-guerrilla, now dissident and murderer Sibaso as an anti-counterpart to the spirit medium Nehanda and the spirit of the anti-colonial struggle. Accordingly, Sibaso's version of love, the rape, is in his narrative offered as a parallel to the history not only of his own nation, but also as a parallel to the African continent in disarray:

> There is a type of spider which changes colour when mating. It devours its own partner and rolls him into a fine paste. With this it courts its next partner. It offers him this round, perfectly prepared sacrifice in exchange for a brief but sweet liaison. This kind of spider hangs between trees and can only be viewed in the light of a full moon. Such a spider possesses a valuable secret, the knowledge that love cannot be founded on mercy, but that mercy can be founded on love. It knows the true agony of ecstasy, that violence is part of the play of opposites, and that during war, there are two kinds of lovers, the one located in the past, and dead, the one in the future, living and more desirable. The past is a repast, the future a talisman. This kind of truth also belongs to the fantasy of a continent in disarray. (Vera 2002:76)

The African continent in its disarray spurs visions, in which the present must be viewed as an interval between the past, articulated as a sacrifice, and the future, articulated as a promise. Sibaso's distorted narrative of history, in which the liberation war has no single significance but is rearticulated as a distortion of reality and a perversion of the spirit of the anti-colonial struggle, is therefore in this analysis read in relation to the context of 'a continent in disarray'.

6.5. Discussion

The analysis in this chapter has shown that *The Stone Virgins* can be read as engaging the official narratives of Zimbabwean history on two levels; a straightforward level where the official silencing of the Matabeleland genocide is being challenged by

Vera's voicing of the atrocities; and a level where Vera rewrites her own grand narrative of the spiritual reality of the anti-colonial struggle.

At one level of *The Stone Virgins* Vera accounts for the way in which the government perpetrated the Matabeleland genocide. She describes in horrifying detail the manner of the 5th. Brigade and thus re-articulates the 'ugly history' that should have been silenced under the unity discourse. By refusing to forget these atrocities, it can be argued, Vera attempts to rewrite the official version of this part of Zimbabwean history. The story of Nonceba and Cephas exemplifies the difficult process of healing the wounds of war by 'restoring the past'. Their healing process can function as an allegory for the healing process of the nation. In that way their 'learning to live with the memory of hurt' repeats Vera's demand for a commemoration of the atrocities of the Matabeleland genocide, as she suggests a healing process which is based on creating the narrative space and time for healing. At another level of *The Stone Virgins*, Vera enters into a dialogue with her previous articulation of a spiritual temporality of the anti-colonial struggle in *Nehanda*. Firstly, Vera insists on displaying different points of view as valid articulations of history as she constructs the narratives of the assailant Sibaso and his victim Nonceba as independent voices that function as independent articulations of subject positions along with other possible articulations of subject positions. This insistence on difference in point of view and subject position creates the narrative space for articulations of difference and for articulations of the nation's history, which cannot be merged into a grand narrative because of the integrity ascribed to the different points of view. Secondly, by recycling *Nehanda*'s imagery of spirituality in Sibaso's narrative, Vera moves away from the grand narrative of the spirit of the anti-colonial struggle. Not only does Vera point out that the nationalist visions of a social utopia were shattered after the war, she also rearticulates her own triumphant African spiritual temporality in Sibaso's fragmented and broken narrative of his nation; a narrative which dismantles rather than reinforces the temporal and spiritual imagery of official nationalism.

The social disarray that signified society during and after the liberation war, which Vera depicts through the rape of Nonceba and murder of Thenjiwe and Sibaso's sacrilege against the shrine in the Gulati hills, is connected to the novel's theme of rewriting the nation's history by depicting it as being made up of a polyphony of articulations of the nation's history which occur in a narrative space that cannot accommodate a dialogical meeting of the minds. Sibaso's role in respect to the virgin sacrifice of Thenjiwe and Nonceba appears to be a distorted parallel to Nehanda's role in the novel *Nehanda* as he represents the idea of desecration and violation of kindness, as opposed to Nehanda who represents the spirit of the anti-colonial struggle. The hero figure of Sibaso in *The Stone Virgins*, who in view of the spiritual history of *Nehanda* should represent 'Nehanda's bones risen' because he has participated in the de-colonisation of the nation, can be viewed as a cruel parody of the grand narrative in *Nehanda*. Sibaso's broken vision of the connection between

past, present and future and his version of a virgin sacrifice form a parallel to the spirit of the anti-colonial struggle in his distorted spiritual reality. This distortion fragments the spiritual reality of *Nehanda* into a multiplicity of narratives and thereby distorts the nationalist symbols of *Nehanda*.

7. Conclusion

My analysis was inspired by the historians' call for a critical rewriting of Zimbabwean history in light of the monopolisation of the discursive space of national history and identity by the ZANU (PF) government in Zimbabwe today. This has led to an exploration of the way history has been turned into a symbol of national identity in Zimbabwe, and how this symbol has been appropriated to political discourses in different ways in the Zimbabwean nationalist movement and represented in Zimbabwean literature.

The violent 'birth' of the Zimbabwean nation under colonialism has become a symbolic point of reference for representations of the nation's history because the nation's space and time has been defined by the colonial occupation. National symbols such as the narratives of a Great Zimbabwe pre-colonial African civilisation and traditionalist articulations of the mythic role of spirit mediums in the anti-colonial struggle have thus functioned as symbolic defiances of the colonial definition of the national time and space by defining the national community as deriving from a pre-colonial national community and an eternal national spirit. The anti-colonial struggle is represented in these narratives of the nation as an act of self-defence on the part of an indigenous community from which the Zimbabwean nation descends. Representations of the nation's history and national identity are as such suspended between articulating the national community as indigenous but also as defined by the anti-colonial struggle: the Chimurenga. These representations of the nation as indigenous and yet defined by the anti-colonial struggle have here been analysed within the discursive field of national identity formed in nationalist discourses and Zimbabwean literature. This analysis has focused on how representations of the nation's history and national identity have been articulated over time within this discursive field by different nationalist discourses as a means of organising internal and external power relations. In addition the nationalist discourses have been used to delimit the nation's imagined community discursively by defining different agents in relation to an inside-outside schema. This schema is defined both spatially and temporally with the anti-colonial struggle as its point of reference, thereby outlining 'African' as indigenous and in this respect 'inside' and accordingly defining 'colonial' as alien in this respect 'outside' the imagined community of the nation. Because the

anti-colonial struggle defines the national community, the liberation war and the 'liberators of the nation' have a privileged position within the discursive field of Zimbabwean national identity. The power relations which are regulated through the inside-outside schema work by defining political agents in relation to the anti-colonial struggle and specifically in relation to the liberation war, which is the reason the political discourses of ZANU (PF) are focused on defining ZANU (PF) as the 'liberators of the nation' and its political opponents as 'agents of the colonial oppressors'. In the above analysis has been outlined how this discursive appropriation of the Zimbabwean anti-colonial struggle has been rearticulated a number of times in order to exclude different opposition groups from 'the national we' according to the inside-outside schema of national identity. This process of defining political opponents as operating outside the 'national we' has been part of a political environment in the nationalist movement, which above all has been signified by the divisions between the political parties before, during and after the liberation war and by the relationship between the political leaders and the Zimbabwean people; a relationship that has been mired by violence and struggles for power. This has made it a dangerous business to oppose the authority of ZANU (PF) and President Mugabe, who is in his own words 'a bigger person' because of his historical authority as the liberator of the Zimbabwean people. As such, an opposition to his authority or to the authority of the ZANU (PF) government will by ZANU (PF) be represented as 'outside interference', just as critique of the role of the liberation armies during the war or the Matabeleland genocide is represented as 'neo-colonial mouthpiecing'. The Gukurahundi and the third Chimurenga are examples of how different groups have been represented within the inside-outside schema and dealt with accordingly by the ZANU (PF) regime. The Gukurahundi and the third Chimurenga also display how the unity of the nation is prone to rewritings in the nationalist discourses of ZANU (PF), as alliances shift over time. As such, a discourse of unity persists in different forms in each of these articulations of the national community, however, the agents, who are being articulated as either inside or outside of the national community, differ over time.

Like other Zimbabwean authors, Yvonne Vera has walked a fine line between the need for a critical reckoning with the colonial past and addressing the contemporary problems of Zimbabwean society in a meaningful way. While her novels generally have used the nation's history as the backdrop of individual women's stories, the novels *Nehanda* and *The Stone Virgins* stand out in Vera's writings each in its own way by engaging the nation's history more directly than her other novels. *Nehanda* answered Vera's own need for a rewriting of the first Chimurenga from an African and feminist point of view, and *The Stone Virgins* was a conscious response to Ranger's call for a critical rewriting of the Matabeleland genocide. Hence, their representations of the Zimbabwean nation are not only located in 1993 and 2002 respectively, they are also located in two different discursive contexts i.e. that of a

critical rewriting of colonial history and patriarchal dominance and that of a critical rearticulation of the ZANU (PF) government's unity discourse.

The analysis of the novel *Nehanda*, which has been performed here, has located the novel in the context of the present political discourses and has analysed its feminist nationalism as part of the symbolic field of Zimbabwean nationalism, as an anti-colonial critique and as a representation of a spiritual temporality ascribed to the anti-colonial struggle. This reading points out how the novel *Nehanda* is aligned with a shared African critique of colonialism and how it makes common cause with a traditional religious world-view in order to form the narrative framework for the narrative of the female hero Nehanda. This analysis has also shown how this narrative framework adds to a nationalist imagery, which the nationalist discourses of the ZANU (PF) government draw upon in its articulation of its own authority as the main protagonist of the anti-colonial struggle in the ongoing third Chimurenga. This discursive appropriation of the first Chimurenga in the third Chimurenga discourse works by articulating the history of the first Chimurenga and the liberation war into a temporal schema that equates the Chimurengas with an ongoing struggle against colonial and neo-colonial forces. The opposition, the white commercial farmers and other critics of the ZANU (PF) government are therefore represented according to the inside-outside schema of national identity as subversive agents, who are aligned with the former colonial masters, in an attempt to overthrow the legitimate heirs to the rule of the Zimbabwean nation: ZANU (PF). The third Chimurenga discourse articulates a patriotic history, in which the struggle for the de-colonisation of Zimbabwe did not end at independence, and it affords ZANU (PF) and especially President Mugabe privileged positions in the national narrative because it claims that they represent an incarnation of the spirit of the anti-colonial struggle, a role which is likened to the role of Nehanda. This discursive appropriation of the anti-colonial struggle also draws on an appropriation of Africanism by describing the third Chimurenga in the language of a general African critique of global power relations. The third Chimurenga is articulated as the final de-colonisation, which should serve as an example for other African nations who ought to follow the example of President Mugabe and show the former colonial masters the door. Accordingly, the present time is defined as a state of emergency, which is signified by the war against the neo-colonial forces that threaten the Zimbabwean nation with regression into a colonial state. In that way, the third Chimurenga discourse deems the current 'state of the nation' irrelevant for political debate and the government unaccountable for its mismanagement of the country, because the prime objective of the government is to defend the nation against the neo-colonial enemy.

Against the backdrop of the ZANU (PF) government's political appropriation of the history of the liberation war and the anti-colonial struggle, a number of different groups of people have attempted to articulate other versions of the nation's history. They define national identity in other (sometimes broader) terms and oppose

ZANU (PF)'s historically based authority by voicing (among other things) the 'ugly history' of the Gukurahundi as well as insisting on the role of ZAPU in the nationalist movement and the liberation war; all versions of history which have been silenced and overruled by the ZANU (PF) government under the discourse of national unity. These oppositional versions of the nation's history attempt to break the silence, with which the ZANU (PF) government has covered the Matabeleland genocide, by obliging the Zimbabwean people to remember and forget 'the divisions of the past', as part of the road towards independence and unity. The novel *The Stone Virgins* engages this discourse of national unity; breaking the silence by voicing versions of the nation's history that the government has invited the Zimbabwean people to forget. It does so by articulating a number of different versions of the nation's history, which are narrated from different points of view that cannot be merged into a grand narrative of the nation. Rather, the narratives of the nation's history present in *The Stone Virgins* are represented as coming from a number of different subject positions that each in their own right articulate different stories of this time and place in Zimbabwean history thus forming a polyphonic, rather than a unison, articulation of the nation's history. By insisting on time and narrative space in healing the wounds of the nation, Vera opposes the obligation to remember and forget the Matabeleland genocide in the way that is dictated by the ZANU (PF) government. Vera suggests an attempted closure or healing of the wounds of the nation through the role of the historian Cephas as the one who takes care of Nonceba and his restoration of the nation's past. Time for memory and healing as well as an opening up of the discursive field of national history and identity are suggested as means of rearticulating a viable polyphonic narrative of the nation.

The Stone Virgins also represents an intertextuality with the novel *Nehanda*. When read in relation to the government's appropriation of the history of the first Chimurenga, *The Stone Virgins* appears to be a rewriting of the grand narrative that is the narrative framework in *Nehanda*. By recycling the imagery of spiritual reality into a broken and fragmented narrative of the spiritual temporality of the nation connecting or rather disconnecting past, present and future, *The Stone Virgins* represents the spirit of the anti-colonial struggle as somewhat less glorified. This stands in contrast to Vera's narrative framework in *Nehanda* where the triumphant spirit of the anti-colonial struggle, when merged with the feminist appropriation of the mythical Nehanda, appears as an allegory for the possible deflation of patriarchal dominance: 'how things could be'. In *The Stone Virgins* this narrative of the triumphant spirit of the anti-colonial struggle is turned into a narrative of a distorted reality where rape is mistaken for lovemaking, and where the 'hero' guerrilla soldier is ostracised from society and lives a half life of sacrilege and desecration of kindness as a cruel parody of Nehanda's role in *Nehanda*. In this narrative the grand narrative of the nation has become blurred, fragmented and broken and, as such, it no longer feeds into the spiritual and temporal imagery of official nationalism.

The Stone Virgins rearticulates the time-space relation, which is the narrative framework in *Nehanda*, in Sibaso's fragmented narrative of the relation between past, present and future. The narrative space which the novel outlines appears as an attempted opening up of the discursive field of national history and identity in Zimbabwe by suggesting different articulations of the relation between the past, present and future that can blur, fragment and distort the imagined relation between the first, second and third Chimurenga. The spirit of the nation, which in *Nehanda* was born out of the anti-colonial struggle, is in *The Stone Virgins* rearticulated as a grim apparition that has become distorted during the liberation war in a way which renders it useless as a point of identification for articulations of national identity.

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Summary of *Nehanda*

The birth of Nehanda is watched over by the women of her village who accompany the birth with a tale of the first sighting of a white man near their village. The white man is understood as a sign of death. Growing up, Nehanda falls ill, her mother experiences sombre visions and finally realises that Nehanda is not 'her own' and initiates a ceremony in order to distinguish which spirit has taken her daughter as a medium. It is a time of drought; but when summoning the help of their ancestors the villagers find that their 'holy tree of rain' has been taken over by the white men. The white men have settled at the top of the nearby hill. This is an offence to the villagers and their ancestors. Meanwhile, the whites plan to civilise 'the natives' by converting them to Christianity and to civilisation.

The royal spirit Nehanda that has possessed the protagonist conveys a message to the villagers: because they have tolerated the whites for so long, the ancestors feel betrayed and the time has come to rise up and fight. The medium of the royal spirit Kaguvi leads the people into rebellion. During the fighting Nehanda resides in a sacred cave in the hills where the people come to receive instructions and tell of their battles. The Africans take the settlers by surprise in the beginning, but in the long run they lose and when they return to the cave, they find Nehanda gone. Nehanda has fled into the woods, where for a long time she escapes the search party that has been sent out to capture her. Nehanda's spirit follows the Africans, but they cannot hear the voice of their ancestors without the medium, and the whites destroy their village and keep terrorising them until Nehanda allows herself to be captured. The mediums of the two spirits Nehanda and Kaguvi are finally tried and executed by the whites. Nehanda, however, escapes the hanging – in spirit.

Summary of *The Stone Virgins*

PART 1 (1950–1980): During a short stay in the village of Kezi Cephas Dube falls in love with the villager Thenjiwe and stays with her for some months. Their love story is brief. He is a stranger to her land, and she needs to understand him completely. Cephas does not understand her and returns to his work as a historian in Bulawayo. At the time of the ceasefire before 1980, female soldiers from the liberation army are taken as a sign of the absolute freedom that is anticipated after independence, however, the hopes of the people in Matabeleland are shattered.

PART 2 (1981–1986): Thenjiwe and Nonceba are assaulted in Kezi. In a surprise attack the dissident Sibaso cuts off Thenjiwe's head, and disfigures Nonceba's after having raped her. Nonceba is found and taken to the hospital, where she is visited by Cephas who has learned about their fate from the newspaper. In Kezi, soldiers burn down the nerve centre of the village; the Thandabantu Store. They kill the village elders who are at the store and torture and kill the store keeper under accusations of supporting the dissidents. The dissident Sibaso is hiding in the hills of Gulati, in a sacred cave which has been used for shelter during the war. Here Sibaso again takes refuge after having fled Bulawayo, where he no longer has a home. Having returned from hospital, Nonceba is sought out by Cephas who takes her away from Kezi which has become 'a naked cemetery'. In Bulawayo they can help each other heal the hurts from their loss.

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