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Inequality, Moralism and Legitimacy in South African Literature

Re-reading apartheid from Millin to Wicomb

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***

This is dedicated to Tony Emmett (1948-2013) and Konstantin Sofianos (1983-2015), who I lost before the PhD started, yet who determined the approach of this work in distinct and formative ways.

Declaration

This thesis is submitted to the University of Warwick in support of my application for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy. It has been composed by myself and has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree.

Christine Emmett
16 December 2020

Abstract

Racialised inequality has existed in South Africa since the arrival of the first settlers, so that the shadow of illegitimacy has fallen upon successive governments and ruling classes. Along with changing political and material contexts, claims to legitimacy have been altered and reformulated. This thesis argues that these discourses have been instrumental to the development of the novel in South Africa, and that representations of totality and history have necessarily sought to support, critique or reformulate these discourses. Two decades after apartheid, South Africa remains a profoundly unequal society. Therefore the scope of this thesis spans the years from the 1940s to the 2000s, using historical-contextual and close reading to determine how specific novels have registered and responded to drives to counter, justify or legitimate the power of a small ruling class.

Discourses of legitimacy have travelled under various guises – from sexuality and white supremacy, to paternalist hierarchies, internecine cultural rivalries, claims of popular consent, pragmatism and depoliticisation and the collapse of class into racial difference. By focusing on these I attempt to historicise formal questions about the South African novel, like the prominence of didacticism and difficulties of representing spontaneity. I argue that an individualized and identity-based moralism about racism has been shaped by class interests – and that this has led to an equivalent blindness to the historically specific character of race and racism in South African prose narrative.

In this vein, each chapter offers a close reading which challenges orthodox readings by highlighting the salience of class and legitimacy. Readings are offered of the work of Sarah Gertrude Millin, in terms of cultural rivalries between English-speakers and Afrikaners at the dawn of apartheid; of Nadine Gordimer's *Late Bourgeois World*, in terms of 1960s' repression and dissent; and of John Miles's *Kroniek uit die doofpot*, in terms of late apartheid's purportedly "non-ideological" emphasis on pragmatism and technocracy. The thesis also departs from the ruling party's discourse to consider the way in which legitimacy was constructed by antiapartheid Nationalist movements. Thus, novelistic depictions of the 1976 Soweto Uprising by Miriam Tlali, Mbulelo Mzamane, Sipho Sepamla and Mongane Serote, prefigure the class divisions and tensions in contemporary South Africa. It concludes with a consideration of Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* and Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light*, fictions in which postapartheid discourses and the construction of a heroic nationalist narrative are read against continuing inequality, class immobility and the troubled legitimacy of the national elite.

Introduction: Moral Authority, Legitimacy and Apartheid

"You see, my friend, you are white and I am wrong."
- Modikwe Dikobe, *The Marabi Dance*

Ahead of a wider discussion of race, moralism and legitimacy, it seems useful to offer a vignette which illustrates the subjective pressures implicit in these social and historical discourses. In JM Coetzee's *Boyhood*, the reader is offered a depiction of the kind of anxiety which could only occur in the context of economic inequality. It is presented through the typically artless focalisation of a child:

> On his birthday, instead of a party, he is given ten shillings to take his friends for a treat. He invites his three best friends to the Globe Café; they sit at a marble-topped table and order banana splits or chocolate fudge sundaes. He feels princely, dispensing pleasure like this; the occasion would be a marvellous success, were it not spoiled by the ragged Coloured children standing at the window looking in on them… On the faces of these children he sees none of the hatred which, he is prepared to acknowledge, he and his friends deserve for having so much money while they are penniless. On the contrary, they are like children at a circus, drinking in the sight, utterly absorbed, missing nothing. (72)

The young protagonist considers asking the Portuguese owner of the café to chase the kids away. But, he notes, "if he were to get up and go to the Portuguese, what would he say? 'They are spoiling my birthday, it is not fair, it hurts my heart to see them'? Whatever happens, whether they are chased away or not, it is too late, his heart is already hurt" (73).[1]

[1] I'm grateful to Charles Van Onselen (1998), for his review of Coetzee's novel, which drew my attention to this passage.

And so happiness is tainted. The point, as Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett's famous study attests, is that the elite within deeply unequal societies are not shielded from its corrosive effects (2011). The child's self-conception of princely magnanimity is correspondingly not possible in this context where he is visibly reminded that others are so demeaned.

Along with the recognition of his pain follows the obvious and historical social reflex to remove or isolate oneself from their gaze implicit in this scene.

> You have only to contort your face into a scowl and wave your arms and shout, '*Voetsek, hotnot! Loop! Loop!'* and then turn to whoever is watching, friend or stranger, and explain: '*Hulle soek net iets om te steel. Hulle is almal skelms.'*— They are just looking for something to steal. They are all thieves. (72-73)

The desire to be left alone to a fantasy of legitimate plenitude is thereby justified by resorting to racist stereotyping – significantly a stereotype with the veneer of morality ("They are just looking for something to steal"). Yet underneath this disavowal lies the contradiction that the coloured children's presence, their appreciation of the scene suggests ("drinking in the sight, utterly absorbed, missing nothing"): that they have exactly the capacity to appreciate wealth and displays of magnanimity; that their position on the other side of the glass is the arbitrary result of a discriminatory history; and that, equivalently, the young Coetzee no more deserves his wealth and pleasure than the children deserve their poverty. His pleasure and magnanimity has been rendered tawdry and illegitimate, objectified as though he were an entertainer at the "circus" (72).

The anxiety of illegitimacy and the social reflexes which seek to dispel it persist in contemporary South Africa. As the figures currently stand, the top 10% of the population own 90-95% of all wealth, with 80% owning no wealth at all (Orthofer, 2016).[2] What good is power if one cannot feel justified in it? And how does one enjoy wealth when the gaze of those without it cannot be avoided?

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[2] The World Bank reports a Gini coefficient of 0.63 (2018:xv). Income, however, looks slightly better with the top 10% owning 55-60% of all labour incomes (Orthofer, 2016).

While apartheid-era thinking justified the racialized nature of inequality through stereotypes of laziness or immorality, postapartheid South African elites have sought to disavow the structural nature of racialized inequality by reducing it to the racism of individual groups and actors.[3] During the last decade, particularly, individual incidents of racism have intermittently saturated social media and South African news cycles as though racism's "last stand" was located in the individual psyche.

Racist spectacle generally involves the acts or utterances of individuals or small groups, ranging from the sadistic or murderous to the thoughtlessly banal. On the lighter side of this spectrum, the racism of a social media post triggers widespread condemnation and blanket media coverage, comprising editorials and denunciations, repeated at length while running the gamut of racial divides in the country. [4]

The general appellation in these instances is that racism is alive and well in South Africa, and that racist individuals should be denounced fervently, even if the racists in question are private individuals lacking a broader platform. And yet, media cycles of denunciation and indignation have little effect on the racialized structural problems of South African society. South Africa retains high levels of violence and crime as one of the most economically unequal societies in the world, with the racialization of inequality not having shifted significantly since the end of apartheid (Government of South Africa/World Bank, 2018).[5]

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[3] Throughout this thesis I use the construction "postapartheid" over that of "post-apartheid" to designate, similar to that of "postcolonial," that while apartheid in its titular form may have been superseded, many of the structures and effects of the political regime continue to determine the ostensibly post-apartheid context. In this way "postapartheid" represents a state which is both technically "after" apartheid but still determined by it.

[4] Penny Sparrow is likely the most prominent of these individuals, having become famous in 2016 for a racist Facebook post complaining about black people on the beach (https://www.news24.com/Tags/People/penny_sparrow). Adam Catzavelos, more recently, posted a racist video on Twitter also complaining about black people on beaches (2018; https://ewn.co.za/Topic/Adam-Catzavelos). Vicki Momberg was charged with *crimen injura* for a video which showed her verbally assaulting a black policeman (2016; https://www.news24.com/Tags/People/vicki_momberg). The Reitz Four were four students at the University of the Free State who denigrated and humiliated black workers on film (2008; https://mg.co.za/tag/reitz-four).

[5] Some other countries which suffer from particularly high economic inequality, such as Brazil and USA, are also marked by racial divisions. And yet, in South Africa, while economic inequality may be racialized, it is no longer confined to racial difference: "inequality in South Africa is not only a phenomenon between race groups: evidence from the postapartheid period shows that intra-race inequality has grown at a rapid rate, and by 2009, intra-race inequality exceeded inter-race inequality" (Francis & Webster, 2019:793).

It is worth noting though, that media reportage of racism has made the filing of *crimen injuria* suits much more common – an obscure legal ruling has effectively become common parlance within South African society.

While it is not the intention of this study to consider the correlation and mediation between public debate and substantive social change, the intensity of indignation and denunciation remains starkly distinct from the persistently structural nature of South Africa's problems. The question, then, is whether these denunciations can be read beyond their evident denotative significance of highlighting and condemning racism, towards their wider ideological and performative aspects: as discourses which signal the legitimacy of the speaker within an economy of moral status and anxiety.

To read the intensity of denunciations and indignation beyond their denotative claims is not to question the persistence of individualized acts of racism, but rather to understand the repetitive emotional and moralistic response as presenting an excess, symptomatic of the subject's own standing in society as much as that of the racist. This is more evident when we consider that a change of sentiment among individuals cannot change the economic foundations which racialize class within the country. In this way moral outrage over-emphasizes agency, when increasing inequality has highlighted precisely a lack of thereof. Correspondingly, indignation also appears to form part of a discourse of legitimacy invested in distinguishing a speaker or group's identity, as much as winning the minds of its recipients.

Morality within this guise appears as a distinctly individualized discourse, which is not to suggest that structural accounts eschew morality altogether, but that morality merely forms part of an analysis where material relations remain the frame within which agents act. In this sense it seems useful to cleave towards Perry Anderson's account of the distinction between morality and moralism to frame a critique which targets the idealized type of morality I am describing. In distinguishing between morality and moralism, Anderson describes moralism as,

> the vain intrusion of moral judgements in lieu of causal understanding—typically, in everyday life and in political evaluations alike, leading to an 'inflation' of ethical terms themselves into a false rhetoric, which lacks the exacting sense of material care and measure that is inseparable from true moral awareness (1980:86).

From this perspective, moralistic responses to racist spectacle share a blindness with previous liberal accounts of apartheid which relegated racism to the agency and cultural imperatives of interest groups, without reference to the structural demands of the global

capitalist market or South Africa's place within it. As Dan O'Meara notes, these accounts depict the apartheid regime as the product of "rigid, reactionary and racist ideals of a monolithic 'Afrikanerdom'," the triumph of an insane and immoral ideology against an ideal of rationality read as "the modernizing and integrative imperatives of economic development" (O'Meara, 1983:1).[6] O'Meara's *Volkskapitalisme* demystified this account– detailing how the rise of Afrikaner nationalism could be more meaningfully understood through the mobilization and alliance of varied class interests amid the changing social relations of capitalist accumulation in South Africa. His approach highlighted the extent to which analyses of apartheid and racism had remained on the level of sentiment and culpability, obscuring the material and historical forces which produced apartheid. The liberal account merely provided a "pale, negative mirror image" of Afrikaner nationalism, adopting its self-description and producing a mere inversion that maintained the obfuscation of its idealism (O'Meara, 1983:5).

What spectacle-based anti-racist discourse then shares with racist discourse is exactly a preoccupation with immorality as the driving force of social ills. This "morality" of racism is as evident in Sarah Gertrude Millin's moral horror at miscegenation as it is in DF Malan's paternalistic notions of responsibility, adulthood and self-respect as the linchpin of the Afrikaner society (Koorts, 2013: 558;559). The idealism of these accounts thus conceals precisely, in O'Meara's words, "the character of the South African state as a capitalist state," (O'Meara, 1983:7) where a crisis of capitalism can be reduced to a particular social actor – whether urbanized/ "detribalized" black South Africans, backwards Afrikaners, greedy English liberals or racist white suburbanites.

Where the liberal narrative during apartheid implicitly legitimated those English liberal commentators who were spared complicity with South Africa's racist social structure, racist media spectacles, in their reduction of South Africa's social problems to the sentiments of racist elites, similarly obfuscate the structural nature of racialized inequality in South Africa today, with intent and culpability positioned as the driving

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[6] O'Meara provides Adam and Gilliomee's *Ethnic Power Mobilised* (1979) and de Kiewiet's *A History of South Africa* (1972) as examples, but other liberal accounts are proposed by Spense, de Villiers, Wilson and Thompson's accounts in *Oxford History of South Africa* (1969), Horwitz's *The Political Economy of South Africa* (1967), Hobart Houghton's *The South African Economy* (1976) and Butler, Elphick and Welsh's *Democratic Liberalism in South Africa* (1987).

force of inequality. What all these moralistic discourses share is the suggestion that it is possible to exist outside of capitalism: that those who denounce racism can, by the nature of their allegiance to a moral authority, exist with some level of legitimacy outside of these exploitative relations.

We then return to the question of what surfeit or surplus is achieved by this discourse which has as its object the subject's capacity to identify and highlight racism as a means of distinction within South Africa's unequal relations. What surplus could outweigh the punitive aspects of individual culpability within a context where it is impossible to live outside of exploitation? What is the history of these representations of legitimacy? And what fears remain occluded by their anxious repetition?

Apartheid Moralism and Rivalry

To understand the vicissitudes of morality and legitimacy around racism, one must recognize that apartheid discourse never eschewed claims to morality; in fact morality was framed as its *raison d'être.* As Saul Dubow notes, along with its negation of Afrikaner inferiority, the utility of apartheid as a term, drew on its perceived coherence, in contrast to the piecemeal and exploitative nature of Union government segregation (1995; 2014). As McClintock and Nixon (1986:142) also indicate, this concern with moral legitimacy can be read into the developing euphemisms of the term which were employed over time in response to apartheid's critics – with a lexical reframing of apartheid as "separate development" and "democratic pluralism" echoing the developmentalist agenda of the World Bank.[7]

Furthermore these developing euphemisms highlighted the persistent need to legitimise the regime, to refresh the moral substance of the term throughout apartheid's tenure – an activity which was never finished or complete. As Aletta Norval notes, "[d]ifferent groups of intellectuals partook in the struggle to give meaning to the signifier 'apartheid'. The significance of these interventions should not be

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[7] These terms appear to be drawn from the language of World Bank reports, suggesting not only the way in which the apartheid government sought to appease the international community, but also the development of a global currency of euphemism (for more on 'Bankspeak' see Moretti and Pestre, 2015).

underestimated, for they facilitated the elaboration of a horizon within which it became possible to give apartheid its 'moral' overtones." For Norval,

> The highest expression of morality, within this horizon, was the creation of 'self-governing 'Bantu homelands.' Within this, the system of differential positions was expanded: not only the Afrikaans- and English-speaking communities could now exercise their right to difference; also the Zulu, Sotho, Venda and Xhosa 'national units' could partake in that freedom. The symbolization of the event of ethnicization of South Africa in this manner made it possible to present apartheid as natural, just and moral in the eyes of the white Afrikaner population. By re-creating the world in their image, what was a specific solution to a very particular series of dislocations became universalized. With this, the movement from myth to imaginary was completed. Apartheid could no longer be considered as a series of *ad hoc* responses to pressing problems. It became a complete, moral vision of social division. (171)

What Norval highlights then was that a fundamental aspect of High Apartheid discourse claimed the freedom, authority and morality of the ostensible Afrikaner way of life, and that this could be bestowed upon black South Africans in the future. In this way it was presented not merely as a system which benefited Afrikaners, but one which produced them as custodians of a distinct moral and social vision.

In this way legitimacy was aligned with claims of moral authority, its essence strictly dictated within the terms of Afrikaner dominance. Morality, thus narrowly defined, allowed for apartheid exploitation, along with a disciplinarian emphasis on service, responsibility and loyalty to community. In this sense, many apartheid ideologues were probably quite idealistic, convinced that

> apartheid was a genuinely just way of solving South Africa's racial conflict. For, unlike partial *ad hoc* segregation which was held to be intrinsically exploitative, it was believed that total segregation would provide Africans with full opportunities to develop according to their own cultural norms… a belief in the moral rectitude of apartheid was crucial to the relative cohesiveness of Afrikanerdom during the 1950s and 1960s. (Dubow, 1995:283)

Moral rectitude thus carried the heavy burden of apartheid legitimacy, a matter of great instrumental importance given the conflict and rivalry within the white community among Afrikaners and English-speaking South Africans. Because English South Africans were perceived as financially and politically dominant within the Union

government (1910-1948), Afrikaner Nationalists' framed United Party segregation policies as "intrinsically exploitative" (Dubow, 1995:283).[8] Against this claim, apartheid could be put forward as a plan derived from the moral authority of Afrikaners.

In many respects, we can read this self-presentation as a response to the morally-coded characterization of Afrikaners within Imperial and English representations. JM Coetzee in his account of early South African literary culture notes:

> The Dutch Boer in Africa was subjected to close and censorious scrutiny (scrutiny that continues to this day) because his sloth, his complacent ignorance, his heartlessness towards the natives, his general slide into barbarism seemed to betray the whole imperial side. (Coetzee, 1988:3)

That the liberal account of history would continue this characterization through imputing apartheid to the madness and immorality of Afrikaners merely confirms the anxiety around legitimacy which fed this internecine rivalry in the white community. As this undercurrent persisted, Rian Malan would describe it as "another war," central to apartheid discourse but concurrent to the readily visible racial one, "the war of words and moral recrimination" (1991:26).

Paternalism

The value of a moral vision is thus entangled in its legitimizing effects. In "Domination and legitimacy," Weber distinguishes involuntary from voluntary domination in terms of its capacity to inspire obedience and duty in a controlled population ([1968] 2013:944-945). In this sense, legitimacy is that form of authority which is broadly perceived to inspire obedience, and it is for this fact that there arises a "generally observable need of any power, or even any advantage of life, to justify itself" (953). Correspondingly, from Weber's analysis, "[e]very highly privileged group develops the myth of its natural, especially its blood, superiority" (953). This perspective serves to obscure the material basis of advantage and to suggest that each individual, those of the

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[8] The United Party, first under the leadership of Barry Herzog (till 1939) and then Jan Smuts, was the ruling party in South Africa from 1934 to 1948 when they were ousted by the (Afrikaner) Nationalist Party. It was dissolved in 1977 (Clark & Worger, 2013:30).

dominant group especially, “has deserved his particular lot” (953). It is for this reason that “the continued exercise of every domination… always has the strongest need of self-justification through appealing to the principles of its legitimation” (954).[9]

In South Africa, one of the structuring principles for legitimation was a paternalism which pervaded both Afrikaner discourse, but also, to a lesser yet still prominent extent, white liberal politics. Insofar as paternalism managed to yoke its notion of a racial hierarchy to already existing hierarchies of gender and age, it managed to satisfy Weber’s criteria for his principles underlying legitimation. Firstly, that dominance was framed upon the “personal authority” of the father figure, which was derived from the “sacredness of *tradition”* (954), and that this structure of domination conformed to “a system of rational norms” (954) similar to those which regulated the heteronormative family.[10] Thus the duty and authority of fathers was coterminous with the obedience of his children. This equivalently corresponds to the aristocratic ethos which Eugene Genovese recalls in his discussion of Southern slaveholders in America, this worldview “in which some (slaves, women) were naturally subordinate to others whose domination they accepted in return for a protection without which they could not hope to survive” (1988: xv). [11] The logic of paternalism thus rests on varying poles of domination and submission, but more importantly, agency and dependency. Its potency lies precisely in the assumption of dependency and a correlating guidance, leadership and authority of those in positions of authority.

As a cultural practice, paternalism was already reasonably established in the early 1900s, and has been documented both within the sharecropping farming society developing around the Vaal (Van Onselen,1992) as well as in the Cape Afrikaner tradition where coloured farm servants were maintained as part of an extended family

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[9] I follow Deborah Posel’s suggestion that the discourse of legitimacy forms one aspect of ideology (1987:437-438).

[10] I have excluded Weber’s criterion of “charisma”, which requires “the surrender to the extraordinary… a savior, a prophet or a hero” (954), as it is the criterion most clearly focused on specific individuals and cannot be generalized to a dominant group.

[11] George M. Frederickson provides a now canonized comparative study of American and South African history in his book, *White Supremacy* (1981); whereas Stanley Greenberg, in *Race and State in Capitalist Development* (1980), produces a study which reads similarities between the American state of Alabama and South Africa (as well as Ireland and Israel) in terms of the interests of businessmen, farmers and the white working class.

(Koorts, 2013:558).[12] These practices found a common basis in the typically Anglophone population with the authority claimed by Native Commissioners in the Native Affairs Department. The colonial and Union governments had emphasized the value of maintaining a "protective relationship towards its African 'wards'" (Dubow, 1989:12), with the Native Affairs Department functioning "on behalf of Africans' interests" in what Dubow refers to as a "sympathetic paternalism" (1989:12). As Lindie Koorts notes, from its beginnings as a "conventional wisdom of the time," paternalistic views of race would become "the staple of apartheid mythology and discourse more than 30 years later – almost as if they passed from common knowledge to law of nature" (2013:561).

The social currency of paternalism as a legitimizing myth is equivalently evident in the relative absence and lack of currency accorded to biological scientific racism in South Africa (Rich, 1984:5). This is significant not only because it underscores the high purchase which paternalistic hierarchy with its notions of moral rectitude provided, but also because it avoided deepening internecine rifts within the white community. As Dubow notes, given scientific racism's reliance on notions of degeneration, "[t]he predicament of poor whites, which formed one of the key axes around which the Afrikaner nationalist movement was mobilized, begged difficult questions about race deterioration and degeneration" (1995:284-285).[13] By contrast, a

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[12] My use of "coloured" refers to an apartheid racial classification which encompassed a wide range of creole identities, "a mix of Khoisan, East Indian, and European ancestry" (Durham, 2012:652). While the classification has been adopted as an identity by some groups, it is widely contested by others.
The question of how the term should be written, whether it should be capitalized or not (ie. with an upper case C), is equivalently contested. Mohamed Adhikari, for instance, opts to capitalize it, thereby acknowledging the postapartheid grassroots reclamation of the term. He quotes journalist Paul Stober saying, "[a]s a distinct ethnic group with over three million members, we deserve a capital letter" (cited in Adhirkari, 2005:xv). However, Gabeba Baderoon and Zimitri Erasmus on the other hand have opted not to capitalize the term; thereby distinguishing between the apartheid racial category (capitalized) and "a kind of blackness" (not capitalized) with a specific and complex history (Baderoon, 2014:161). Since capitalization can thus either refer to the apartheid designation or to its oppositional reclamation; I have opted to maintain consistency across all apartheid racial categories, writing it without capitalization, thereby emphasizing its equivalence to the social imposition and construction of other racial categories.

[13] Another "naturalized" notion was the liberal segregationist perspective on "reserves", which extrapolated from colonial stereotypes of African societies "as pastoralized and rural entities that merged back into the African landscape" (Rich, 1984:5). In this sense, the ideology of "territorial segregation" is likely as important as the notion of moral authority for describing the ideological basis of apartheid thinking. This is, however, outside of the scope of this study, and is dealt with by other literary scholars (see, for instance, Coetzee's "Reading the South African Landscape" in *White Writing* [1988], Rita Barnard's *Apartheid and Beyond* [2012], Wamuwi Mbao's, "Inscribing Whiteness and Staging Belonging" [2010]), Zoë Wicomb's "Five Afrikaner Texts and the Rehabilitation of Whiteness" [1997-1998] and Jennifer Wenzel's "The Pastoral Promise and the Political Imperative" [2000]) .

focus on moral authority and paternalistic hierarchy maintained a sharp division between black and white while obscuring class divisions in the white community. That distinctions in class and culture threatened the imagined cohesiveness of the white community was already evident at the inception of Union-era segregation:

> Racial segregation can indeed be seen as the counterpart to the creation of a unified white South African nation. Earlier, reference was made to the transformation in meaning during the 1920s of the word 'race'. Whereas it had previously applied to relations between English and Afrikaners, it now became applicable to whites and blacks. This change in application is indicative of the process by which a unified sense of white identity was engendered through the exclusion of blacks from civil society." (Dubow, 1989:15)

Thus, we need to read paternalism as one of the main discourses through which legitimacy was claimed, while acknowledging the internecine conflict and rivalry that it attempted to suture. In this way, triangulation appears as a fundamental aspect of the developing ruling class in South Africa – a trait common within other settler societies. As Genovese reminds us, ruling classes are shaped through confrontations with the specific class(es) they rule, along with "the nature of confrontations with other classes outside its immediate sphere of activity." (Genovese, [1969]1988:5)

Therefore, within South Africa particularly, the balance of conflicts within the white community, along with the social pressure of inequality, produced a situation where the need to legitimize dominance was especially pronounced. Paternalism thus provided an early shape for this discourse, followed by the shifting construction of apartheid's "moral horizon."

Nevertheless, the problem of legitimacy is not solely relegated to white South African dominance. Chapter 3 will discuss the class stratification of township life and how this impacted on notions of Nationalist legitimacy in the struggle against apartheid. The particular moralism of some black South African literature is, for instance, famously criticised by Njabulo Ndebele who labelled it moralistic and spectacular, with its "exteriority of everything" (1991:38) representing South African oppression as having a "brazen, exhibitionist openness" (1991:32). For Ndebele, South African culture at the end of apartheid was "a society of posturing and sloganeering; one that frown[ed] upon subtlety of thought and feeling… and the mature acceptance of failure, weakness, and limitations" (1991:42).

While Ndebele's critique may be accurate in its description of the "specular" and didactic form taken by much black South African literature under apartheid, it is ungenerous in its suggestion that this form arises from such intellectual weaknesses like "posturing" or "sloganeering".

The primary explanation for the form is surely that art and culture were viewed as a strategic part of anti-apartheid political struggle. This was certainly the case for the way in which Black Consciousness approached cultural practises – as the exercise of "moral and intellectual leadership" central to "the making and unmaking of hegemony" (Peterson, 2006:165). And while literature may have been overburdened and reduced by this conscientizing task, it clearly performed important work, contributing to the mass mobilisation on the 1980s and 1990s. As Robert Holton notes in his primer on global inequalities, "objective social differences only become inequalities when they are understood as violating social norms and when they are seen as socially generated and thus amenable to social reform. For much of history, inequality was seen as natural and a product of God's will. It was part of the order of things." (2014:11)

However, some loss of nuance in favour of an unambiguous didacticism may, in part, be attributed to the particular pressures exerted by the classed nature of townships. Certainly, much black South African prose was written by the township elite – if not elite through economic capital, then through education and cultural capital. This is because black writers under apartheid were in the minority economic position of having the time, education and resources to write – and yet, because of the nature of racial segregation, densely populated townships meant that professionals and middle class residents were often "living side by side with working people and the poor" (Mayer quoted in Bonner & Segal, 1998:58). The result was that acutely felt status differences and attendant questions of legitimacy would have exerted their own pressures on cultural products. This can be conceptualized in terms of Sumit Sarkar's notion of a "middle class consciousness" which is ambivalently divided between loyalty to the working classes and aspiration towards gaining entry into the upper classes (2000).[14]

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[14] I read South African literature as primarily being a middle class literature, with most South African novels reflecting a societal position that is awkwardly or precariously balanced between poverty and exploitative wealth. In this way, I follow Pierre Bourdieu's positioning of writers as occupying "a *dominated position* … which is itself situated at the dominant pole of the field of class relations" (1983:319).

Nevertheless, in postapartheid South Africa, inequality has persisted, alongside the development and expansion of the black middle class and elite. And as inequality persists, so does the need to legitimate the dominant class. It is the continual work or production that legitimacy requires that leads Rodney Barker to read Weber's account of legitimacy primarily as an activity through which legitimacy is claimed, and not as a prescriptive or normative account of what legitimacy entails. Thus rulers and governments are continually legitimizing themselves.

> The claim of rulers to special status or qualities, and the actions they take in cultivating this claim, are the central part of endogenous legitimation, of the self-justification of rulers by the cultivation of an identity distinguished from that of ordinary men and women." (Barker, 2001:3)

And while this action is typically the preserve of governments and rulers, this performance of legitimacy in apartheid South Africa had the effect of denying authority to English liberals while stabilizing hierarchies of race. That many critiques of apartheid attempted to attack its legitimacy according to similar notions of moral authority meant that various groups and individuals adopted elements of the legitimizing discourse, merely positing the replacement of one elite by another.[15]

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What this thesis then seeks to understand is the inextricable relationship that South African political discourse, with its emphasis on race and racism, has with notions of moral authority and legitimacy, and how South African novels and political interventions have mediated, subverted or fallen prey to this cultural logic. Thus, I investigate how claims of legitimacy have worked and circulated at various points and moments in South African history, and how moral legitimacy has conditioned and developed the form of South African prose narrative.

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[15] More recently Steven Friedman has noted that assumptions that South Africa's problems are solely the result of an immoral and corrupt postapartheid ANC regime merely hide the historical fact that the negotiated settlement of 1994 "failed to alter the economic patterns that exclude millions from the economy's benefits" (2019:280). These assumptions thus enshrine their own particular brand of moralism – or lack thereof, this time in the guise of state corruption, highlighting the continued salience of rivalry and discourses of legitimacy among the dominant classes.

One way in which we might frame the relationship between legitimacy and moral authority is to think of it as a meritocratic form of thinking. That it functions to "obscure and extend economic and social inequality" by reading the social through the individual, where individual qualities are considered innate, thus excluding the primacy of social location (Littler, 2017:7;3-5). Its form is also predetermined by socially constructed notions of status, valorising middle-class values while positioning working class culture as abject (Littler, 2017:5-7). Even Amartya Sen, who does not read meritocracy as mere ideological construction, highlights the profoundly contingent nature of "merit" on the notion of what is construed as a "good society".[16]

From this perspective it's useful to consider two quite different novels, both responding to constructions of a "good society" in very distinct ways: one, André Brink's *A Dry White Season* ([1979]1984), narrated firmly from inside apartheid's moral and ideological universe, and another, Modikwe Dikobe's *The Marabi Dance* (1973), drawing back to a world prior to apartheid hegemony, in which a variety of discourses circulate and jostle for supremacy.

Where Dikobe's novel traces the seemingly amoral and anarchic world of pre-apartheid Johannesburg slums, Brink's novel sketches a moral response to apartheid which inevitably collapses into apartheid moralism. In the novel, Brink's protagonist, an Afrikaner schoolmaster named Ben, unwittingly ends up in a deadly battle with the apartheid government Security Branch when he attempts to uncover the mystery surrounding the death of school janitor, Gordon Ngubene, and his son. However, despite Ben's humble attempts to "[make] a few small practical arrangements" to help "a couple of people I happen to know personally" (71), his actions elicit the punitive response of the regime so that his interventions result in the death, detention and exile of the individuals he hopes to help. He also remains trapped within the logic of an apartheid moralism which slowly degrades his legitimacy as a father and a teacher. In

[16] "The general idea of merit must be conditional on what we consider good activities… The promotion of goodness, or compliance with rightness, would have much to commend it, and in this basic sense the encouragement of merit would have a clear rationale. But given the contingent nature of what we take to be good or right, there would inevitable by alternative views regarding (1) the precise content of merit, and (2) its exact force vis-à-vis other normative concerns in terms of which the success of a society may be judged" (Sen, 2000:6).

this way even the potential for political martyrdom is denied to him when his marital infidelity is exposed.[17]

It transpires then, that the only the small political gain, having his and Gordon Ngubene's story told, is made by someone who stands outside the prevailing moral currency of the "honest, decent…[,] churchgoing.. family man" of which Ben is a part (59). Where Ben's "dry white season" positions the moral horror of apartheid alongside the creeping death and devastation wrought by the great drought of 1933, the frame narrator of the text, a hapless unmarried romance writer, describes his account of a "dry white season" as the writer's block which eventually motivates him to write Ben's story. Thus the tragedy of Ben's story remains framed by a narrator who appears to have little interest or investment in Ben's project. As the narrator blithely notes, "I've known dry patches in the past, and I have always been able to write myself out of them again. But nothing comparable to this arid present landscape" (11).

By contrast, Dikobe's narrative negates the possibility of any merit or morality underlying the stratification of society. We see this borne out in the trials and struggles of Martha whose talent for singing is squandered through the vicissitudes of her location amid an uneven mix of urban squalor and conservative rural convention. But her narrative is significantly framed by the two Ndlovus – two amoral criminals who epitomize the picaresque nature of Johannesburg life. In the opening narrative, MaNdlovu, the local shebeen owner, enlists Reverend Ndlovu to help her deposit the dubiously attained money of her estranged dead husband. Reverend Ndlovu, after extorting a decent amount of alcohol and a kiss, absconds with her money, boarding the Mafeking-Salisbury train. Yet in no time, the stolen money is in turn stolen from him. Thus the Reverend, who is a fraudulent priest, with no training and in fact lacking the ability to read the bible at all, experiences this ironic reversal with a profound sense of moral indignation:

> The location children are all crooks. They learn these things in the bioscopes. I have been a priest and respected by people. The Native Commissioner of Bethal gave me a certificate of priesthood and the people killed two oxen when I was

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[17] Another example of a man of conscience trapped within the logic of apartheid morality can be found in JM Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980). In the novel, a well-meaning magistrate attempts to form an emotional connection with an indigenous woman and to help the indigenous inhabitants living around the colonial frontier station he occupies. He fails in both pursuits and is branded a collaborator, tortured and expelled to the margins of his community.

> ordained as the Reverend Ndlovu. I have now been touched by profane hands. I have buried the dead and had their sins forgiven, but those blue-nines! I pray for them to go to hell. I didn't steal the money from Ma-Ndlovu. She gave it to me because the gods of Lobengula willed it. And she, Ma-Ndlovu, did not work for it. She staged Marabis and sold beer on Sunday. It's a sin to work on Sunday… (24)

That Ndlovu has himself attained the money by stealing it and that he is only nominally a priest disappears in the moment of outrage: a view which is only possible because everyone else is assumed to be illegitimate and corrupt. Thus, as the corruption of Reverend Ndlovu is exposed, so is that of the society where people kiss "on the pretext that they were brothers and sisters" (1) and where men make love to "mothers and daughters" (1). From this representation of the social economy – inextricable from its governance by the Union government, the Native Affairs Department, the church and the police – moral authority, merit and legitimacy are already corrupted notions. This is especially evident in the Reverend's tirade when a white porter tells him to report the robbery to the authorities, a task made all the more difficult because the thieves who stole his money were pretending to be police.

> Ah! My friend, nice because you are a white man. White people believe other white people even when they tell lies and swear to God that they are telling the truth… Bishop Mtembu was sent to jail for breaking his service contract with a white farmer, because he wanted to plough according to the agreement, the farmer refused and the Bishop left the farm without notice. The farmer reported him to the police and charged him with desertion and breaking his contract. He tried to explain to the Magistrate that the farmer had agreed to give him four acres for himself to plough and when he wanted to plough according to the agreement, the farmer refused. So the Bishop was arrested and charged and sent to jail. You see, my friend, you are white and I am wrong. (24)

This piece, so illustrative of the veneer of justice painted onto an unjust situation, recalls Sol Plaatje's point about the racialized distribution of justice in *Native Life in South Africa*, "[i]n the law courts the Natives do not get the same justice as the whites. A Native convicted of an offence gets, in the first place, the punishment which a white man would get and something extra for the colour of his skin" ([1916] 1998: Ch.10).

That the white porter responds to Ndlovu's speech by resorting to a predictable paternalism ("The white man is doing all he can for the black man. You must be good to the baas and the baas will do all he can for you. You hear, my boy?'" [25]) merely enrages Ndlovu more. He counters this paternalism by asserting an alternative

hierarchy, undifferentiated by race: “Please don’t call me ‘your boy’. I am older than you by ten years. Please don’t call any man older than you ‘boy’. It’s not manners” (24).

In Dikobe’s excoriation of commonplace claims to moral authority and legitimacy, we find the alternative to society’s fraud and criminality not in those paternalistic overtones offered above, but in the turn towards anti-apartheid activism. By the end of the novel, safely back in Zimbabwe, outside of the confines of South Africa’s oppressive system, Reverend Ndlovu actually does train to become a priest and learns to read. But the gospel which he ends up preaching when he returns to Johannesburg is not the Christian one, but that of black liberation.

In contrast to the moral clarity contained in the final pages of *The Marabi Dance*, the moral clarity which *A Dry White Season* reaches towards becomes increasingly evasive. It’s disconcerting, then, that a novel so preoccupied with the moral response to apartheid is unable to produce an alternative moral framework. Ben’s great revelation by the end of the novel is precisely that the imposition of his own moral framework is that which renders his actions futile and destructive: “I wanted to help. Right. I meant it very sincerely. But I wanted to do it on my own terms” (304). In this way, prior to this awareness, the logic that Ben follows remains only nominally distinct from the imminent paternalism of the security police and from that of the crooked lawyer, Levinson, who bemoans the futility or lack of gratitude expressed by black characters to their ostensible white helpers (62, 69).

Correspondingly, Ben is also frustrated in seeking justice by the apparent morality of his society: “my real problem, he notes “is benevolence, Christianity, understanding, decency. Not open hostility… But this thick, heavy porridge of good intentions on the part of people obstructing you ‘for your own good’, trying to ‘protect you against yourself’” (234). A “porridge” which stands both for the hierarchized pastoral care threaded throughout Afrikaner society and the thick glutinous consistency which restrains and impedes Ben’s attempts to help those around him.

The resulting perspective is one in which moral truth is contained elsewhere, beyond the cultural framework of white South Africa: “Everything one used to take for granted… now turns out to be illusion. Your certainties are proven lies. And what happens if you start probing? Must you learn a wholly new language first?” (161). Apartheid’s moral vocabulary, its “sense of adulthood”, “self respect”, the primacy of family life with its “tender and elevating influence”, the importance of a sense of

responsibility towards educating children and the habit of working hard and regularly, cannot reach beyond itself.[18] At worst this vocabulary delegitimizes progressive action by framing it in terms of immorality and hypocrisy – it provides the "moral horizon", as Aletta Norval has suggested, which restricts political movement and autonomy.

This is why Ben's only ally on his fellow teaching staff, a young teacher called Viviers, remains one of the more unsettling, albeit peripheral, characters in the novel. As Ben becomes more alienated from the moralistic structure of his society, he finds Viviers's political idealism and his open condemnation of moral hypocrisy "more aggravating than the disdain of others" (72; 262).[19]

This is why Viviers's response to finding out about Ben's extramarital affair with the journalist Melanie Bruwer is particularly significant. Earlier in the narrative, Viviers has confidently asserted that the Security Branch would not be able to coerce him, but when the Security Branch leak photos documenting Ben's affair, Vivers responds with open disdain.[20] It is not only Viviers's blatant ignorance of the extent to which he has been manipulated by the Security Branch that is farcical, but that his sense of his own moral rectitude highlights the extent to which coercion and manipulation was achieved through moralistic discourses. "Mr Du Toit…" he says,

> I hope you don't mind my saying so, but I do feel you've let me down terribly. I've always taken your side, from the very first day. I really thought you were concerned with an important cause, and with basic principles. But to do what you have done now— (292-3).

That Ben's privacy has been violated, or that the Security Branch were involved in the collection and dissemination of these photographs are insignificant to Viviers, whose "basic principles" remain firmly trapped within the moral horizon of the regime. That the Security Branch is able to deploy Ben's infidelity to effect his social exclusion equivalently emphasizes this point.[21]

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[18] These quotes are from Lindie Koorts's article which provides an interesting account of Afrikaner paternalism drawn from DF Malan's speeches (2013:559-560).
[19] Ben is embarrassed by his enthusiasm (198) – and more than once, the teacher is described as a "young dog", both pointlessly aggressive (71) and superficially excited "at every new idea" (198).
[20] Viviers: "Why should you be sorry? If they think they can intimidate me they have a surprise coming" to which is added a pledge of loyalty bolstered with a "smile of satisfaction" (226).
[21] In fact, the moralistic and paternalistic language of the Security Branch is consistently alluded to – from the experience where Ben feels guilty, and as though he is incriminating himself, without knowing why (60, 115) to their paternalistic overtones (62, 115,225). It's evident in my analysis of *Late Bourgeois*

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We return, then, to the small scene noted at the beginning where the young Coetzee is facing the gaze of the coloured children. In a sense then, this thesis is primarily interested in the stories people tell themselves to justify, mollify or deny the power of that gaze which the young Coetzee feels as he is reminded of his social privilege. Novelists, and the totalities they produce, have embodied these feelings, have represented them and have at points attempted to write against them. The question is one of legitimacy – both on a statal level, but also in terms of the individual's sense of goodness and integrity in the face of those who are denied and excluded.

The young Coetzee's discomfort and the equivalent means by which groups justify their dominance according to various criteria links the personal and individual to the collective and the state. For while a common response would claim, "but I am not responsible for your suffering", it is exactly these legitimatory discourses which allow governments and elites to position themselves as either disinterested or as the heroes and benefactors of the poor.

In this way, Sarah Gertrude Millin is the clear, if unexpected, place for this study to start, since the naturalist world of her novels emerges from her concerted belief that miscegenation was an injustice and that the coloured community and its impoverishment was the abject result of imperial arrogance and immorality. The result is a prose that is as moralizing and didactic as it is racist.

Thus, the first chapter considers Millin's *King of the Bastards* (1949), published shortly after the National Party took power in 1948. This novel, while largely presenting a rewriting of her most famous novel, *God's Stepchildren* (1924), nevertheless highlights the ways in which Millin's racism was invested in white internecine rivalry and conflict.

In this later novelistic revision, Millin constructs a world which actively posits the Afrikaner – for her, synonymous with the poor white – as below the English South African, a clear response to the 1948 elections and an equivalent anxiety about Afrikaner nationalism. The outgoing United Party statesman Jan Smuts's foreword to

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World (in Chapter 2) that Gordimer, as a writer, is aware of this tendency and attempts to write beyond – or rather beneath it – in a poetics which requires more to be hidden than exposed.

the novel, equivalently indicates how her vision was invested in denying the legitimacy of Afrikaner nationalists – yet not to dismantle the notion of power, but to highlight how necessary the Englishman's role must be.

Chapter Two then presents an account of some of Nadine Gordimer's early novels, *A World of Strangers* (1958) and *The Late Bourgeois World* (1966), specifically as they work to undermine the legitimacy and neutrality of the white South African observer by highlighting the textuality of ostensibly neutral observation and the effect of racial division on conceptions of totality.

The bulk of the chapter will consider how *The Late Bourgeois World* depicts a recuperated legitimacy, not in the white dissent and activism which was being brutally repressed in the 1960s, but outside the margins of a white world view, outside of either narrator or narration. This dissent from the status quo, emerging as secrets, remain seemingly inaccessible to the reader and are highlighted by semantic and textual multiplicity and obscurity. In this way they register both the increasing repression and surveillance of the apartheid government and a morality and legitimacy which exist outside of the stifling quietude of its gaze.

By Chapter Three, the study will return to the reawakening of mass resistance in the 1970s and early 1980s, showing how the later reemergence of anti-apartheid Nationalism ushers forth the development of a legitimatory discourse within the new black politicized elite, particularly in their depiction of the 1976 Soweto Uprising. In this sense, I consider Miriam Tlali's *Amandla* (1980), Mbulelo Mzamane's *The Children of Soweto* (1982), Mongane Serote's *To Every Birth its Blood* (1981) and Sipho Sepamla's *A Ride on the Whirlwind* (1984), and how along with the liberatory discourse they contain, they also present the developing class striation within Gauteng townships. Thus, despite township elites invariably positioning themselves as the bearers of popular consciousness, the novels trace an emerging discomfort about the gulf between the educated elites and those spontaneous and unruly mobs which the nationalists would seek to discipline in order to claim their legitimacy through popular consent. This issue will be picked up again, later in Chapter Five, when postapartheid South Africa exposes the continuing problems of legitimacy experienced by the ostensibly new national elite.

Chapter Four then concerns itself with the 1980s and early 1990s, the latter days of apartheid in which the legitimatory discourse shifted to accommodate governmental reform as well as the increasingly militarized repression of Total Strategy. Within this

context, I consider John Miles's 1991 novel, *Kroniek uit die doofpot,* both in terms of its singular and original response to the depoliticizing discourse of the time as well as its representation of self-deception and the racialization of language.

By the final chapter, we will have entered postapartheid South Africa in which continuing structural inequalities continue to trouble the legitimacy of the ostensibly new elite. Thus, in my analysis of Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* and Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light*, moralism concerning race and racism and the construction of victims as social heroes both highlight the various social mobilities at stake and their subsumption in outdated discourses on race, gender and language, as well as the new elite's anxious attempts to legitimize itself amid the continuation of popular insurgency.

1. Millin and the Frontier of Sexuality

"He was obeying the dictate of the first law of white South Africa, which is: 'Thou shalt not let your fellow whites sink lower than a certain point; because if you do, the nigger will see he is as good as you are." – Doris Lessing, *The Grass is Singing*

A scene from *King of the Bastards* (1949) by Sarah Gertrude Millin highlights the textual dynamics of legitimacy and desire that might torment the writer of miscegenation. Within the precepts of bourgeois morality, she must exalt the virtues and urgency of racial segregation, while, paradoxically, documenting and describing miscegenation and illicit desire.

Two historical characters, an early 19th century Dutch missionary, Johannes Van der Kemp, and an early Afrikaner frontiersman, Coenraad de Buys, are brought together by their various dealings with the amaXhosa in the Eastern Cape. Coenraad is there to improve his situation on the frontier, helping the Xhosa chief, Gaika (sic), in return for refuge and nominal power, while Van der Kemp has been sent by the London Missionary Society (LMS) to convert the members of Gaika's kraal. Whereas Coenraad has already fathered a number of interracial children with various partners, Kemp will, later in the narrative, on his mission station in Bethelsdorp, attempt to assimilate by marrying a 15 year old Madagascan slave.

So Van der Kemp and Coenraad meet, and shortly afterwards Van der Kemp narrates the story of his redemption, confessing his past to Coenraad. "[F]aint-hearted only before [his] lusts," he describes himself as having been "the slave of vice and godlessness":

> "The brothels of Leyden knew me; dancing halls—so named—of the lowest"… The absorbed, oblivious missionary, excited by his memories, continued. He

> was speaking, not to Coenraad, but himself. Even his language took that *literary form* in which, through many nights, he had told his pillow of his sins (91; my emphasis)

Following this episode, Coenraad's perspective on Kemp will change, though it is not the knowledge of Kemp's past that changes Coenraad's perspective, but the way in which Kemp tells it. "He can speak of God as much as he likes," Coenraad thinks, "He *enjoys* to remember these things" (93; my emphasis). Similarly, when Kemp marries the young slave woman, claiming to have "followed the wish of God" (178), the reader will know by "a look on his face" which is "not entirely religious—an ecstasy … noticed in senile men smitten with their sex" (178) that Kemp is not a holy man, but perverse according to the types described by early psychiatrists in terms of "the remanifestation of the genital drive in old age" (van Haute & Westerink, 2016:xvii).

In this context where there is an ostensible gap between the legitimacy claimed for action, and a character's deeper motivations, pleasure and enjoyment become suspect. Indeed, that which "instinctually" or "prejudicially" keeps races separate is, in Millin's conception, a "profound feeling"…and can be overcome only by another biological force, such as sexual desire" (cited in Coetzee, 1988:153).

It is then also notable that what betrays Kemp's true inclinations is the "literary form" that his confession takes, his enjoyment of the memory. What this instance highlights then, is how sexuality potentially disrupts discourses of moral legitimacy – no less, when that legitimacy is claimed as a justification for political agency.

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The work of Sarah Gertrude Millin (1889-1968) not only presents the discourses of South African racism in its crudest forms, its "nakedness" and "shamelessness" (Coetzee, 1988:137), but highlights the organisation of racist fantasy and affect within the contested boundaries of the developing nation state. The significant internecine rivalry between the two dominant segments of South African society – Afrikaners and English-speaking South Africans – would invariably shape the South African discourse on race. In this sense, Millin's work is one basis from which to trace the various factors and narratives which continue to inform racial discourse in South Africa today.

Between 1919 and 1966, Millin published (locally and overseas) 17 novels, two autobiographical works, two political biographies, an extensive war diary and two

accounts of South Africa. Given the reception and prodigiousness of her output, she could be considered alongside Olive Schreiner (1855-1920) and Nadine Gordimer (1923-2014) as the most significant South African authors of the late 19th and 20th century (Coetzee, 1988:138). But unlike Schreiner and Gordimer, whose works have been widely received as progressive readings of the state of South Africa, Millin presents a particular difficulty within the South African canon. Aligned with the dominant racial ideologies of her time, her literary skill and vision relies on a gratuitous and lurid racism which structures and saturates her writing. It is the inescapability of Millin's worldview that has determined and occluded critical work on her oeuvre.

Reviewing Millin's biography, Sheila Roberts (1980) notes that Millin "suffers now from almost total disregard, and, it is possible to argue, deservedly so" (250). Reminding readers that Millin's racism made her "hardly likeable" (250), Roberts allows Millin's biographer the comparative honour of crafting such an exemplary narrative, that it makes even Millin appear less despicable: "in spite of my lack of enthusiasm for Millin as a writer," Roberts notes, "I was enthralled by Martin Rubin's account of her" (252). Nadine Gordimer, reviewing Rubin's book in the *Times Literary Supplement*, provides a more balanced account of the complexities of Millin's biography and life, though necessarily qualifies her admiration with disdain "Millin…was a remarkable woman, she was also a monster" (1978:1012). This sentiment is highlighted by the article headline, relegating Gordimer's praise to a secondary position, with minimal room for ambiguity: "A Brilliant Bigot." Even in 2013, pre-empting his critics, one scholar notes: "Given the crudeness of [her] racial paradigm, it is fair to ask why one would bother returning to Millin's fiction in this day and age" (Eatough, 2013:396).

Insofar as critics have felt vulnerable or tainted by an association with Millin's work, it's notable that Millin's biographer himself attempts to avoid this issue by arguing that her life and work are important primarily in their descriptive capacity, for depicting the racism of white South Africa. To understand Millin is, therefore, to understand white South Africa and apartheid, with Millin "as a symptom—a victim" Rubin claims (1977:11). Thus, through a "bland one-to-one generalisatio[n]" (Green, 2000:119-120), Rubin relegates Millin's cultural significance to a case study of

apartheid ideology, claiming a congruency between Millin and white South Africans which is tendentious, both logically and historically.[22]

For in attempting to justify a full study of Millin's life and work by locating its significance outside of the actual object of the study, Rubin manages to elide the significant heterogeneity of white South Africa within the historical period he is addressing. This diversity, partly expressed by the political and cultural conflict between English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking South Africans (or Afrikaners or Boers) produced what Saul Dubow refers to as an "internecine intensity of white politics" (2006:206):

> [i]nternal divisions along class and ethnic lines meant that white society was anything but homogenous. During the inter-war years the visible poverty of 'poor whites' became a major campaigning issue for the developing Afrikaner nationalist movement which was apt to blame the social predicament of poor whites on the rampant materialism of British imperialist and capitalist interests (Dubow, 1995:166).

In turn, these divisions influenced the discourses and development of the incipient apartheid state; they are respectively encoded in Millin's work, shaping the racist paradigms that inform her work. Seeing Millin's work through the reductive binary of white versus black occludes and distorts the worldview which informs her novels, reducing our understanding both of her work as well as its significance for approaching the various conflicts through which the South African nation state has been shaped.

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Given the societal importance placed on sanctioning interracial relationships in the early 20th century, it is hardly surprising that a South African woman writer might adopt this as the central concern for her novels.

As a public concern, miscegenation was widely legislated, beginning initially with the curtailment of extra-marital sex among white and black people in 1927, with

[22] Rubin claims that "Millin was above all a white South African" and that "her outlook remained limited to that of the typical white South African" (1977:11).
Both Nadine Gordimer and Shelia Roberts take issue with Rubin's claims about white South Africans. But curiously, this is not because "white South Africa" was actually far from homogeneous in terms of class and culture, but in their capacity as writers, they highlight the fact that 'white South Africa' had also produced writers who were firmly critical of both apartheid and Union-era racial segregation.

attempts to extend this law to interracial marriages in 1936 and 1937. All forms of interracial sex and marriage would eventually be outlawed by the apartheid government in 1949 (Dubow, 1995:181-182). As Dubow pertinently claims, "[t]he Mixed Marriages Act, perhaps more than any other single statute, symbolised the meaning of apartheid for supporters and opponents alike" (182). But more so, what the initial 1927 legislation of interracial sex suggests is that anxieties about miscegenation preceded apartheid, and that in this early form they presented one means by which to dampen the internecine conflict between English and Afrikaans-speakers by producing them both as white. In this way they reflected the political expediency of racial segregation and the language which encoded it. As Dubow notes,

> Racial segregation can indeed be seen as the counterpart to the creation of a unified white South African nation. Earlier, reference was made to the transformation in meaning during the 1920s of the word 'race'. Whereas it had previously applied to relations between English and Afrikaners, it now became applicable to whites and blacks. This change in application is indicative of the process by which a unified sense of white identity was engendered through the exclusion of blacks from civil society" (Dubow, 1989:15).

Of course, this attempt at unification would prove tenuous by the time the Afrikaner nationalists came to power in 1948. But importantly, with an emphasis on sexuality, this "unified sense of identity" could be imbued with a particular moralism which proffered the moral legitimacy of white dominance.

Millin's achievement, then, was to translate a national or social question about race and public policy into a domestic and sexual one, positioning white women at the moral centre of her novels. But, importantly, it is white English-speaking women who became the moral centre in her work. This can be understood in terms of Nancy Armstrong's claim that the representation of sexuality in the modern novel served the purpose of highlighting women as moral actors within society. As Armstrong notes,

> [the] struggle to represent sexuality took the form of a struggle to individuate wherever there was a collective body, to attach psychological motives to what had been the openly political behaviour of contending groups, and to evaluate these according to a set of moral norms that exalted the domestic woman over and above her aristocratic counterpart (1989:5).

Though the discourse on interracial relationships may already have been opened by the South African government's legislation, Millin took authorial charge of this discourse,

converting it into a discourse on sexuality – one that distilled moral and prejudicial notions around race into "common sense" representations of middle-class morality. As Dubow notes, this was invariably the significance of miscegenation as a societal preoccupation: it was a discourse that fused the public and the private, which Millin, as a woman writer, was adequately positioned to take up. Dubow notes:

> [t]he [perceived] danger of racial mixing was particularly acute because it operated in the private arena as well as the public domain; it linked anxieties relating to sexuality, the family and the individual with the broader concerns of race (Dubow, 1995:181).

In this way, Millin's earlier writing encompasses the various concerns of pre-apartheid South Africa. This entailed foregrounding women's role within the moral economy of white supremacy by representing miscegenation as a moral problem. However, as the unity of English and Afrikaans segments grew more tenuous amid the growth of Afrikaner nationalism, Millin's investment would clearly turn towards advocating the legitimacy of English-speaking South Africans. This was reflected in the moral centrality given to English-speaking women in her later work.

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Millin's preoccupation with sexual morality makes it peculiar that Coetzee should claim that "the force that drives white men to defile themselves with black women is never represented in Millin['s work]" (1988:155). Though he later argues that Millin's writing is heavily marked by her "adaptation of [then] respectable scientific and historical thought" (138), drawing variously from Social Darwinism and degeneration theory, Coetzee misses the point that, though Millin did not directly represent the motivations behind interracial sex, she was clearly concerned with the role of sexuality in miscegenation.

Millin represented interracial sex as sexual aberration, on par with early 20th century discourses around "inversion" and paedophilia. In this respect, an especially influential, and overlooked, figure in her writing is the German-Austrian psychiatrist, Richard von Krafft-Ebing. Variously considered "the founding father of sexology" (Vleminck, 2017:65), Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* (first published in 1886) is

considered a foundational work for the scientific study of human sexuality (Vleminck, 2017:65), also contributing to the development of the confessional scientific discourse around sex, of which he became a fundamental figure (Foucault, 1990:63-64).

Krafft-Ebing wrote about sexuality at the time when the "degeneration theory" which critics have highlighted in Millin's work (Coetzee, 1988:143) was at its prime, with perversion read as a "functional sig[n] of degeneration" (Vleminck, 2017:66). Krafft-Ebing was also responsible for providing the first "psycho-sexual" definition of sadism and masochism as parallel perversities – notions which, along with their constitutive sexual aims of activity and passivity, would find their way into Millin's depictions. But by far the most telling indication of Millin's interest and familiarity with Krafft-Ebing's work resides in the title of her best-known novel, *God's Stepchildren* (1924).

In *Stepchildren of Nature,* his biography of Krafft-Ebing, Harry Oosterhuis highlights the peculiar mixture of pity and condemnation that is clearly signalled in Krafft-Ebing's adoption of the figure of the step-child. Here is Krafft-Ebing writing about perverts:

> Science shows us that such moral monsters are stepchildren of nature, unfortunate creatures, against whom society has to protect itself, to be sure, but who should merely be rendered harmless and who should not be made to suffer for their social incapacity and their sexuality, for which they cannot be held responsible" (cited in Oosterhuis, 2000:95-96).[23]

Given the manifestly paternalistic tone of Krafft-Ebing's description, the parallel between his designation ("stepchildren of nature") and the title of Millin's novel ("God's Stepchildren") strongly indicates influence, particularly because various English translations of Krafft-Ebing's major work, *Psychopathia Sexualis,* were being published from 1893. What, then, can Millin's interest in sexuality as perversion tell us about the representation of race and legitimacy in her writing?

[23] Krafft-Ebing's notions of sexuality and degeneration additionally drew from Morel's theory of hereditary degeneration in a "neuropathic family" (Oosterhuis, 2000:53).

The 1920s, Effects in *God's Stepchildren*

Millin's most well-received novel, *God's Stepchildren*[24] plots a neat tragedy, delineated in four parts, whereby the early sins of the father, Reverend Andrew Flood, are meted out on successive generations of coloured children who seek to escape the fate of their "black blood," yet are simultaneously denied entry into the white community. In this sense, it depicts a fantasy in which the crime of miscegenation is continually repeated, until the repressed returns, quite literally, when Barry the final descendent (who, we are told, even physically resembles Andrew Flood) faces the ostensible truth of his mixed blood, and returns to his coloured family.

In his discussion of scientific racism in South Africa, Saul Dubow notes that despite the urgency with which Social Darwinists sought to define "colouredness," due to "their status as a marginal or residual category…it was impossible to define coloureds in essentialist terms" (1995:186). There was also a widely held belief that many "coloured" individuals were "passing" as white (1995:188). Suturing anxieties around the potential unreadability of "coloured" subjects were a plethora of racist stereotypes embodying various notions of moral and physical degeneration (Dubow, 1995:187) which served to compensate for a lack of scientific research to validate these claims.

It was clearly Millin's interest to explore how these mythologised effects could be imprinted within social reality. To account, though, for the conceptual blurredness and unreadability of the coloured passing for white, she had to depend quite heavily on the vague notion of an instinctual "racial consciousness" that could intrinsically discriminate between races (cited in Coetzee, 1988:153). Pertinently though, in an era of paternalist ideology, Millin also relied on female characters, and their interiority, to embody these ideas. In this way, she positioned white women as the primary gatekeepers to sexual community. Two instances of this gatekeeping in *Stepchildren* are instructive to our understanding of the sexual politics underlying this decision:

Elmira Kleinhans, the white-looking great-grandchild of Andrew Flood, after years of socialisation in white boarding schools, is about to be propositioned for

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[24] Hereafter referred to as *Stepchildren*, with *King of the Bastards* referred to as *Bastards.*

marriage by Henry Krell, the son of a wealthy white Cape Town merchant. Elmira's plans will be foiled, though, when she meets Henry's parents. This is because Mrs Krell looks upon Elmira "with the defensive suspicion and hostility of the mother about to be robbed of her young" (152). This maternal possessiveness means that Elmira is experienced as an "interloper in [the mother's] nest," presaging an "impending loss" (152). Later that evening, Mrs Krell will appeal quite hysterically to her husband about this loss of maternal significance. The words she uses in her plaint are apparently unintentional, presented as a Freudian slip: "He notices us so little now that if we were *to paint our faces black* he would not be aware of it" (153; my emphasis). This unprecedented choice of words will remain on Mr Krell's mind when he later decides to look into Elmira's background, uncovering the fact that Elmira is of coloured descent and thus forcing the relationship to be broken off.

Another instance occurs one generation later, when Elmira's son, Barry, returns from England with a British wife. Edith, his older and white half-sister, is horrified:

> Edith told herself that she was trembling with indignation for the sin Barry had committed in marrying a white girl, but she knew in her heart that she was suffering for more personal reasons. For nine years she had dreamt of Barry's return. And now every moment of his return would, she foresaw, be stabbed with jealousy for her… Gone were her dreams of a peaceful old age, hallowed by his need of her and by her pride of him. In neither sense was he anymore hers (283-284).[25]

Though Edith, unlike Mrs Krell, is conscious that this is an interracial union, the jealousy and insecurity which they express is strikingly similar in its possessive maternal rendering. This is particularly notable, because Edith is not Barry's mother, nevertheless, she finds herself identifying as such, describing his marriage as a "defection" (286; 288). The rising pitch of envy and anxiety will act itself out in a similarly parapraxical way—

> She had not definitely formulated them [her words], had not even consciously known she was going to say them, yet her face flushed and her voice breathless even before she spoke…as if her crafty inner self, having secretly laid the plan, had wrought compulsion on her innocent outer self to execute it (287).

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[25] Consider the similarity to Mrs Krell's possessiveness about her son: "[for] she had pictured him always and inevitably as her son, nothing but her son. And, suddenly he had thrown her over" (152-153); "never mine—only mine—again! I don't want to share him, and have the least part at that!" (153).

Upon discovering that Barry's wife, Nora, is pregnant, Edith forces Barry to disclose the fact that he is not white to his otherwise ignorant wife. Millin clearly intends to indicate that the violence of this intervention is terrible, but tragically inevitable and morally necessary. Thus Edith's brutality in outing her "son" leads to a peculiar reflection on her part which is eventually imbued with the suggestion of divine sanction. It is as though her racial gatekeeping is equivalent to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to cleanse an original sin, passed down between generations.

> Although it had hurt her to see them happy, although the jealousy in her had made her force this ruinous crisis, no sooner had she done so, than she would have given, she felt, anything in the world to make them happy again… 'Oh God, why am I like that?' she cried in her heart. 'What is this twistedness in me that won't let me be good? Why do I have to make suffering for others, even if it causes me to suffer myself?' It struck her all at one with an irony that dried the tears in her eyes that God would be able to answer that question. He, too, had created suffering for which He must suffer (291).

Thus, what Millin describes as the "profound feeling" of racial consciousness ("instinct" or "acquired prejudice") is entrenched in the unconscious of these English South African women through a pseudo biological, even biblical, notion of protecting the species in what manifests as maternal defensiveness and envy.[26]

Notably, this manifested anxiety about possessing a child can be read in terms of what Juliet Mitchell in another context posits as women's unrecognised wish to be accorded the power and status of a man in "the only form legitimated by culture" (Mitchell, 1974:7). In this sense, the anxiety expressed by Mrs Krell and Edith about losing their male children is equivalently about prestige and power within patriarchal society. That Mrs Krell unintentionally compares this to being black ("if we were to paint our faces black") suggests a particular urgency to the dangers involved in a loss of status, an awareness of the depths of the social hierarchy. In this way, racial

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[26] Nevertheless, the racialized unconscious with which Millin provides these mothers will not reappear in *King of the Bastards* (1949) a number of years later. The kind of Freudian conception of an unconscious that is present here – slips of the tongue and unconscious actions that serve to police the colour line – are notably absent in her later novel, where a profoundly odd note reflecting Millin's distaste for psychoanalysis will emerge when she compares psychoanalysts to witchdoctors (129). It's worth noting that Wulf Sachs's *Black Hamlet* was published in 1937, and given the small size of the Jewish community in Johannesburg, Millin may have been responding to Sach's psychoanalysis of John Chavafambira, a Manyika healer-diviner.

consciousness as the province of white women, both highlights the idea that women play a prominent moral role within the drama of racial segregation, but also a latent anxiety about preserving one's place within the racial hierarchy.

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To return to South Africa's history of internecine conflict and the place of Millin's work therein, we are faced with another occlusion that pervades critical approaches to Millin's oeuvre.

It is *God's Stepchildren* (1924), the general consensus states, which was Millin's most successful novel. This assumption has meant that it was her only novel to have received prominent critical treatment, as well as being one of the very few of her works to have been reprinted since her death. But this assumption of success and centrality forms part of what I will argue is a fundamental misrecognition of her work that imbues it with a sense of continuity which distorts the way in which her novels developed over time according to their registration of social change.

This is to say that *God's Stepchildren*, though it did mark an important point in Millin's career, was not well received within South Africa.[27] As Rubin notes, "[d]espite the greater praise by the critics, *God's Stepchildren* did not make any particular impression upon the reading public and its sales were not notably good either in Britain or South Africa" (1977:84). In contrast, the novel was successful in the USA, where it became a bestseller, garnering significant praise (Rubin, 1977:83-84). Millin's greatest South African success was actually published 25 years later, just after the fall of Smuts's coalition government. But this novel, *King of the Bastards* (1949), would go on to be neglected within the critical imaginary of South Africa, held as the novel which presaged Millin's steady decline: her relegation of whatever artistic merit she retained towards becoming a full-blown apartheid functionary.

Nevertheless, *King of the Bastards* was a far greater success than any of Millin's previous novels, indicating that the South African reading public was now more generally "attuned to the author's patterns of thought," allowing the novel to

[27] Rubin does, though, indicate that *Stepchildren*'s success overseas and the positive reviews it received from some overseas publications led Millin to see the novel as her "finest fictional achievement" (1977:83).

become "one of the bestselling novels in the history of South Africa" (Green, 2000:228). By contrast, the novel fared badly overseas, leading her American publisher, Harper, to refuse the renewal of her contract (Green, 2000:230).

Michael Green, the only critic to highlight these issues, asks what is clearly a pertinent question regarding the widespread assumptions regarding Millin's oeuvre:

> Why should *Bastards*, universally adjudged by these critics to be far inferior to *God's Stepchildren* – even at the level of readability – as a literary work, have found success where *God's Stepchildren* had not? Most significantly, why do critics continue to treat *God's Stepchildren* as *the* indicator of South African racism in literature? (2000:120)

To answer this question, Green posits two possible factors – firstly, that this indicates an instance in which South African critics remained trapped within "perceiving [their] literary history from a metropolitan perspective" (2000:122), and secondly, that by the time *Bastards* was published, the South African reading public had changed, moving from an investment in segregation based on territorial terms towards "developing a racist cast of a more biological bent" in accordance with Millin's predominant writerly vision (2000:121).[28]

Bastards is, though, not a well-executed novel, either in terms of its narration or characterisation; this is likely a factor in the lack of critical interest it received. But it is precisely the novel's unreadability that makes its success significant in approaching the larger questions concerning South African racism and Millin's position in the canon.

To claim that the misconception that positions Millin's most successful novel as *Stepchildren* is merely a case of prioritising international recognition, or due to *Bastards*' literary weakness, only accounts for a minor part of *Bastard*'s occlusion. Paraphrasing Margret Cohen, Franco Moretti reminds us that "without understanding that forgotten works are shaped by a coherent, if now lost, aesthetic, one simply

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[28] This is the subject of Coetzee's analysis of Millin's work in his essay "Blood, Taint, Flaw, Degeneration: The Novels of Sarah Gertrude Millin" in *White Writing* (1988). The strength of Coetzee's piece is that he contradicts the widely held truism that racism is inimical to the writerly project, indicating how Millin co-opts a pseudo biological discourse to represent South African society. Nevertheless, in Coetzee's otherwise nuanced essay, he claims that "Millin's ideas on blood and race, and the complex of feelings that underlay these ideas, change little between 1920 and 1950" (150f). Green responds to this by claiming that Millin's audience had changed by 1950, with the popularity of *Bastards* highlighting a "distinct cultural shift in white English-speaking South Africa" (2000:122). However, I would rather argue that Millin's work does, in fact change, along with her society, and that this is registered in the differences between *Stepchildren* and *Bastards.*

dismisses them as uninteresting or inferior in terms of aesthetic(s) which have won out" (in Moretti, 2013:88). To understand more comprehensively, we need to consider the fantasized popular reception of *Stepchildren* as an indication of how one historical era has come to eclipse another within the South African imaginary. This is analogously a misrecognition of the (white) South African nation, and a fantasy about its unified identity, forged through depictions and sanctions on miscegenation—sexuality. Through considering the two novels in terms of the "broad social processes that underlie cultural selection" (Moretti, 2013:138), I intend to highlight some of the conflicts, fantasies and pressures exerted on literary representations of legitimacy from the 1940s onwards.

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On considering the titles of our two novels, "God's Stepchildren" and "King of the Bastards", it becomes evident that, taken within the oeuvre of Millin's work, the latter novel performs some level of rewriting for the former. Retaining the focus on paternal authority (God, king) and offspring, both titles read as depictions of aberrations within the white patriarchal family (stepchildren, bastards), analogous to the developing South African nation state. This repetition of concerns is further strengthened by the repeated figure of the missionary who performs a dubious, false morality within the novels: the historical figure, Reverend Johannes Kemp is clearly the basis for Millin's writing of Andrew Flood in *Stepchildren* (Green, 2000:119); Kemp himself appears in *Bastards*, as the foil for Millin's historical protagonist, Coenraad de Buys.

Though Millin returns to her various preoccupations with race, sexuality and morality, the texts fundamentally differ in their focus and structure. While *Stepchildren* is a novel of "dynastic ambitions… trac[ing] the history of a *flaw*" (Coetzee, 1988:139; original emphasis) through an intergenerational framework (Coetzee, 1988:143), *Bastards* adopts the form of a historical novel, mapping the political state of South Africa via a narration of the past through the exploits of Coenraad de Buys. Likewise, by the time Millin is writing *Bastards,* her focus has shifted beyond miscegenation, extending to a broader concern with sexuality and its pathologies.

Bastards relates a number of historical episodes, loosely drawn from Theal's accounts of early South African history (1894). In the main historical narrative, contemporary politics are recast through their ostensible origins – the South African

frontier. The frontier lends the narrative its contemporary significance, exposing as Eric Walker would claim "the deep marks which frontier conditions had impressed on European South Africa" (in Legassick, 1980:44).[29]

The narrative follows Buys's trek out of the Cape Colony, first across the Fish River, and later north, across the Orange River. During Buys's dealings with various Xhosa and Zulu leaders, he accrues a motley group of followers, some the offspring of his various interracial relationships and marriages and others the political and social outcasts of the Cape Colony, following him in his pursuit of power outside the confines of colonial society.

Critics may not have recognised *Bastards* as a rewriting of *Stepchildren*, due to post-publication litigation that resulted in the removal of *Bastards'* framing device, disrupting the intended disciplinary closure of the narrative. Green (2000), Coetzee (1988) and Rubin (1977) appear not to have noticed that "re-printings" (rather than new editions) of the novel had been altered, and that subsequent printings' initial and final pages had been excised. The action, which remained undeclared by both Millin and her publishers, was due to a court order instituted by the Buys family on 26 July 1950 (Millin Papers, A539). The family issued an interdict restraining Millin and her publishers, Central News Agency, "from reprinting, publishing, circulating or selling further copies or editions of the book and for damages of defamation" unless subsequent printings excluded the specified pages.[30] That subsequent printings of the novel had these parts removed is evident in the UK/Heineman copy of the novel may also account for some part of its lack of success overseas.

The excluded material includes a frame narrative for the story of Coenraad de Buys, where the Buys great-grandchildren debate whether they should attempt to deny their mixed racial heritage and pass as white.[31] Similar to Barry in *Stepchildren*, Buys's

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[29] This interpretation which locates the origins of segregation and apartheid in the early South African frontier came to be known as "the frontier thesis of history" and will be discussed later in the chapter.
[30] These were: pages viii, pages 1-4, two paragraphs on page 336 and the whole of pages 337 and 338. In fact, this court interdict appears to be the only collected archival material on the novel; as an apparent correlation to this, the collected papers of Millin housed at Wits University library do not include among other manuscripts from this period, a manuscript for *Bastards* (Millin Papers, A539).
[31] Having been slandered by Millin, Buys's descendants would have claimed legal recourse for those parts of the novel where Millin mentioned them specifically by name. According to Green (2000), she had interviewed Buys's descendants while conducting her research for the novel; it appears, she had no reservations about using their real names in the framing narrative.

descendants make the "sensible" decision of returning to their non-white community, performing the same disciplinary closure of that in *Stepchildren* in 1924.

Millin's clear interest in rewriting *Stepchildren* two decades later thus leads us to a consideration of the political and social changes which condition the different political environments from which the two novels emerge.

The 1940s, Origins in *King of the Bastards*

Given the anxiety surrounding the social status of white women depicted in *Stepchildren*, it is interesting to note that the 1920s were a time of relative optimism, with the advent of South Africanism and the political union between Afrikaans and English-speaking South Africans. Published in 1924, the novel followed the adoption of the 1920 Native Affairs Act and the 1923 Urban Areas Act – two pieces of legislation which would, along with mining reform and the Native Lands Act (1914), "collectively hel[p] establish the framework of the segregationist state" (Marks, 2001:203). These laws were buttressed, as Shula Marks notes,

> [by] paternalist notions of trusteeship and segregated 'parallel' institutions, for which one might read white supremacy, and were crucial in cementing the alliance between Smuts's English- and Afrikaans-speaking supporters, and thus for [Smuts'] vision of a broader white South African nationalism" (Marks, 2001:203).[32]

By contrast, in the late 1940s when Millin was writing *Bastards*, much had changed. Urbanization and the rise of Afrikaner nationalism had deepened the antipathies between Afrikaners and English South Africans, leading to increased defensiveness and insecurity in both communities regarding the welfare of their cultural group alongside a fomenting rivalry over who should legitimately govern the country.

Added to this was Afrikaner anger around South Africa's involvement in World War II. Afrikaner nationalists had been opposed to supporting Britain against Germany,

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[32] In Rubin's account of Millin, he notes the closeness between Millin, Smuts and Hofmeyr as contradictory, given Millin's later defence of the apartheid regime. In this respect, he seems peculiarly unaware of the continuities between Smuts and Malan's (NP) rhetoric on race (Marks, 2001:212).

which was considered a cultural ally (Worden, 2012:100; Beinart, 1994:136; Davenport and Sanders, 2000:346). Concurrently, antisemitism (and Nazi sympathies) had been on the rise in South Africa (Norval, 1996:45-46; 77-79). Millin already highlights this in her 1934 edition of *The South Africans*,

> the anti-semitism spreading overtly through the post-war world jerked him [the Jewish South African] out of his happy dream… And those Jews who once felt themselves so secure in their white skins that they could afford to resent the encroachment of those who were not white, have now, in their own misfortune, a deeper understanding (217). [33]

In 1948 Smuts's Union government would lose the general election to the Afrikaner National Party (NP). Beyond anger at Smuts's decision to support the Allied forces in WWII, anxieties around urbanization, labour conditions and job reservation (Dubow, 2014:4; Davenport and Sanders, 2000:372), a significant aspect of the NP's success was their campaign slogan of "apartheid", as a consolidated and morally legitimate philosophy for legislating race in South Africa (Dubow, 2014:4; Beinart, 1994:138).

Given this political background, Smuts's foreword to *King of the Bastards*, presumably written the year after he had lost power to the Afrikaner Nationalists (and surely another factor in the novel's popularity), becomes particularly significant. Calling the novel Millin's "*magnum opus,*"[34] he notes that the narrative is constructed from "fragments of myths and truths belonging to days before the Great Trek, and strongly bearing on the Great Trek":

> In our preoccupation with the Great Trek, the earlier phase of our history has been neglected. Here it stands, freed from the obscurity in which it has been buried for so long. We can now form a juster opinion of our beginnings, and of the formative forces which have shaped this history of ours. The tragedy of colour which is South Africa stands revealed for all to see it…" (v)

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[33] For Coetzee, the "utter failure" of *Bastards* is due to its reliance on "an ethnic typology of tribe after tribe that Millin has to elaborate out of her own entrails" due to the overriding structure of the novel, resulting in "too much of the 'solitary figure surrounded by space'" (1988:162). But in so far as Coetzee is correct, his perspective suffers from a dearth of historical consciousness, in that he does not reposition the failing and blandly episodic character of the novel as Millin's attempt to map what she perceives as the perversity of an Afrikaner 'type.' Coetzee does acknowledge that Millin produces ethnic distinctions within the dominant classes, "even when the milieu is wholly white, her cognitive set has a strong ethnic bias, seeking to pick out German or Jewish or Dutch or Anglo-Saxon features" (158). Nevertheless, he never develops this insight in the light of Millin's treatment of Afrikaners.

[34] A cautiously worded letter from Alan Paton to Millin's publicist notes that he would "hesitate to agree with General Smuts who calls it her magnum opus"; adding "I most certainly hope that it will achieve the success that its qualities deserve" (1948 cited in Paton, 2009:195).

Smuts, denouncing what he perceives as the arrogance of Afrikaner nationalism, calls for a "juster opinion of our beginnings" – specific beginnings which he reads as the *origins* of the particular racial anxieties that his party has been charged with not addressing adequately.

If *Stepchildren* can be understood as a novel of effects, which considers the consequences of interracial sex on the descendants of these unions, then *Bastards* is a novel that attempts to trace origins – the ostensible origins of the Afrikaner, as well as the sexual origins of miscegenation. Thus, Millin's suit in this novel is that she presents a history which precedes the Great Trek, where the protagonist is a character who, for her, is significant in his amorality. This metonymy is then used to reflect on the development of the Afrikaner as a political subject and the conflict that would develop between Cape Liberals and Afrikaner Nationalists.

Digressive links with a broader history are provided throughout the narrative – and the narrator turns specifically towards the Great Trek in the second half of the novel, when Buys arrives in Grahamstown:

> From here [would be] issued the Manifesto of the Voortrekkers before they went on the trek of treks—the Great Trek. The Boers *said* they were weary of the plunderings of the dark peoples; their losses over emancipated slaves; the odium cast on them, under the cloak of religion, by the missionaries. They *said* they dispaired [sic] of saving the Colony from these evils; and that, being assured the English were as little eager to keep them as they to remain, they were now leaving the fruitful land of their birth to enter a wild and dangerous territory with only the wish to live quietly and justly; molesting none unless molested; at peace with all; under God and their own laws (208-209; my emphasis).

Millin's focus on what the Boers claimed as their reasons for the Trek, and her emphasis on merely recording what they said, suggests a disparity between the account and the actual motivation. The real motives are not provided, but Millin clearly signals that feelings of persecution, abolition of slavery and political sovereignty do not fully account for why the Boers left the colony – recalling, in this respect, the exalted claims that Van der Kemp makes regarding his decision to marry the slave.

Taken historically, though, it appears that the Trekkers said little to nothing regarding their reasons for leaving the Cape Colony – and it is precisely this trait which

allowed for the Great Trek's inscription as a point of origin for Afrikaner nationalist mythology:

> [w]hereas the participants in the Great Trek did not justify their actions with historical arguments, those very actions formed the basis of the myths by which Afrikaner nationalism, as it developed, came to be justified (Hamilton, Mbenga & Ross, 2010:31).

Through this cultural process of meaning being imposed in retrospect, the Trek became the central, consecrated event in the Afrikaner nationalist view of history (Hamilton, Mbenga & Ross, 2010:33).

Questioning the moral legitimacy and validity of the nationalist myth, Millin puts forward her own perspective in decidedly pithy fashion: "[t]he difference between Coenraad and the trekkers who followed him was that he turned his back, not only upon some white men, but upon all white men" (210).[35] Thus Buys, in *King of the Bastards*, is put forward as an origin story (or primal myth) of the Afrikaner, serving Smuts's injunction that people "form a juster opinion of [their] beginnings." Millin also uses the comparison to suggest that Afrikaners are deficient in their loyalty to their race – that they "turned [their] back[s]… upon some white men". In this way the novel is centrally invested in questioning Afrikaner nationalists' claims to the moral legitimacy needed to address racial problems in South Africa.[36]

Conversely, Buys as a character was not especially congenial to constructions of Afrikaners as a consolidated cultural identity. O'Meara notes that Afrikaner nationalist mythology produced "Afrikanerdom" as a "300-year struggle" to establish roots in South Africa, while "constantly under attack from primitive inhabitants of the region and the relentless enmity of British imperialism", construed as "the cleansing fire" of long struggle ordained by "Divine Will" (1983:4).

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[35] Millin's representation of the frontier recalls Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis of American history (1893), with the frontier as "the outer edge of the wave—the meeting point between savagery and civilisation." As Legassick notes, "he was concerned primarily with the frontier as isolation from a parent society, as an area where the natural environment had a greater shaping influence on behaviour" (Turner, cited in Legassick, 1980:57).

[36] Presenting Coenraad de Buys as a foundational figure is equivalently antagonistic towards Afrikaner nationalism and its attendant historians who, though they "viewed the rebellions [and thereby the earlier phases of trekking which Buys was a part of]…as essential formative phases in the Afrikaner character" contrastingly also "downplay[ed] the role of these dubious people" (Legassick, 1980:65).

But if Afrikaner nationalists promoted a falsely consolidated identity, then many English and liberal historians, in criticising Afrikaner nationalist versions of history, "[took] for granted the discrete identity and organic unity of 'Afrikanerdom'…simply revis[ing] the moral assessment of Afrikaner nationalism from positive to negative" (1983:5). Thus the "disparate, differentiated and highly fractious Dutch- and Afrikaans-speaking populations [were] unproblematically reduced to a static and monolithic ethnic group" (1983:6).

In many respects, this tendency materialised most prominently in popular conceptions of the encounter at the frontier. Martin Legassick highlights how the frontier thesis of history was thought to "explain" more contemporary racial attitudes in South Africa, with slavery and Calvinism on one side, Cape paternalism and liberalism on the other, "and the frontier between them" (1980:52):

> the 'frontier tradition' thesis imposed a dichotomy—sometimes the dichotomy of missionaries and officials versus colonists, sometimes of Afrikaner nationalists against their (largely British) opponents, sometimes of Cape liberalism against Republican frontierism (1980:47).[37]

While Buys's story would appear to validate Legassick's claim that the frontier was actually a "fluid zone of social relations" (1980: 60f), Millin's representation of the frontier attempts rather to provide the "true origins" of the race problem in South Africa. But while one can read her primary stance as putting forward the homogenising and dualistic constructions perpetuated by the "frontier tradition", by resurrecting and returning to a figure like Coenraad de Buys, she manages to complicate her own representations of legitimacy and race. Though Millin clearly followed Smuts in believing in the moral supremacy of English liberals, her own encounter in writing the frontier destabilises the very narrative of white supremacy that underlies her work.[38] And in this sense, this frontier resembles that other frontier which Freud posits – that of sexuality.

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[37] This is opposed to the kind of claim made by de Kiewiet (see Lipton, 2007:14-15) that the "group consciousness" that developed in the encounter between races on the frontier was primarily responsible for racism.

[38] The narrative figure of Coenraad de Buys bears some similarity to Freud's figure of Moses in *Moses and Monotheism*. At a time of mounting Zionism, Freud's historical narrative of Moses depicts him as an Egyptian; thereby inscribing difference at the origin of the Jewish identity (Said, 2004).

Problems of Sexuality

In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality,* Freud defines the sexual drive in terms of a frontier:

> The concept of instinct [*Trieb*] is thus one of those lying on the frontier between the mental and the physical" (Freud, 1905:168).

I follow La Planche in translating the German *Trieb* as "drive", rather than "instinct" (*Instinkt)*. This approach reads instinct as "a preformed behavioural pattern," corresponding to the biological notion of hereditary impulses adapted to a particular object (La Planche, 1985:10). Instinct, as a conceptual term, would effectively match Millin's naturalist aims – with its emphasis on an ostensibly biological predestination; however it is hardly sufficient for novelistic representation, which relies on interiority and social context. In this sense, the preferred term – and heuristic – is the polymorphous *Trieb,* which denotes the psychically derived individual aspect of an instinct and is most accurately represented by the sexual drive.[39]

However, the distinction between instinct and drive problematizes the normative approach to sexuality which earlier sexologists, like Krafft-Ebing, put forward. For if the sexual drive is not purely biological, but is understood as "the psychical representative of an endosomatic, continuously flowing source of stimulation" (Freud, 1905:168), it becomes distinctly more difficult to isolate a normal aim or function for human sexuality.

As I have noted, Millin's attempt to demythologise the origins of the Afrikaner through the narrative of Coenraad de Buys, cannot be extricated from the text's preoccupation with origins and sexuality in which miscegenation is constructed as a political problem. Yet, having drawn on Krafft-Ebing to conceptualise miscegenation, Millin's representation of sexuality comes up against exactly that conceptual blurring between perversion and normality which Freud had highlighted in his use of drive or *Trieb*.

Thus, in working its way back to Coenraad's origins, *Bastards* attributes a significant role to Coenraad's mother, Christina, as the reason for Coenraad's sexual

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[39] This distinction is worth highlighting since James Strachey somewhat confusingly translates *Trieb* as "the sexual instinct".

dysfunction. The historical narrative begins with Christina, twice widowed at the age of 30, marrying Coenraad's father, Jean de Buis, who is only 22.[40] Christina's nine children from previous marriages crowd the house, and Coenraad's father is described as being "ruled and tormented" by her (5). She is also the driving factor in their relative penury, wasting what little money they have after Jean's parents have effectively disowned him (in protest to what they see as an unnatural age difference and Christina's dubious character). As Green notes, the historical account of Christina is further embellished by the implication that she has poisoned her previous husbands, much like the famed murderess, Daisy de Melker (2000:128).[41]

But behind Christina's murderousness is not merely a hunger for material gain, but an excessive generativity and sexual desire: "[A]s she desired men, so she desired children. She was a natural breeder" (21). In Freud's conception of sexuality, of the component polarities that determine individual sexuality, he isolated what he termed the *aim* of the sexual drive (1915). The aim is positioned in contrast to the sexual object: "Under a great number of conditions and in surprisingly numerous individuals, the nature and importance of the sexual object recedes into the background. What is essential and constant in the sexual instinct is something else" (1905:61). For Freud, this will be the sexual aim which leads to the "release of the sexual tension" both through sex and more diffuse and varied "preliminary sexual aims" (1905:61;62).

The aim of the sexual drive occurs in two forms: passive and active. Activity, associated with mastery and the tendency to act upon an object, and passivity, the desire to be acted upon by another (1905:71). While Freud initially followed the descriptive logic of his times, attributing the distinction to masculinity (strong/active) and femininity (weak/passive) respectively, he later abandoned this, acknowledging that activity and passivity co-existed in men and women, and that these instincts were fundamentally subject to change: "[e]very individual… displays a mixture of the character-traits belonging to his own and to the opposite sex; and he shows a

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[40] Millin's disgust at relationships that involve significant age difference (e.g. Edith and Riall, Kemp and his Malay wife, and Lindsell and Elmira) clearly inscribes generational boundaries in normative terms, which is coherent with paternalist hierarchies which conceptualise black people as the wards or children of white men.

[41] A similar claim is later made of Mantatisi (sic), the Batlapi queen regent.

combination of activity and passivity whether or not these last character-traits tally with his biological ones" (Freud,1905:142f). [42]

Millin's work, on the other hand, does not merely rely on gendered designations of passive and active sexuality, but puts forward the distinction in normative terms. In this way, the active sexuality represented by Christina, who pursues men rather than being pursued and who wants offspring for non-functional pleasure, disrupts the paternalist structures of society.[43] Prior to Coenraad's running away from his family, Christina will marry her daughter's brother-in-law, effectively becoming her daughter's sister (20). The disruption of genealogical linearity and a confusion of familial roles is variously pointed to as one effect of pathological sexuality, with a similar instance occurring in *Stepchildren* when Adam Lindsell marries the much younger Elmira, fathering young Barry Lindsell who, though he is Edith Lindsell's half-brother, becomes her adoptive son.

Through disrupting the paternalist structure, Christina has altered the societal role ascribed to her, resembling Millin's depiction of "poor whites" in *The South Africans:* "A poor white is someone of European extraction who cannot support himself according to a European standard of civilisation, who cannot keep clear the line of demarcation between black and white" (1934:187). "And finally" she concludes, "poor whites are, in these days, born into their degraded existence" (1934:187).[44]

A similar debasement is suggested of the Afrikaner community, with Christina's degradation aligned to the Afrikanerisation of the Buis family name: a symbolic act, "debasing" the original European heritage of the original:

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[42] For Freud in 1905, both the sexual object and the sexual aim are important to the study of sexuality. But because in Millin's case the sexual object of her novels is virtually always the same, this analysis focuses on her representation of the aim – and how it is used to construct pathological sexuality.

[43] In Freud's 1905 version of *Three Essays,* infantile sexuality is associated with non-functional pleasure, "without reference to an object or to sexual difference" (Van Haute & Westerink, 2016:ix).

[44] In this way, what was quite evidently a problem of class was understood as a problem of race. As Thompson notes, by 1939 "the average English-speaking White was twice as wealthy as the average Afrikaner" (2001:183). The ensuing sense of disruption and its relation to degeneration reflects why 'the poor white' problem was both a galvanising force for Afrikaner nationalism as well as a deterrent for South Africa adopting a strictly scientific racism:

> given the overwhelming prerogative to maintain white prestige as a whole, any association between white poverty and Afrikaner racial incapacity was potentially highly divisive. Thus, although white South Africa was potentially highly receptive to eugenic theories which asserted its racial superiority vis-à-vis blacks, the wider implications of eugenics theories became distinctly unpalatable once the fitness of whites in general came under scrutiny (Dubow, 1995:166).

> A new nation was building in the Cape; the French past had been trodden out; the third Jean de Buis became Jan de Buijs or Jan de Buys or simply Jan or Johannes Buys. There was just the thought of a "u" behind the pronunciation of the name Buys as BASE (16).

This suggests that the ostensible decline of the Afrikaner nation (the majority of "poor whites" were Afrikaners) involves a loss of linguistic or cultural heritage reflecting sexual excess or pathology. In Millin's curious account, the change from Buis to Buys is not merely rendered in prescriptivist terms, but is actually charted as a form of debasement (as the capitalisation of "base" suggests).

This is all to indicate the novel's anticipation of Coenraad's desire for women who are not white. In this schema, Coenraad's mother's active sexual aim determines his passive sexuality, which, in Millin's texts, appears as a decisive factor in a man's tendency towards interracial sex. Passivity is then concurrently attributed to a masochistic desire to destroy one's white identity—

> But why, indeed, had he [Coenraad] in his time, been drawn to savages and not, in van der Kemp's words, to gentler women? Was it a malevolence in his nature or in nature itself? Was it, in some strange way, to punish his mother for his father's death and her marriage to a man twenty years younger than herself? Was it an inheritance of the wild sexual quality that had driven his mother to nameless deeds? Was it a matter, not complex, but simple—the casual beginning with Maria [his first partner] in which lay his end[?] (96).[45]

In the quote above, Coenraad is not presented as an agent with choices, but as one subjected to pathological sexuality. In this sense, the reasons for aberrance must be a result of some form of inheritance, reaction or personal failing. In this way, his sexuality is constructed in relation to his mother's active sexuality: as retaliatory or sadistic, as pseudo-biological inheritance, or as sexual passivity ("the casual beginning").

Keeping in mind that representations of sexuality have the capacity, as Leo Bersani has noted, "to orientate our imagination of how political power can and should be distributed and enjoyed" (2010:21), it is understandable that Millin's society, heavily structured by a paternalist hierarchy, would treat with contempt those who do

[45] Millin, in a short biographic sketch of each of the characters appearing at the beginning of the novel, draws a causal line from Christina to Coenraad's sexual relationships with black women: "it seems likely that he felt something which made him, later, prefer black women to white" (1).

not actively maintain their position within its ranks.[46] In keeping with Millin's subversion of Afrikaner nationalism's origin myth, Coenraad's passivity grates against the capacity for Afrikaners to be respected as strong and active leaders. A similar constellation of affect is equivalently present in the pathologising of homosexuality, where "there is a legal and moral incompatibility between sexual passivity and civic authority. The only 'honourable' sexual behaviour 'consists in being active, in dominating, in penetrating, and in thereby exercising one's authority'" (Bersani, drawing on Foucault; 2010:19).

Nevertheless, masculine passivity also needs to be read in terms of the "theoretical unity" of sadism and masochism (De Vleminck, 2017:76). Whereas miscegenation is presented as a masochistic act against one's race, Millin also suggests that Coenraad has turned away from white women as "punishment" for his mother's active sexuality. This, however, is not constituted as a question of agency. In fact, the link between miscegenation and a sexual passivity is rather presented as the indirect result of aggression or misogyny. This is already present in the interracial unions in *Stepchildren,* when Andrew Flood, rejected by the sociable colonist, Mary Keeble, takes Silla as his partner, and when Adam Lindsell, who will marry Elmira, gazes on her as a child, preferring her to his daughters and his white wife. This is further emphasized by the animosity Lindsell feels towards the women in his family, "Mr Lindsell had always been annoyed with her [his wife] because the girls had not been boys; and because, being girls, they were not at least sturdy and attractive girls" (131).

Therefore, rather than interracial unions being presented as an active choice in a nascent discourse about racial equality (congruent to the equality of men and women), here miscegenation is positioned as an act committed *against* white women – with sexuality having become an act of aggression or sadism. This corresponds with Krafft-Ebing's formulation of sadism which held that "the close relation between pleasure and cruelty was not specific to sadism or masochism" and originated in more general

[46] This is confirmed in the uncomfortable homosocial intimacy between Coenraad and the various Xhosa leaders who befriend him. Their affections are strikingly at odds with the rest of the text, but Coenraad is presented as silently acquiescent. One leader, Ndlambe, is described as the "obese, gift-bearing, sentimental chieftain," who cannot cease thanking Coenraad for very minor actions, and spontaneously "lean[s] forward and stroke[s] Coenraad's brown beard" (52). Gaika will then later say, "No, no, Buys, you must not think of leaving me. I love you… very much"; "You must never leave me, Buys… My heart weeps at the thought that you may leave me" (61;62).

human characteristics like “the active male and passive female roles in sexual relations” (Van Haute & Westerink, 2016:xxii).

Freud clearly drew his definition of sadism and masochism in *Three Essays* from Krafft-Ebing (De Vleminck, 2017), but while Krafft-Ebing had been reticent about the simultaneous occurrence of sadism and masochism, Freud embraced this view of perversion, emphasizing that the activity represented by sadism and the passivity represented by masochism constituted “a theoretical unity” (De Vleminck, 2017:76). This meant that both modes were “always articulated together” (De Vleminck, 2017:76). While one of the two modes would be dominant at any given time, the other aim would be subsumed in the realm of fantasy, as Freud notes, “[a] sadist is always at the same time a masochist” (1905:72).

Therefore, miscegenation, the result of masculine passivity or masochism “against the race”, can congruently be read as symptomatic of masculine aggression towards white women. In this way, a concomitant anxiety again rises to the surface in Millin’s writing, as with her 1925 representations of Mrs Krell and Edith, where to lose one’s place in the social hierarchy is to become dangerously vulnerable to the aggression of those above you. [47]

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[47] The social precariousness that haunts Millin’s work is also starkly rendered in her depictions of |Xam ‘Bushmen’, reaching its height in *King of the Bastards*. While the ‘Bushmen’ are described as vengeful and amoral (10); they are also recognised as “the artists of Africa” (9). So that, “[a]fter all the Bushmen were gone, slain every one by hunger, perished by the spear, white artists and scientists, following the hunters, sought and copied the Bushmen paintings in the caves from which they had been smoked out, driven out and utterly destroyed.” (10).

In this way, the genocide of the |Xam looms heavily over the text. As de Prada-Samper has noted, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that “the extermination campaigns against the |Xam in the second half of the nineteenth century [were] the first officially documented account of genocide” (2012:183):

> The notion that the Boers hunted the San as vermin (and all too often without the slightest provocation on their part) was quite commonplace in the nineteenth century in publications about the Cape colony, and is mentioned in popular publications from at least the 1830s onwards. Whatever conclusion is reached … thousands of San perished at the hands of commandos organised by frontier farmers, not always white, and that an untold number of women and children were forced to become serfs of the murderers or their families (de Prada-Samper, 2012:172).

While Millin was clearly not progressive enough to openly recognise the correspondence between the Jews and the San; the notion of genocide, that an entire social group might be destroyed, had just been defined in the 1948 UN resolution (just preceding *Bastards’* publication) in response to the Nazi holocaust. Given Millin’s advocacy about the plight of Jewish people, it is likely that she could have drawn the comparison.

In the light of this, it is likely that the ambivalence with which Millin faces these facts emerges in the text: with a representation of the |Xam as artists (much like herself), but then also as savage and capable of depraved violence. A fear of equivalence emerges and is then violently repressed – resulting

In the final instance, then, part of the textual changes from *Stepchildren* to *Bastards*, concurrent to the political rivalries and instabilities of the period, will derive not only on the troublesome frontier between normal and pathologised sexuality, but eventually from a broader concern that sexuality, as non-functional pleasure, is dangerous and destructive in and of itself. In this way, Millin's representation channels the fear of generativity associated with racist fantasy, in which white supremacy is rendered vulnerable "in the face of the 'vigorous' and 'virile' mass of Africans … 'flooding' into the cities" (Dubow, 1995:181).

This is the case in *Bastards*, where the white English women of *Stepchildren*, with their role as sexual gatekeepers, are absent from the narrative. Without Millin's particular moral centre, sexuality itself is left unimpeded. This is evoked primarily in the figure of Mantatisi (sic), a Batlapi leader who, upon being spurned by her intended lover, goes on a murderous rampage through the country.

Millin describes the Batlapi leader as a dominant figure, allowed the privilege to subvert her society's dictates on feminine sexuality, "[s]he was generous, inspiring, magnificent in her manner, and, so exceptional as she looked too, the people felt her to be above her sex—its decorum and chastity. They allowed her the ways of a king" (247). Unlike many of Millin's characters, Mantatisi takes pleasure in her sexuality, described in terms that are at odds with Millin's generally impersonal style in which sexual intimacy is notably absent.[48] Here the text describes how a potential lover evades Mantatisi's caresses, "since he did not like her, he refused to boast to her, and he could not help moving a little when her long fingers with the pale nails played about his arms and chest" (249). Likewise, "[w]hen Mantatisi loved she could never give enough. All she had or saw or heard of or thought of she ached to give the men she loved" (251).

After she has been rejected, the queen regent has her lover decapitated, disposing of his head and using his ceremonial brass collar as a headdress. Encrusted in the headdress is a diamond, resembling a giant "eye" which has the character of "flash[ing] in the sun as if in it were buried a thousand small sharp spears" (251).

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in a reaction-formation in which the violence of 'Bushmen' (and the dehumanisation that it implies) erupts arbitrarily into the text.

[48] Nadine Gordimer famously claimed that Millin feared and hated sex (1987).

Mantatisi is then described as feeling an "awful satiety" in the wake of the violence, "she at last owned Motsholi. There was nothing he could henceforth refuse her" (256).

From this satiation in violence, desire will again erupt as mass sadism. Similar to the way in which Coenraad's mother Christina is depicted through desire and murderousness, Mantatisi's desire culminates in the genocidal impulses of her army, raging through the countryside, killing women and children and leaving in their wake a pile of rotting corpses:

> [Her army] went naked, their bodies shining black with grease and charcoal; high plumes of black ostrich feathers on their heads; and round their necks, waists, legs, arms, and in their ears, flashing rings of brass and copper…. The story spread of an army numerous as locusts; preceded by hornets; followed by vultures; led by a giant woman who was in part an unstriped zebra; who had a single enormous blazing eye in the middle of her forehead; who fed the whole company of her warriors with the milk of her breasts (259).[49]

Described alternately as "[h]undreds of naked, pitch-black, gnashing, furious devils" (272), the Mantati are cannibals and "the enemy of all living." In this representation, unrestricted sexuality necessarily leads to cruelty and destruction.[50] The violence speaks perhaps to a growing realisation that sexuality would not yield to the segregationist's categories of society. As La Planche notes, "the crux for Freud is to show just how extended, almost universal, the field of perversions is, and how their existence demolishes any idea of a determined aim or object for human sexuality." (1985:15). A similar notion is highlighted by Freud, when he notes, that "[i]n the sphere of sexual life we are brought up against peculiar, and indeed, insoluble difficulties as soon as we try to draw a sharp line to distinguish mere variations within the range of what is physiological from pathological symptoms" (1905:74).

This is to say that the violence of the Mantati in *King of the Bastards* reads as an attempt to force disciplinary closure upon a narrative in which sexuality and pleasure disrupt the very social categories which Millin is anxious to preserve. These

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[49] It is tempting to read this scene as a return of the repressed, but I would rather argue that it is the eruption of sexuality within a societal structure that is incapable of containing it.

[50] Fundamental to this image of Mantatisi's sexuality (which corresponds to typical colonial depictions which displace libidinal energies and desire onto the colonised body) is the link with Coenraad's mother, Christina – a link back towards the anxieties surrounding internecine conflict. In that Christina kills her husbands, and practises blood magic, we are presented with a parallel, which given the significance of the origins of Afrikaner identity in this text, suggests that Afrikaners have been changed fundamentally by their encounter with the South African environment.

categories are, as I have indicated, not solely those of black and white with their attendant racist fantasies, but also those of the moral and legitimate against the perverse and therefore illegitimate.

That is to say that reading beyond the blatant racism of Millin's work towards her moralising treatment of sexuality and the specific way in which sexuality is linked to political legitimacy resurfaces the internecine conflict of white society – that rivalry for dominance among English-speaking and Afrikaans South Africans within a society which was steeply hierarchized and where the lower rungs constituted a formidable drop.

But as I have shown, in an attempt to isolate and represent miscegenation as sexual pathology, the text inevitably reaches an impasse where the ostensible frontier between normality and pathology breaks down. Within what increasingly appears as a collapsing schema, maintaining one's social position becomes increasingly fraught. This is then the secret of Millin's racism, that it is not merely a reflection of the steeply hierarchized society from which she emerges, but of the paranoia and social precarity which is continually reproduced in the individual's relation to that hierarchy.

2. Secrets and Legitimacy in Nadine Gordimer's *The Late Bourgeois World*

> "oh, the stone! Do you remember the stone? The stone under which the things had been hidden?... each word of yours had a double meaning to me, just as if another word were hidden under it."
> - Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*

> "There are possibilities for me, certainly; but under what stone do they lie?"
> – Nadine Gordimer, *The Late Bourgeois World*

Critiques of Nadine Gordimer's work have tended to focus on the political morality of her work, rather than her capacities as a storyteller. These accounts tend to read a crudely transparent moralism into her novels – an example of which is provided in *The Columbia Guide to SA Literature in English Since 1945*, where the authors characterise her novels in the following way:

> [I]ndeed it is hard not to construe her work as paradigmatic of those novels that, according to [JM] Coetzee, are content to 'supplement' history rather than seek to 'rival' it. As time passes, her novels will continue to be useful sources of historical data… *One would like to be able to say that the 'insider's' perspective that they afford is an intimate one charged with the textures of real life*; or that the characters or situations represented are so fresh and free from cliché that they acquire an (as it were) independent life in the reader's imagination. But unfortunately, as the vast majority of her South African readers have attested, neither postulate is true (Cornwall, Klopper and Mackenzie, 2011:12; my emphasis)

In this approach to her work, we find Gordimer "commit[ed] to narrative realism" (in contrast to a modernist Coetzee) and intentionally and fundamentally didactic –

committed to a more or less straightforward “moral agenda” (Wagner, 1994: vii). For indeed, Gordimer’s positioning within the international publishing world, as well as the large number of political essays she wrote during her life, played easily into the construction of her as an “interpreter and recorder of the South African experience” (Wagner, 1994:vi).

This positioning, due in part to the way that peripheral writers were constructed and marketed in the global marketplace, required a belief that “her fiction [would] function as a transparent mirror of her society, ‘innocent’ of ideological bias” (Wagner,1994:vi). And yet, as the *Columbia Guide* attests, her writing occupies this position quite uncomfortably. For one, many postcolonial critics have questioned Gordimer’s legitimacy as a reporter of South African experience. And further, if Gordimer’s work is to be read as primarily didactic, then any flaw within the moral universe of her texts would necessarily devalue her whole project.

A wide variety of critiques, drawing from these two poles, have contributed to a developing loss of interest in Gordimer’s work. Kathrin Wagner’s 1994 study, *Rereading Nadine Gordimer*, documents these developments. In this way, it provides a well-researched, but theoretically problematic account of those writers who have sought to critique Gordimer’s work. For, in taking all of Gordimer’s detractors as correct (and she does an adequate job of indicating just how much negative criticism Gordimer has received) many of the critiques she presents tend to contradict one another. This is evident, for instance, when Brenda Cooper’s claim that Gordimer is unable to represent a “totality” (1994:24) later contradicts the claim that Gordimer is writing from a totalizing western historico-cultural matrix (1994:31-32). Yet other critiques also end up conflicting with the main thrust of some of Wagner’s own argument. What the book then highlights is the atomisation of positions from which Gordimer has been attacked – leading one to suspect that these attempts to question Gordimer’s novelistic sense and legitimacy might be effects of the difficulty of Gordimer’s literature itself, rather objective evaluations.

Gordimer’s fiction appears then to have itself become a space upon which a particular contestation of legitimacy is projected. I will argue, though, that these readings elide the fundamental textuality of her work – ignoring her own engagement with the problems of legitimacy in the construction of her enigmatic first-person narratives. This is part of what is at issue when the *Columbia Guide* laments her failure

as a chronicler of South African experience, lambasting the lack of an intimate "insider's' perspective… charged with the textures of real life."

Rather than oversight, I argue that this lack of narratorial intimacy finds its most stark representation in *The Late Bourgeois World* (1966), and is part of a self-conscious and metatextual response both to the diminishing prospects of white dissidence within the 1960s and her global reception as a "reporter of South African experience." In eschewing the sham legitimacy of that role, her writing attempts to render an un-narrated legitimacy: one which remains on the outskirts of the narrative while nevertheless asserting its undefined presence.

In this way, I follow Ronald Suresh Roberts's injuction to recognise the modernist concerns in Gordimer's work, drawing away from the "misleading notion that Gordimer is a 'realist' writer… carting hard-fetched facts from the apartheid gulag" (2005:15). This also entails avoiding the critical tendency to collapse the Gordimer whose primary occupation was as a fiction writer into the figure presented by her political essays and articles. While recognising the historical context of racial segregation and government repression which animated her non-fiction work, this chapter will, perhaps generously assume that writers occupying these dual roles are able to wear more than one hat.[51]

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Within the span of her writing career, *The Late Bourgeois World* (1966) is generally taken as a break in Gordimer's political and aesthetic vision, signalling the end of an earlier developmental period in her fiction. The following phase, leading towards her "high period", would involve a shift towards a more radical political outlook, along with greater literary experimentation – leading up to the publication of her most critically acclaimed novels, like *Burger's Daughter* and *The Conservationist*.

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[51] Robert Boyers has also noted the disservice which this confusion of modes does to Gordimer's work (2005:118). One way of conceptualizing this is provided by Hedley Twidle (drawing on Roberts), in which one understands that "the critical intelligence of Gordimer's fiction often ran ahead of her nonfiction, offering more acute and prophetic social analysis than the sometimes generalized humanist register of her essays" (Twidle, 2018:99). Of course, Gordimer is hardly the only writer whose literary output has been reduced by its having been read against their non-fictional work. This is equivalently the case for Zoë Wicomb, whose critical essays have established the dominant prototype for reading her fiction.

As Stephen Clingman notes, "[l]iberal humanism is the keynote of her first two novels [*The Lying Days* and *A World of Strangers*] and, in a different way, of her third [*The Late Bourgeois World*]; her work charts an inner history of this ideology in this time" (6). Clingman thus reads *The Late Bourgeois World* as both the culmination and turning point of Gordimer's engagement with liberalism, and her departure towards radical politics (1992:90). Dominic Head, similarly and yet conversely, follows the same periodization, with *The Late Bourgeois World* signalling the end of the early novel cycle, moving towards the "dominant transtextuality" which characterises *The Late Bourgeois World*, and later, *A Guest of Honour* and *The Conservationist* (1994:32). Thus, from a textual perspective, the novella can be considered as the culmination point of various techniques and concerns from her earlier work which register the political milieu, while the brevity of its form provides an especially dense and referential text from which to reconsider the earlier texts.

The Late Bourgeois World provides a first person account of the narrator Liz Van den Sandt's day, from learning of her ex-husband Max's death, through visiting her son and her grandmother, to meeting with a PAC subversive and finally somewhat unprecedentedly deciding to financially aid the armed struggle. As Liz goes about her day she offers a retrospective account of Max's life – assessing the path that led him from anti-apartheid freedom-fighter to turning state-witness and betraying the movement. The narrative opens with Max dead, having lost his identity and self-conception as a freedom fighter and having taken his own life. In this way, betrayal of the struggle is presented as a betrayal of Max's sense of his identity.[52]

Published in 1966, shortly after the destruction of the African Resistance Movement (ARM) and the institution of 90-days detention without trial, *The Late Bourgeois World* moulds the repression evidenced by these political events into the plot and characterisation of the novel. In it, the narrator-protagonist, Liz, sketches the apartheid society around her, while recollecting the doomed life and aspirations of her activist ex-husband, Max. Opening with the news of his suicide, Liz recounts Max's life from a liberal suburban background through to his later failed revolutionary exploits. Max's life is presented as a failure: first in his apprehension for a failed act of

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[52] A similar construction is encountered in Adrian Leftwich's account of his betrayal of NCL/ARM (2002).

sabotage, his subsequent breaking under police interrogation, and then epitomised by him testifying against his fellow saboteurs.

The figure of Max clearly recalls two prominent members of NCL/ARM, a primarily white liberal underground resistance movement which practised acts of "protest sabotage" aimed at indicating that there was still active opposition to the apartheid state, and thereby challenging white consensus (Lewin, 2011:67).[53] One of its members, Adrian Leftwich, was instrumental in bringing down the movement after cracking under the pressure of interrogation, naming and testifying against his colleagues (Driver, 2015:15). Leftwich's betrayal would contribute to the other prominent ARM member, John Harris, planting a bomb in a railway station (Driver, 2015:15). While the platform was meant to be cleared, the eventual result was bungled, leading to a number of injuries and the death of a civilian bystander (Lewin, 2011:104-105).

That Leftwich's testimony indirectly triggered the events which would lead to the apartheid government's decision to hang Harris in 1964, positions both men as figures representing both the idealism and vulnerability of early opposition to the apartheid government. It also presented the first and final attempt at militant armed resistance within the white South African community. As Hugh Lewin notes, "John's bomb in 1964 delineated the extremes of state power and the possibilities for opposing it" (2011:112).

Insofar as ARM came to signal the decline and erasure of white opposition, it also highlighted the swift development of the apartheid government's Security Branch in the form of detentions, spying and torture. As former ARM member Hugh Lewin notes,

> none of us really expected to be caught, not by a police force as crass as the one that had lost its head at Sharpeville: crude, brutal and stupid. That was the old stereotype of the police which we still believed, that they were bumbling and inept. It was a comforting idea – and dangerously wrong (2011:76).

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[53] Apartheid spy, Gordon Winter, describes ARM as "a group of intellectuals, journalists and university students who had decided that sabotaging government installations (without causing loss of life) was the only way to attack apartheid" (1981:42).

This was also recognised by Ruth First, who noted that detention during this period was "part of a wider tactic for dealing with political whites, the errants who would not go into the *laager* of whites against Africans" (1965:142). She further noted that,

> some were permitted to leave the country: this was one way of physically removing opposition. If among those locked up there were men who broke under the strain of detention and interrogation, they would be used for information by the Security Branch (1965:142).

Looking back, the name "African Resistance Movement" is itself especially telling of a particular political milieu, reflecting both a naivety about political representation and a liberal promise of undifferentiated social identities. Appending the name "African" to a resistance movement of predominantly white activists would clearly become impossible in later years, particularly with the advent of Black Consciousness and a more critical discourse about political representation.

But the impossibility of the utopian identity position that ARM adopted, that they could, in Lewin's words, "escape [their] whiteness" (Lewin, 2011:45), registers an equivalent problem which was troubling Gordimer at this point. For As Gordimer's biographer notes, in the juncture between *A World of Strangers* (1958) and *The Late Bourgeois World* (1966), Gordimer had intended to develop what would later become her short story "Not for Publication" into a novel, a novel which focalized and chronicled the life of a black nationalist political leader, from his patronage under various white benefactors to his ascent to prime minister. However, this attempt at "a long-form, cross-racial fictional inhabiting" failed (Twidle, 2018:99). And so frustrated at her inability to narrate a consciousness which was not white, she instead cut the novel down into a short story, a "still-born fictional counterpart" as her biographer Roberts calls it, in which she scrupulously avoided "inhabiting the consciousness of its central figure" (Twidle, 2018:99).

Not only does this episode tells us that Gordimer was becoming increasingly aware of the distance which was growing between white and black south Africans, that "she could not see into the inner life, the going growth, of a black nationalist politicia[n]" (Roberts quoted in Twidle, 2018:99). But it also indicates that the political agency adopted by ARM, its attempt to "escape… whiteness", had, along with their now defunct movement, lost any legitimacy it had previously held. A particular path for white dissidence had now closed.

Nevertheless, in his account of John Harris's life, CJ Driver attests that

> [i]n the thirty-six months of its active existence, the ARM/NCL was, objectively, successful, not just in the damage it did (in economic terms, considerably more than MK during the same period) and the modicum of publicity it achieved, *but in managing to keep itself secret*, for all the scrupulous self-doubting of many of its members (2015:12; my emphasis).

Driver moves from this assertion to ask whether Harris's botched sabotage attempt was a "[c]ock up or conspiracy?" (2015:31) Through this question Driver gestures towards the apartheid government's active attempts at crushing resistance to ensure consensus within the white community – an argument which is supported by his account of the bomb controversy.[54] But it is this notion of a well-kept secret, the capacity or failure to maintain secrets under the watchful eyes of the state, which animates many of the accounts of this historical moment (see Driver, 2015; Leftwich, 2002; First, 1965). It is the possibility and political power of a secret which also helps Gordimer, after her failed inhabitation of the consciousness of a black nationalist, to produce a space in which she can represent political agency and legitimacy. This legitimacy, located outside her narrator, will nevertheless inflect and determine the narratorial mode of Gordimer's novella.

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One notable aspect of *The Late Bourgeois World* is its employment of first-person narration. At first glance, the narrative barely shifts from Liz's point of view. This is picked up by Kathrin Wagner in her re-reading of Gordimer's novels where she uses it to mount an ideological critique:

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[54] Driver's short book presents an account of John Harris, who Driver refers to as a "Liberal Terrorist". The text analyses Harris's life, his contribution to politics and the subsequent bomb controversy for which he was executed. In detailing "the life, execution and rehabilitation of John Harris," the book goes some way towards highlighting the utopian ideals of Harris and his fellow ARM candidates. Through the eventual description of Harris's inclusion (as the only white person) in a commemorative event for political prisoners who were executed by the apartheid government, the account highlights the anger and grief that the author clearly experiences in seeing how liberalism in South Africa would come to be tainted by white South Africans' complicity, passivity and fear.

> It is highly significant that Max van der Sandt is not allowed to speak for himself in the novel and is thus absent as a countervoice. Instead, he is seen through the eyes of his ex-wife, Elizabeth, in a first-person narration that never deviates from her perspective. (Wagner, 1994:48)

The assumption then of a fundamentally monologic character to Gordimer's text, indeed, corresponds neatly to the various charges of didacticism (arguably the preeminent monologic genre). However, it's equivalently significant that Liz's recollection, performed *in medias res* and offered in hindsight of Max's death, complicates, refines and even negates aspects of her ostensibly monologic account. As I will argue, Liz's narrative is subject to a variety of ambiguities and interruptions.

This is already evident from the first introduction to Liz, where the narrative is introduced as both partial and heavily determined by the speaker:

> I opened the telegram and said, 'He's dead—' and as I looked up into Graham Mill's gaze I saw that he knew who, before I could say. He had met Max, my first husband, a few times, and of course he had heard all about him, he had helped me get to see him when he was in prison. 'How?' he said, in his flat professional voice, putting out his hand for the telegram, but I said 'Killed himself!' – and only then let him have it (7).

The telegram, however, merely reads "MAX FOUND DROWNED IN CAR CAPETOWN HARBOUR" without any reference to the actual circumstances surrounding his death. Liz's immediate inference, though, is that her ex-husband has committed suicide. How does she know – or rather, why does she assume these extraneous details? We could be in the hands of a privileged observer, except that by initially withholding the information contained in the telegram, her own account appears rather to suggest a particular interest in how the news of Max's death is interpreted. In this way, the opening of the novel immediately draws attention to its unreliable narrator. That this is the moment initiating Liz's narration of Max's life indicates that the unclear motivation for producing a particular interpretation of his death will surely arrange the account of his life.

Thus, as Edward Said notes, "the reflective narrator is always a narrator preventing the wrong sort of interpretation. His narrative assumes the currency of a rival version" (1974:120). In her self-presentation as a privileged observer, then, Liz's interpretation signals a prominent and potentially obvious rival interpretation. To what

extent has she been complicit in Max's grizzly end? And why is the partial account worth its utterance?

When Graham reads the telegram, wondering aloud – and rhetorically – why Max might have killed himself, Liz cannot hold back a response which is compromised by what appears as guilt, thinly veiled by her protestations:

> I felt immense irritation break out like cold sweat and answered, 'Because of me!'… Graham patiently bore my angry voice, yet though he must know I spoke in the sense of 'to spite me', I saw in his face the astonishing consideration of a self-accusation I had never made, a guilt that, God knows, *he* knew was not mine. Blast him, he chose deliberately to misunderstand me. (7-8)

A sense of responsibility for Max's death slips out ("Because of me!"), and is followed by a string of negations that serve to foreground the opposite of what is claimed: "yet he must know", "the … self-accusation I had never made", "he chose deliberately to misunderstand me". These missteps are part of a number of interruptions which trouble Liz's narrative – combining into one form of the counter-voice that Wagner has diagnosed as absent.

From this perspective, a similar form of negation and parapraxis appears to deconstruct the first-person narration of Gordimer's previous novel, *A World of Strangers* (1958). In this instance the narration betrays the bumbling and good-natured exterior of a liberal foreigner, Toby, who presents himself as the canny outsider who moves freely amid the racially segregated world of 1950s South Africa.

This is particularly the case when Toby's black friend Steven challenges him about his lack of romantic interest in women from the township. The argument is significant because Toby and Steven, in their interracial friendship, pride themselves on being "private-lifers" – individuals who do not allow politics to dictate or impose on their personal lives. Notably, though, Toby's account of the disagreement suggests precisely that his sexual or *private* preferences may indeed be reflective of his politics. This becomes evident in the negations which structure his account:

> Steven *couldn't seem to stop* worrying me that evening; he said, treating the women present – as he always did when it suited him – as if they were not there, 'I can't understand it, Toby seems to find all our women too fat. What's this English taste for starved women?' *We all laughed, but he went on*, 'I've never been able to interest him in a nice African girl yet.' Everyone laughed again, and I gave him some nonsense in answer; yet he was not looking at me, he had turned away to someone else, and I understood that he meant what he said, *it was a cover* for *some*

reservation he had about me, *some vague* resentment at the fact that I had not been attracted by any African woman. He, *I knew, did not suspect me of any trace of colour-prejudice*; he attributed my lack of response to something far more wounding, because valid in the world outside colour – he believed that African women were simply not my physical concomitants. It was a slight to him; hypothetically, he had shown me some woman he had possessed and I had detracted from his possession by finding her unbeautiful" (215; my emphases).

As Toby attempts to deny the racialized nature of his beauty standards, he switches towards dismissing his friend's ostensibly sexist views ("treating the women… as if they were not there", "I had detracted from his possession") in order to diminish the credibility of Steven's criticisms. Toby does, however, earlier in the text claim that "[t]here is no distraction in the world to equal the pursuit of a woman… I had, I suppose, an Eastern equation of women with pleasure; I fiercely resisted any impingement on this preserve" (149-150). Reflecting perhaps on Gordimer's own discomfort with feminist discourse used opportunistically to posit black men as inferior (see Gordimer, 1984 and Driver, 1983), Toby's hypocrisy is given a notably political edge.

On its own, then, Toby's recognition that Steven tends to objectify women would function to deepen Steven's character, but amid the repetitive negations and hedging, the narrator betrays his discomfort at being confronted with his own preferences. Steven's question is figured as excessive ("[he] couldn't seem to stop", "We all laughed, but he went on"), and denied both in terms of its extent ("some reservation", "some vague resentment") and its substantive content ("He, I knew, did not suspect me of any trace of colour-prejudice"). Toby euphemistically notes the woman's "unbeauty", and in a final move, claims that Steven (rather than Toby) believes that black women are not his "physical concomitants" – a formal and circuitous way of suggesting physical attraction or romantic companionship that strains to distance itself from the intimacy of sexual union. In this way this passage already highlights distinct problems in assuming, as some critics have done, that Toby is the idealised western liberal against which Gordimer measures the moral corruption of South African society.[55] Rather Toby's narration suggests his conditioning by the very

[55] Again, this is illustrated by the *Columbia Guide*: "Toby's detached perspective, in terms of which all things South African are implicitly measured and found wanting in contrast with an enlightened Western 'normality,' essentially becomes Gordimer's own: a 'Martian' viewpoint, as it were, adopted as a

discourses of being a privileged outsider in which his own racism is suggested by the evasions and subsequent unreliability of his narration.[56]

While unreliable narration in *A World of Strangers* undermines the sense of Toby as a privileged observer, *The Late Bourgeois World* deploys it to a much greater extent. This intensity highlights not merely the complicity or involvement of the narrator in the story, but the actual motivations or purpose of the narrative itself. There are, for instance, a host of questions surrounding Max's life and death which Liz does not disclose. For instance, Liz never specifies how – or who – betrayed Max. She notes that the bomb he planted was found before it could explode and that "he was arrested within twenty-four hours" (54).

And yet, the events she describes are directly preceded by her receiving a phone call from Max, presumably just after he'd planted the bomb: "When the papers come out…" he tells her, "there may be something big… Don't forget" (54). That she knew about the bomb prior to its detonation is again followed by a string of negations: "Nobody knows this. Nobody at all. I didn't even tell the lawyers. I have never told Graham. It's all that's left of Max and me; *all there is still between us*" (54; my emphasis). The ambiguity of the final phrase, either suggesting a shared intimacy or a conflict, serves to highlight the obscurity which Liz's narrative generates.

Which is to suggest that important aspects of Liz's account appear, upon further reflection, intentionally oblique. A similar obscurity pervades in Liz's description of her profession as a laboratory technician. Again, readings of this representation have tended to miss the historical nuance, with critics describing her work in the lab as aptly "cool and dispassionate" and "entirely dissociated from the living human entity" (Wagner, 1994:50). And yet, Gordimer's ironizing constructions of political detachment or her problematization of the distinction between public and private have already been noted (see Medalie, 1999).[57] When Liz describes her job, it is in the following terms:

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defence against corruption or corrosion by the habitual and the familiar" (Cornwell, Klopper& MacKenzie, 2011:11).

[56] The specific textuality of the way in which Toby constructs his narration will be addressed later in the chapter when I turn towards a discussion of the titles lining his bookshelf.

[57] It is then no surprise that the image of detached and clinical work will recur in the character of Claudia in Gordimer's later novel, *The House Gun* (1998). For Claudia, the practised detachment of her medical career allows her to deny her complicity in the violence of apartheid – that she is detached from the

> analysing stools for tapeworm and urine for bilharzia and blood for cholesterol (at the Institute for Medical Research). And so we keep our hands clean. So far as work is concerned, at least. Neither of us makes money out of cheap labour or performs a service confined to people of a particular colour. For myself, thank God shit and blood are all the same, no matter who they come from. (37)

Initially the description might appear merely to confirm Liz's "cool", detached and "dispassionate" exterior, and yet, the verbal play on "we keep our hands clean" in the context of working with faeces and urine should alert the reader. For, much like Razumov in Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*, the terms ("tapeworms", "cholesterol", "bilharzia") in which Liz describes her laboratory technician job will turn out to be encased in historical and textual references. While "tape worms" recollect Tsafendas's famous denial of political involvement or affiliation in his attempt to assassinate apartheid president HF Verwoed,[58] cholesterol and bilharzia are both used earlier in the novel to signal moral and political complicity with the violence of the apartheid regime. They are referenced in Max's ill-fated wedding speech:

> What I'm asking you to look out for is – is moral sclerosis. Moral sclerosis. Hardening of the heart, narrowing of the mind; while the dividends go up. The thing that makes them distribute free blankets in the location in winter, while refusing to pay wages people could live on… It sets in pretty quick. More widespread than bilharzia in the rivers, and a damned sight harder to cure (31)

While Liz's response to Max's speech is to lament "moral sclerosis" as "that prig's phrase" (32), her continued reference to bilharzia and cholesterol, as an underlying condition of atherosclerosis, highlights the semantic multiplicity (Bakhtin, 1984:241) of these phrases. A variety of possible alternative narratives proliferate, for instance that Liz could be misremembering or attributing her own words to Max or that the

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violence of the society around her. Later, of course, when Claudia's son is on trial for murdering his ex-lover, the self-deception of this professionalism is brought into stark relief.

[58] As Hedley Twidle pithily notes, "[i]t was of course in the interests of the National Party and its security apparatus to deem Tsadendas's actions those of an irrational and delusional individual" (2019:26). As Zuleiga Adams has highlighted, the depoliticisation of Tsafendas served to draw attention away from the failure of apartheid bureaucracy – specifically in terms of Tsafendas racial classification: "What renders his subversion so remarkable is that Demitrios Tsafendas, after 20 years of illegal immigration, deportation and stays in mental hospitals, not only circumvented South Africa's identity paper regimes, where the 'normative grid was dense, surveillant and discriminatory in a totalizing way'; he also succeeded in assassinating the very man who is credited with thinking through the architecture of this grid." (2013). Gordimer refers to Tsafendas again later in the novel (28).

description of her job might function as a code for her continued involvement in subversive politics. [59]

Her disgust about Max's speech, however, resides specifically in the ineffectiveness of its naive and unmediated honesty: "[w]hat sort of show could this awkward honesty make" she notes, "against the sheer rudeness of him?" His contravention of social mores, of introducing politics into the socially-prescribed formula of a wedding, is shown to be more important than the political message he delivers: "They were all in the right, again, and he was wrong; and I could have kicked him for it…" (32) In this way, honesty as a mode of political engagement has become obsolete.

The type of politics that Max represents is thus usefully represented as irretrievable. When a newspaper report about Max's death emerges, Graham mentions that a diving team has managed to remove the car: "There was a suitcase full of documents and papers in the back, all so damaged by water that it will not be possible to determine their nature" (34). Liz's response, that the erasure of this whole trove of Max's documents is "good" (43), suggests that whatever Max remained involved with, or whatever information he still possessed, is usefully buried. Again, a negative allusion strengthens this reading, "[w]e might have been cool criminals" she notes, "discussing a successful getaway." (34) Why it is "good" that the documents are illegible, is again unclear, as Liz's account presents another aporia to the reader. And yet Liz later wonders whether the documents may have contained Max's treatise on "African Socialism," (53)[60] an optimistic political, work which assumed that the postapartheid future was close enough to discuss what should happen after liberation. Max's documents (or work), now framed as irretrievable, signal the death of a certain form of optimistic dissidence in contrast to the useful secrecy which their destruction maintains.

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[59] The striking juxtapositions which emerge from these descriptions suggest something illicit, a level of unreported information, "The calm of white coats and routine work… came from me like the bar on the breath of a drunkard" (51). And in terms of historical parallels, when Liz tells us "I had bundled the papers into a laundry bag and kept it hidden in the laboratory" (53), we might be taken back to the figure of Anne Swersky (Driver, 2015:61), who disappeared mysteriously when John Harris was apprehended by the Security Branch after aiding him by hiding explosives in her university office.

[60] "I wonder if it was the papers of the African Socialist methodology that Max took down with him in the suitcase." (53) This episode likewise suggests more knowledge on Graham's part than initially suggested.

Thus, while much of Liz's narrative of Max ostensibly catalogues the psychological weakness that leads him to become a "failed" revolutionary, there are points – "secrets" as Frank Kermode (1980) would describe them – in her own narrative and the description of her day, which not only bring the completeness and veracity of her account into question, but in doing so suggest the contours of what a fuller more honest account might be. But the narrator clasps her cards close to her chest, and the other account is merely gestured to. What is encountered then functions as a typically Conradian aporia whereby "what the tale… reveals is the exact contours of [an] obscurity" (Said, 1974:120).

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By referring to a Conradian obscurity, I am hoping to draw out some of the formal aspects of Gordimer's text that reproduce Conrad's modernism. Consider, for instance, the following narratorial statements concerning the incapacities and multivalence of language:

> 1) This scrutiny of the clichés of perfunctory communication, the hit-or-miss of words inadequate either to express or conceal, embarrassed me. Like most people, I do not mean half of what I say, and I cannot say half of what I mean; and I do not care to be made self-conscious of this (1958:113).
>
> 2) Words, as is well known, are the great foes of reality… To a teacher of languages there comes a time when the world is but a place of many words and man appears a mere talking animal not much more wonderful than a parrot" (1911:55).

While the first passage is from Gordimer's British narrator, Toby, in *A World of Strangers*, the second passage is drawn from the narration of the language teacher in *Under Western Eyes.* The similarities in the two statements indicate how Gordimer is drawn to Conrad's notion of the narrator as a "talking… parrot," with Toby's equivalent sentiment that individual subjectivity is constructed by a socially determined language which leaves little space for either agency or the accurate representation of reality.

Additionally, Gordimer's debt to Conrad extends particularly to her depictions of revolutionaries within her texts, where the porous nature of heroism and enmity indicts society by highlighting the tenuousness of these categories. Jeremy Hawthorn's characterisation, for instance, of the main question of *Under Western Eyes*, could equally be read into most of Gordimer's writing: "What are the respective claims of self-interest, social duty and common humanity?" (cited in Hampson, 1992:172).

Gordimer's indebtedness to Conrad has already been highlighted by Ronald Suresh Roberts. He notes that "Gordimer was drawn in particular to Joseph Conrad's acerbic portrayals of exiles and revolutionaries in *The Secret Agent* and even more in *Under Western Eyes,* a work of greater complexity and ambivalence" (Roberts, 2005:290). Contiguities between Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* and Gordimer's *Late Bourgeois World* in particular can further be identified by their mutual intertextual dependence on Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. The intertextuality of Gordimer's work thus appears out of place in characterisations of the author which focus on her unconsciously or automatically adopting the role of reporter and observer of South African society. While scholarship has in fact highlighted the insistently conscious textuality of her work (see, for instance Jackson, 2015; Coetzee, 2002; Clingman, 1992), recognition of this textuality should allow us to see how various literary references and returns establish a critical distance between the author and her reporting or observing narrators.[61]

Approaching Gordimer in this way, it is now possible to see Gordimer's self-conscious and at times playful awareness of the reception of her work overseas and the various demands that overseas publishers made about the way in which South African reality should be depicted. This had largely been ignored, till her biographer, Roberts, noted that in her ostensibly autobiographical *New Yorker* piece, published just after her first novel, *The Lying Days* (1953), she had essentially invented much of what was claimed to be factual. The piece, entitled "A South African Childhood: Allusions in a Landscape" (1954), describes Gordimer's childhood spent in the East Rand, amid the mines and mine dumps, with family holidays at the beach (in Durban and Cape Town), visiting relatives (in the Free State) and, finally, a trip to the Kruger National Park.

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[61] Stephen Clingman, for instance, highlights the textual references to Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* in Gordimer's 1987 novel, *Sport of Nature* (Clingman, 1992:xx). Jackson (2015) and Coetzee (2002), however, focus on Gordimer's debt to Turgenev.

Roberts notes that Gordimer had fabricated the whole episode in the Kruger Park and had "invented autobiographical anecdotes," including family members that didn't exist (2005:15).

In this way, the *New Yorker* piece already highlights the extent to which Gordimer had started perceiving the textual nature of ostensibly "truthful" accounts. Describing her eventual trip to the Kruger National Park, years after the piece had been published, Gordimer notes "I had heard so many tales and seen so many home movies about the Kruger Park ("My dear, and then the lioness walked right up to the car and sniffed the tire!") that I almost dreaded going" (quoted in Roberts, 2005:136). The *New Yorker* piece subsequently reads as an amalgamation of these tales, with the narrator's story about approaching some elephants in the game reserve providing an equivalently clichéd account of wildness experienced within safe confines. Further textual work is performed by an engineer who works within the camp and the excitement of exclusivity the narrator feels spending time with an insider. But even this is evidently another tale repackaged, with Gordimer's reading of Hemingway determining the parameters of her ostensible enjoyment: "[t]he engineer was just such a man as poor Francis Macomber might have chosen as an escort on a hunting trip" (137).

This awareness of the narratorial demands of the global publishing industry and her undermining of the first-hand nature of narrative accounts in response makes its way into *A World of Strangers* to undermine Toby's "privileged alien status." The novel particularly highlights the publishing ties between colonial centre and former colony with its demands for interpretation and distribution which condition Toby's encounter with racism in South Africa. For one thing, Toby, the narrator, is the agent of a British publisher "Aden Parrot" on assignment from the UK to cover for the temporary absence of another emissary.

When he arrives in Johannesburg, he goes through a list of notable people compiled by his mother – one of which is, "[a] writer, who'd brought out, under our imprint, the miscegenation novel now as regular a South African export as gold or fruit" (46). Later, as though to confirm the identity of this author, one character asks Toby, "[d]idn't you bring out that book there's been such a fuss about?" (61), to which he responds, "[y]ou mean *God's Creatures*?" (61)

Gordimer had at various points acknowledged the imprimatur and impact of Sarah Gertrude Millin for young South African novelists, and had also alluded to Millin's success overseas along with her dominance as a narrator of South African

experience.[62] Occupying this cultural position had made Millin incredibly successful, and so upon receiving an honourary doctorate from Wits University in 1952, the institution had lauded this aspect of her writing, describing her as "par excellence the interpreter of South Africa to the English-speaking world. This is not only because of such an essay in objectivity as 'The South Africans'… It is also, and chiefly, because of her novels of South African life" (cited in Rubin, 1977:244).

In this way, Toby repeatedly acknowledges a textual relation to his education and expectations of South Africa. His reading in preparation for his trip has delved into the gamut of published texts which describe the former colony: "The bluebooks, the leaflets, the surveys, the studies – the thick ones by professors of anthropology and sociology, the thick ones by economists and agronomists, the sensational ones by journalists" (19). But his experience of Africa when his ship stops off in Kenya enroute to South Africa is fundamentally determined by the "boy's books" (33) that he has read as a child, so that his experience of the place is depicted in the terms of imperial romance: "I had spent the day in Mombasa like Sinbad the Sailor, seeking with my northern blood the old voluptuous adventure of warm seas and idleness in the sun" (18).

Later, sitting on his bunk, the reader is allowed a glimpse into Toby's narratorial drive towards adventure which will remain an unstated motivation for his excursions into the townships and his friendship with Steven. His perspective, as much as his reason for going to South Africa, is heavily embroiled in the business of colonial publishing. The titles, read as follows, "*The Peoples of South Africa, The Problems of South Africa, Report on South Africa, Heart of Africa*", with Toby approaching them with a near religious reverence, "read[ing] the titles, the authors, the publishers' imprints, rhythmically and compulsively" (20).

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[62] Millin had established and founded South African PEN (Rubin, 1977:262) And Gordimer has mentioned how early in her career Millin had sought her out, acknowledging her as a fellow writer and offering her some level of literary community (Rubin, 1977:240). Gordimer did note, speaking to Rubin, that Millin was unfortunately destined to remain in some level of literary isolation – if not because of her politics, then due to her egotism. Gordimer relates, particularly a telling episode where Millin, after reading *A World of Strangers* warns Gordimer, with characteristic racial paranoia, that her black friends are merely spies for criminal gangs. "She was perfectly serious and sincere about this" Gordimer notes. (cited in Rubin, 1977:255).

The reference to Millin's success and centrality in the episode ("*God's Creatures"*) is playfully wrenched away, though, when it turns out the character is talking about *"White Cain, Black Abel*" (61): a humorous play on Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and Mannoni's *Prospero and Caliban* (1956).

In this way, Toby, in his haplessness and naivety, can read as a literary descendent of Doris Lessing's British liberal, Tony, in her 1950 novel, *The Grass is Singing.* In Lessing's novel, Tony, appears towards the end of the novel, to provide an outsider British view on the disintegration of the Turner household. The similarity of names suggests a direct reference to Lessing's character, and Gordimer certainly draws from a similar construction of the new British visitor who cannot appreciate the complexity of the reality he encounters, however well-meaning. As Lessing describes him,

> Because he had never yet earned his own living, he thought entirely in abstractions. For instance, he had the conventionally 'progressive' ideas about the colour bar, the superficial progressiveness of the idealist that seldom survives a conflict with self-interest ([1950] 1973: loc. 2741).

In her *New Yorker* piece, Gordimer reiterated this sentiment, however, applying it to the understanding of race within the former colony,

> [i]n a country [e.g. Britain] where people of a color different from your own are neither in the majority nor in the ruling class, you may avoid altogether certain complications that might otherwise arise in the formation of your sense of human values….The problem of how you would behave towards them if you met them can be almost purely academic (1954:139).

In Lessing's novel this construction is emphasized by Tony's stockpile of books about Rhodes, indicating both his belief in the grand imperial tale, as well as his ignorance about the socially corrosive effects of the colonial situation. In Gordimer's novel, this interest in Rhodes is equivalently employed as a symbol of ignorant metropolitan idealism and is suggested in the playful homophone presented by Toby's lover, "Cecil Rowe".[63] The textual parallel between the two novels thus usefully suggests that Toby/Tony, though helplessly bewildered by the context in which he finds himself, nonetheless implicitly understands the racial hierarchy which is operating within southern Africa.

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[63] It is worth remembering that Millin had written a biography of Rhodes and that when in Lessing's novel Mary Turner reads the line about Rhodes sitting on a bucket while dreaming of greater purpose, the reference appears to be to Millin's biography (e.g."Rhodes felt himself emperor of the universe…It was with a shock he woke to find himself once more on the brown earth. In his dreams he had been whizzing to the stars like a bucket on the wires of his own Kimberley mines" [Millin, 1952:186]). That Tony is enamoured with the imperial story of Cecil John Rhodes, makes it especially amusing that Toby spends much of *World of Strangers* chasing after and flirting with Cecil Rowe who exudes "the rites of female self-worship" (108) and who "belong[s] to the unreality through which I had fallen" (110).

As such, Toby is not merely the neutral observer from outside, but is himself conditioned by a certain perspective of South Africa that the company he works for is in the business of propagating. And so part of Gordimer's Conradian inheritance becomes evident in the way her novel reads both ways. It both allows readers to observe on a simple narrative level what an outsider would see if they arrived in South Africa, but also deconstructs the legitimacy of that account, producing a fundamentally different novel. In this subtle grounding of unreliable narration, we note the beginnings of a style which will reach its culmination in *The Late Bourgeois World*.

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Textuality, then, though it has been neglected by many of Gordimer's critics, plays an important role in her work. When Liz of *The Late Bourgeois World* complains of her ex-husband "Max simply did not know what it was like to live with others; he knew all the rest of us as he knew Raskolnikov and Emma Bovary, Dr Copeland and Törless"(43). These references are not merely intended to catalogue Max's bookshelf, but to produce a thicker statement about perception and the textuality of the narrative itself.

Again, as with her other criticisms of Max, what is significant are the terms in which Liz mounts her criticism of him. The surface significance of the list of fictional characters gestures towards the fault of mistaking fiction for real life. But as signifiers pointing beyond the text, they highlight an external textuality to the narrative, serving the submerged and opaque level of secrets implicit in the mode of narration.

This is particularly evident in the reference to Raskolnikov from Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, in the first place because Dostoevsky's text exists as a forerunner to Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* (1911; 1985) which Gordimer draws from, but also because it presents a valuable intertext for grasping the interplay of secrets and truth in *The Late Bourgeois World.*

In Dostoevsky's novel, state, church and conscience are funnelled through the character of detective Porfiry Petrovich, who rather than doggedly hunting Raskolnikov for his murder of an old lady, ominously waits for him to expose himself. This initial confidence that Raskolnikov will effectively expose himself relies on what Porfiry

describes as the inevitable failure of the criminal to conceal his crime. This, to Porfiry's mind, is due to the criminal's need to confess:

> the criminal himself, at least almost every criminal, is subject at the moment of the crime to a kind of breakdown of his reasoning faculties and of his will-power, which are replaced by an amazingly childish carelessness just at the moment when he is most in need to caution and reason. (90)

And indeed, Raskolnikov does fit this category, speaking and acting with a doubleness and allusiveness which harbours the oblique threat of giving him away.[64] Bakhtin refers to this tendency as the "half confession" of a character existing on the threshold (1984:170).

Part of Raskolnikov's half confession is not just enacted by his lunacy in returning to the scene of his crime, but by going as far as to actually narrate his killing of the old lady to the police clerk, Zamyotov, under the guise of sarcasm, including previously unknown details of where he has hidden the stolen pledges and money. The scene is a representative one, because, in Raskolnikov's delirium, he somehow always remains only one step away from confessing to the detective. The inevitability which this casts over the narrative, gives a sinister pre-eminence to Porfiry's confrontations with Raskolnikov.

It is this dialectic and its act of half confession that I would argue typifies Liz's negations and protestations – as well as the motivation for her narration in the first place. For, much as Liz might suggest her sympathy and tangential involvement, she also obliquely indicates a greater responsibility in the narrative that is provided, as I have indicated, this greater involvement is gestured at through the semantic multiplicity of her descriptions.

But the deferred confession remains frustratingly intangible and hidden, and in this way Liz's intangible secrets function much as those of Raskolnikov, for which Porfiry, though sure of Raskolnikov's guilt, is unable to indict him. "I thought," Porfiry later complains, "if a man is guilty, you ought to be able to get something tangible out of him in time" (462). And indeed Porfiry faces much frustration waiting for Raskolnikov to expose himself, even though in his "fierce hysterical guilt" this is something he is already wont to do (185).

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[64] It is this tendency which Conrad also imbues Razumov with in *Under Western Eyes.*

And so, though Porfiry knows Raskolnikov is guilty, the tangible evidence which Porfiry requires for a conviction is unavailable. The evidence, it turns out, is hidden under a stone, comprising the money and pledges that Raskolnikov has stolen from the old lady. Porfiry's frustration – and the reader's contrasting last hope – then lies under the stone, so that while Raskolnikov has effectively already confessed to the crime, the stone will never be found without Raskolnikov's help. Porfiry eventually loses his temper, exclaiming agitatedly "oh, the stone! Do you remember the stone? The stone under which the things had been hidden?... each word of yours had a double meaning to me, just as if another word were hidden under it" (Dostoevsky, 1951: 464-465).[65] As though intentionally pointing the reader towards this interplay of truth, concealment and power, Gordimer interrupts the narrative of *The Late Bourgeois World* with a refrain, placed both in the epigraph and appearing without context in the middle of the narrative – "*There were possibilities, but under what stone? Under what stone?*" (54).[66] It is in the same vein that Liz will claim later in the text, with similar italicisation, "I was afraid Luke would somehow divine – not the actual fact, but that there was a *possibility*; that there really was something for me to conceal" (87).

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At this point it is useful to return to the historical context that determines the nature of the novel's "half confession." As CJ Driver notes of NCL/ARM suspects detained by the special branch,

> No one blamed John Lloyd for taking the pressure off himself by making a statement to the Special Branch, though some detainees chose to tell them more than others did. Almost no one who was held for any time in solitary confinement succeeded in not telling the Special Branch something. Indeed, it seemed to be one of the purposes of the Special Branch to prove that they could break the will of anyone they held, merely to show that they could; they often

[65] By the end of the narrative, the importance of Raskolnikov's guilt will have superseded his own physical existence, with Porfiry counselling that in the event that Raskolnikov kills himself, he leave a note and "please don't forget to mention the stone" (474).
[66] Though a number of critics, as well as apartheid censors, have considered the relevance of the Gorky epigraph (see Wagner,1994:48 and MacDonald, 2010:229); little attention appears to have been paid to untangling this one from Kafka, though its meaning is arguably just as central. Strictly, the quote is attributed to Kafka and can be found within his diaries (Jan 12, 1914, in 1949:12). But even within this ostensibly "original" context, it is likely that they are a reference to *Crime and Punishment.*

> continued to hold people who were never going to be charged with any offence until they had made some sort of statement, whatever their scruples were (63).

This passage portrays resistance as "not telling" or straying on the side of "some sort of statement" which tells less or nothing of strategic importance. And indeed, this reappears in a number of contemporaneous narratives as the only available means of resisting interrogation and the increasing securitisation of the apartheid state (see, for instance, Lewin, 2011:96-97). Ruth First in an account of her own 90-day detention, also discusses this contortion of telling in order not to tell:

> I was packing my mind. Into a strong-room section labelled 'NEVER to be divulged' I stored everything I knew… which would provide trails to information the Security Branch so wanted. I was left with precious little: names of people either safely out of the country or beyond saving because they had already been caught and imprisoned and informed upon; information that we had partly divulged ourselves… I might placate them with some more information that could not take them any further (1965:112-3).

This terror of being forced to confess or inform – to speak – emerges in a moment where Liz appears to be boasting. "I certainly had enough courage," she claims, "to measure up to what was needed then – before Ninety Days – and I limited my activities only because of Bobo. Other people had children, too, of course, and they put their political work first..." (42) The distinct change heralded by the institution of 90-days detention is thereby acknowledged, along with the demands that it made on activists. She also, however, mentions "other people", but characteristically, the narrator narrows the category of "other people" to Max, who is dead and therefore politically safe – "I'm mincing words. After all these years, because Max is lying drowned. It's like putting on a hat for a funeral, the old shabby convention that one must lie about people because they're dead. The fact is, there was no one responsible for Bobo except myself" (42). Swiftly, a discussion of political engagement and activity has been reduced to the inequalities of family life.

As Madeleine Fullard points out, information gained from activists could be used to catch other activists, but more importantly this information would be instrumentalised by enlisting confessors as state witnesses.

> [M]ost state witnesses were genuine activists who succumbed to pressure exerted on or invidious choices placed before them. To ensure convictions, the state required members of the liberation movements to testify against their

> comrades. Forms of coercion included the protracted and renewable periods of detention that stretched out endlessly; mental and physical torture; the threat of long prison sentences or even capital punishment; and blackmail based on specific personal circumstances. The system insured that few trials were short of state witnesses, be they ANC, PAC or ARM, drawn from all echelons of the organisations… Most detainees, in fact, ultimately gave some degree of information, and many made signed statements… Some leaped at the chance to evade prosecution, while others were reluctant and evasive, still seeking to protect their comrades in subtle ways (2004:337).

Consider, then, the significance of the things Liz will not divulge: she will not tell how Max was caught, she will not tell how she immediately knew the circumstances of his death, she will not specify the contents of the papers in his car, and she will certainly not explain how everything fortuitously comes together for her funding of the PAC.[67] From this angle it then appears that many of the significant parts of Liz's story are missing. And yet, there is a conspicuous narrative, but it is primarily concerned with character psychology, framing Max's turn towards political engagement as just one symptom of psychological instability and familial dysfunction. In this way, the overt narrative resembles the delegitimising discourses which depicted political dissidents, like John Harris, as mentally unstable.[68]

And yet, the title of the novel suggests a wider sphere of interest, extending beyond the circumscription of Liz or Max's individual narratives. The bourgeois world of the 1960s was underlain by a profound growth in state repression, with the Sharpeville Massacre and the subsequent banning of the ANC and PAC standing as the most publically visible aspects of this. Mass political mobilisation was thus crushed and the apartheid state filed legislation to facilitate the work of the Security Branch, while using the courts to provide repressive measures with a "veneer of legalism"

[67] This reading has already diverged quite significantly from the standard account of Gordimer's novel which characterizes it as "bleak and unforgiving", with "Elizabeth [as] a typical Gordimer narrator: cold, knowing, even smug, but frustrated, desperate, full of self-loathing", define by "alienation and frustration" (Cornwall, Klopper and Mackenzie, 2011:11;11;12).

[68] In this respect, Peter MacDonald's contention that Gordimer's novels of the first three decades seems correct, if necessarily reductive: "All in their different ways also reflect Gordimer's preoccupation with the interpenetration of the public world of apartheid politics and the apparently private spheres of the family, friendships, sexuality, and, indeed, individual thought and feeling" (2010:220). However, as this chapter makes clear, the private is used in particular discursive ways to legitimise or delegitimise the public.

(Fullard:355).[69] In this way, the courts became a means through which political opposition could be crushed and "banned organisations [depicted] as violent, communist and a dangerous threat to white security" (Fullard, 2004:312).

Trials thus became a means for building consensus within the white community – both in terms of instilling a passivity towards increasing authoritarianism and convincing the electorate of "the need for extraordinary measures against a violent African and/or communist threat" (Fullard, 2004:312). It is sobering to consider the extent to which subjects were interpellated into the repressive and authoritarian operations of the state. Security operative, Captain JJ Viktor boasted of his capacity for making detainees, like John Harris, speak, by giving them – in terms that are notably paternalistic and intimate – "a bloody good hiding" (Winter, 1981:95).

In the face of these tightening security frameworks, it is entirely conceivable that many activists were not adequately prepared for what confronted them in detention.[70] As much was acknowledged by Bram Fischer, when he noted of 90-day detention,

> "[i]t is clear that the lack of experience of torture of political prisoners was the main contributing cause making this such an effective weapon in the hands of the Special Branch. We did not realise that even loyal comrades might break down. We did not pay attention to training comrades to withstand solitary confinement and the 'statue' method of interrogation and physical torture" (Fischer in Fullard, 2004:338).

Fischer, here, is speaking of the Communist Party, a group significantly more organised than NCL/ARM, for whom the "main qualifications were daring, resourcefulness, and a degree of recklessness" (Dubow, 2014:92). Indeed, it would be misleading to think of the members of ARM as hardened, or even trained, terrorists. For all the sabotage acts that they managed to perpetrate successfully, they were a mixed group of people – mostly politically-informed liberal students and Trotskyists who were frustrated by

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[69] Increasing state surveillance is suggested at the end of the novel as Liz lies in bed, with the lights of a car driving past notably illuminating and "search[ing]" the room (90). In this way, windows, rather than a screen into the outside world, become spaces of intrusion. This sense of surveillance will re-emerge later in *The House Gun* (loc 3704), "exposing," as David Medalie has noted, "privacy as a false dream of refuge" (1999:634).

[70] This is made evident particularly in Adrian Leftwich's confessional account, "I Gave the Names" (2002).

their powerlessness in effecting change through parliamentary means (Gunther, 2004:195).

Much like Max, ARM's revolutionaries were drawn from the same middle-class (or bourgeois) society which the novel portrays. The novel depicts the characters as products of their society, with their failures reflecting those of the society from which they emerge.[71] Thus Gordimer's protagonist can claim of Max:

> It wasn't likely [Liz states,] that they'd pray for [Max], the ones he worked with, the ones he betrayed. Max wasn't anybody's hero; and yet, who knows? When he made his poor little bomb it was to help blow the blacks free; and when he turned State witness the whites, I suppose, might have taken it as justification for claiming him their own man. He may have been just the sort of hero we should expect (19)

In this way, Max embodies the contradictions of his society; what is heroism to one group is betrayal to another. Correspondingly, the notion that ARM was too idealistic and thus fundamentally ineffectual, "politically committed but badly organised" as Clingman puts it (1992:92), only accounts for one reading of their significance. Hugh Lewin similarly attests,

> Our attacks had been no more effective than those of the other underground group, and the effect of our activities had been minimal, doing nothing to dent the regime, or to raise public awareness … And most crucial to us, there had been no indication that what we, as a largely white group, were doing had been recognised in any way by any black groups." (85)

And yet, as CJ Driver's account of the events surrounding John Harris's bomb attests, there is significant proof to suggest that the unintended death that resulted was part of a police conspiracy (2015:31-39). From this perspective the subsequent trial and execution of Harris was a means of enforcing the perception that opposition to apartheid was both generally absent and profoundly aberrant within the white community. After all, Harris was the only white man that was publicly executed by the apartheid government.

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[71] This insight is captured in *Crime and Punishment* when Porfiry, with patronising acuity, asks Raskolnikov, "[w]hy, it's not the middle-class idea of disgrace that's bothering you, is it?" (471) Indeed, disgrace is necessarily constructed within a particular social milieu.

Approached from this angle – of the apartheid government's manufacture or manipulation of consent – the most threatening aspect of ARM was precisely the suggestion that white apartheid society might in its reproduction actually produce those forms of alienation that coalesce into political resistance. Equally, the wealth shored up by its members becomes stagnant and rots. This is evident in the figure of Liz's grandmother, whose bank account will be seized in support of Luke Fokase's anti-apartheid activities:

> She has lived on dividends all her life (her father was an engineer associated with Rhodes and Beit) but – my mother says – she won't leave any behind her, the expenses of her senility are eating up the last of her capital (60).

Thus the old society contains the kernel of its destruction, with the spectre of internecine conflict and discord haunting the apartheid project.[72]

Thus Liz appears as an unlikely, but unsettling, figure of insurrection. Though she moves about her society undetected, there are secrets held inviolably and intimately within her, which remain inscrutable. Additionally, Liz's son, Bobo, as a representative of the new generation, holds the promise of a new politicisation which supercedes his father's failed one. Thus, Bobo remains undaunted by institutional pressure, "Bobo had mastered everything; that place [boarding school] has no terrors for him" (17), he recognizes the predominance of racism with his society (19), and is "aware of the necessity to recognise and alleviate suffering" (17). Furthermore, his father's death concretises his opposition to apartheid,

> What came to him in that moment must have been the reality of all things he had read about, happening to other people, the X showing where on the pavement the body fell, the arrow pointing at the blurred figure on the parapet (16).

Suggested in this passage is a timely secret of the apartheid state – the ways in which people died in detention: whether they committed suicide, were murdered, or to what extent these exist on a continuum. While Madeleine Fullard (2004) has documented these deaths, Gordon Winter has described a form of torture, whereby prisoners were

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[72] This is, notably, a different form of discord to that presented by Millin in the previous chapter. However, the new dissidence or conflict emerges exactly from the resolution of the previous conflict – as suggested by "Max's Anglo-Afrikaner parentage" (MacDonald, 2010:229).

hung from a window – often resulting in their unintended death (1981:581-587). Certainly, Chris van Wyk's poem, ("In detention"), highlighting the blatant absurdity of excuses provided for deaths in detention ("He slipped on the ninth floor while washing/ He fell from a piece of soap while slipping"), became one of the most famous literary evocations of apartheid circumlocution.[73]

Bobo's developing mastery is thus positioned in contrast to older compromised generations, of which Liz remains a representative. This is evident in her ambivalence towards authority: "[w]hy am I so idiotically timid before such people [the headmaster]," she notes, "while at the same time so critical of their limitations?" (15). Liz is, in Bakhtinian terms, a character existing on the threshold, "[a character] of considerable development, but in everything incomplete, a man who has lost faith and yet who does not care to believe, who rebels against the authorities while fearing them" (Bakhtin, 1984:171).

This status largely determines the half-confessional nature of the narrative. One aspect of this is her clear interpellation into her society, in which as Andrew Long notes of *Under Western Eyes,* the novel

> links informing and confession; [the] informer is one who informs as an act of confession, as though he feels compelled to confess as a way of professing allegiance to authority and to the state. So, the novel concerns modern subjectivity insofar as it also addresses the apparatus of surveillance—the use of the secret police and informers—and, significantly, the extent to which these are internalized (2003:491).[74]

Nevertheless, in Gordimer's novel a new generation of activists is pointed to. In the same way that the society birthed ARM, the ANC and PAC, social reproduction will

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[73] Fullard notes that 20 men died in detention between 1960 and 1969 (2004:331) – she further indicates that, given the psychological and physical torture that many suffered, it is possible that many of the suicides were clearly "what could be termed induced suicide or…torture gone too far" (2004:334). Fullard further notes how "On 9 September 1964… [Suliman] Saloojee 'fell' to his death from the seventh floor of The Grays… The magistrate ruled that Saloojees's death was a suicide [but] [i]n the light of Abdulhai Jassat's evidence about being dangled from a window by the security police, the notion of a suicidal leap becomes questionable at best. Several detainees…also reported being hung from a window." (2004:332).

[74] "Thus, informing and confession are modes of interpellating the modern subject." Long is an Althusserian, seeking to delineate the "complex of psychological and ideological determinations that induce people to answer the call of the state without direct solicitation" (2003:491-2).

eventually produce the next generation of resistance out of the wealth of previous generations. Of course this would turn out not to be the case for another decade. But this error suggests a level of optimism which is seldom attributed to Gordimer's work, though it appears to have been present at the time of writing. As Bram Fischer noted in his trial statement "[t]his can never succeed for one cannot move backwards in history" (1966:21). Indeed, as even the censors noted, the designation of "late" in "Late Bourgeois World" meant that the status quo was "doomed to destruction" (MacDonald, 2010:228). [75]

In this way, Liz's inscrutability speaks to Gordimer's project of "writing about the psychological workings of liberal patronage… without reproducing them" (Twidle, 2018:100). This is achieved through a half-confessional narrative in which Max's failure is underwritten by undefined and unresolved secrets which put the accuracy of Liz's account into question, but also suggest a fuller optimistic narrative external to Liz's representation.

As this chapter has indicated, this mode of narration was both a response to government censorship and repression, as well as an acknowledgment of the limitations and contradictions of her internationally ascribed role as a "recorder of South African experience." The narration in *The Late Bourgeois World* therefore attempts to textually portray the recognition that legitimacy was no longer a white liberal project and would develop outside of the ambit of white political dissidents – who would take on an increasingly limited role in the ensuing fight for democratization. In this way it was preparing for the mass political mobilizations which would eventually return in the 1970s and 1980s.

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[75] This is peculiarly borne out in Peter MacDonald's analysis of the apartheid censors' decision to ban circulation of the novel (which remained so till 1976). Though the novel obliquely gestures towards the various secrets of the apartheid state and its opponents; what finally made it unpalatable was a typically Millin-esque anxiety about racial gatekeeping as embodied by white women. Though tentative about the effects of first-person narration, "[w]hat made it finally 'undesirable'" MacDonald notes, "was not so much the fact that it depicted subversive activities or interracial desire, but that it presented them through the eyes of a white woman—Dekker stressed her race and gender throughout—who considered such things as 'wholly normal'" (230).

Given the previous discussion on secrets and the repressive interpellation of the narrative, the censors' conclusion appears to be so arbitrary as to suggest a profound ignorance about the repressive functions of the government which they were serving. In some senses, an analogue for this kind of figure is found in the weekend shoppers that Liz encounters, "the good citizens who never had any doubt about where their allegiances lay" (27).

3. Discipline and Consciousness in the Novels of Soweto ’76

“We have no guns, we have only stones, boxes of matches and petrol… Together, hand-in-hand, with our sticks and our matches, with our necklaces, we shall liberate this country.”
– Winnie Mandela

These lines, recalled as a mark of Winnie Mandela’s infamy, marred the legitimacy of what would otherwise have been one of South Africa’s most respected struggle heroes. As Sisonke Msimang notes, Winnie Mandela’s poor reputation was due in part to the ambivalence directed at black women holding public office, and in part to the equivocation and hypocrisy of the ANC’s discourse on popular political violence in the 1980s (2018:13-14).[76] Eventually Winnie Mandela’s identification with popular mobilisation (“we have only stones”, “together, hand-in-hand”) and popular violence (“with *our* sticks and *our* matches…”) was condemned by her peers as her “having gone rogue” (Msimang, 2018:14). By this logic, Winnie Mandela appeared to have been absorbed by the popular masses among whom she had lived while most high profile ANC members were isolated in prison or in exile. A line in the official discourse appears to have been crossed, with the distance between the elite nationalist and the masses collapsing: Winnie Mandela was effectively absorbed into the spontaneity of the crowd and appeared to be following its directives.

The focus of this chapter, however, is not on the turbulent 1980s of this scene. Rather it focuses on the narrativisation of the 1976 uprising, in such novels as *The*

[76] Msimang cites James Myburgh’s article detailing a number of instances during the 1980s where the ANC encouraged violence, if not necklacing directly, to its constituency (2018). These commands show that the ANC would, after the 1976 rebellion, come to adopt *instructing* chaos as a tactic. The extent to which township violence was a result of these calls is still unclear; however the distinction between “instructing” violence and spontaneous mobilization is pertinent – and appeals to the discussions on discipline and spontaneity which this chapter will discuss.

Children of Soweto (1982), *To Every Birth its Blood* (1981)*, A Ride in the Whirlwind* (1981) and *Amandla* (1980). Each novel, in its mediation of the historical event, narrates the development of the determination towards "conscientization and violent resistance," infusing the anti-apartheid struggle with "a sense of political destiny" (Sole, 1988:68;69). The historical paradoxes underlying Winnie Mandela's words are anticipated by these novels as they attempt to manage conflicts around spontaneity, popular mobilisation and elite mediation in their representation of the rebellion. The narratives thus appear, in retrospect, to remind us that they were nevertheless composed in the *aftermath* of 1976, and that the discomfort, contradictions and narrative failures they present highlight anxieties provoked by the uprising not only to apartheid rule but to nationalist elites' sense of legitimacy. These tensions brought up through the heaving consciousness of township mobilisation present unresolved questions about inequality and political power which persist into postapartheid South Africa.

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In Sipho Sepamla's novel about the Soweto Rebellion, an exasperated policeman, Colonel Kleinwater complains–

> the situation in Soweto has deteriorated to an alarming degree. And the Minister is furious… He says we have allowed a children's revolution to shake the economy of the country. We embarrass him in the eyes of his enemies… I've told the Minister that my personal theory is that the members of the Resistance Movement [ANC] and their fellow-travellers are the real brains behind the whole agitation in Soweto. Of course the Minister holds the view that the real trouble-makers are this new breed in the townships known as Black Consciousness. He has an unfortunate obsession about this consciousness thing. There's nothing I can do about it. What I want to know is why can't all the forces at our disposal stamp out the mischief-makers? Why haven't we had a meaningful breakthrough after all these damn weeks of hard labour? Why? (18)

The quote presents a microcosm of the disputes surrounding the uprising. Who was behind them? How did they occur? And if they were the result of spontaneous popular anger, then how should we understand the need to assign a particular instigator or source? These questions are important specifically because accounts of the student uprisings and the ensuing rebellion which spread across townships were used to signify the resistance and implicit consent of the masses to ANC leadership. Not incidentally,

the riots also ushered in their own movement in South African literature – both a culmination of Black Consciousness's cultural work, but also a departure towards a new nationalist project.

As with the frustration expressed by Kleinwater, the apparent spontaneity of the uprising has provoked an ongoing debate about its provenance. In its most common iteration the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) vies against ongoing claims that the riots were instigated by ANC supporters, thus representing a culmination point in national struggle history.[77] This ongoing conflict becomes evident in Xolela Mangcu's claim that the blotting out of Black Consciousness's primary role in the national liberation struggle constitutes a form of "evidentiary genocide" whereby the ANC both "appropriated the language of the Black Consciousness and Pan Africanist movements while disfiguring the role of those movements in the struggle for liberation, with specific and real consequences for how we think about development" (2011: 2). Mangcu's claim that the obscuring of the "real" story might impact South Africans' empowerment and self-determination is a response to Jacob Zuma (then deputy and later president of the ANC) having claimed "that the ANC had masterminded the June 1976 uprising" (2011:3).[78] That Mangcu chooses this specific event in a long history of anti-apartheid struggle suggests not only its singularity, but also its status as a defining moment of 50 years of anti-apartheid struggle. However, the ANC contends that though the links between the townships and the exiled leaders were weak, there were a handful of underground ANC members within the township who were working within the community ahead of the uprising (Ndlovu, 2006:336-337). Given the difficulty of reconstructing clandestine histories, the fractiousness of the dispute highlights the extent to which struggle history is deployed to foster legitimacy for parties, ideologies and philosophies of liberation. [79]

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[77] A number of political agents and organisations have been left out in this account, because they were not directly implicated in the rebellion. Though looking at the whole of anti-apartheid history it would be fundamentally remiss not to acknowledge the role of workers' unions, international organisations and lobbyists as agents of political change. These actors will be discussed more closely in Chapter Four.

[78] Certainly, whatever the role of Black Consciousness, this utterance removes a great deal of agency from the participants of the uprising, suggesting a level of elitism to which the politician would hardly concede.

[79] Karis and Gerhart also note that it is inaccurate to characterise the uprisings as only having been concerned with educational grievances – though they were important for its initiation and continued to fuel the rebellion (1997:183).

In his analysis of the group of students who marched to Orlando West/Phefeni Junior Secondary School on 16 June, Sifiso Ndlovu notes that the debate about the uprising's origins has "tend[ed] to obscure the true nature of the crowd taking part in the uprising," noting that "[the] crowd was socially identifiable and impelled by specific grievances originating from the classroom and underpinned by cultural imperialism" (Ndlovu, 2017:41). Thus Ndlovu suggests that there were no immediate political affiliations within the student crowd. It's a welcome insight as it highlights the distortions which nationalist narrative requires, yet remains problematically narrow, demarcating only a small selection of the protestors for analysis. The eventual crowd that marched to Orlando Stadium comprised 15,000-20,000 schoolchildren, and more prominently, the riots spread throughout the Rand and other townships across the country (Dubow, 2014:180-181).[80] Ndlovu does acknowledge that after the outbreak of violence "the situation changed and the crowd began to comprise other elements" but to his reading these other elements no longer form part of "the genuine student protest" and merely "distracted attention" from it (2017:41-42).

To question which part of the protests were genuine appears somewhat disingenuous. The rebellion stretched much further than just the marching students on 16 June. In Soweto alone, it lasted a week, with 176 people killed and 1139 injured, continuing with oscillating intensity for the next year (Dubow, 2014:181). Ndlovu's characterisation of "specific grievances" read against the ensuing revolt renders the distinction somewhat insignificant.[81]

Rather it appears that it is precisely the overall lack of political direction, the spontaneity of the riots, which imbue them with a special significance. For many they also mark the beginning of the end of apartheid; they occurred at a time when international attention and growing condemnation of apartheid pushed the Rebellion

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[80] The Rand refers to the Witwatersrand, a 56km long gold-bearing ridge bordering the South of Johannesburg, and which runs past Johannesburg, Carletonville, Klerksdorp and Welkom.

[81] Beyond the question of institutional reform to Bantu Education, the question of education for black South Africans was existentially and politically loaded – symbolising the possibility for advancement and social mobility. In *To Every Birth its Blood,* an encounter with a racist white lift operator highlights this point:

> 'It is dangerous to educate a kaffir,' the lift man said.
> 'Oh, is that what's going through your head? There will be thousands of us educated soon, and you won't be here, Mr Koek,' Tuki said laughing.
> 'We will see to it that you are all dead before it comes to that,' the lift man said, almost spitting on the floor. (76)

In this instance education appears synonymous with anti-apartheid and black liberation.

into the global news cycle and solidified growing international pressure against apartheid (Dubow, 2014:180,189; Clark & Worger, 2004 [2013]:76-77,80). The Uprising occurred then, quite remarkably, within a context where almost all political opposition parties were banned, imprisoned or exiled, with the link between party and base (both rural and urban) having become quite tenuous. It is this spontaneity which both obfuscates the question of provenance, but also produces the political legitimacy which is sought within the provenance debate. As one moves beyond the main clash between black students and the white apartheid state, the narrative becomes exceedingly contentious. The resulting fractiousness traces the fault-lines of postapartheid South African nationalism: the construction of heroic nationalist narratives, and their relation to an amorphous, striated and differentiated black population.

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In keeping with Soweto '76's historical significance, the uprising itself, produces a divergence of form within black literary production. The decade following 1976 produces four canonical prose works, aimed at narrating the events of the revolt and its aftermath: Mbulelo Mzamane's *The Children of Soweto* (1982), Mongane Serote's *To Every Birth its Blood* (1981), Sipho Sepamla's *A Ride in the Whirlwind* (1981) and Miriam Tlali's *Amandla* (1980). In terms of plot, the novels generally recount the activities of a group of student activists, headed by a student leader, who have been mobilised in the lead up to the march on 16 June. Following police and community violence, they are forced underground by government repression where they team up with ANC cadres and various community supporters to finally either flee the country or be captured by the police.[82] Prior to this outcrop of novels in the early 80s, black South African writing had largely been produced in short forms. Correspondingly, the authors listed above are not primarily read as novelists, but as short story writers and poets (with Miriam Tlali as the necessary female exception). Additionally, 1970s cultural

[82] Serote's novel, however, departs significantly from this formula, while retaining a number of shared characteristics. This departure will be discussed later in the chapter.

production preceding the riots had been determined by the rise of Black Consciousness, the cultural output of which was dominated by other literary forms:

> One of the interesting factors about the resurgence in writing among blacks was that the preferred genres of the 1970s were poetry and theatre instead of the dominant prose of the 1950s and 1960s. Prose was to make a significant comeback in the mid-1970s (Peterson, 2006:170).

As Aubrey Mokadi has highlighted, these novelisations were an attempt to claim popular South African history as a history of the people (2003). But moreover, this was a shift from shorter genres towards the narrativisation and descriptive emphasis of the novel, a shift in representation that demands its own forms and investments.

The abruptness and difficulty of negotiating this move is reflected in the work of short story writer Mbulelo Mzamane. His novel, *Children of Soweto* remains transitional in a variety of ways: from its division into three parts, as the lingering imprint of his primary vocation as a short story writer, and its relative failure to grasp the descriptive characterisation of the form.

By contrast, Mzamane's short stories, written before the riots of 1976 but collected and published in *Mzala/ My Cousin Comes to Joburg* in 1980/1981 (see Gaylard, 1999:110) are bitterly humorous and picaresque, covering the lives of various residents attempting to get by in the township. The primary cycle follows the narrator's cousin, Mzala ("cousin" in isiZulu), who arrives in Soweto from the rural homelands and has to adapt to the vicissitudes and excesses of urban township life. This involves learning how to evade the police, swindling gullible township residents, and strategically disregarding his pious uncle's injunctions towards maintaining a chaste and obedient Christian household. The narration is generally first-person, or heavily focalised, depicting an irreverent anarchy which pervades in a context where the law itself lacks legitimacy.

By contrast, Mzamane's novel about 1976, *The Children of Soweto* (1982; 1987), loses its humour in its adoption of "an ideological framework" (Mzamane cited in Gaylard, 1999:110). The resulting didactic account of the uprising recounts the week of the Soweto revolt, with a description and chronology of events that aims to present the context and motivations of the students through a group of student activists. Its tireless detailing of the tactics and reasoning behind the uprising, the pious serving of the township community and the strategic achievement of political goals, reduces the

novel to a somewhat verbose activists' manual, a trait which is shared by Miriam Tlali's novel, *Amandla*. Belaboured by thin prose, Mzamane's text insists on an unfavourable comparison with the didactic and praxis-based African classic, *God's Bits of Wood* (Sembene, 1960).[83] However, though Mzamane gestures at what he hoped to achieve with the text, the novel's characters remain predominantly instrumental, the narrative achieves little beyond a summary retelling of events. Compared to the vivid depictions of township consciousness in Mzamane's short stories, the novel highlights the difficulty of changing forms and navigating the cultural and political break. It appears then that Mzamane's difficulty lies specifically in representing the broader political aspirations and consciousness that underpinned the riots. This difficulty is shared by the other 1976 novels, though without the tendency towards self-congratulation which makes Mzamane's text so unpalatable.

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If Mzamane and Tlali's novels, among other accounts, share a difficulty with representing the consciousness of the uprising, then one way in which consciousness is more meaningfully represented is through the novel's depiction of smoke and fire.

Fire is an effective marker of spontaneity, because as a weapon it is accessible to those who can access neither firearms nor political power. It also has the capacity to spread quickly, with the added effect of erasing the identity of the individual who started it.[84] During the riots, fire was used to great effect, reducing imposing government-run township buildings to smouldering heaps. Historical accounts of the rebellion have maintained fire as a metonymic symbol of popular opposition to apartheid, with details of township residents razing municipal offices, police stations,

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[83] At the end of the novel, the narrator, now in exile, tells us: "How sweet it is to sit on a balcony of the President Hotel, protected from the steaming tropical heat, sipping cold Castle lager, and watching pretty Batswana women with their well-padded buttocks shaking to a sensuous rhythm, with their breasts like watermelons and some of the most fabulous legs I have seen, walking up and down the Mall below, on my lap a copy of *God's Bits of Wood*!" (244). The celebratory objectification of women in the passage above ("well-padded buttocks" or "breasts like watermelons") reads particularly uncomfortably against a feminist classic like Sembene Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood* (Agho & Oseqhale, 2008; MacDonald, 2015).

[84] Niren Tolsi eloquently makes this point within the context of service delivery protests in postapartheid South Africa (2008). This correlation between political dispossession, struggle and fire endures into contemporary postapartheid South Africa (see Tolsi 2008), with a housing activist from Abahlali-baseMjondolo stating "where there is fire, there is politics" (Chance, 2015)

government buses and beerhalls (Karis & Gerhart, 1997: 168; Davenport & Saunders, 2000:453). Baruch Hirson, in this vein, titles his history of 1976 "*Year of Fire Year of Ash"*.

It follows that the 1976 novels are generally set amid these burnt out remains of the township. In Sepamla's *A Ride in the Whirlwind*, an ANC cadre, Mzi arrives in Soweto and is greeted by a landscape filled with symbolic intensity,

> [Mzi's] excitement was raised high by what he saw […] burnt-out buildings in silhouette under the dim light of a myriad stars. These ruins were mere names in that hour: the post office in Dube, the rubble of the municipal offices; the stubborn remains of a beerhall huddled together under the chill of the night. It was mind-boggling for Mzi to hear the story of fire and billows of smoke two nights earlier. (37)

Where government structures have been reduced to "huddled" and vulnerable figures, fire and smoke express the great potential of cumulative anger and resistance. Even the pollution of coal fires has become suggestive as Soweto is described "bend[ing] its neck under the mass of a grey cloud of smoke" released by "[f]ires… [that are] crackling in each home" (29). Within Sepamla's novel the words "fire", "flames" and its resulting "smoke" and "ash" are repeated consistently, occurring 142 times within this 250 page novel.

The possibilities for fire and smoke, particularly, to depict the amorphous growth of politicisation within the township is already evident in an extract from Frankie Ntsu kaDitshego's poem, "The Ghettoes":

> Those who claim to be nonsmokers are wrong
> The place is polluted with smoke from
> Chimneys
> Trucks
> Hippos
> Gun-excited camouflage
> Dagga-smokers
> and burning tyres
> Non-smokers are smokers too! (1979:36)

And thus Miriam Tlali's novel, *Amandla,* also draws on the symbolism of fire to produce similar narrative effects. At the beginning of the novel, the reader is introduced to various characters as they gaze into the flames emanating from government offices, police stations and buses, recalling memories of their suffering at the hands of

apartheid government bureaucracies. The various characters are sympathetic to the violence which fire represents, yet it is soon made clear that these disciplined and good people – nurses, doctors, teachers and clerks – are not the ones who have engaged in this violent destruction of property. They might share this anger which the fire represents, but choose to respond with restraint. To delineate this distinction, Tlali allows the reader a glimpse of, in her words, an "amorphous multitude" (13) that is intent on killing a defenceless white man who is trapped in the township. The mob is attempting to break down a door and is shouting "give us petrol!" to fuel the fires they are lighting (14).

In this way, it is instructive that fire presents one context in which a distinction is made between those characters of depth and those who remain part of an amorphous and undifferentiated mass. Fire and ash, in this way, become features of an undifferentiated backdrop without a particular subject, whatever action was involved in burning down these buildings has been reduced to a setting that merely signifies popular discontent, lacking a particular agent.

This is the first sign in these narratives that class discrepancies might contradict the notion of a unified and undifferentiated opposition to apartheid, troubling more celebratory readings of these novels. For instance, in his book-length study, Aubrey Mokadi characterises the 1976 novels in terms which, to my view, mischaracterise them. Emphasizing the novel's attempt to recount the "mood" and "feelings" of "ordinary people" (Mokadi, 2003:18), [85] he expands on the political aims of the texts:

> Significantly, the latter writers have dispensed with the individualistic struggle for self-realization that characterizes western literary forms. Inspired by the Black Consciousness Movement, they concern themselves almost exclusively with Black readers, forging a positive Black self-image and focussing on the communal struggle for political equality. [...] They set out to establish a search for alternatives that would counteract the cultural onslaught of White domination and serve the evolution of an ideology geared towards the needs and aspirations of an emergent Black proletariat (Mokadi, 2003:19).

Yet despite reference to "communal struggle" among the "emergent Black proletariat", Mokadi's description manages to flatten class distinctions within the texts. He is clearly not referring to Tlali's "amorphous multitude," but rather the protagonists of the

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[85] "In attempting to recount the 'mood' and 'feelings' of ordinary people, the writers go beyond limiting themselves to the facts and figures of the events concerned." (Mokadi, 2003:18)

novels: nurses, doctors, journalists and clerks – a decidedly middle-class rendering of what constitutes "ordinary people." In Jacob Dlamini's account of growing up in Katlehong, this distinction is registered, in that it is exactly the "priests, doctors, nurses, teachers and government clerks" which formed the elite class or "high society" of the townships, and could be distinguished from the working class or, to use Mokadi's phrasing, the "emergent Black proletariat" (2009:78).

The narrative is then effectively classed because the township environment of the 1970s contained its own stratifications. In this respect Soweto was particularly representative. As social historians Philip Bonner and Lauren Segal note, "[b]y the early 1960s, if not before, Soweto was an extremely class- and status-conscious society" (1998:58). They further cite a survey of Soweto carried out in 1964/5, which noted,

> The presence of teachers, nurses, doctors, personnel managers and businessmen living side by side with working people and the poor has produced acutely felt status differences, much more specific than the distinction usually found in the working class areas (elsewhere in the world) between the respectable and the no-good. (cited in Bonner & Segal, 1998:58) [86]

In Bonner and Segal's description, class distinctions were deeply felt and, indeed, moralised. Differences were consolidated at the top into a "thin layer", a "sharply defined elite" comprising businessmen and professionals (Bonner & Segal,1998:58). This distinction was also determined by residents' differing rights to the land they occupied. The township of Dube, for instance, was initially set aside for wealthier families to obtain freehold and build their own homes (Bonner & Segal, 1998:31),

> Dube soon became known as the 'most glamorous township' in Soweto. In fact, in years to come, Soweto's residents would describe Dube as the place of the 'excuse me's' – because the African intelligentsia who lived there were wealthier and were thought to speak overly polite English. They also identified the suburb as the place of 'highbugs', 'tycoons' and 'socialites' (Bonner & Segal, 1998:31).

Otherwise, Sowetans self-identified as falling into either a "middle class of semi-skilled workers", including policemen and clerks (making up approximately a quarter of the

[86] The text referred to here is Philip Mayer's "Soweto People and their Social Universe" (1977).

population) or "ordinary working people" divided into the "respectable poor" and the "dissolute" (Bonner & Segal, 1998: 58).

Moreover, under apartheid the class composition of Soweto was particularly rigidly defined, with class definitions and boundaries more stable than they were either before or after apartheid (Alexander et al, 2013:4).[87] The solidity of class difference represented in Black South African narratives of the time, can be contrasted to Modikwe Dikobe's *The Marabi Dance* (1973), set in the pre-township world of "vibrant inner city slums." Pre-apartheid slums, like the Doornfontein of the novel, hosted a variety of classes and races, and were later dismantled by the British and Union governments – with Africans relocated to the Sowetan townships of Klipspruit and Orlando in 1904 and 1931 respectively (Wale, 2013:35).[88]

It follows that Dikobe's representation presents a level of mobility which is missing in later apartheid-era narratives, and that the freewheeling nature of this context is what most distinguishes Dikobe's characters from those appearing in Mzamane's Soweto short stories. For instance, as noted earlier in the Introduction, a fake pastor of Prospect Township, Reverend Ndlovu, robs a fraudulent widow and shebeen queen, MaNdlovu, but is then himself swiftly robbed by a gang of thieves pretending to be the police. Characters exist in a state of flux, both in terms of their identities and fortunes, undergoing continual metamorphoses.

By contrast, though it trades on a similar picaresque humour, Mzamane's *Mzala* follows characters who, though engaged in the same survivalist games and tactics, are firmly rooted within their class positions. In this way, failures to move beyond one's assigned station provide much of the humour in Mzamane's short stories. In "A Present for My Wife", the one woman's rivalry with her wealthy neighbour merely highlights the visibility of social distinctions and the inability to alter one's designated social standing. Whereas, in "Fezile" a character's aspirations towards upward mobility merely highlight the circularity of his situation when the car he buys is stolen and he arrives late to work: "You bought your car in order to secure your job and then it almost landed you out of the same job. On the other hand if you relied on public

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[87] To avoid anachronisms, Alexander points out that townships have actually become poorer since apartheid, as more wealthy residents have moved out to the suburbs (Alexander et al, 2013: 24). This means that, unlike now, during apartheid Soweto still hosted a prominent and defined elite.
[88] See also Proctor (1979) and Bonner and Segal (1998).

transport you arrived late for work so many times you ended by being sacked" (106). The Soweto 1976 novels, though charged with ideological fervour, remain set within this landscape of class rigidity, despite their obvious change of focus.

The difficulty, then, of reading the 1976 novels as both politically radical, but also in thrall to the class distinctions of their time requires some recognition of the ambiguous role played by elites in nationalist anti-apartheid discourse – whereby they had both sympathy and allegiance with the masses, but also projected their own aspirations as leaders onto the text.[89] Historically, the ANC and urban leaders were drawn from the petty bourgeoisie (Alexander, 2013:18), a class which was "numerically small yet consistently provided leadership" in the party (Bonner, 1982 in Alexander et al, 2013:18). This suggests, then, that the nationalist elite of the ANC comprised "a leadership that had its own 'sectional interests' and placed its own 'stamp on events'" but which could not be smeared as "mere manipulators'" (Alexander 2013:18).[90] Ranajit Guha, in another context, highlights the kinds of discursive strategies that Alexander puts forward as "sectional interests". For Guha these circle around elite nationalists' use of popular mobilisation to legitimate their leadership (1992:119). Though Guha writes about distinctions between elite and subaltern interests as they developed within colonial India, his analysis of the interaction and conflicts which develop between popular and elite forms of resistance, and the strained relations produced by apparently spontaneous mobs, discipline and consent plot suggestively onto the South African context.

While it might appear tenuous extrapolating this dynamic to the novels under discussion, black South African writers under apartheid were already necessarily members of the elite by dint of their education.[91] Up until 1976 in Soweto, "prestige

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[89] My conceptualisation is drawn from Sumit Sarkar's useful account of elite or "middle-class" ambiguity in his analysis of anticolonial patriotic literature in South East Asia (2000).

[90] A clear example of this in the 1976 novels is the almost complete exclusion of the unemployed who played a reasonably important role in anti-apartheid struggle. As Alexander notes, "[u]nemployment underpinned the 1970s and 1980s struggle against apartheid in two ways": "it provided a critical mass of young recruits" to the political struggle and "wiped out the benefit of improved wages" therefore leading to stronger worker resistance (Alexander et al, 2013:21).

[91] Kelwyn Sole arrives at a similar conclusion in his analysis of the novels: "The choice of the novel as a preferred form to portray the events of Soweto 1976 by these writers needs to be subject to scrutiny, particularly in the light of their avowed desire for a black audience … in a country where a mass black audience for newspapers is only a few decades old and where literacy is anything but general (let alone proficiency in English), such a choice precludes consumption by many lower-class black people" (1988:81-82).

was linked more to education than to money" (Alexander et al, 2013:17). Education was likewise perceived as a tool for social mobility, and English proficiency, specifically, was an elite characteristic seen as a "defining feature" and a key to "self-advancement" (Bonner & Segal, 1998:31).[92]

Schools in the township were thus also spaces of class distinction, forming a crucible for class striations within the racially segregated townships. This is again captured by Jacob Dlamini in his account of his early school career in Katlehong township:

> I knew who my social betters were long before I knew what they were… underneath [the school uniform] lurked social distinctions that were prevented from displaying themselves largely by a state that did not care to distinguish between a black doctor and a black domestic. So it was that a teacher's daughter found herself at the same school as the shoeless son of a gardener. But the differences did show themselves… and our modestly educated teachers proved themselves the most ardent defenders of such class distinctions. (2009:77)

In Dlamini's account, it is actually in response to the apartheid government's racial categorisation, reconstructed as a blindness to class difference subsumed under racial homogeneity, that the "extremely class- and status-conscious society." which Bonner and Segal describe in their historical account, is reproduced.

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From Guha's insight about the utility of popular consent for anticolonial nationalist groups, a distinct aspect of the 1976 novels is their relegation of opposition to acceptable elite, and in this case bourgeois, mediation. One historical precedent for approaching the novels in this way is provided by the ANC's immediate response to the 1976 rebellion. In an editorial from their official journal, *Sechaba*, aptly titled, "Our Youth Needs ANC Revolutionary Leadership" the editor declares,

> the present upsurge of the youth is reminiscent of the mood after the defeat of Nazism, when the then youth – amongst them Mandela, Sisulu and Tambo –

[92] While the number of black South Africans in school had been increasing "from 588,000 in 1945 to over 2,741,000 in 1970"; the number of black "salaried employees and businessmen" remained a very small segment of the overall population, at 94,000 (Southall, 2016:32).

> formed the ANC (Youth League) which radically transformed the ANC into the present day revolutionary vanguard and *authentic voice of the oppressed* and suffering people in our country. […] present-day youth *lack a sound political direction and leadership*. The temporary vacuum after the banning of the ANC and the imprisonment of many of its cadres and leaders contributed a great deal to this unfortunate situation. The emergence of the Black Consciousness movement has attempted to remedy this situation […] Unlike splinter movements which exploit the extremely racial character of our situation when appealing to the youth, the ANC gives the youth a *clear political direction* as in the Freedom Charter" (ANC, 1976:17-18; my emphases)

Though the editorial speaks specifically to ANC rivalries with Black Consciousness, it replicates a number of the discursive traits discussed above: an attribution of political spontaneity to the Uprising, presented as naive or undisciplined, and a subsequent inscription of a need for "political direction," which we can read as mediation. In this way, the ANC's legitimacy as the "authentic voice" of the people is inscribed, supported by the enforced correspondence of the youth of the ANC and the implicitly unsophisticated politicisation of the 1976 youth.

What this party line effectively does, then, is to minimise the disruption that the student's revolt delivered to the ANC's claims of legitimacy through consent. Just so, political activist Dinga Sikwebu notes,

> Old political movements were definitely caught off-guard. Having convinced themselves that the only way to fight the apartheid system was through armed struggle, the old political movements cautioned the youth for wanting to fight the regime with stones. Instead of tapping into the energies of young people to build a mass movement inside the country, the student movement was seen as a recruitment ground for liberation armies (2019).

In this way, popular consent becomes the embattled undertone of these novels. This question is lucidly summed up by Boykie in Serote's *To Every Birth its Blood*,

> What I am saying is that no matter what comes, or rather, who comes and professes to be with the people in fighting for our rights, they have to convince this whole nation that they have the power to do so. How do you do that? (49)

From this perspective, the apparent spontaneity of the rebellion, though it emphasized and highlighted township residents' bitter opposition to apartheid, also threatened the legitimacy of the nationalist elite. Thus the spectre of the mob looms especially large in

the 1976 novels, especially in Tlali's *Amandla*, in which the student leader, Pholoso, is positioned in contrast to the mob and various other characters as a figure of self-discipline and fastidiousness. After the first day of the rebellion, Pholoso stumbles into his uncle's house, dazed, injured and – notably – carrying a fire extinguisher. He falls back into a reverie of his day, particularly a failed attempt to stave off an angry mob which was attacking a white man trapped in the township. In Pholoso's recollection, as the door of the shack protecting the white man gives way, he entrusts a brass medallion, a prayer memento, to Pholoso, asking him to take it to a priest (285;14).

The mob on the other side of the door is armed with precisely those contingent and haphazard means of a subaltern mobilisation. Beyond fire, they are introduced through the weapons they carry: an assortment of traditional weapons and household tools or implements refashioned on the spot, "[s]till, in his hazy intellect, he recollected… the amorphous multitude, armed with picks, pangas, axes, stones, broken beer bottles, all kinds of weapons" (13). The mob presence is thus violent, unruly and most importantly, uninvited. Questions are raised about who leaked the information about the white man's presence to this group of undesirables from "the beerhalls, where the mobs of men were burning, drinking and looting" (14).

The recall of this memory is traumatic, with the physical remains of the conflagration clinging to Pholoso in terms which suggest suffocation, restriction and denigration: "Pholoso smacked and parted his grey parched lips as if in an attempt to spit out the particles of sand and soot he could still feel in his mouth. The pungent, stinging, stiflying smoke – he could still smell it" (13).

Toward the end of the narrative, as Pholoso is about to leave the township, he will return to the memory of the "shouting, cursing, drunken multitudes" (286), reminded of the threat of an unmediated, irrational and undisciplined mass,

> enraged people…pandemonium and hell…each one had his or her idea of what should be done…the majority wanted him to be lynched…no amount of reasoning could dissuade them…the majority came from the beerhalls…bottled-up wrath…sum-total of mercilessness" (286-287).

That this mob, brimming with energy ("enraged") and lack of direction ("each on had his or her idea") is capable only of violence, implies a need to define and circumscribe what freedom and franchise should mean for them. Furthermore, since the mob are not open to reason ("no amount of reasoning could dissuade them"), they cannot claim

justice. The logic of the text holds that Pholoso is the only thing left protecting the white man, “his only buffer and perhaps his ray of hope” (286). In this image, the leader of the student movement is positioned not just in contrast to the masses, but also as the only hope for reasonable mediation with the white people. The text, much like Sepamla’s and Mzamane’s, will end with the student leader escaping the township to join the ANC underground. This becomes its own marker of exclusivity, not merely because he must physically distance himself from his community, but because, as Guha has noted, underground organisations with their reliance on “conspiratorial methods and armed intervention by individual activists or tightly welded commandos,” rely on secrecy and the exclusion of the masses (1992:104). This is itself a negation of mass participation (1992:104). So even if the armed struggle unleashed the prospect of intergroup and state violence, it relieved elites of what Guha reads as “the enemy within”, “[t]hat enemy designated, with some condescension, as ‘enthusiasm’… the initiative of the masses unbridled by elite control” (1992:104).

In this way, this problem tends to be denied in retrospective nationalist histories, where the elitism of cell-work and the enthusiasm of mass participation are presumed to share a peaceable, or even compatible, coexistence. This tension, however, remains in Sepamla’s *A Ride on the Whirlwind,* where the intersection of underground and community struggle becomes a site of conflict. In the narrative, an MK cadre, Mzi, who is sent to help the students in the wake of June 16, remains deeply sceptical of the involvement of the community. He complains, muses and interjects variously throughout the text that the struggle, already “cluttered” by “amateurs,” is a pond hosting “small fish” and “big ones like me” (179; 136; 148). Eventually, his callousness will be foregrounded when, amid the detention of the students, he considers the expedience of their imprisonment: “In a way, the detention of members of the student group could be said to be a blessing in disguise. The struggle was cluttered with the possibility of many persons being destroyed in the cross-fire between them and the enemy” (179). For Mzi, the only struggle is the underground struggle.

And yet, one of the forms which the elite privileging of underground work takes is an emphasis on discipline. In this way, the unruly and spontaneous mob, presented in contrast to nationalist leadership, owes their violence to a lack of discipline. This is, again, usefully described by Guha,

> the nervous reiteration of the need for discipline […] figures as an obsessive theme in so much of what they had to say about the activity of the masses in the nationalist upsurge. One can hardly make any sense of that obsession except as an attempt to compensate by discipline for what the bourgeoisie had failed to gain by persuasion. (1992:103)

The valorisation of discipline, particularly in *Amandla*, produces a form of didacticism which is necessarily entangled with anxieties about elite legitimacy. Pholoso, in Tlali's rendering, is not just idealised, but insufferably austere. He is introduced as the perfect grandchild, the senior prefect of Ipopeng highschool (90) and the virtual reincarnation of his dead father (38). He "spends most of his time reading" his father's books (37; 90), caring for his grandmother (37), and continually insists that the student leaders must "read, read and read." When they are not reading "heavy political matter," they should read about "meditation, yoga, self-discipline." (83) "As one reads," he reflects to his audience,

> one discovers why it is important to control one's actions, emotions and thought processes. Self-discipline is important. One must avoid over-excitement, over-indulgence, over-anxiety and other corrupting weaknesses. (83)

At his most insufferable, he uses an intimate moment with his girlfriend to piously quote Abrahm Tiro. In their final moment alone together, before going into hiding, he spends his time enumerating the political responsibilities of "we the oppressed" amid prudishly chaste "affectionate glances" (290).[93]

Again, a more circumspect representation of discipline is presented by Sepamla, when Keke, an immature student, the "darling of his mom" (81) and the only son in his bourgeois wealthy family falls into a "depressive mood" (82; 86) of longing and regret, suspicion, jealousy and fear (83). Ignoring injunctions by the other students to be cautious (70), he works alone and unsupervised in the kitchen of their hideaway, mixing bombs. Having decided to "kill time tinkering in the kitchen" (107), Keke is distracted by recurrent anxieties about an informer among their ranks, and so causes an

[93] Kelwyn Sole also recognizes this tendency within Tlali's novel, noting that, "[t]he position of leadership enjoyed by Pholoso (his name means "savior") appears to be natural, stemming from his responsible and charismatic personality. He is a school prefect who is nicknamed "Moses" by his followers. When he addresses students in the hideout underneath the church, his attitude resembles that of a schoolteacher" (1988:76).

explosion, exposing the students' location to the police and leading to a few of the members' arrests.

The distinction then between those fit for political activity and those without self-discipline, who require guidance and mediation, is thus reproduced.[94] Like the precious prayer memento entrusted to Pholoso at the point where he attempts to hold off the angry mob, a world of chaos continually returns to threaten the purity of the movement. As Pholoso flees the country to join the underground struggle, the medallion falls, dropping into a muddy township canal which flows out of the township,

> [t]he concentric circles grew wider and wider as it vanished into the black slime at the bottom of the water, mingling with the murky sediment of rubble, tins, garbage and other decayed deposits. Then it rose again as a current caught it… The shiny ripples carried the brass medallion along, the silver chain trailing like a halo. (285)

Where a deep layer of sediment and decay symbolise the social chaos of the township mobilisation, the silver chain and medallion – the beatific image of Pholoso's discipline – initially submerged and indistinguishable from the mire, re-emerges at the point where it flows out of the community.

Through the sanctified imagery which Tlali accords Pholoso, the township becomes "an inert mass", awaiting the guidance, discipline and shaping of a "superior will" (Guha, 1992:72). In Mzamane and Tlali's narrations, events which clash with the implied superiority of students are excluded, disavowed or discredited.[95]

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[94] This is also acknowledged in Kelwyn Sole's more tentative account: "What may be significant in this is the implication that it is the better educated, more articulate, and radicalized sections of the black community that at the same time lead the black revolt against apartheid and, in a sense, mediate between the two racial enclaves and interpret them to each other" (Sole, 1988:75).

[95] As Sole has further noted, "[t]he attitude to black workers in these novels is significant: it tends to be dismissive" (1988:77). One such incident is where the anti-student violence of hostel workers in response to the political censures of the students is simply discredited as the result of police conspiracy (see Tlali, 1980:153 and Mzamane, 1982:226-227). Karis and Gerhart (1997), however, note that beyond obvious police meddling and manipulation, the students had neglected to reach out or "conscientize" the hostel-dwellers. In this sense, they merely issued edicts for stay-aways and boycotts without explaining the reasons for participation. This neglect, as Karis and Gerhart note, was underlain by class tensions between the two groups: "Even in the best of times," they note, "there were class tensions between the settled urban residents of South African townships and the less sophisticated semi-urbanised contract workers who made up the majority of inmates in the dreary barracks-like hostels of the Witwatersrand and Cape Town" (1997:172).

Nevertheless, a critical hesitation might counter that within the actual historical account township students were certainly not all members of the township elite, and that the simple association between education and elitism is reductive. Yet, what the discussion above portrays is specifically the distance between the students as historical actors and the way in which Tlali, Mzamane and Sepamla represented them. In this sense, representations of the student leaders, Pholoso (Tlali), Tsietsi (Mzamane), and Mandla (Sepamla), function as substitutes for an elite nationalist leadership which was notably absent during the revolt.

This is also evident in the way that most of the texts downplay the generational tensions which have been recorded – consider, for instance, Pholoso's dutiful love for his grandparents, or even the immediate support given to the students by their parents in Mzamane's account. For Jacob Dlamini, a generational war existed alongside the more overt anti-government one. "It is clear", he notes of the student uprising,

> that part of the motivation among the students was a profound dissatisfaction with their parents. Many students felt that their parents had failed them by not taking the fight to the apartheid government, that parents had acquiesced in their own oppression and that students had been left out to dry by their cowardly carers (2009:90).

Dlamini acknowledges that this was in part due to ignorance about the older generations' resistance to the regime – and to Bantu Education when it was initially introduced. Later, students would become more aware that the uprisings were "part of a legacy of struggle" (91); however the "generational fissures" opened in 1976 would widen throughout the 1980s.

Generational difference is, nevertheless, more coherently depicted in Mongane Serote's properly multigenerational narrative, *To Every Birth its Blood.* The novel manages to present a number of generations' responses and resistances to life under apartheid, with tensions emerging in a generational blurring between child and parent. Take for instance, the new generation of activists – grandchildren named "Oupa" and "Granny." While these instances might readily be explained by readings that have stressed the complexities of time within Serote's novel, which simultaneously alternates between the external and psychic, producing a temporality that is at times repetitive, circular and linear (Sole, 1991; Borzaga, 2015), temporal circularity also facilitates and absorbs the work of younger activists within a historical narrative of

nationalist struggle. In this way, the children are not innovators, but are returning to the struggle of their grandparents as history repeats itself.

Likewise, in *Amandla*, there is a consistent suggestion that the student leader Pholoso is the reincarnation of his dead father and his grandfather (38; 106). He is the closest child in both generations to his grandmother (38), hiding with her when he is evading the police (169) in a novel where one of the central narratives follows his grandmother's determination to have a tombstone lain for his grandfather.[96]

In this way, it is useful to reflect on the point that none of these writers were coevals of the students themselves. They were adults at the time of the uprising, many with children of their own.[97] From this angle, the didacticism common to these novels presents itself less as the voice of the students and more as the students being preached to. It is worth recognising that as much as this was an attempt to record the history of the uprising at a time when narratives of struggle were being repressed, it was equivalently an attempt to ventriloquize through the students, to teach, guide or shape the next generation.[98]

Such was the parental stamp that the ANC invariably placed on events, that they managed to misrepresent Sam Nzima's famous photo of Hector Pieterson. In Nzima's photo, a dead Hector Pieterson is being carried by a bystander with his traumatised sister running alongside him. However, the caption for the photo in *Sechaba's* booklet, "Spotlight on Soweto" (ANC, 1976), represents this as a scene of familial trauma – the death of a child, carried by a grieving father (Pieterson's sister, also in the photo, is notably not mentioned).[99] This highlights not only the nationalists' distance from the events of 16 June, but also their condescension towards students who spear-headed the revolt and who, to the ANC, lacked coherent political organisation. There is a certain conception of power here – of leadership and direction – through which events are

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[96] This emphasis on paternal lines of inheritance is perhaps somewhat at odds in a narrative that has been called feminist (see, for instance, Boswell, 2013). It seems, rather, that a particularly obvious sexual division of labour pervades where women are meant to contribute to the struggle through subsistence farming and maintaining the homestead; whereas men are expected to act as publicly political agents.

[97] It is perhaps especially important then not to conflate the writers of these novels with the actual students of 1976. At the time of the riots Tlali was 43, Mzamane 28, Sepamla 44, and Serote 32.

[98] It is also significant that none of these writers felt compelled during the 1980s Vaal Uprising (the most widespread and sustained period of resistance in South Africa's history) to narrativise those events. This will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Four.

[99] The photograph and caption which I refer to is on the back cover of *Sechaba* 1976 (vol. 10[4]) as well as on the cover of an accompanying booklet, entitled "Spotlight on Soweto".

interpreted. It is thus that mothers and fathers are assigned a presence at the riots which they did not have, and that student initiative is equivalently diminished.

Consequently, a certain level of scepticism about the influence of the ANC, as an older generation waiting to appropriate the student activists' struggle, emerges in Sepamla's *A Ride in the Whirlwind* in the figure of Uncle Ribs. Ribs is an ANC operative who has been based in Soweto and who provides the link between the student activists and Mzi, the MK operative. Talking to Mzi at the beginning of the narrative he discusses their plan to "seize the initiative from the group" and appropriate its "hot credibility" (29). He further tells Mzi that he will need the students' cover to achieve his mission (29). This distinction between generations and political aims is not lost on the students themselves as they discuss Ribs's role,

> "I was introduced to Mzi by Uncle Ribs. And who doubts Uncle Ribs?" queried Mandla.
> "But mfanakithi," chipped in Roy, "Uncle Ribs stands for one thing. And we stand for another."
> "There is a generation gap between Uncle Ribs and us. It means our vocabularies are not exactly the same. But surely that doesn't mean we cannot work together" (42-43).

That said, Uncle Ribs, is presented as an ambiguous character – with motivations which remain hidden behind clouds of smoke which render him, as his name suggests, smoked like a rack of ribs.

> Uncle Ribs was marked by one seemingly incurable habit---smoking. He chain-smoked at an alarming rate. And there was even at that time a suggestion of a health hazard, for the man coughed violently at intervals. But behind the cloud of smoke the brown eyes darted and observed detail in an uncanny manner (75).

The "clouds" of smoke that Ribs produces (35,44,62) thus function to obscure the nature of what people are seeing and saying, with spaces growing "murky with the smoke climbing, whirling and tumbling in the little space," (25) standing in contrast to the immediate spontaneity of fire which recurs through the novel. Ribs does not signify the momentum of youth or popular mobilisation, but rather the ambiguous role of older, elite mediators. Smoke is either the emission of a slowly smouldering base, or alternatively, the stifled end of a conflagration.

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In this way, the disavowals and tensions of class, generational difference and nationalist underground organisation form part of a vocabulary of discipline and, ultimately, consent which pervades the 1976 novels. However, an embodiment of these concerns is also reproduced through its obverse – collaboration. This manifests both in the act of collaboration following detention, and, centrally, in the reviled figure of the black township policeman.

Indeed, while the collaboration of activists is presented as temptation or fall from grace, the township policeman resurfaces continually as the ultimate – and often irredeemable – symbol of collaboration and betrayal. In historical terms, the prominence of black policemen makes sense: in 1975 black South Africans made up 48% of the policeforce membership, with 15,903 black policemen in its employment (Brewer, 1994:239).[100] In this way, black policemen actually presented one of the most recognisable façades of the apartheid government – as well as the ultimate symbol of collaboration and betrayal for activists. The question of how to deal with collaboration differs across the novels. In Mzamane's congratulatory rendering, the problem is simply resolved through the Uprising,

> Many supporters of the System, from members of the police force to members of the UBC…were put in their right place, at least for a while. And when they did ultimately rear their ugly heads, their credibility and influence had sunk to an all-time low from which they were never to re-emerge. (242).

Similarly, *Amandla* negates the problem in line with its didactic form. In this sense, policemen are ostracised from the community (94) with the stigma of their careers impacting their family (47-48) and with the profession so unpopular that "there [is] a constant demand for additional police" (44). However, if the police are unpopular, then it is well-deserved: throughout the narrative, children are murdered and chased by

[100] As Brewer notes, detailed information about the subsequent social composition of the force is largely unavailable, since from 1976 "the Commissioner reduced the level of information about the force in his annual reports" (1994:275), a movement in line with the increasing militarisation of the police force. However, Brewer does note that following the 1976 Uprising, black police membership fell by 6.1% between 1976 and 1979 (1994:275).

policemen and their dogs (64-65; 32). Police are also described ignoring township crime when they encounter it (32).

These portrayals, however, are complicated by historical accounts which indicate that township police experienced significant popularity for the first three decades of apartheid; there was still a reasonably high level of prestige associated with the police force, largely because of high crime rates in the townships (Kynoch, 2003). While this would have changed following sustained police brutality during the 1976 rebellion, Tlali's characterisation refuses the existence of this recent past. Rather, any ambiguity about the police is discounted by overgeneralising discontent: "How can you trust a policeman?" (43) one character asks, and later, "[h]ow can you trust a person who goes about chasing people for passes, shooting and killing people to make a living?" (110). Those who do trust the police, easily find themselves being used – as one young woman, in an attempt to impress her estranged lover, betrays the students because "she thought that a policeman is a respectable person" (279).[101]

In Sepamla's less didactic representation, policemen remain condemned, yet in this instance, more for the fact that they encourage collaboration with the government. In this sense, they are depicted as poisonous, infecting the community. While two characters are planning to kill a black policeman, the student leader, Mandla, asks "[w]hen do we rid the world of the venom?" (184). And indeed, the idea that black policemen acted as a kind of venom, a poison that elicits acceptance and maintenance of apartheid is equivalently highlighted by Tlali's disavowal of the problem.

But collaboration in Sepamla's novel is primarily represented in biblical, if not Edenic, terms. This is evident in the depiction of activists detained: One activist, Nkele, is represented as bound in her prison cell, naked, "her breasts bare, dangling like over-ripe fruit," while a snake is allowed to freely traverse her cell (182). Another student activist, Boysi, has fresh fruit left in his cell to tempt him into collaboration, so that his anguish and hunger are instrumental to unravelling his resolve ("the air in his cell was filled with the tempting smell of fresh fruit" [186]). When he finds himself bending to

[101] In a final telling episode, the two black policemen of the novel end up gearing up to kill one another over their rivalry (greed/jealousy) for a woman (266). In their absent-minded distraction they are speedily dispatched by guerrillas who have been waiting for them – another heavy-handed lesson about the self-defeating decision to become a township policeman.

temptation he recognises his betrayal as a sin, with his guilt manifested through the remaining stench of "the 'fruity smell'" (204-205).

The adoption of Edenic imagery is not surprising given Black Consciousness's ecumenical origins (Magaziner, 2010). As Magaziner notes, "[r]eligious talk pervaded the production of Black Consciousness…[going] beyond mere rhetorical convention to suggest religious—primarily Christian—ways of thinking [that] underpinned activists' approach" (55). Thus, the spread of the "gospel" of Black Consciousness was thought in terms of "evangelists" who might "convert" others (Magaziner, 2010:55; 57).

While the appropriation of a religious discourse of sin and salvation might have allowed Sepamla's Black Consciousness inflected writing a more stable space from which to represent collaboration, *Amandla*, again, can only resort to the disciplinary vocabulary of didacticism, with characters discussing the inevitable murder of sell-outs (280). This is re-iterated so consistently as to suggest that collaboration was actually a significant problem. "What we want to do" one student says, "is to deal with them so that they will remain a living example of what a spy, a traitor of the people should look like." (139) Is this the way, one wonders, by which consent will be elicited? Returning to further discussions about the police one character says, "[t]here's no need for them. The children of Soweto seem to know how to discipline the community better than they" (189). In this way, Tlali exposes the crudeness of her schema – someone needs to discipline the community, but it is the students and not the police.

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If there is an impetus to deny collaboration, then Sepamla's novel usefully allows external voices to reach beyond what appears as the stifling disciplinarity of Tlali's novel. A doctor in *A Ride in the Whirlwind* responds to the claim that killing the black police officers will discourage others from joining the police force:

> Our people have come to see the [police] force as work. For them it is like going down the mine, going to a factory, going to the classroom to teach. Why, it is like going into the army to fight their own brothers. It has its rewards[:] 'Survival, mfo. The survival of self, the survival of stooges. The police force is a way of survival ... Have no illusions about your mission. It won't touch the system. The system relates to survival for others while it relates to oppression to some of us,' (111)

This depiction appears to correspond to John Brewer's historical account of the South African police. As he notes, recruitment was often made on the basis of promises of social mobility and a regular salary (1994:236), with the employment of black South Africans within the police thus also a reflection of the colonial context insofar as "[it was] consistent with the absence of other stable and well-paid forms of employment for the colonized population in a very racially structured economy" (1994:333).

What this recognition of the "[police] force as work" gives voice to is the existence of a township consciousness beyond the disciplinary narrative which attempts either to claim or teach consent. Again, Sepamla allows externality to intervene when one character considers her troubled relationship to township politics. A nurse who has been harbouring student activists in her house, Sis Ida finds herself captured and thrown into detention, an inadvertent casualty of the struggle. In jail, she reflects on the difficulty of political affiliation, noting how she initially joined the Movement "with great expectations", but later withdrew, having become disillusioned with "the uphill nature of politics", "disenchanted by slogans", and so moving between the ANC and Black Consciousness organisations (191).

> She wished the man [her interrogator] would ask about why she was in and out of the doors of so many of the organisations. … She would tell him her society allowed no convictions to take root in one. Instead illusions were pocketed as beliefs until one realised in the glare of the sun that the belief was as shiftable as a chair to be replaced by another. It seemed to be something to do with survival (191).

In fact, in Sepamla's novel, there is a distinct fear that the nationalists have not managed to gain the necessary support or consent of the people. It is evident that though this question is placed in the throat of an apartheid interrogator, it nevertheless speaks to the nagging anxieties which emerged when nationalist leaders claimed to have the people's consent:

> "Ask yourself what happened to Mandela and Sobukwe. I tell you those men lost. They believed the people were behind them. They thought one magic word said by them would raise the country behind them. They were deceived." (187)

The presence of these voices marks the distinct difference between Sepamla and the novels of Tlali and Mzamane. Where Sepamla's characters voice the fear that the

nationalists might indeed not have the support of the majority, Tlali and Mzamane's visions cannot allow for this totality, cleaving rather towards the didactic and disciplinary and thereby barring access to any credible sense of the consciousness or experience of rebellion. Where Sepamla, more cautious of the divides in his society, allows for some nuance and discordance, approaching some small level of Bhaktinian polyphony, Tlali and Mzamane's renditions can only conceptualise politics by suppressing the existence of this irresolution.

This anxiety goes some way towards explaining why Tlali's novel is, in formal terms, flawed. Since the role of the novelist is subsumed towards the disciplinary role of relaying political information to readers who cannot be trusted to make up their own minds, the dialogue among various characters generally does the work of the narrator by developing the background to action or recounting perspectives that readers should adopt. At its worst, the reader is faced with exchanges where, since everyone is always in agreement, characters explain circumstances to each other that they clearly already know! In this way dialogue becomes monologue, with little distinction or variation through characterisation. The inability to allow for dissent not only suggests that the author had little faith in the self-organising capacity of the popular mobilisation, but that the ambivalence and irresolution of popular consciousness was profound enough to pose a threat to the didactic message of her novel. For township residents amid uprisings and political mobilisation would still have had to eke out a living in whatever way possible, making some level of complicity necessary for survival. This is the widely diffuse significance of the observation offered by Sepamla's doctor: "[t]he system relates to survival for others while it relates to oppression to some of us."

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Mongane Serote's *To Every Birth Its Blood*, compared to the other 1976 novels, manages to produce a space, albeit limited, in which different strands of popular consciousness might emerge. This is likely because it is more centrally invested in depicting a consciousness underlying and emerging from the uprising rather than plotting the events thereof. This is partially achieved by widening the timeframe of the novel beyond the rebellion of 1976 and its "days of power," so that the novel exceeds a mere chronology of events, also tracing the experience of those inevitable days of disempowerment which both preceded and followed.

In the novel, the frame narrator, Tsi, relates the development and fates of various political activists through his life narrative. The embedded text thus provides focalised third person narrations from these various characters, from activists to exiles, with later sections including “spectacular” political actions: the murder of township policemen, acts of sabotage and other clandestine political operations. These are then interspersed with and opposed to the domestic focus and pessimism recounted in other parts of the narrative.

This bifurcation has troubled critics, leading Njabulo Ndebele, for instance, to vacillate in his reading of the novel. Thus, initially he claims that “the spectacle takes over and the novel throws away the vitality of tension generated by the dialectic between the personal and the public” (1986:156 cited in Sole, 1991). A few years later, however, Ndebele claims that the text is distinctive in its attempt “to deal with the ordinary concerns of people while placing those problems within the broad political situation in the country” (2006:51). Ndebele’s two readings, however, combine to suggest that the singularity of Serote’s text lies in the means by which its form marries the idealism of struggle to the despair of oppression and abuse, thereby representing the development of a political consciousness rooted in the daily violence of the township. The novel is therefore primarily a political novel, like the other 1976 novels, but seen through the narrator Tsi’s eyes, its political idealism must emerge from a material context in which political mobilisation is neither immediate nor obvious.

For one thing, Tsi is not a student leader or activist. Though he is directly and indirectly affected by the politics of the township and much later turns towards political work, he is neither an idealised nor admirable character. An alcoholic and reformed criminal who has been involved in various dubious and often pointless projects, Tsi is not able to support his detained brother’s wife nor is he capable of taking responsibility for his own illegitimate child. In stark contrast to the valorisation of education in other 1976 novels, he is educated, yet remains impotent. In this way, he floats listlessly from job to job, unable to intervene in difficult situations and unable to defend himself even when he is verbally attacked by individuals with less status or education (76). In this novel education is not enough, and thus didacticism is shown to be equivalently insufficient for mobilising revolt.

As a photographer Tsi adopts a passive stance towards events, representing without acting, in contrast to his brother, Fix, who has been detained for his political activism. From the outset of the novel, the logic of apartheid political repression is such

that the reader is denied the certainty of the nationalist activist voice embodied by Fix. While this voice is the primary or only one we encounter in Mzamane and Tlali's novels, in *To Every Birth its Blood*, Tsi embodies both the wavering or ambiguous consciousness embodied in Sepamla's novel by Sis Ida.

Gone, also, is the impetus to idealise community or the relationship between generations evident in Tlali and Mzamane's novels. The family, for instance, is a site of abuse, with parents perceiving their children as failures, without a future. "They have all gone to hell" (38) Tsi's mother says of her sons, describing Tsi, particularly, as "a dirty, foul-mouthed rat, that has nothing; that sleeps in stinking blankets" (63).

Correspondingly, most of the novel's domestic scenes appear hopeless. The abuse of Tsi's parents is matched only by the misery which Tsi brings to his romantic partner and the mother of his child, providing a sense that cycles of abuse repeat themselves endlessly. From this perspective, the question is how Serote manages to link the drudgery and degradation of this life to political mobilisation. While Serote's novel is equivalently invested in the heroic nationalist narrative that appears in other novels, a less directed political consciousness also emerges – one which captures the elements of fire, spontaneity and anti-collaboration which have eluded the grasp of the other novels.

One way in which this consciousness is developed is through the textual coupling of personal despair and impotence with a developing political resistance and mobilisation. While this is achieved through a number of symbolic modes, including, for instance, Serote's incorporation and reference to music (Washington, 2015; Titlestad, 2003), this chapter will focus on the economy of laughter within the novel, symbolising an extremity of experience and existence which underlies the political consciousness of 1976.

Drawing on the personal, physical and social valences of humour and laughter, Serote's text instrumentalises this common expression of joyfulness and subversion to highlight, rather, the individual and social despair, alienation and defeat which both characterises the township's environment as well as the individual's survival within it. Thus, at the beginning of the novel the distinction is made between laughter as enjoyment and laughter as deflection. Describing his partner Lily, the narrator Tsi notes, "[s]omething about her laughter, when she really laughs, not when she laughs instead of crying, has made me discover many things, even about myself" (7).

Following this recognition of multivalence, the novel provides various instances of laughter that highlight the distinct absence of mirth. In one instance, the narrator encounters an old man:

> I let out a groan; I meant it to be laughter. He looked at me.
> 'Boy, don't laugh at your elders,' he said, trying to look serious, suppressing laughter. (15)

The narrator intends to laugh, but instead groans, expressing not amusement but enervation. However, the old man, so habituated to the particular despair the groan implies, still receives it as laughter. In turn he chastises the narrator for disrespecting him. In this way the degraded nature of enjoyment and humour and the existential burden which this implies, bleeds into the maintenance of social norms like authority and respect. As the scene ends, the old man attempts to make a serious point ("don't laugh at your elders"), but, "supressing laughter", he inadvertently signals the opposite – that the environment denies the authority and respect which accrues with age.

Elsewhere laughter erupts "like a scream, long, hysterical" (29), signifying not only weariness, but an extremity, or verge, upon which a character might snap,

> I knew that her life was a terrible, brutal pain. …Her eyes, which could shoot defiance, anger, love and hatred straight into your heart with one stare, said it; they said how weary she was, how bewildered, and how she was at the verge of anything, be it to kill, or to make love until it hurt, or to pour methylated spirits over her body, set herself alight and laugh at you. It could be done. (18)

The climatic point of these depictions occurs when the narrator, Tsi, is assaulted by a white policeman. The episode details the narrator maintaining his resolve and composure under assault, until the policeman takes hold of his testicles and crushes them in his fist. The moment of defeat occurs when, under this pressure, Tsi's rectal muscles give way so that, "[t]he air from the arsehole seemed to sing in laughter" (55). The unintended physical response leads him to feel "as if the whole sky had fallen on the back of my neck, something snapped…" (55). The violation of the assault then inheres in highlighting Tsi's physical inability to withstand the power wielded by the policeman: to fart, to turn his own violation into a joke. Just as the limits of the body crudely dictate the limits of his willpower, just so his capacity as an individual to resist apartheid's regime of power is highlighted. Laughter thus comes to signal the shame

attending his personal and individual vulnerability to collaboration and that the individual and frail body determines, in the final instance, the capacity of one's spirit.

As he drives home after spending a week in detention, the memory of his violation returns: he feels the soreness of his muscles. "I could feel the smell of the [jail] cell on me, of the dirty blankets, of the shit that was in the bucket. I saw how my trousers were creased, dirty, and smelling of sweat, shit, urine, the lot. I felt like laughing aloud, but I held on" (57). The narrator's humiliation will re-emerge at various points, as when he returns to the white liberal newspaper offices where he works. He will hear "someone laughing, other people laughing" (70) continually recalling the "terrible laughter" (55) of his humiliation, transposing the very physical brutalisation of one instance onto a wider net of structural oppression that determines his own ambiguity and wavering commitment towards political resistance.[102]

An important predecessor for this treatment of laughter as a symbol of helplessness, collaboration and shame is provided in Mbulelo Mzamane's short story collection, *Mzala*. In Mzamane's picaresque depiction of the apartheid township, laughter and humour come to depict the cycles of abuse and constriction of the harsh and unrelenting apartheid township environment. In these stories, written prior to *The Children of Soweto*, Sowetans are given to exploiting and deceiving one another, with humour primarily derived at the expense of characters that are vulnerable to the trickery of the narrator or protagonist. In this way, helplessness inflects the laughter of Mzamane's township in which characters reproduce the oppression they themselves have been subjected to.

One critic, Lokangaka Losambe, however, attempts to read these stories more optimistically by deploying Bakhtin's notion of carnival to suggest that the humour of the short stories is in fact "carnivalesque laughter" or "grotesque realism" filled with revolutionary and liberatory spirit (2000).[103] Yet, the stories, while humorous, appear less concerned with subverting the violent landscape of apartheid, than with a picaresque chronicling of the often dubious or violent means required to survive. The

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[102] A similar sentiment is momentarily noted in Sepamla's novel, where the township residents are "angered and embittered" by the brutalisation of their children so that "the people of Soweto laughed and laughed in the bitterness of their day." (57)

[103] Losambe thus uses this reading to suggest continuities between the seemingly apolitical short stories and the foregrounded politics of *The Children of Soweto*. Yet as I have indicated earlier, the lack of continuity between Mzamane's short stories and his novel indicate exactly the political imperative of the 1976 moment and the pressing importance that the writers felt in approaching this project.

"Mzala" stories, for instance, follow the narrator's cousin (*mzala* translates from isiZulu as "cousin") from his initial realisation that he will be forced to sustain himself in the township without the required apartheid documentation, to his various ways of acquiring money without the legal capacity to either live in the township or acquire a proper job ("My Cousin and the Law"). Mzala quickly develops the creativity required of him, swindling his family and the community. His existence as a "trickster," equal parts ignorant and cunning, is jarringly humorous against a depiction of township life which is increasingly rendered as harsh and dehumanising. In "My Cousin Becomes an In-Law" the narrator's mother dies, but her death is somehow unremarkable in the context and mentioned only briefly without ceremony. Likewise, the humorous antics involved in locating Mzala's jilted lover's house are undercut by a description of the surrounding poverty that the narrator cursorily describes—

> It was a dingy little shack, almost a hole, near the outskirts of the location. No fewer than three families must have lived in that hideout, judging from the mucus-covered, puffy-bellied children we found raining stones and sticks on one another outside ("My Cousin and his Pick-ups", 26).

Thus poverty and death produce a backdrop to the stories, with the disempowerment of the environment often leading to outrageous assertions of masculinity that provide a humour that trades on objectifying women. Between girlfriends, wives and various mistresses, most female characters are more or less exchangeable. They are also simply easier to manipulate than speak to, becoming the targets of various tricks and jokes when they become "uppity", demanding more of their otherwise circumscribed lives.

In this sense, the stories show that within the township, weakness or gullibility is invariably, or justifiably, exploited. Thus, a narrator cursorily divulges that he steals money from his wife ("A Present for my Wife"), or that a landlord can pressurise his female tenants into sex due to the "unavailability of alternative accommodation" ("My Cousin comes to Joburg":10). Taken with the enjoyable swindle of Mzala and Jikida acting as township herbalists – various significant and small acts of abuse appear not as a subversion of apartheid but rather as an illustration of the intersectional nature of oppression and a lack of collective consciousness.[104] In this way, Losambe's claims

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[104] Losambe's mistake also emerges as one of chronology. Not accounting for the fact that *Mzala* is a collected publication of stories that had previously been published in *Staffrider* magazine, he dates the

that the stories present a "vibrant, inclusive, spontaneous, carnivalesque, popular culture" that "sustains vital energy in a hostile environment" appear somewhat misplaced (see Losambe, 2000:33; 30).

However, the development of this representation will provide a foundation for Serote's use of laughter as an unstable and polysemic sign. Rather than the carnivalesque, what Tsi's laughter and Mzamane's humour suggest is a failed attempt at deflecting or neutralising the despair and violence of the political context. In this sense, the failure of this move towards humour and lightness with its attendant collapse into despair and resignation signals an ambivalence residing on the verge of popular consciousness.

At a later point, the latent power which this inversion represents will become clear, as Tsi, having undergone his own brutalisation at the hands of the police, comes to understand the brutalisation of his parents. The passage presents a moment in which the failure of laughter, as the failure of deflection, prompts a recognition of collective suffering which overcomes the pacifying effects of shame. It is worth quoting at length:

> I was looking at my father's face, as he dug into his plate, opened his mouth, and chewed, thoughtfully, now and then saying something to my mother. I thought about the scene at the police station, the scene on the counter, how I screamed, how I fell, how I lay on the ground, weeping like a child. I wondered, I wondered how my father would have handled that scene! Would he scream? Would he weep? What would he do when he shook his body out of its slumber and found himself lying there on the floor, in shame? Yes, it could happen, it could happen to him, like it happened to me. It could happen to him. Suddenly, he looked very old, weary, and feeble as I looked at him and the thought crossed my mind. I thought of the many times he had driven along the same road, the same road where we saw a man, lying on his back, in the dark, in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by red and blue flickering lights. My father had driven many, many times along that road. He had driven many times, even before I was born, along that same empty, dangerous road, where the red, blue lights flicker in the dark.[..] I began to understand what kept him so quiet. I began to understand why he seemed to be frightened by us, Fix, Ndo and myself. … Yes, I could understand how it came about that every time he talked about Kaunda, Nyerere, Nkrumah, he became irrational, he became like a small boy, talking about heroes in a movie he had seen. I understood now, as he sat there, that he could not afford to see any fault with his heroes, he had to believe that they

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stories incorrectly, not acknowledging the fact that the collection was published in 1980, a few years after the magazine publication of the individual stories. These were primarily written and published between 1973 and 1975 prior to the Uprising of 1976. See Gaylard (1999:11) for a comprehensive account of their publishing history.

> loved him and were going to build Africa for him, that they were almost like God. Every time one of them made a statement in the press about South Africa, he seemed to memorise it word for word, and he would talk about the article to everyone he met, and then shoot them with the lines they had said. He had to believe that one day, his heroes, his supermen, were going to fly into South Africa and seize it out of the terrible grip that now held it. …His heroes were old men like him, who knew the law, who had respect, who were not like me, reading what white people said and believing it, and then walking the streets at night, hardly having time for God, cursing him for creating day and night instead of a long, endless day. 'You ashame us, you young people,' my father would say (62-63).

Through the contrasting juxtaposition of Tsi's brutalisation with the regular politeness of the family meal, Tsi comes to recognise his father's brutalisation. In this recognition of his own parents' struggle and the degrading effects of attempting to survive within the dehumanisation of the political environment, Tsi is also able to contextualise his father's nationalist fantasy. In these fantasies Tsi's father can idealise the nationalist elite represented by Kaunda, Nyerere and Nkrumah, imbuing them with the power of deliverance and salvation to rescue him from the brutalisation, enervation and compliance which mark his survival within the environment.

In this way the text allows readers an insight into the disappointment which underlay the generational tensions of the 1976 rebellion. The realisation is that the consciousness of his parents, and increasingly his own, is one of brutalisation and compliance. And that the untenablility of this situation is shared by both generations. In this way, to survive is to constantly have to deflect the truth of one's misery and collaboration – through minimisation or fantasy. In this way, the text shifts our gaze towards the shared spiritual death of the small and unheroic inhabitants of the township, recognising how political agency is ceded in the name of survival.

Serote's text returns in this way to Sepamla's doctor, whose explanation of collaboration applies: "Survival, mfo. The survival of self, the survival of stooges" (111). In this way fertility and life, much like laughter, become akin to despair. By this logic, living under apartheid becomes a form of death, with survival and prosperity under these material conditions reduced to collaboration and the reproduction of its abuses. This is why Ndo, who batters his wife, is described, huddled over in despair with "[h]is head […] bowed, as the branch of a tree, loaded with fruit" (17).

Conversely, an old man, huddled over in defeat is described as having a “bright” face, “like a famer looking at his crops” (15).[105]

It is from this recognition that Serote’s depiction of popular consciousness emerges. This is prefigured when Boykie says,

> We imagine that we have a home, we know that in reality, if there was a quick way that these settlers could wipe us out, they would, and if they did not need our labour they would. All these things live with us every minute of every day (49).

Because black life has been moulded into the service of apartheid, death must be embraced. In this way Tsi’s parents will be redeemed and radicalised by hearing their son, Fix’s testimony at his own trial. His strength will reawaken their strength, and yet Fix’s life has had to cease to allow for this revelation. This conclusion is reiterated by Grace, when she says of her husband who is sent to Robben Island,

> He is not dead, but he is not available to us… He believes in what he did, that gives us strength… It will be our children, our husbands, our loved ones who will have to die and go to jail to save us all, it will have to be us (135).

In this way, collaborators are redeemed by those who have forgone the sanctity of their lives. As we have encountered in Sepamla, one of the greatest barriers to remaining loyal, as the doctor highlights, is the attempt to live, to survive within the system. In a sense, then, collective conscious becomes a consciousness of death.

Historically, this impetus to renarrativise death and destruction to avoid its pacifying grip was taken up within Black Consciousness circles. Upon the death of a prominent SASO activist in detention, a preacher responded by likening the activist to Jesus Christ, claiming “‘Christ’s death is the prototype of all deaths that are a mask of victory,’ …and so, like Christ, the dead activist had actually won” (cited in Magaziner,

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[105] These images of fertility and despair are thus arranged according to multiple levels of significance, similar to those of “bleakness” and “regeneration” that characterise Ayi Kewi Armah’s *Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. As Neil Lazarus notes of Armah’s novel,

> while the narrative focus… falls unremittingly upon the existing social order, the inner gaze of the text...[is] directed beneath and beyond the surface…. Armah’s readers are called upon to be alert to the spectral reality of this inner gaze, which haunts and even subverts the bleak surface of everyday life…. The inner gaze urges upon us the realization that the shape of tomorrow’s world is embryonically borne in today’s action (1987:138).

2010:9). The bible, similarly, also provided this precedent for suffering communities to reach eventual redemption (Magaziner, 2010:113).

And yet, it is possible to miss the peculiarity of this discourse as one that remains distinct from a nationalist consciousness of death as martyrdom. Thus, Nelson Mandela's famous statement from the dock is concerned with death in a different modality:

> I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die. (1964:355)

Here the significance of death is a question of number, measuring and emphasising the extent of Mandela's commitment to the struggle – which exceeds the limits of his life. However, in Serote's novel, what emerges is not only this nationalist discourse, but the contours of a less heroic popular discourse, in which, since survival is itself collaboration, death as the embodiment of non-collaboration, must be embraced. This negative mode of thought is thus a form of collective consciousness which minimises the individual will to survive so that death no longer remains a deterrent to non-collaboration.Take for instance, the dead activist Nolizwe, who is remembered saying,

> [you] must know that a time was coming when we would rather die than give the names; when we would rather fall from the top floors of the buildings to save the lives that must take the lives of these mad men." (97)

An indicator of this consciousness within the historical account is provided by Saul Dubow, who highlights the way in which a seeming obliviousness to danger or death marked the 1976 rebellion. He quotes a photojournalist: "[w]hat was remarkable…was the attitude of the children. They were so incensed with anger that many seemed oblivious to the danger" (cited in Dubow, 2014:180).

Thus, while Tlali and Mzamane painstakingly detail the steps, plans and exploits of the students, the didacticism of their novels is unable to capture this aspect of consciousness which interprets black life and survival under apartheid as already necessarily co-opted. From this perspective, the degraded value of individual protection, maintenance and survival are foregone in favour of fire, destruction and death.

This recognition allows us to return to Tlali's *Amandla* to the brief moment when the idealised student leader Pholoso is depicted as an emotional and flawed member of the rebellion, momentarily indecipherable from the faceless mob. This is the moment, after the murder of his friend by the police, that rage overcomes Pholoso's otherwise prudent character. Gone is the prototypical nationalist leader, recommending meditation and reading, quoting various political tracts by heart. Instead, Pholoso finds himself "burning, breaking, destroying all the municipal buildings to revenge the shooting and killing of his closest friend" (157). In this instance, Pholoso, in an undisciplined moment, slips out of the nationalist discipline and into a consciousness akin to that described above.

In this way, beyond the anxieties of nationalist legitimacy which evidently determine the disciplinary nature of the 1976 novels, Serote's narrative provides a glimpse into the interiority of the rebellion. In this depiction, the consciousness of the township appears as one in which laughter is pain, fertility is death and the imminent destruction of fire builds the popular mobilisation.

4. *Kroniek uit die doofpot* and Apartheid Reformism

A common assumption about apartheid is that the nationalist mythology of the Great Trek with its divine ordination of Afrikaner supremacy remained the centerpiece of National Party policy and discourse throughout its rule. Within South African literary studies, this approach is reflected by critics' narrow interest in the Afrikaans genre of the *plaasroman* (farm novel), that symbolic container of nationalist mythology which remained a dominant literary form, particularly in its subversion by anti-apartheid writers.

But what novels like Etienne Van Heerden's *Toorberg* (1986) and Marlene van Niekerk's *Triomf* (1994), with their representations of the diseased fruit and roots of Afrikaner nationalism, are less capable of capturing is the changing discourse and lived experience of late apartheid – with its disavowal of racism, its shift from ideological continuity to technocratic pragmatism and reform, and its varied approaches to suppressing popular insurgency. As an ideological development, these discourses presented a change in the means by which legitimacy was projected onto dominance and white supremacy. It is a change which is not fully captured by a project of excavation.

There is, however, an attempt to account for this change in Etienne Van Heerden's caustic rewriting of the *plaasroman*. *Toorberg* is primarily set on the generations-old Moolman family farm. A magistrate, sent to the farm to investigate the death of a young child, finds himself visiting a politicized church pastor, Oneday Riet, who is being held in detention in a nearby town. The magistrate's purpose is to ask about his investigation, but the detainee pre-empts him, asking "[a]re you another of the magistrates supposedly sent to check whether they pull out our toenails?" ([1986] 1993:94). In a novel which considers a generational history of injustice materialized through a family-owned farm, Riet's question bypasses the long and tormented nationalist history embodied by the Moolmans, drawing the reader back to the

immediate surface experience of late apartheid – in which a deceptive cosmetics of justice has developed to imbue state repression with the veneer of legality.

In many respects this veneer would become more important as the National Party attempted to mitigate increasing international pressure following the Soweto Uprising of 1976. Max du Preez highlights how the Information Scandal of May 1978 became emblematic in this regard, having exposed the government's covert funding of the ostensibly independent *Citizen* newspaper and its investment of millions of Rands on propaganda projects meant to improve its image (du Preez, 2003:75).[106] Not only did this expose the falsehood of South African democracy, but it highlighted the extent to which the apartheid government had shifted towards manipulation to improve its image rather than attempting to convince the world of its ideological vision. The scandal also undermined the government's claim to moral supremacy. As du Preez notes,

> Looking back, the Info Scandal was a very important moment in the history of South Africa and of Afrikaner nationalism … the old myth that the leaders of Afrikaner nationalism were honest, straightforward and God-fearing men who had to be followed blindly and trusted because they knew the way forward was blown sky-high in the eyes of their once loyal followers (2003:76).

To du Preez's thinking, the scandal brought an end to the reverence attributed to former leaders like Verwoerd, and hastened the break-away of the National Party's right wing, in the form of the Conservative Party (2003:76-77). It also meant that remaining members of the Party faced an even greater crisis of legitimacy than before. Consequently, the government would attempt to regain its footing by strengthening and widening its base from other angles, and so a period of reform was initiated.

Accompanying reform measures therefore marked a discursive shift – from assertions of ideological purity and moral obligation to the *volk,* towards a focus on pragmatism, adaptability and, in PW Botha's words, the "abolition of unnecessary and hurtful discrimination" (Posel, 1987:434; cited in Posel, 1987:443). In practice, this led to the development of a new range of racial and political euphemism alongside the depoliticized language of reform. In tandem, to suppress developing mass resistance,

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[106] The international propaganda war of the apartheid government is detailed in Ron Nixon's book, *Selling Apartheid: South Africa's Global Propaganda War* (2016).

PW Botha's government championed the technocratic "total strategy" which allocated a greatly expanded role to the military within civil government, thereby "employ[ing] coercion and terror on a scale historically unmatched" (Posel, 1987:422; Lodge, 2011:425). It was, as David Lodge notes, a regime of "brutality with tolerance" (2011:425).[107]

It is these shifts and contradictions, rather than the excavation processes associated with ideological continuity, which are the central focus of John Miles's 1991 novel, *Kroniek uit die doofpot* (translated as *Deafening Silence* [1996]). The characters in Miles's novel navigate a changing and deceptive landscape, underpinned by a "[a] new language of legitimation" (424), which as Deborah Posel notes, "was not simply the ideological reflex of changing structural conditions and ensuing reforms; [but] became an instrument of control in itself" (424).[108]

And so this new veneer of legitimacy and an unwillingness to accept its falsity will determine the actions and outcome for the main character in Miles's novel. *Kroniek* partly follows the unfortunate life of Tumelo John Moleko, a black South African from the rural Free State province, who joins the police force, thereby gaining a foothold in the developing small black middle class – the formation of which was a central programme of the late apartheid government. However, one day Tumelo John is assaulted by one of his senior colleagues, a white policeman, Colonel van Niekerk. On the one hand, the assault bursts his eardrum, leading to deafness in one ear, while on the other, it engages Tumelo John in a protracted legal battle which exposes the inveterate racism and corruption of the police-force. The narrative will conclude with Tumelo John hounded and eventually murdered, along with his wife, by the policemen he had worked beside.

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[107] Lodge attributes this quote to Nadine Gordimer. However, it appears to be Lodge's own adaption of a phrase which belongs to her biographer Ronald Suresh Roberts. It originally reads "[t]he 1980s weirdly mingled brutality with hope in South Africa" (see Roberts, 420). Whatever errors may have occurred, Lodge's formulation is nevertheless quite suggestive.

[108] Deborah Posel in her discussion of the period of reform specifies that its "language of legitimation" did not constitute "a complete or uncontested ideological shift" (1987: 419). From this perspective she distinguishes between ideology and a discourse of legitimation by defining ideology as a "vehicl[e] for the constitution of subjectivity" which includes the language of legitimacy "but is not exhausted by it" (438). In this way, she claimed at the time of writing that the language of legitimacy as she describes it was not "effectively persuasive, and internalized into the experience and subjectivity of at least one audience" (438). However, the narrow definition of ideology notwithstanding, in hindsight, and given its later impact on the transition settlement, the language of legitimacy more than likely satisfies the requirements of ideology which she set.

The novel thus fictionalises the real-life murder of Richard and Irene Motasi in November of 1987. Initially based on a news article that appeared in *The Sowetan* newspaper (Miles, 1996:297), the Motasi case was later heard at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) as various apartheid Security Branch members filed for amnesty for the murder of Irene Motasi.[109]

These later accounts would vindicate much of the narrative that Miles's novel provides about the life of the policeman, yet, the novel additionally constructs an accompanying metafictional narrative, in which the white author-as-character attempts to reconstruct Tumelo John Moleko's story through collected official documents, trips around Moleko's old neighbourhood, interviews with various people and discussions with Tumelo John's colleagues and friends. The framing narrative thus also appears to fictionalise the author himself and provides a meta-commentary and contextualisation for the embedded narrative. In this way, each chapter of Tumelo John's life is followed by a brief chapter recounting the author-narrator's progress and reflections on constructing and reconstructing the embedded narrative.

The novel proceeds within this dyadic structure, with the embedded narrative consistently interrupted by the frame, emphasizing the artificiality of the narrative while developing the author-as-character within the contrasting and limited horizons of 1980s white South Africa.

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Given the explicitly political basis of Miles's novel, it's strange that the introduction to the 2005 edition acknowledges the politicized or "committed" ("*politieke of 'betrokke'*") nature of the novel, but then contends that on a "deeper" level it concerns a "universal" theme: the normal individual struggling against a powerful system. Gunther Pakendorf continues to describe the main character as "a black policeman during apartheid, an ordinary person striving for modest happiness for him and his

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[109] See, for instance, https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/decisions/2001/ac21010.htm. Antjie Krog, in her account of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, also discusses the incident, drawing on Miles's depiction of the murder to interrogate the truthfulness of the perpetrators' accounts (1998:82-89).

family, and who isn't really interested in politics" (Pakendorf, 2005: loc. 29; my translation).[110]

The description, with its praise of universal themes, manages both to describe a black apartheid policeman as "ordinary" (a claim which, as the previous chapter indicated, is highly contested) while also relegating politics to a secondary attribute of the novel, as though this perspective would improve one's estimation of it. While the wider context for Pakendorf's claims will be addressed later, the confusion of his two-level schema in which universality is primary and politics secondary anticipates what emerges as an important trajectory within the novel.

One critic, MJ Prins, attempts to provide a solution. Prins suggests that while Miles's meta-textual commentary puts forward tell-tale signs of universalism, like the author's recognition of Tumelo John's story as "[a] story that actually has no beginning" (16; cited in Prins, 1994:210), specific and concrete events are introduced to discourage "South African readers [from] think[ing] too much in "universal", and therefore abstract terms, about his novel" thereby dimming its political message (Prins, 1994:214; my translation). This is, for instance, how Prins interprets the repetition and difference later in the narrative when the author notes, "[t]he story doesn't have a beginning, or, rather, it began a very long time ago" (88).

And yet, while Prins's analysis is perhaps more sophisticated than Pakendorf's schema, both accounts fail to recognise that the frame narrative, in which the author pieces together Tumelo John's narrative, is itself a plotted narrative: one in which the author's understanding and consciousness develops and changes. The frame for Tumelo John's narrative therefore provides not merely metatextual commentary, but a narrative in its own right.

And so the author-character starts out with an initial universalising contention that Tumelo John was a "*proverbial common man* who thought life was a fire at which you could warm yourself – and with which you could play" (16; my emphasis). The claim also draws on the generalising function of idiom, in this case, the popular Afrikaans idiom, "*as jy met vuur spiel sal jy brand"* (if you play with fire, you'll get

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[110] "'n [S]wart polisieman onder apartheid, 'n gewone mens wat net na beskeie geluk vir himself en sy gesin streef en nie eens in politiek belang stel nie."
All subsequent translations of Miles's text will be taken from the English edition of the novel, translated as *Deafening Silence* (1996); with the caveat, however, that Eithne Doherty's translation loses much of the nuance of the original Afrikaans.

burned): both a parental or paternalistic warning about risky behaviour and a retrospective claim that renders harm or damage as the inevitable result of imprudent actions. In this instance, the author-character's perspective of Tumelo John's life emerges from a position of presumed superiority.

Throughout the embedded narrative, Afrikaner idioms are repeatedly used. While they are often defamiliarised by being spoken by black policemen, their repeated use becomes more an indicator of the general political environment than of their professed universality. We see this in consistent refrains of "*slim vang sy baas*" (you're too smart for your own good) and "*as jy nie wil luister nie, dan moet jy voel*" (if you don't want to listen, then you'll have to feel).[111] Taken together, these repeated idioms portray an authoritarian threat of reprisal for nonconformists presented as the inevitable logic of the universe.

This is particularly the case for the idiom "*as jy nie wil luister nie, dan moet jy voel"* which suggests that if an individual fails to take advice or follow rules (*luister*: to listen or obey), they will either cause themselves some kind of bodily harm, or that someone will have to "teach them a lesson," that is, punish them, so that they learn to obey.[112] Therefore, the novel concerns itself with different levels of "listening", where one level translates as obeisance, to which the protagonist and the author-character will need to become deaf to, or unlearn, so that they may hear and see what is actually going on.

This explains the often ambiguous symbolic economy of Tumelo John's deafness, which gradually develops after he is assaulted by Van Niekerk. The starkest rendering of this symbolism is near the end of the novel, as Tumelo John is detained by his former colleagues and hears policemen discussing the brutal and punitive ways in which they treat black demonstrators. He finally acknowledges the racism which has surrounded him throughout his time at the police:

> Had he really been listening to such stories every day? When had he stopped being deaf …? Fancy having to become deaf in order to hear! (220)

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[111] It is difficult to find a close translation for "*slim vang sy baas*" which emphasises the inevitable bad result or comeuppance of being *too* clever or smart (for which can be read non-conforming or "cheeky"). Perhaps a closer semantic translation is "too clever by half," but rather more fitting is probably another South Africanism: "think you too clever; that's why your tail got cut!"
[112] The Afrikaans verb *luister*, translates as listen, hear, and notably – obey. It is often used to qualify imperatives and commands.

Likewise, by the end the frame narrative, the author will abandon his initial interpretation of Tumelo John as an insouciant who "played with fire" or tempted fate. A similar change is foreshadowed at the beginning of the frame narrative, when paging through Tumelo John's files, the author recognises a "reluct[ance] to dig deeper" (16). He finds himself assailed by "an uneasy feeling [that] something appalling would happen to him, too", so that to continue reconstructing the narrative he will have to "overcome his distaste" (16). And so while fear of government repression is registered, what emerges is a subsequent "distaste" and "reluctance" to investigate Tumelo John's life beyond simple and received interpretations (for which we can read *universalising*). In this way, common-sense conceptions are presented as one way of bypassing historical context and specificity, while government repression is internalised in forms of self-censorship: distaste and reluctance.

This is important, because the qualification appended to the claim to universality "[t]he story doesn't have a beginning, *or, rather, it began a very long time ago*" (88; my emphasis), highlights the author-character's dawning realisation of a deep history of hierarchical and racialized socio-economic organisation in South Africa. From the introduction of private property, from labour exploitation to colonialism and apartheid, these antecedents produce the existing conditions which have taken on the appearance of timelessness or universality.

And so, to counter the clasp of ideology, historical specificity is given primacy within the form of the novel. Specific date ranges are demarcated by each chapter, encouraging contextual readings. In this way, the main plot of the embedded narrative (excluding initial background chapters) runs from 19 August 1983 to 30 November 1987, with the frame narrative situated only a few months later, running from August 1988 to 1 December 1988. In this respect, it's especially important that the chapter in which Tumelo John is assaulted – the central event of the plot – is dated 8 September 1984, taking place during the Vaal Triangle Uprising of September 1984.

Furthermore, the determination of history is recognised when Tumelo John accepts the structural nature of the injustice he faces. By this reasoning, the insurmountable barrier he has been facing is not the man Van Niekerk himself, a mere product of history, who out of uniform resembles "a bag of silage, slightly dented, on the moving conveyor belt of a mill" (267). It is not Van Niekerk who propels the racialized injustice of the narrative, but the historical institutions which have produced

him, granting him power and protection. "Van Niekerk was unimportant," Tumelo realises,

> It was what was behind him that was important, whatever gave him his power and permitted him to break what he could, gave him orders and said, trample with the boot, tug on the rein. Not Van Niekerk, but the faceless Head Office (268).

Conversely, within the frame narrative, it will be the historically and culturally determined nature of language, with its universalising idioms, circumnavigations and omissions that the author will recognise as part of the coercion of his society.

> All I want to say … has already been said. And it couldn't have been prevented what happened here. In the meantime a generation of new believers has been born, full of devotion for a land where all will speak the same language, all will receive one mighty, inclusive culture, so inclusive we'll all think alike; in which everybody knows where to lay the correct structural accents … a culture that will transform all diversity into uniformity and where there will always be a place for the indispensable coercion. So that today's most devout can tomorrow be the loudest in professing: we didn't know (295-296).

In this way, language becomes the medium through which the oppressive conformity and grandiose promises of inclusivity are rendered. In this way it recalls the self-serving and coercive paternalism depicted in Breyten Breytenbach's poem "*Taalstryd*" ("The Struggle for the Taal")[113] in which black South Africans are addressed in turn:

> You will learn to be submissive
> submissive and humble.
> And you will learn to use the Taal,
> with humility you will use it
> for it is we who possess the mouths
> with the poison in the throb and the flow of the heart (1976:93).

Breytenbach's poem traces the trajectory from the moralised authoritarianism contained in the apartheid government's attempts to force schoolchildren to learn Afrikaans, to the resistance which followed, embodied in the Soweto Uprising and its destruction of government structures. In this way, Afrikaans, from its initial struggle for recognition

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[113] "Taal" translates as language in Afrikaans. As translator Denis Hirson notes, "the Taal" refers specifically to the Afrikaans language, with "Taalstryd" ("Struggle for the Taal") referring to "the struggle to establish Afrikaans as a language in its own right" (146f).

in the early twentieth century to its being forced upon black South Africans, becomes "the grammar of violence/ and the syntax of destruction". While Breytenbach's poem stresses the violence and authoritarianism underlying the ostensible morality of the government's cause, symbolised pertinently by the poem's epigraph "Clean as the conscience of a gun," Miles's depiction focuses particularly on the strategy of ignorance which would later emerge as a final attempt to obscure Afrikaners' culpability: "today's most devout" he notes "can tomorrow be the loudest in professing: we didn't know."

Thus the embedded and frame narratives present parallel trajectories from willed ignorance to knowledge. From this perspective, the tension between the universal and political becomes just one trajectory within the development of the novel and a stumbling block which must be overcome.

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The plot trajectory of *Kroniek* therefore appears to anticipate attempts to depoliticize the novel. This corresponds to the wider literary context which became particularly evident following the peculiar reception of Elsa Joubert's controversial novel, *Die swerfjare van Poppie Nongena* (1978; translated as *The Long Journey of Poppie Nongena* [1980]).

Bare plot details of Joubert's novel are sufficient to convey its critique of the ostensible morality of the homeland policy, exposing it rather for what it was: a system which created a pool of precarious and super-exploitable labour. Thus, Poppie Nongena is a black South African woman who is moved and removed to various different parts of the country according to apartheid legislation, so that forced removals, pass laws, an exploitative labour market and poor medical provision function as enervating barriers to her attempts to educate her children, keep her family together and remain a law-abiding citizen.

Yet, as David Van Schalkwyk notes, the "unprecedented acclaim and publicity" that Joubert's novel received appears contradictory, given the tacit acceptance of apartheid by many of its readers (1986:186). And so, alongside the novel's widespread translation, its receipt of three major South African literary awards, 150 reviews, interviews and reports, as well as cabinet ministers purporting to have read it; most of the criticism and interpretation that the novel received contained "urgent and systematic

attempts to depoliticize" it (1986:186). For instance, one reviewer notes that "its honesty is apolitical," another that "Joubert's book is *never* political," another that its achievement is that of "*not* lowering the literary to the level of our politics," and yet another that "Poppie's problems are generally human ones, they are universal" (1986:186-187; 189).[114] As Van Schalkwyk concludes, "the material conditions of Poppie's existence [are] thus evaporated into metaphysical abstractions" (190) – a conclusion which could be extended to Pakendorf's account of Miles's novel.

While Van Schalkwyk ascribes the depoliticisation of Joubert's novel to the white South African public's unwillingness to recognize the atrocities of apartheid, it is also a marker of the particular discourse of legitimacy which emerged after the Soweto Uprising of 1976.

Accordingly, critics have recognized the correspondence between Miles's and Joubert's novels (Warnes, 2009), with both narrating an Afrikaans-speaking black protagonist attempting to navigate the pitfalls of apartheid amid popular political-historical events (the Soweto Uprising and the Vaal Triangle Uprising). Yet, it might be more accurate to see Joubert's novel as a forerunner to Miles's, with *Kroniek* presenting an elaboration on some of the thornier aspects of Joubert's novel – and particularly as a novel which notably anticipates the depoliticisation which *Poppie Nongena* received.[115]

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[114] Joubert herself also claimed that her novel was "not a political book," but rather "a human novel that goes beyond the boundaries of politics" and should "be judged as a literary work and not a political one" (187; 188). Without getting trapped by questions of authorial intention, it would be worth noting that Joubert's novel somehow, despite its condemnatory representation of apartheid legislation, did manage to avoid censorship – and this certainly needs to be kept in mind when considering her own representation of it.

[115] Specifying this relation as influence, if not a re-writing, provides the added benefit that both can be appreciated in terms of their specific projects. Warnes's assertion of the two novels' common interests ("everyday violence and its effects") leads him to evaluate the authors against each other: "Miles, recognized as one of the pioneers of South African postmodernism, is in fact more technically innovative, ironic, and self-consciously literary than is Joubert" (2009). This claim seems ungenerous, since the two writers clearly have different aims and projects, with correspondingly different markers of sophistication. As Anne McClintock has forcefully argued, critiques of the novel notwithstanding, *Poppie Nongena* with its generic ambiguity, polyphonic narrative voice and experimental representation of collective identity makes it formally significant and meaningful in its own right (McClintock, 2018).

If politicization was thought to undermine honesty and beauty then these assumptions appeared to run concurrent to a discourse of national defence and security which presented political opposition as terrorism and political dissidents as representatives (or stooges) of cold war conspiracy.[116] Take, for instance, Jacques Pauw's depiction of the language of death squad members:

> 15-year-old township activists armed with stones and sticks were '*gewapende terroriste'* (armed terrorists) and civic leaders who led disobedience campaigns in townships were *'opgeleide revolusionêres'* (trained revolutionaries). Any black person opposed to apartheid was easily branded as a '*Marxsis'* (Marxist) or *Kommunis* (Communist) (Pauw, 2017:18).

While death squads were clearly extreme proponents of these transmuting discourses which dehumanised their victims, this discourse developed along with the increasing militarisation of South Africa, and has perhaps been most clearly depicted in Anthony Akerman's anti-conscription play, "Somewhere on the Border" (1982). In Afrikaans literature, this mode was perhaps most evident in Etienne Van Heerden's short stories "My Kubaan" (1983) and "My Afrikaner" (1983), as well as Breyten Breytenbach's excoriating poem, "Brief uit die vreemde aan slagter" (1972).

Yet, where Van Heerden's stories comprise dramatic monologues addressed to mythologised personas of the Border War, and where Breytenbach's poem addresses the South African president, BJ Vorster, directly ("vir Balthazar"), Miles's novel lacks any direct address, and correspondingly, the immediacy of racism and violence. In this sense, just as Tumelo John will recognise that his opponent is not Van Niekerk but the unapproachable and inaccessible "faceless Head Office" (268), just so the depiction of Tumelo John is received second-hand through the author-character of the frame narrative, with the name "John" appended to "Tumelo Moleko" as a constant textual reminder of the projection (or shared consciousness) of the author himself.[117]

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[116] See Monica Popescu "Reading through a Cold War lens: Apartheid-era Literature and the Global Conflict" (2012).

[117] However, the limits of the author-narrator's imagination and representation will become apparent, when later at the end of the narrative, Tumelo John's friend Temba will provide a startling and contradictory criticism of his friend, "but there was one thing I couldn't go along with, and that was their fooling around with firearms. That wasn't right, and I told them so… and in front of the child, too" (273). The depiction of Tumelo John as gun-toting and reckless, however, will be appended by Temba's recognition that Tumelo John was community-minded and altruistic ("he helped so many people, you've just no idea" [273]) and, ironically, that he was a good father – "[h]e loved his child very much" (274). The reader will be left to consider the aporia that remains behind the author's representation.

The obfuscating role of distance likewise emerges in Tumelo John's response to his work in the police force. As a policeman he is seldom deployed to the street, but rather fills a primarily administrative role as a duty officer, logging guns in and out of the police station and "check[ing] all entries in the occurrence book … [against] outstanding reference numbers" (49). The distance of administrative work is notably what he most enjoys (49), and partly motivates his decision to use individualised legalistic and bureaucratic routes to receive justice. In this way most of the novel is taken up with the bureaucracy of formal complaints, the filing and drafting of statements, meetings scheduled and re-scheduled, internal investigations corrupted, departmental hearings postponed and deferred and a variety of documents manipulated.

That bureaucracy serves to introduce a polite distance between antagonistic members of society is already presaged at the beginning of the narrative, when Tumelo John is deployed along with other policemen to intimidate a group of 1200 steel-cable factory workers who are striking (19). Looking around, Tumelo John notes the "frustrat[ed]" restlessness of the workers which reminds him of the poverty he experienced growing up. While he cannot understand what they are saying (they are migrant workers from Mozambique), he can read "their gestures of anger and resentment" (20).

Later, speaking to his friend Nkosi, he questions the apparent illegitimacy of the strike – the strikers are, after all, only being paid R20 a month. To this Nkosi responds

> The trouble with those men out there today… was they didn't know how to go about getting what they wanted. It's all their own fault…. A factory like that has worker committees: they could have gone to them and talked over their gripes…. There's one thing about the white man: you must always use the right channels, boetie!" (21-22)

These channels, as Tumelo will find in his attempts to bring himself to justice, are effectively controlled by the very interests that complaints would be levelled against. Yet in this way, any resistance or opposition unmediated by the government was presented as violent, irresponsible and primarily destructive.

This emerges in PW Botha's infamous "Crossing the Rubicon" speech of 1985, in which he claims that political opponents were opposed to "peaceful negotiation" and sought to "seize and monopolise all power" by "violence and by burning down schools and houses and murdering innocent people" (404; 406). In this way, violence was not

contextualised as a response to political exclusion or to state violence (which is unacknowledged, save as necessary "defence"), but rather posited as the result of irresponsibility – an unwillingness to follow "the right channels," as Nkosi suggests. Hence, in Botha's framing, demonstrators were unprepared to accept "joint responsibility" and were only capable of "destroy[ing]" the country (405; 406).

And yet, Botha's formulation of mass political resistance as irresponsibility and political immaturity points to the emergence in the 1980s of mass-participatory democratic structures (like the United Democratic Front) and the developing coalition of anti-apartheid and workers' struggle. This was embodied by the 1984 Vaal Triangle Uprising which, in Miles's novel, exerts considerable pressure on the police force at the point when Van Niekerk assaults Tumelo John.[118]

That the assault is linked to the increasing difficulty and frustration of attempts to contain the Uprising is coherent, since the Uprising became the most widespread and sustained period of resistance in South Africa's history (Dubow, 2014:211). Initiated in 3 September 1984, it could only be dampened by the government declaring a state of emergency a year later in September 1985.

And while the immediate cause of the Uprising is contested, the initial demonstration painfully coincided with one of the central reforms of the government, the tricameral government. This extension of limited representation for those classified as coloured or Indian was meant to bolster PW Botha's claim that the government had a "preference for consensus politics… sound inter-group relations and …. Constitutional renewal" (cited in Clark & Worger, 2013:94).[119] In practice, this expanded representation was still heavily mediated and excluded the (black) South African majority from any form of political representation.[120]

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[118] The "Vaal Triangle" refers to a triangular-shaped area south of Johannesburg, with includes the industrial towns of Vanderbijl Park, Vereeniging and Sasolburg. The area also importantly includes a number of townships – Sharpeville, Boipatong, Bophelong, Sebokeng and Evaton.

[119] While Martin Murray claims that the opening of parliament actually provoked the uprising (1987:248), Tom Lodge questions this causal link (440). In *Kroniek*, Tumelo John claims that the opening of the new parliament coincided with the introduction of new and higher rents within the Vaal townships. Therefore he fears that the violence will lead people to forget that "it is the rent business which started the trouble… How can you force people who haven't any money, not even enough to buy food, to pay more rent?" (78).

[120] It did, however, allow government officials to claim that the government was putting the sins of apartheid behind it while potentially expanding both its voter base and thereby claiming increased legitimacy for its rule.

On the day of the tricameral government's opening, demonstrators in Vereeniging organised to picket against rent increases and the corruption of local councilors (Lodge, 2011:441). This was followed by a two-day strike and a school boycott in neighbouring Sebokeng and Sharpeville, with angry residents burning down shops and public offices (411). Following the state's response, the insurrection spread to Soweto (17 September) and Springs (14 October).

However, by 7 October the South African police were unable to limit or quell the intensity and scale of demonstrations, and so the government deployed the army. As Martin Murray notes, deploying the army was an attempt to "assuage the fears of the white electorate" about the Botha regime losing control, when in actuality this was already the case:

> This deployment of regular army units signalled both an acknowledgment that greater muscle was required to cope with th[e] broadening scale of revolt and the grim determination of the white authorities to stifle it through force. The standard paramilitary police procedures – tear gas, rubber bullets, shotguns, water hoses, 'sneeze machines', whips and dogs, widespread detentions, and so on – proved incapable of stemming the wave of popular mobilisation (Murray, 1987:253).[121]

The combined effect of police and military repression led to 150 deaths during September and October (Murray, 1987:255). And yet, the Uprising signalled an important moment where workers and students came together. From this perspective, the main feature distinguishing the Vaal Uprising and the Soweto Uprising of 1976-7 was that while the latter was initiated mainly by student activists comprising a limited but powerful ideological base, the Vaal Triangle Uprising, by contrast, "had deeper roots in working-class dissatisfaction," meaning that "the unrest almost immediately attracted the participation of broader layers of oppressed masses with a wider spectrum of ideological perspectives" (Murray, 1987:256). This meant that, compared to the rebellion of 1976, the 1980s insurrection was more widely dispersed and more inclusive, producing "new, transformational structures of popular authority" (Dubow, 2014:211).

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[121] This much is also recognised in Miles's text, when an officer, having just returned a few months later from Sebokeng notes that the popular mobilisations are "much worse" than those of 1976: "If the defence force [i.e. the army] hadn't come to the rescue, the police would all have been killed, every last one of them… in a couple of years nobody will be able to do anything with those young people" (159).

The impact of this wider participation was directly felt in the white community when a two day stay-away was called on 5 November, with a million workers participating (Lodge, 2011:411).[122] As Murray notes, "[t]he strike was the first time black workers joined student groups and civic organisations in a coordinated mass protest over political grievances" (258). It was the most successful stay-away since 1949, proving the immense power of mass organisation across different political bases, reverberating throughout the country (Murray, 1987:260). As Murray notes, "filling stations ran out of gas, factories came to a virtual standstill, white managers were forced to staff supermarket checkout stations [and] maids did not turn up for work'" (1987:259).

Frustration and anger from white employers and the police in the face of these disruptions must have been palpable. In *Kroniek*, Colonel Van Niekerk's assault on Tumelo John is triggered by one of his black officers, Letshoene, failing to arrive for work on the day that Van Niekerk and his team are being deployed to the Vaal Triangle to quell the protests (75).[123] The combination of mass resistance with Letshoene's absenteeism (or passive resistance) drives Van Niekerk into a racist eruption of which Tumelo John, merely in charge of logging the presence or absence of his colleagues, becomes the unsuspecting victim. That Tumelo John's individual fate is effectively tied to the mass politics occurring around him is thereby made evident. He may not identify with the demonstrators, or as a member of a racialized class or group, but his life remains determined by the racism of his society which, in the final moment, does not distinguish between him, his absentee colleague or the demonstrators.

Beyond Miles's novel, however, the conspicuous absence of literary accounts of the Vaal Uprising are notable – particularly given the number of literary representations of the Soweto Uprising just eight years before. In fact, Miles's novel provides one of the only registrations of the 1984 Vaal Triangle Uprising – and so it is apt that a novel concerned with the suppression of history incorporates and narrates a historical moment which has likewise been repressed.[124] It follows then, that much like the actual

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[122] Importantly, this also included migrant workers (Lodge, 2011:411)

[123] The intersection between significant events in Tumelo John's life and those of the historical collective struggle against apartheid has also been noted by Van Coller who highlights a correspondence between Tumelo's decision to become a policeman in 1961 insofar as he claims that "the early Sixties is seen as the era of violent resistance to Apartheid when unrest occurred across the country" (2005:330).

[124] Highlighting this repression is the inclusion of a character within the frame narrative (merely referred to as "the friend") whose role is primarily to insist on the importance of historical context. In this sense, he has to remind the author and his publisher about the salience of the Uprising, as well as the massacres

language of state-sanctioned violence, the action of the demonstrators primarily occurs outside of the frame of the main narrative. Similarly, the novel's plot – Tumelo's attempts to bring Van Niekerk to justice – is effectively initiated by the Uprising.

And yet, even against this historical backdrop, Tumelo John remains typically bourgeois in his outlook for most of the narrative. He does not recognise the power of mass demonstration, nor the ways in which his assault is linked to the troubled legitimacy of the state and its response. And so, while his assault is both concurrent and triggered by the mass demonstrations of the Uprising, Tumelo John's own revolt takes the "correct" and individualised channel of bureaucratic procedure: just hours after the assault he logs it in the occurrence register and files a criminal charge at his local police station.

Yet at the point of his assault, the distance, the insulation of his class, and the denial of history start being torn away. At that moment, despite his social mobility, he becomes indistinguishable from the mass of impoverished black South Africans to which the police ascribe criminality and dissipation. This is the meaning of his humiliation: "[t]o be treated in front of your juniors and total strangers as if you were a criminal, a murderer" he opines "… treated like trash, like a kaffir" (94).

That Tumelo has internalised the racialized meaning of the epithet as some form of objective reality, suggests that prior to this episode he had seen his position in the police force as insulating him from the racialized gaze. The actual precarity of his status as a black South African will now become increasingly evident to him, as discussing the severity of his injuries, he draws away from the physical harm that Van Niekerk has done him, instead focusing on how the racial epithets have degraded his social position and the privileges associated with it.

> [T]he colonel said dreadful things to me … He called me a kaffir, and I work with him in the same force. Everyone knows the Boers call people kaffirs. I know it's what they yell when they're panel beating someone, when they're kicking someone on the ground…[b]ut you don't say it to someone who works with you in the force … He didn't just call me a kaffir and say he'd kill me. He said all we're good for is to break up and burn things… destroy things they've given us (108-109).

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and repression which occurred while the so-called homeland, KwaNdebele, was being granted a specious independence by the apartheid government (89; 182; 203).

That Tumelo John voices his knowledge of police torture marks a rupture in the psychic construction of Tumelo's loyalty to the police, which has thus far been predicated on feigning ignorance about the nature of their work. His wife's response will indicate a profound reluctance to acknowledge what he has said through the language of politeness:

> Tumi, please. Do you have to talk about it? I know you don't like that side of police work, but it's not what you do. You do your own work (109).

That Busi responds by suggesting that the mention of torture is itself excessive or impolite ("*Móét jy oor sulke goed praat?*") indicates how silence functions to imply distance and that this distance obscures complicity. This is further emphasized when she makes the false distinction between *his* work and *that* work ("*[m]aar jy doen mos nie sulke werk nie, jy doen jóú werk*").[125]

In this way, Busi's response echoes state discourses of "technological rationality" whereby "[s]tate practices [were] depicted as merely technical, instrumentally rational strategies, devoid of substantive political or ideological doctrine" (Posel, 1987:420). And yet, self-deception also appears to be in service of retaining the privileges which Tumelo John has accrued by working at the police – not only a stable salary, but that marker of bourgeois success: his house. For the decision to remain in his job throughout his trial is premised on an anxiety about maintaining his middle-class status.

This form of co-optation became a significant part of government strategy in the 1980s, with the promotion of free enterprise to the black majority as both intended to deflate the appeal of communism and to produce a vested interest in the status quo. In this way the police force could be seen as a fore-runner, with recruitment advertisements for black policemen promising "opportunities for genuine social mobility" and access to "the pension scheme, fringe benefits, and regular salary

[125] As the narrative progresses, the distinction between the work that Tumelo does and that of the rest of the police force will be further undermined. The final blow will be dealt when just prior to Tumelo John's murder, a "49mm" gun is "noted" or "recorded" [my translation; *opgeteken*] in the vicinity of Tumelo John's house. Along with referencing Tumelo John's prior job of logging firearms in and out of the police station, the use of a technical name creates ambiguity about whether the note is documenting the heavy rainfall of the afternoon or the firearm which will later be used to murder Tumelo. This is one instance, however, where Doherty's translation misses the nuance of the original Afrikaans (see 277).

advancement" (Brewer, 1994:236), while also supporting "the colonial policy of getting the colonized to share in the administration of their oppression" (333).

Within the perspective of the reformist government, capitalism and middle-class values functioned not as a liberal, ethical right extended to township dwellers, but as a system for co-optation and control of the black majority (Posel, 1987:422; 423). In this way the promotion of free enterprise became a formidable part of what came to be called "Total Strategy".[126]

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The distancing of Tumelo John's job, his co-optation through social mobility and a generalised aversion towards "politics" form part of what Deborah Posel has identified as "a new language of legitimation" that the government adopted around the reforms which characterised the final 15 years of apartheid (1987). She provides an overview of political catchphrases that quickly overtook the Afrikaner Nationalist vocabulary which Verwoerd and his predecessors had championed:

> 'Pragmatism' now trumps 'ideological principles'; uncompromising racial separatism must yield to 'rational reform', including the extension of 'free enterprise'. 'Effective government' entails a 'total strategy' in defence of 'civilised values', rather than a moral crusade upholding white supremacy for its own sake (1987:419).

Where ideological purity and an Afrikaner ethics had prevailed, political discourse now turned towards compromise with "[a] bewildering vocabulary, in which trusty old formulations were mangled together with neologisms … rapidly cobbled together in pursuit of a neo-apartheid political solution" (Dubow, 2014:203).

This reformulation, alongside government reforms, had become necessary since the material and political context of South Africa had shifted significantly. Since the mid-1970s, the economy had become increasingly unstable and international condemnation for apartheid had grown (Clark & Worger, 2013:102). And so, following

[126] In this sense the police force can also be read as a forerunner, with the "externalization and militarization" of apartheid opposition affecting the mindset of the police prior to the public adoption of Total Strategy in 1977 (Brewer, 1994:256). Brewer suggests that the police may have played an important role within the development of this rhetoric despite that fact that "only the role of the SADF is acknowledged in the literature" (1994:256).

the national strikes of 1973 and the Soweto Uprising of 1976, the government moved towards implementing reforms to recover social stability while implementing increasingly repressive counter-revolutionary measures (Van Zyl-Hermann, 2020:194; Lodge 409;425). This multi-faceted approach would to be called Total Strategy.

As Saul Dubow notes, the language of Total Strategy appeared to unite what would otherwise appear as disparate moves, thus "a successful counter-revolutionary campaign encompass[ed] all realms of society, politics, economics, and policy, so as to engage the enemy at every level, direct and indirect" (2014:200). Repressive force was therefore achieved through the creation of "a centralised and managerial state" with increased military spending and power (Dubow, 2014:200).

In addition to this, reforms focused on defining and thereby controlling the scope of industrial action and supporting the emergence of a black middle class as a buffer against further insurrection (Lodge, 2011:409; Dubow, 2014:196). In Miles's novel, this is the space in which Tumelo John finds himself. His entry into the urban middle class, from his Free State rural origins are tied to the financial and social security of his job supporting the apartheid state. His concern, for instance, with not losing his suburban house, indicates the stranglehold of complicity which was produced by reforms which sought to give middle-class black South Africans a greater stake in the status quo. As Posel notes, capitalism was "depicted and upheld *explicitly as a system of co-optation and control"* (1987:423). We can see this in PW Botha's own stated rationalisation for social reform:

> We hope to create a middle class among the nations of South Africa. Because, if a man has possessions and is able to build his family life around these possessions, then one has already laid the foundation for resisting Communism (cited in Posel, 1987:423).

This "foundation" was variously constructed through the introduction of a 99-year leasehold scheme in townships, increased government spending on African education (1977-1982), the scrapping of pass laws, and restructuring of labour laws (1986) (Lodge, 2011:197;199).

In this way the containing function of reforms proved reasonably successful since, as Lodge attests, the relative success of the reform strategy was apparent during the later democratic transition which left undisturbed many of the inequitable economic structures that underpinned apartheid. As Lodge reminds us,

a combination of liberal reforms and militarized repression succeeded in containing or at least defining the limits to popular insurgency. The relative success of these state policies helps to explain why the political settlement of 1994 left intact much of the structure of an extremely inequitable society (2011:409).

In many respects the complicity and co-option of this emerging black elite into a highly inequitable society – a movement largely produced and actively promoted by the late apartheid government – would come to fruition in postapartheid South Africa (as will be discussed in Chapter Five).[127]

Thus, the profoundly diffuse bonds and psychic mechanics of complicity which Miles's novel highlights trace the introduction of a discursive environment in which racism cannot be tied to particular historical individuals, in which legal changes do not bring about equality, and where even if militarised oppression ceases, repression will have been internalised, rendering open confrontation impossible.

From this perspective the late apartheid government's legitimatory discourse seemed particularly invested in obscuring both their investment in state-sponsored racism, but also the mechanisms by which inequality would be perpetuated. Thus, the patent absurdities of the government's grandiose claims, epitomised by Piet Koornhof's pronouncement that "[the government] [would] not rest until racial discrimination ha[d] disappeared from [the] statute books and every day life in South Africa" (quoted in Dubow, 2014:204). And yet, the continued impact of economic complicity, the effectiveness of neoliberal reform, and the means by which economic inequality was maintained in postapartheid South Africa, suggests that Koornhof's final conclusion that "[a]partheid as you know it… is dying" (quoted in Dubow, 2014:204) was not so far off. Grand apartheid with its ideological continuities was dying, but would be replaced not by democracy but neoapartheid.

This argument seems increasingly plausible in the face of reforms which focused on drawing new segments of the population into the National Party's base. In

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[127] A further point, latent to Lodge's observation is that if the reforms and repression were so effective that they persisted and moulded the future postapartheid society; then to what extent can the current periodisation of apartheid/postapartheid, with its break in 1994, remain intact? Should the post- or rather, neoapartheid period, in which South Africa finds itself crippled by major inequality, not be read as a developing continuation of the late apartheid reformist period? Taken together, the policy of reform and repression, along with its new language, had far-reaching consequences, the significance of which have largely been overlooked in literary analysis.

this sense, the marginal representation of the "tricameral government" (1983) and the relaxing and repealing of "unnecessary" or "hurtful" discrimination, such as the Immorality and Mixed Marriages acts (1985) performed important ideological work (Dubow, 2014:205;199).

The disjunctive effect of these reforms, which would only become fully evident after the ostensible shift to democracy, is presaged within Miles's text, when the author-narrator visits Tumelo John's friend Temba Kefasi towards the end of the novel. Temba has been introduced as a business partner of Tumelo in his fledgling photography business, and so the author-character interviews him, shortly after the embedded narrative stages Tumelo John's violent death.

Temba is presented with all the trappings of what would later be constructed as the rainbow nation dream: a "brand-new house," an interracial marriage and family ("[h]is wife and mother-in-law are Afrikaans, his child, white"), a paragon of social mobility, completed with "a Sony TV," and a certificate emblematic of his social prestige as "an elder in his church" (273). Yet, despite these trappings which suggest profound political change, the reader is reminded of the persistence of coercion as Temba describes the corruption of the police and his harassment by homeland police officers (273). In this way, the outward signs of progress acquire a sinister aspect, with Temba's lifestyle expressing not equality but the co-optation and containment dreamed about by PW Botha's government.

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These factors, the denial of history and politics and the compartmentalization of complicity, all comprise the cultural effects of Total Strategy. The notion that defense was of such paramount importance that it should be made "applicable at all levels" and to all functions of state (Posel, 1987:422) manifests itself in a vignette of evasion and self-censorship when the author-narrator interviews a crime journalist about extrajudicial violence within the police force.

Upon arriving at the journalist's house, however, the author must first navigate his way through a surreal landscape. Walking through a garden he encounters inflated toys that have been damaged and discarded, soiled by dirt:

> The toys, mainly plastic, in all kinds of psychedelic colours, and very battered, are enormous. There are gigantic ducks, much dented and holed at their bases, and machine guns with sawn-off barrels. A large pink helicopter, splotched with mud and without its rotors, wallows on the ground. (118)

He then enters through the back door and finds the journalist sitting at a television with his infant son and "[t]wo wolf-like dogs" (118). The ensuing discussion will prove vague and insufficient, with questions about excessive force and the questionable trustworthiness of the police rejected out of hand ("Now you're talking politics" [119], "*Nou praat jy politiek.*" [loc. 1872]), and the journalist claiming that extrajudicial violence, along with its perpetrators, be seen as "an exception" ("Think of it as an exception" (120), "*Jy moet dit sien as 'n uitsondering*" [loc. 1877]).

Part of the frustration of the encounter will stem from the journalist's insistence on discussing a novel he is writing – one in which the setting moves from "a far distant planet" to Pretoria (120), a parody of the political decontextualisation which he proffers in his view of the police. The space-themed novel thus identifies the over-sized toys in the garden as imaginative or conceptual props, damaged and soiled by the "wolf-like" dogs. Indeed, the scene heightens the stifling formulism of the crime journalist's claims:

> He says the honour of the security police is beyond question. Everything they do is for the good of the country. They've nothing to do with politics; it's all a matter of national security. He says I can take it from him, they are of the highest integrity (120).

Leaving, the author will wryly note of the journalist's toys, the soiled and broken conceptual props used to represent reality, that "the dogs summarily render harmless whatever lands. Total reduction of a total onslaught" (120).

In this image, Total Strategy with its universal focus on defense, becomes a mental process whereby representation has itself become part of the strategy. This is not the only time in which dogs symbolize the ambiguous and internalised violence of state repression – with its twin focus on protection and repression. Both Tumelo John and his police chief own dogs, while another pair of dogs are found suspiciously sniffing around in the white suburbia of the frame narrative.

In this way the novel materialises how fear under authoritarian rule has become internalised and thereby indistinguishable from a variety of other affects. This is the

case for the "two prize Rottweilers" of the police chief, Brigadier Botha, which notably appear when he reprimands his subordinates, but are also found roaming around the college campus, so that "[e]veryone also had the utmost respect for those two dogs. If you happened to come across them on the campus, you stopped dead in your tracks" (106). Where "utmost respect" can become indistinguishable from vigilance and fear, the distinction between consent and coercion has eroded. Dogs occupy this shifting space: representing violence, loyalty, arousing fear as well as feelings of security. This is for instance why, when a discussion touches briefly on the existence of the ANC, the dogs outside appear to be pricking their ears, "restlessly, sniffing at the neighbour's footprints", later climbing up on the window ledge to "muzzle against the window-pane as if making sure the neighbour is still there" (90; 91). In whose service are these dogs whose main claim is the rendering null of an apparent (Total) onslaught? And what is finally justified in the name of a safety or protection which cannot be extricated from repression and violence? This misrecognition of repression as safety produces irony, when Busi praises Nkosi, a Vlakplaas operative, saying "Nkosi's a man who always makes you feel so safe" (262).[128]

In a later moment of confrontation, the police Brigadier insists that Tumelo retract his original charge of assault against Van Niekerk "in the interests of college discipline" (116). When Tumelo John refuses, the Brigadier tells him "If you go through that door… you're finished" – an ambiguous phrase, but which is heightened to its full violent potential when one of the brigadier's rottweillers jumps up on his desk, ready to attack (116). Though Tumelo John is clearly in danger, both men are startled by the dog's movement, the immediate transition between discipline and violence. This portrays the extent to which even perpetrators within this system did not perceive the violence of their actions and refused to acknowledge its presence. In a sense, then, the language of legitimacy which Posel describes is not only a means of control, but allows the dominant class to shield itself from the intolerable knowledge of the violence they perpetrate and which is perpetrated in their name.[129]

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[128] Vlakplaas was an infamous counter-insurgency unit from which apartheid death squads hunted, tortured and murdered anti-apartheid activists (Pauw, 2017:18).

[129] As Pauw has noted, "[t]he conspiracy needed its own language – one that didn't leave any suggestion of blood, pain, loss or suffering. Never, but never, did they use words like 'kill' or 'murder' or 'assassinate'. '*Maak 'n plan met*' (make a plan with), '*vat hom uit'* (take him out), '*raak ontlae van hom'* (get rid of him), *'los die probleem op'* (solve the problem) and the favourite: *'elimineer'* (eliminate). This

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In this respect, it is Tumelo John's great mistake to misread or misunderstand the economy of euphemism which obscures the racialized landscape within which he lives. This is illustrated in an early scene, where Tumelo John and his grandfather, still in the rural Free State, watch a man climb off a bus. His grandfather observes that the man is clearly a foreigner, ignorant of the world he is navigating: "Look at that!" he exclaims, "[h]e trod right on that little grape bush. Who from around here would walk on food?" (14). By contrast, the young Tumelo John does not notice any of this, focusing rather on the prestige of the man's appearance – that he is "heavily built", with "powerful" arms and hands as big as spades (14). The prestige of stature thus foreshadows Tumelo's own future advancement, whereas his grandfather's awareness of the landscape highlights the ignorance which eventually decides the path he will take. Following this analogy, Tumelo John's belief in the possibility of justice under apartheid and his initial misreading or willed ignorance of the manifestations of injustice will lead to his tragic end.[130]

Historically, this obfuscation becomes evident not only in the discourses of legitimation and Total Strategy, but also in the way that language was regulated. The common law precedent for *crimen injuria*, for instance, rendered the use of the racially denigrating term "kaffir/kaffer" legally actionable from 1976 via the case of Ciliza vs the Minister of Police and Another, with Mbatha vs Van Staden in 1982, and with Nduna vs Coetzee in 1983 (Botma, 2019:109). Where the injury in these legal actions encompassed the insult to dignity that racist epithets suggested, it perhaps ironically also highlighted the strained politeness and euphemism which accompanied the final decade of apartheid. As Christopher Hope noted, "[South Africa] is a land where euphemism has long been, like war, an extension of policy by other means" (cited in Dubow, 1994:355).

allowed the killers to pray and attend church, get married and raise families, hold funerals and cry when their pets passed away" (2017:17-18).

[130] In this respect, one critic has noted the allusions to Eugène Marais's canonized short story, "Klein-riet-alleen-in-die-roerkuil" (Van Coller, 2005:331) in which the character fails to "heed warnings" and dies tragically as a result (Van Coller, 2005:331).

Thus *crimen injuria* arises in Miles's novel as Tumelo John is waiting to receive his police training in Johannesburg. In the text, Tumelo, just arrived at Cleveland police station, is led to the barracks by his friend Nkosi. Sitting on his bed, he picks up a newspaper with a front page news item about "a man who, the previous day, had appeared in a Johannesburg magistrate's court on a charge of *crimen injuria*: he'd called a black advocate a kaffir. The magistrate had repeatedly warned him about his insulting demeanour. The case had been postponed" (19). The inclusion foreshadows Tumelo's own struggles with the continual postponement of his own case – as Tumelo John's advocate notes, "[j]ustice delayed is justice denied" (273).

Significantly, as Gawie Botma has observed, media reporting of *crimen injuria* cases under apartheid indicated that "the public was informed about the increasing taboo of and legal sanction against the use of the K-word. But at the same time the way the reports were framed… indicated that white popular opinion perhaps did not share and appreciate the concern" (Botma, 2019:111-112). One way of understanding this apparent contradiction is to view the policing of epithets as notably not about discouraging racism, but as a means of preserving legitimacy by suggesting that society has moved beyond racism. In this way legitimacy could be premised on the dignity of a white ruling class whose polite language implied their ostensible superiority.

This is perhaps most powerfully registered in Mark Behr's 1993 novel, *Die reuk van appels* (translated as *The Smell of Apples* [1995]) – a novel which concerns itself primarily with the discourse of apartheid racism and its various repressions. In the novel, the patriarch of the Erasmus family, a prominent general in the South African army, loses control and beats his daughter after she addresses a black man using a racial epithet (Behr, 1995:53-54). The episode seems disjunctive in a novel which charts the interpellation of Afrikaner white supremacy (Barnard, 2000). Yet it is precisely the fact that Afrikaner self-conceptions of impartiality, superiority and legitimacy were threatened by the stigma that came to be attached to racial epithets that rendered their utterance unbearable.

In a similar way *Kroniek uit die doofpot* stages language under late apartheid as a site of removal and disguise, so that official and sanctioned language use hides and disavows racism, but in the same breath parasitically thrives off a racism which is so deeply entrenched that it structures the environment itself. This is evident in a peculiar detail: the repeated exegetical motif of the *koraalboom* or Coral Tree (*Erythrina*

coralloides), appearing on both sides of the narrative frame as a symbol of upward mobility for black South Africans under PW Botha's reforms.[131]

As Tumelo John leaves his impoverished Free State village to enter the police force, the tree signals the start of spring, with "the first red clusters of the coral trees" prominent in an arrangement of drol pere, rooibos and raasblare at the entrance of the police training college in Hammanskraal (23).

They will also appear as Tumelo John photographs his senior, Captain Sithebe, for the police yearbook:

> In this photograph he was seated in military fashion, looking past the camera into the future: behind his shoulder with its brand new epaulette, a spray of bushveld coral tree in full bloom – almost twilight, lens aperture at maximum, definition impeccable (51).

It's jarring then that Sithebe will later prove, despite his exalted gaze and the insignia of his rank ("brand new epaulette"), to be trapped into performing the functions of a yes-man for his white superiors. Yet, behind him, the tree's fecund appearance is visible, just as it presents itself in the garden behind Tumelo John's suburban middle-class house (66). Much like Sithebe's rank in the police-force, the house, for Tumelo John, is a sign of his social arrival and achievement, so that it is both fitting and equivalently jarring when his father, looking at the house, proudly exclaims – "Well, now you're living just like white people in town" (51).[132]

And so, it follows, that like the images of apartheid mobility which outwardly display success while retaining the structural accents of the racial hierarchy, the presence of the Coral Tree, with its bright red blossoms, points to what had recently up till then been its common South African name: *kafferboom* (kaffir tree).[133]

In a letter to *African Wildlife* in 1984, one reader bemoaned the tendency towards anglicising Afrikaans common names by fabricating English alternatives with "scant regard for traditional South African names" (Cooke, 1984:32). While the author provides a number of exemplarily clumsy names, like "bacon bush" and "candlewood,"

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[131] Miles's text relies heavily on symbolism in this manner. Other symbols that have already been identified and widely discussed include the clay-pot that Tumelo John is given by his mother, a wooden head that he has bought from Zimbabwe and, of course, his increasing deafness (see Van Coller, 2005:332; Kgomo, 1998:16-18;22-23; Van Reenen, 2012:209-210).

[132] Doherty's translation misses the note of admiration expressed in the original Afrikaans, "*tja, julle bly soos witmense op die dorp*" [chp.5; loc. 710].

[133] The tree's name was first recorded in 1772 by the Swedish botanist CP Thunberg (Hennessy, 1975).

he adds, "no doubt *ethnic* considerations have developed the name 'coral tree' for the 'kaffirboom' … we all grew up with" (33; my emphasis). That the author of the letter uses the word "ethnic" to euphemise race, is just one irony which further indicates that in 1984 the adoption of the name Coral Tree was still experienced as relatively recent.[134] Certainly the sheer number of flora and fauna which used some compound form of the epithet "kaffir/kaffer" to describe plants or animals attests to how common its use was, and how deeply racialisation was inscribed into the landscape.[135]

The tension of the metaphor, then, is that displaced racism remains – even amid the middle-class "buffer zone" that Tumelo John inhabits. So profound is Tumelo John's repression of this knowledge that to decorate his front lawn he will plant "ploughbreakers" (*Erythrina zeyheri)* (56), known as an underground Erythrina tree – with its link to the *kafferboom* even more deeply buried in the extensive root structure which comprises the metaphor. The reader will also know that little has changed in between the time of the embedded and frame narratives, when the author goes to see Tumelo John's old house and notes that the ploughbreakers are still there – and that they are blooming (72).

The doubleness of euphemism and pseudonym is thus repeatedly highlighted by the distinctive red blossoms. The language has changed, but the racism which determined it persists, or rather, thrives, under linguistic circumnavigation. The sinister nature of this open secret is that its abundance can be kept hidden – and that its obscured expressions form part of its mask:

> Next door a young coral tree was expanding its scarlet points. The flowers angled backwards against the branches, as if the growth knew it must prevent its abundance from spilling over (66).

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[134] On the use the word "ethnic" as a euphemism for race, see Saul Dubow's piece "Ethnic Euphemisms and Racial Echoes" (1994).

The editor of the magazine responds to Michael Cooke's letter in a note saying "Curiously enough, although the recent adoption of the name 'coral tree' for 'kaffirboom' is a commendable attempt to remove the now-derogatory word 'kaffir' from the South African vocabulary, the name 'coral tree' actually has a long pedigree of its own." (1984:34). He motivates this by noting botanist Johann Auge's use of "coral tree" in the late 18th century (1984:35). However, Cooke's letter remains indicative that "kaffirboom" was the common name, and the editor's clarifying of "a commendable attempt" to remove the "now-derogatory" term, suggests an immediacy to the change, which would certainly have remained central to Miles's readers in 1991.

[135] DC Hauptfleisch includes a whole taxonomy of 54 now defunct compound constructions including the word "kaffer" in flora, showing quite how extensive its use as an environmental descriptor was (1993:99-100).

In an analogous construction, Posel characterises the relationship of the legitimatory discourse to the older discourse as one of parasitism: the ostensibly new feeding off the continued life of the old (1987:439).

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The question of racism present and racism hidden from view thus continually re-emerges as a central preoccupation in the novel. As one character notes, "[b]ehaviour that people are unable immediately to recognize as blatant racism is the greatest danger in this country" (120). This perspective and its implications for how South African racism should be understood and what is at stake in its depiction and description was implicitly in question in a contentious exchange which took place between Jacques Derrida and two South African graduate students, Rob Nixon and Anne McClintock, in the pages of *Critical Inquiry* between 1985 and 1986.[136]

Where the exchange highlights the gaps of interpretation which emerge as one's gaze shifts from the particular to the global, McClintock and Nixon charged that Derrida's essay insufficiently addressed the historical specificity of South African racist discourses. From their perspective it failed to acknowledge the ways in which public discourse turned towards the euphemisms and pseudonyms which shape the late apartheid discourse of legitimacy. As they wrote,

> South African racism has long since ceased to pronounce its own name: *apartheid*, the term Derrida misleadingly calls "the order's *watchword*" (*mot d'ordre*) (p.291), was dismissed many years back from the lexical ranks of the regime. From the 1950s onward, the Nationalist party has radically rephrased its ideology, first tempering the grim rhetoric of *apartheid* into talk of "separate development," then into the even more insidious language of "multinationalism" and "self-determination," and most recently into the self-congratulatory discourse of "democratic federalism" (1986:142).

[136] After *Critical Inquiry* reprinted a perhaps hastily written catalogue introduction by Derrida within its pages, a peculiar decision for an academic journal ("Racism's Last Word", Autumn 1985), McClintock and Nixon published a response taking issue with its ahistoricism ("No Names Apart: The Separation of Word and History in Derrida's 'Le Dernier Mot du Racisme'", Autumn 1986). Derrida, in turn, responded somewhat irritably, accusing them of misreading and bad faith ("But, beyond… (Open Letter to Anne McClintock and Rob Nixon)").

They concluded that "the changing hegemonic functions of the word *apartheid* and its kindred terms must be investigated in the context of an active, social language" (145), highlighting further "[the] power [of political discourses] not merely to address preexistent constituencies but to reconstitute them, or even generate new ones" (146). Their main criticism of Derrida was that his catalogue introduction lacked a "watchfulness…, an alertness to the protean forms of political persuasion. For most of the essay, Derrida allows the solitary word *apartheid* to absorb so much of his attention that the changing discourses of South African racism appear more static and monolithic than they really are" (153).

Derrida, for his own part, refuted these claims.[137] However, what remains interesting is the way in which the exchange delineates two differing explanations about how state racism had maintained its legitimacy. One version cleaves to the historical and deep mythologies of race and Afrikaner supremacy, symbolized by the enduring term "apartheid." The other account traces the surface contortions and obfuscations that were necessary specifically to avoid the use of that term, a façade but also an activity which structured everyday life in late apartheid South Africa.

This distinction of depth highlights two contrasting understandings of lived experience under apartheid and is where *Kroniek uit die doofpot* departs most significantly from other canonized anti-apartheid novels. Take again, for instance, the body of writers who portray apartheid ideology through the established genre and thematics of the *plaasroman* – a large body of literature including Van Heerden's *Toorberg* (1986), Etienne Leroux's *Sewe dae by die Silbersteins* (1962) and André Letoit's *Somer II: 'n Plakboek* (1985).[138] If these novels seek, more or less directly, to deconstruct the authority and legitimacy of Afrikaner nationalism through documenting the subversion or decline of Afrikaner paternalist authority, then *Kroniek*'s focus appears decidedly more modern, concerned as it is with a newer arrangement of reality in which the spectacle of nationalist mythology has receded, perpetuating itself by negating the previous discourse. From this perspective, the general lack of overtly

[137] There is surely quite a lot to say about Derrida's use of the "open letter" form, which addresses itself directly to McClintock and Nixon, thereby erasing the polite distance allowed by general academic discourse. While some of Derrida's criticisms are valid, his accusations of "bad faith" and "misreading" on questions of genre and audience seem equivalently hostile.

[138] Nicole Devarenne writes about this with clarity in "Nationalism and the Farm Novel in South Africa, 1883-2004" (2009) as does Zoë Wicomb, in her essay "Five Afrikaner Texts and the Rehabilitation of Whiteness" (1997-1998).

evident racism becomes more dangerous than the mythology which sustains it. The contrast is evident, for instance, in Marlene van Niekerk's *Triomf*, in which the rubble and debris of the removed inhabitants of Sophiatown continually resurfaces to remind the reader of the illegitimacy of apartheid's social engineering. By contrast, *Kroniek's* representation remains doggedly fixed on the surface, the horror of which lies in its impermeability.

Like the innocuously named Coral Tree which frames Tumelo John's success, the era of reform and repression produced a racism that was no longer publicly recognised, but persisted nonetheless. While politicians extolled the ending of "hurtful discrimination" to legitimise the government's reform project, the deeper structures of society which ensured the reproduction of social hierarchies remained unchanged. From this perspective, racism did not merely remain unchallenged, but was actively left to flourish, obscured as it was by governmental reform. In Miles's novel, this is as much the purpose of *crimen injuria* laws as that of abolishing the infamous Immorality and Mixed Marriages acts. As Lodge notes, the success of this period was reflected specifically by its impact on postapartheid South Africa: the political transition just a few years later maintained this reformist character while retaining the deeper structures of the society which upheld racial inequality (2011:409). This perspective and the questions it raises about how one should understand the past and future of apartheid and its historical significance emphasizes the importance of returning to this period and highlighting the continuities between then and now.

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To end on a more hopeful note, while this chapter has sought to identify a number of phenomenological aspects of repression within the context of late apartheid reform, the peripheries of Tumelo John's story still register a historical context in which, despite the evasions and denials of Miles's characters, the political landscape is changing and mass resistance to apartheid is being mobilised.

While, as I have noted, the Vaal Triangle Uprising features quite prominently, the novel allows for some hope in the capacity of direct democracy not only to highlight the illegitimacy of the state, but also to draw individuals towards a collective and political consciousness from which justice can be demanded.

So while dogs emerge as a distinct marker within the novel for a coercive and internalised self-deception about one's loyalty to the nature of the state, the schoolchildren activists of the Soweto Uprising are represented as breaking through this surface to another reality:

> First, only small, isolated groups of schoolchildren… then a vast mass of children singing *Morena Boloka Sechaba*… then the order to disperse … teeth bared against tear gas … stones.
> 'Then they stormed us,' he said. He'd seen four fall. The dogs had been turned loose. He'd been hit on the head by a stone and all he remembered was that they'd attacked his dog with knives, the dog had gone down and been battered to death with stones and bricks (37-38).

During this period, Tumelo John's own dog, Spotty, will go missing. Tumelo John will recognise for the first time, following the callous and punitive police response, the subjective racism of his colleagues ("Sergeant, you hate blacks, don't you?" [40]). In this way he is left with the "ridiculous conviction" that the dog described above, "killed by the furious children at the beginning of the uprising" has actually been his own (42). "[A]long with Spotty I lost my innocence and grew up overnight" he muses (42). And yet, for most of the narrative Tumelo John remains blind to the pervasive and objective nature of racism – that it is not merely some of his colleagues, but the whole police force and society that are racist. In mistaking the objective for the subjective, he responds to the loss of his dog by buying another which will also be lost at the end of the narrative.

But beyond Tumelo John's individual struggles remains the collective consciousness of the school children – and later that of the mass politics of the United Democratic Front. With the Vaal Triangle Uprising that later follows, Tumelo John's tragedy can be read in conjunction with the rise of collective struggle, a form of resistance which contains not only the clear recognition of what the police dog represents, but the capacity to dismantle and destroy what persists behind it.

5. Illegitimacy and Dis-identification under Postapartheid

"Illegitimacy is an old-fashioned notion, especially in this country, where everything that once was correct, ordered and legitimate turns out to have been nothing of the kind." – Geoff "House full of money," *Playing in the Light*

In an essay from 2013, Antjie Krog highlights the contradictions in the public persona of Tony Yengeni – from his appearance at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to his glamorous rebranding as a new South Africa businessman and later his entanglement in government corruption. She chronicles Yengeni's rise as a postapartheid business magnate away from the trauma recounted at the TRC when he interrogated Jeffrey Benzien about his use of the infamous wet-bag method of torture. Thus, from this early embodiment of fortitude in the anti-apartheid struggle, he would later, through various media revelations, become known as the embodiment of the convoluted arms deal that epitomized the postapartheid state's descent into corruption. "What are the invisible links," Krog asks, "between being tortured into breaking your own moral codes and later corruption; between giving up everything in the fight for freedom and greed?" (2013:83)

Krog's question highlights what appears as an imperceptible shift from jubilation to disillusionment in postapartheid South Africa. The continuation of inequality – still stubbornly racialized – would further pose the question of why the shift to democratic governance was unable to shift the balance of power and wealth within the country. One response highlights the structural concessions and compromises of the political transition (Marais, 1998; Bond & Saul, 2014). Another, and by far the more widely-held public perspective, relegates this problem to issues of

poor governance – that is, a postapartheid state characterized by incompetence, corruption and greed. And so the irony of postapartheid South Africa is surely how quickly a state which emerged as the first representative of popular will in South Africa was so swiftly delegitimized.

As Krog's earlier question implies, the dissonance inheres specifically in the discontinuity between the legitimacy of the struggle against apartheid and the illegitimacy of the postapartheid government: from fighting for freedom to greed and corruption. The characters are the same and yet the story has changed. In Achmat Dangor's novel, *Bitter Fruit,* the Moulana Ismail captures this paradox when he notes that "[n]othing confuses a story as much as characters with shifting identities" (198), and this, as I will show, captures the distinctive contortions which characterise both Dangor's novel and Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* in their attempts to map postapartheid identity and legitimacy.[139]

While both novels are set within the first decade of postapartheid South Africa and share a concern with identities which fall under the apartheid categorisation of "coloured", their focus remains just as clearly on the vicissitudes of what can clearly be called the postapartheid elite. This is so much the case that the main character of Dangor's novel identifies himself as such: "people like him, the new elite who govern… the country" (95). The two novels, concerned with this new elite consider two problems which arise from the existence of this class. In Dangor's novel the legitimacy of postapartheid heroism and victimhood is dissected, while in Zoë Wicomb's novel racial discourse and the promise of social mobility are similarly problematized. Both novels approach the questionable legitimacy of the postapartheid elite not in terms of a disruption in moral rectitude, but rather in terms of a questioning of the category itself.

Bitter Fruit

Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* (2004 [2001]) traces the dissolution of the Ali family in postapartheid South Africa. The family comprises Silas Ali, a high-level government

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[139] I am indebted to Roger Field's article about the impact of Constantin Cavafy's poetry on Achmat Dangor (2011), both for highlighting the significance of this quote from Moulana Ismail, and for Field's highlighting of the centrality of literary modernism for Dangor, which has contributed to my focus on Camus's *The Outsider.*

bureaucrat and former member of the underground resistance and his wife, Lydia, who is plagued by various traumas, most pertinently her rape at the hand of an apartheid policeman which led to the birth of her son, Mikey. However, while Mikey is clearly allegorically placed to represent the new South Africa – the fruit, albeit bitter, of the democratic transition – little redemption is to be found in his character. Introduced via a restrained and aggressive terseness, Mikey spends most of the narrative seducing and exploiting older women before turning towards Muslim fundamentalism and murdering two people.

It is tempting to read Mikey's narrative fatalistically: as the fruit of a profound apartheid transgression, he is doomed by his beginnings. But even if this Sins-of-the-Father narrative, of bad origins leading to poor endings, is tempting (and notably reminiscent of Millin's writing discussed in Chapter One), a variety of narrative turns frustrate this reading. For one thing, in a narrative which ends with Mikey murdering two people, the psychological inconsistency which marks his progression from alienated son to double murderer and religious fundamentalist is not entirely convincing. This inconsistency has typically been occluded by standard critical accounts of the novel due to an overwhelming focus on Lydia and Silas's narrative. However, any reading which takes the rippling effects of Lydia's rape (and Silas's difficulty in responding to it) as the central narrative, obscures what is clearly the equivalent, if not primary, importance of their son Mikey's narrative arc – especially insofar as it concerns questions about the future and legitimacy of the new South Africa.

In discussing the novel, critics have noted that the repressed trauma of the past returns when Silas encounters Du Boise, his wife's rapist, at the beginning of the novel (see, for instance, Graham,2009:95; Miller, 2008; Strauss, 2008). Indeed, this encounter initiates one narrative that is constituted by Lydia's traumagenic response to her violation. Another equally prominent narrative strand is initiated when Mikey reads his mother's diary and learns that he is the child of rape. At the same moment that he discovers his paternity he also recalls an incestuous relationship that he had with his aunt before she emigrated to Canada. Distinguishing the two narrative strands is important as from this initial moment it is left unclear whether the defining event is Mikey's discovery of his paternity or his memory of this early incestuous relationship which was immediately suppressed by his family.

Thus, when Mikey opens his mother's diary, soon to discover that he is the child of rape, we are told that his initial "reluctance" is neither from a sense of "decency" nor fear of the "visitation from the dark past" of Lydia's life (32). His reluctance is instead "rooted in a fear of his own" which involves confronting the sexual relationship he had with his 16 year old aunt a couple of years before, when he was 14 (32; 44). His fear at this point, however, is not directly concerned with the trauma of the proto-sexual game that he played with his aunt. Focalized through Mikey, the game is depicted with a candid sensuality which does not suggest regret or shame. Instead it is the external perspective of their relationship, his mother Lydia's repressive and condemning response, which elicits his fear.

And so Mikey recounts how he and his aunt, Mireille, reconstruct Gandhi's infamous "celibate sexuality" experiment by lying naked alongside each other without physically initiating sex. Yet while Mikey's positive memory of the event emphasizes his "ascetic discipline" in abstaining from sex, his aunt Mireille interprets the game quite differently by calling it "mind sex" (167; 37). Contradictions thus emerge, both in Mikey's notably sensual descriptions of asceticism and across his and Mireille's differing perceptions of what happened. These contradictions do not appear to have bothered either participant, "aroused" as they were "by their game of abstinence" (144).

That his mother and her family upon discovering them interpret Mikey and Mireille's game purely through the language of sexual abuse alienates Mikey (45) and, from his perspective, "transform[s] a scene of beauty into something vile and shameful" (37). The scene ends with its quiet and violent repression: Mireille is banished to Canada and their communication is cut.

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That Mikey and Mireille's incest occurs within the terms of Gandhi's ascetic discipline is both historically and symbolically important, even if this framing is not directly addressed within the text. That the feted pacifist and campaigner for human dignity is juxtaposed with incest highlights the vicissitudes of Gandhi's own personal history. This seeming contradiction of Gandhi's philosophy of abstinence and non-violence maps clearly onto the equivalently contradictory character of South Africa's own political context and the post-apartheid reimagining of its nationalist icon, Nelson Mandela.

Under the guise of an "experiment" in *Bramacharya* (chastity), Gandhi during 1944-1948 practised "taking naked young women to bed with him at night" ostensibly to test his celibacy (Lal, 2000:105). These included his grandnieces, Abha and Manu (Lal, 2000:105), a familial relationship which corresponds to the aunt/nephew connection of Mireille and Mikey. That these episodes were justified in terms of his stated project of "eliminat[ing]… all desire", ties these acts to his political practice of Satyagraha/non-violence (Lal, 2000:105). "Without Brahmacharya the Satyagrahi will have no lustre" Gandhi claimed, "no inner strength to stand unarmed against the whole world" (quoted in Lal, 2000:106). For as Joseph Alter notes, the discipline of physical desire (embodiment) was portrayed by Gandhi as central to his political-spiritual practice: "Gandhi embodied moral reform and advocated that reform's embodiment in terms of public health, which was inherently political, spiritual, and moral in the context of late imperialism" (Alter, 2011:7).

However these experiments were justified, they cast doubt on Gandhi's actions and intentions, particularly given the moral and religious stature (*māhātma*) of the nationalist hero (Howard, 2013:135). That one may be able to locate abuse or subversion at the centre of Gandhi's nonviolence philosophy has led some critics to conclude either that "[h]e had effectively redefined the concept of chastity to fit his personal preferences" (Adams, 2012) or that he was extolling a commitment to principles that were impossible to maintain since he had to subvert those very principles in order to subscribe to them.

In the absence of any defined conclusion about Gandhi's credibility, within Dangor's novel the episode between Mikey and Mireille gestures towards the way in which harm can be produced via specific interpretations of liberatory frameworks. But even more, the contradictions made evident by Gandhi's practices invoke the emerging postapartheid contestation of the 1994 political and economic reconciliation – and pertinently its figurehead, Nelson Mandela.

So while it's interesting to note that Gandhi adopted *Bramacharya* shortly after being confronted with racial prejudice in South Africa (1893–1914; Alter, 20011:10), Gandhi's significance within South Africa is most concretely registered in the profound role that his philosophy played in Nelson Mandela's own emphasis on non-violence

and reconciliation in postapartheid South Africa (Mandela, 1999).[140] To Mandela he represented “the archetypal anticolonial revolutionary” (1999).

Equivalently, by the time of *Bitter Fruit’s* publication in 2001, the persistence of apartheid’s structural violence had become more evident, with Mandela’s role as reconciliatory guide subject to greater scrutiny. For while Silas’s white friend Kate admires Mandela to the point of infatuation (139), Lydia’s brother-in-law Alec contemptuously describes him as “Nelson Mandela the political saint” (86). Here is John Pilger, representing a growing disillusionment within the political left over what Mandela was able to achieve in material and social terms:

> [In South Africa] the inequalities of the past are perpetuated under cover of political ‘reconciliation’. Behind the often theatrical facade of ‘reconciliation’ between oppressed and oppressor, the absolutions dispensed by Desmond Tutu and the deifying of Nelson Mandela, the aspirations of the people of Dimbaza have been ignored, along with those of the majority whose humanity and courage forced the pace of change and brought down apartheid (1998:604).[141]

In this piece Pilger laments what he views as the dismal compromise of the new South African government, especially in terms of the neoliberal reforms and rhetoric which Mandela adopted, despite his nearly deified status. For Pilger the compromises made to business interests and the continued exclusivity of the South African economy troubles Mandela’s legitimacy as a leader, “Nelson Mandela did not stand before the expectant crowds in 1994 and say, as he said to me, ‘You can say [our policy] is Thatcherite, but for this county, privatization is the fundamental policy of the government’” (1998:606).[142]

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[140] Mandela, Nelson. "The Sacred Warrior." *Time Magazine,* 154.27 (1999): 124-126. It’s worth noting that Nelson Mandela did not espouse non-violence throughout his career, having been the leader of the ANC’s military wing, uMkhonto we Sizwe from 1961. However, following his imprisonment on Robben Island, Mandela centred reconciliation and non-violence as a fundamental aspect of the postapartheid national project.

[141] Dimbaza is a town in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa, northwest of East London. Formerly part of the now defunct bantustan, Ciskei, it was used as a dumping ground for those who the apartheid government considered “redundant people” (cited in Pilger,1998:599) as it forcibly removed black South Africans from urban areas. The town then became a measure of the atrocities of apartheid – with removed families isolated and starving, deprived of water and adequate shelter (Pilger, 1998:599).

[142] As Pilger further notes, “[t]he most important 'historic compromise' was made not with the apartheid regime, but with the forces of Western and white South African capital, which changed their allegiance from P. W. Botha to Nelson Mandela on condition that their multinational corporations would not be obstructed as they 'opened up' the South African economy, and that the ANC would drop the foolish promises in its Freedom Charter about equity and the country's natural resources, such as minerals, 'belonging to all the people'. This meant the ANC agreeing to investment conditions that favoured big

Equivalently, in 2003, note the cynicism of ex-ANC member and community activist Trevor Ngwane:

> Without detracting from those twenty-seven years in jail—what that cost him, what he stood for—Mandela has been the real sellout, the biggest betrayer of his people. When it came to the crunch, he used his status to camouflage the actual agreement that the ANC was forging with the South African elite... Basically the ANC was granted formal, administrative power, while the wealth of the country was retained in the hands of the white capitalist elite, Oppenheimer and company. Mandela's role was decisive in stabilizing the new dispensation; by all accounts, a daring gamble on the part of the bourgeoisie. (41-42)

Mandela thereby emerges as a figure whose status served to detract from the contradictions and failures of both the political transition and the subsequent postapartheid state. And indeed, Dangor's novel references these failures through the stubborn inequality of the society he depicts and the encroachment of HIV/Aids. In this way, during the "Age of HIV/AIDS" (213), liberation comes to mean "that only the few get rich" (58), while bankers bemoan their limited family income (45), with children described as "getting… fever[s] when the stock market drops" (74) while beggars continue to knock at the door (43).

To return to Ngwane's relatively contemporaneous account:

> Mandela regularly pops up on TV opening a clinic or a school in the rural areas, sponsored by capital. It shows the great partnership between the private sector, government and people. He likes to behave like Father Christmas: above politics. But whenever there is a crisis, Mandela will be there to oil, smooth and con (2003:53).

Thus, as much as Mandela is a figure of political reconciliation, he is equivalently a figure, who in Ngwane's words, "camouflage[s]", "stabiliz[es]", "oil[s], smooth[s] and con[s]." The unreality of "Mandela's Wonderland" (268) is gestured to when Mikey notes that his own trauma was initially occluded by the "euphoria" of Nelson Mandela's inauguration as president, during which "the word 'freedom' took on an almost childlike meaning, so magical was its effect" (37; 38). In fact, the problem of Mandela's legitimacy is continually alluded to insofar as he is considered "the nation's

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business, and to keeping on the apartheid-era Governor of the South African Reserve Bank, Chris Stahls, an arch monetarist, as the country's senior economic manager" (1998:607).

talisman against a world relentless in its demand for the continuation of a 'political miracle'" (67). "Let Mr Mandela come live here," one character thinks "and then tell me about his miracle" (82).

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The ambiguity of the trauma surrounding Mikey's relationship with Mireille, the conflictual subjective interpretations of their game, and its gesturing towards the contradictions inherent in the nationalist claims of Gandhi and Mandela, all tease out particular valences for Dangor's treatment of postapartheid South Africa.

This mode of representation remains central to Mikey's murder of Vinu's father, Johan Viljoen, at the end of the novel. While it is possible to read this murder as a corollary to the murder of the rapist policeman, Du Boise, as revenge for rape, this reading would also require us to deny the significant parallel between Mikey and Vinu's experience of incest. For one thing, in Vinu's description of her sexual relationship she has with her father, she is 14 when it begins – notably the same age as Mikey when his and Mireille's sexual game starts. Vinu also pertinently does not describe the relationship as rape, but as consensual sex: "I wasn't frightened, I found it beautiful… He wept afterwards, begged my forgiveness. But I told him there was nothing to forgive, we did it out of love" (208). Later, after her father regrets and repents the harm he understands himself to have done, Vinu sees his characterization of abuse as a betrayal, "[h]e betrayed me, Michael," she says, "reduced our love to a case of child abuse" (209).

Vinu's framing of repentance as reduction both questions the efficacy of confession as the framework for truth or reconciliation in the TRC, but also echoes Mikey's earlier interaction with Mireille, shortly after the episode with his mother's diary. When Mikey calls Mireille in Canada she refuses to engage with him, uttering "what we did was wrong, we were so young, we didn't know what we were doing…" (41). Mireille's confession of guilt is also experienced by Mikey as a betrayal, as her having acquired "an adult's sense of shame, the compulsion to confess, even if falsely, in order to obtain absolution" (42). It appears then that this ambiguity, the privileging of one type of experience or subjectivity over another constitutes a form of betrayal,

one which is read as the moralistic and repressive provenance of adults. It is this which appears to haunt Mikey. "Perhaps the Imam would understand", he thinks to himself,

> why Vinu could see beauty in having a sexual relationship with her father? Her father certainly saw none. And if all she was doing was to deny that he had imposed his ageing body on her, his stale lust, his vainglorious manhood, why did he, her father, not have the courage to concede to her – at the very least – her right to that beauty, even as an illusion? (210)

From the above quotation it would appear that pain inheres in the imposition of one person's reality upon another's. It is striking then, that shortly after acknowledging the social difficulty of Vinu's feelings, and how subjective justice and dignity have become, that Mikey "is filled with a quick, seething irritation" (210). Without descriptive or narrative explanation, he swiftly negates this complexity, shaking Vinu awake and disavowing the ambiguity of her account as a simple case of violation and rape: "don't fool yourself… There was nothing beautiful about it. It was rape, Vinu, simple, crude rape" (210).[143]

This vacillation between two profoundly different interpretations of reality, on the one hand as indeterminate and ambiguous and on the other as reducible to pre-established categories, undermines the causal development of Mikey's character. This characterial inconsistency will later reemerge as Mikey prepares to murder Vinu's father. He asks himself, "why am I doing this? Not to avenge Vinu. Killing her father will not eradicate his sin or her complicity, willing or unwilling" (242). He vacillates, temporarily positing that it might constitute "a 'dry run', practice for a more important mission" (242). Nevertheless these vacillations do not stop him from murdering Vinu's father, so that later the reader finds Vinu at the Ali household, intoning "I did not ask you to!" (273).

An equivalent vacillation is evident in Mikey's decision to kill Du Boise. Listening to Moulana Ismail's claim that "[t]here are certain things people do not forget, or forgive. Rape is one of them" (204), Mikey initially considers this claim "crass" and "banal", highlighting again the imposition of a particular perspective which is held to be legitimate: "Who are the 'people' who do not forget and forgive? The

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[143] Lucy Graham reads Vinu's abuse as an "echo… [of] the rape of Lydia" (2012:163). This reading is only possible if you ignore Vinu's conflicted feelings about her relationship with her father and likewise erase the subjective ambiguity of Mikey's incestuous relationship with his aunt.

raped? The children of the rape? What does Moulana Ismail know about being a child of rape?" (205). Later these uncertainties are denied, with Mikey positioning it as a straightforward act – as though the elimination of Du Boise's body will destroy the emotional residue of what he has come to represent: "Du Boise will be no different, all shattered skin and exploding blood" (242).

While vacillation is a common psychological trait, the relative weakness of every position that Mikey holds frustrates the reader's expectations about what would sufficiently motivate his resolution to kill. Whatever has decided these actions in the final instance appears to remain outside of the text. The significance of the two murders is thus obscured, leaving the reader only with an aporia. This moral and causal aporia must either be embraced or it will necessitate a highly selective reading, itself resembling the violence imposed on Mikey and Vinu when their subjective experience is repressed.

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Thus, one of the peculiarities of Achmat Dangor's style is that Mikey's reasoning, and thus the causality behind his actions, is seldom clear. This is especially peculiar in a novel where the characters appear so wrapped up in their psychological turmoil that the concurrent events of the TRC barely reach the surface of the text.[144] While this is the case for all the central characters, none is more inexplicable that Mikey, given that he will eventually murder two people.

A rare moment of illumination to this inconsistency of characters is presented, however, in the contents of Mikey's bookshelf. Guiding the reader towards Dangor's own disruptive style, the bookshelf contains a number of modernist classics, suggesting that the style of the novel inheres specifically in those gaps which trouble the readerly expectation of realist character development. A key position, in this sense, is given to Camus's *The Outsider* – and it is Camus's novel which will allow me to plot Dangor's novel while avoiding some of the prevailing assumptions which have stymied previous critics.

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[144] By the end of the novel when DuBoise applies for amnesty it comes as a shock to remember the meaning and significance of the TRC beyond merely constituting Silas's demanding job. In this way the novel's focalisation also wryly gestures towards the self-absorption of the suburban bourgeois classes.

In the narrative, Lydia is sent by a literature professor to cast about her son Mikey's room to locate a signed first edition copy of Camus's *The Outsider* which he has stolen from a lecturer at his department (245). The novel, stolen along with a gun which will prove instrumental to the two murders at the climax of the narrative, highlights the heavy intertextual debt which *Bitter Fruit* owes. In an interview from 1990, Dangor equivalently gestures to an abiding interest in the novel, "I was…struck by the outsider figure in Western literature. Here Albert Camus's *The Outsider* comes to mind. I, of course, had to find a social and communal basis for some of these aspects in my own writing" (1990:32).

However, while Lydia scans Mikey's meticulously organized bookshelf, retrieving the stolen copy, she finds a stolen first edition of Richard Wright's *Native Son* belonging to the state library (249), along with Joyce's *Ulysses,* Doris Lessing's *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* and Patrick White's *The Tree of Man*. She looks at the rest of the bookshelf, handling the books "one by one", noting, however, that many of them are "out of print and very scarce", rare copies, all of which have been stolen (249).

The double act of signaling literary influence while also deriding the literary or cultural power of these texts, by gesturing to their crude materiality as mere collector's items or stolen objects, is characteristic of the narrative vacillations which characterize the novel. Again, there appears to be no clear motive underlying Mikey's actions. "He steals rare books, for the sake of it," Lydia speculates, "for the pleasure of possessing something beautiful and forbidden, for the simple daring of the act?" (249-250).

A similar tension and incongruence is evident, in the now widely discussed initiatory moment of Silas's encounter with Lydia's rapist, DuBoise, which occurs in the notably banal context of a shopping mall (3).[145] We have entered into a perspective where details which ostensibly empty the narrative of symbolic meaning have been placed on par with grander literary constructions. These vacillations, like the sexual violation and incestuous desire which mark the narrative, serve to empty the legitimacy of the assumed allegorical container of the nation, the family, of its status.

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[145] The significance of this scene is addressed in Russel West-Pavlov's article "The Market and the Post-apartheid Polity" (2015).

And so the novel undermines not only the imaginary coherence of the allegorical family at the centre of its narrative, but also the intertwined sacredness of postapartheid nationalism. That the novel documents this falling apart in a way so scrupulously and thoroughly detailed allows little moral or framing justification to emerge for what the reader witnesses throughout the narrative. Indeed, if under apartheid political didacticism (as discussed in Chapter Three) generally offered one means for writers to avoid the pressures of a fragmented and unequal society undermining their representation of totality, then Dangor appears to subvert this tendency by producing a chaotic narrative with no clear normative claims.[146] In the text a trinity of three objects are presented as symbols of democratic change: The family reunited, the opening of the economy to free and unrestricted enterprise, and the promise of justice and reconciliation. This is gestured to when Lydia recalls her relatives pronouncing that

> The three of them, Lydia, Mikey and Silas (in that order), symbolized the future of the new South Africa… more than Alec's business accomplishments, more than the image of a smiling Nelson Mandela (111).

While the allegorical mapping of the family onto the nation is a familiar device for nationalist representation (Anderson, [1983] 2016:143), the text's emphasis on the curious "order[ing]" of the family already highlights how this allegorical structure will be subverted and undermined throughout the narrative. The alternative emphasis and weight given to Lydia and her son, placed ahead of the father, will produce an altogether different narrative to the standard one which places Silas, the father and struggle hero, in the primary position.

This privileging of the private and domestic is perhaps why the critical reception of the novel has tended to account for the novel within a feminist register – assigning Lydia's trauma to the highest category.[147] For Lydia, Mikey and Silas will

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[146] In many senses, *Bitter Fruit* will indicate that Ndebele's call to return to the "ordinary" was as much a plea for a change in representation as a plea for a different society. What Dangor's text suggests is that removing spectacle and didacticism brings to the fore the experiences of fragmentation and disorientation which characterize South African life. Accommodating these particular experiences within the novel form is what determines Dangor's particular modernism.

[147] However, while *Bitter Fruit* does highlight questions of women and gendered violence, I argue, contrary to most feminist accounts, that the novel's characterisation of oppression and victimhood remains distinctly ambiguous.

turn out to be typical only in so far as Lydia has been brutalized by both the violence of the apartheid state and by her status as a woman, while Mikey, as a representation of the postapartheid future, is typical in that his patrimony derives not only from anti-apartheid resistance, but also from apartheid repression. Thus the first family, with Silas, the struggle hero as father, will slip away to reveal the second family, with DuBoise, the apartheid policeman and rapist, as the father, providing the basis from which the narrative undermines the surface optimism of the new South Africa.

But while Dangor's novel is antagonistic towards nation-building narratives, it is also antagonistic towards the suggested totality of realist narrative. This makes the narrative an especially difficult read; for where South African novels have standardly been written within the realist framework, the multivocal narration of the novel provides an agonizing lens on the microscopic vacillations and conflicts embodied within each character. This minutia effectively alienates the reader, establishing a barrier to identification with any particular character, no less the comfortable inclusive nationalism which the family is thought to represent. While we could understand this "unsettling frankness" in Dangor's narrative as indicative of an "eschewing of pretense", it is a transparency which appears both "idiotic and noble" and that Claire Messud (2014:128) locates at the heart of Albert Camus's *The Outsider*.

Thus inconsistency erects a barrier against identification, so that Mikey, like Camus's Meursault, is neither comprehensible nor sympathetic to the reader. The subversion of omniscience and causal development, much like Camus's novel, means that the reader is left "stranded among several possible judgements" (McCarthy, 2004:23) unable to identify with any of the characters. As McCarthy notes of Camus's novel, "[o]ne does not wish to imply that there are no reasons for Meursault's behavior… there are two kinds of reasons – psychoanalytical and political – but neither renders Meursault a comprehensible, much less sympathetic, character" (McCarthy, 2004:27).

Correspondingly, even at her most victimized, Lydia disrupts any feeling of identification through her own self-absorption and the all-consuming nature of her sexual desire. Nevertheless, feminist and trauma studies accounts of the novel have tended to reduce the novel to "a depiction of the aftermath of the rape" (Miller, 2008:205). From this perspective, Lydia is read through the lens of her victimhood, "a sacrificial and masochistic figure who…has crossed over into a zone of silence" (Graham, 2012:159), a figure whose silence is "predicated on resistance" to "Silas's

attempts to colonize her trauma" (Gunne, 2009:174; see also Miller, 2008:148), or as a figure who "asserts the alterity of her traumatic experience" (Miller, 2008:148). However, much of the narrative follows Lydia's responses to events which cannot strictly be confined to the experience of rape: the infidelity of her husband, her sexual approach towards her son, her memories of her nascent and repressed sexuality and her own eventual act of infidelity at the end of the novel – whether this is read as empowering or not. In fact, as a character, much of her focus is narrowly concerned with her own sexuality – a self-absorption which can only through profound reduction be attributed solely to the aftermath of rape.

In further opposition to this heroic feminist narrative, one could read into Mikey's crucial silence the presence and over-determination of his relationship with his mother.[148] Thus, Mikey's seduction of older women and his murder of his own father fit an oedipal structure. The corollary of this account can read Lydia's repression of Mireille (with its attendant lack of inquiry into Mikey's experience) as an expression of jealousy, a reading made more plausible by Lydia's overt jealousy towards Mikey's older lovers.[149]

Indeed, even in what critics have referred to as Mikey's exploitative or manipulative seduction of older women (Strauss, 2008:54; Akpome, 2017:96), he appears to direct his energies towards women who are congruent in some way to his mother – for instance, Kate, Silas's lesbian colleague, who echoes Lydia's repressed homosexuality or Mireille, Lydia's sister. This raises another interpretation of Mireille's banishment which highlights Lydia's jealousy: irrespective of Mikey's experience, the ambiguity of the "real or imagined sexual relationship", as Silas puts it (45), is reduced to a scene of shame and silence, with Mireille sent away into "exile" in Canada (37). In this episode it is thus not only Mikey's instigation, his agency, which has been disavowed, but significantly, also his desire for a woman that is not his mother.

It is correspondingly clear, then, that by the end of the narrative, Mikey not only runs away from the sordidness of his family (in fact, by killing DuBoise he veritably

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[148] This again would recall Camus's *The Outsider* – particularly those psychoanalytic accounts of the novel which have conceptualized Meursault's actions in terms of his mother's death – foremost in this respect is Rand (1994), but also Gassin and Gay-Crosier (1985).

[149] The corollary of this account reads similarly to Winnicott's frustrated and aggressive mother in his renowned essay "Hate in the Counter-transference" (1949).

destroys one family), but that his turn towards fundamentalism is also a turn away from his mother, towards the masculine preserve of the Imam and his cell.[150] In a sense, Mikey is running away from his mother, who is easily positioned as the latent antagonist of the text. For the feminist privileging of Lydia's rape misreads the novel's characterisation of Lydia, creating a hierarchy of experience where none has been provided. In this sense how do we read the destructive maternal sexuality which Lydia represents? Should we understand it in continuity with her rape? Or does it exist in a realm separate to the political? What troublingly emerges in Dangor's representation is the coexistence and closeness of trauma with pleasure and desire.

The point is that, like Mikey and Dangor's other characters, there is little coherence to Lydia, meaning that the ability to delineate victim from oppressor is frustrated. While Lydia is at points fixated on an image of herself as pure and virtuous, she equivalently projects her errant sexuality onto men, denying her complicity: "no, she said to herself, don't let this *man's* image intrude, remember yourself as that child who wanted to marry God" (115).[151] This superegoic pressure would appear to be in place where, considering her sins ("Who knows what goes on in that part of the brain where words like 'cunt', 'suck', 'suckle' gather in their hordes, waiting to invade the innocent realms of the heart?" [116]) she is unable to confess as a child. From this perspective, her silence is not the mere imposition of Silas's voice or will, but rather an expression of anger and sexuality. As the narrator later notes, there is a complicity to the silence of the household (151).

This is perhaps where my reading departs most starkly from feminist accounts. The difficulty of the narrative's refusal to clarify which experiences or encounters are of greater or lesser importance presents a profound barrier to any standard contextualist account. This is most evident in accounts which take Lydia's rape as the main focus of the novel, forming part of a critical discussion about the occlusion of women's narratives in postapartheid nationalism (Gunne, 2009; Miller, 2008; Strauss, 2005; Mack, 2011). While this is clearly an important historical inquiry, the argument is only

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[150] Even Mikey's turn towards religion has been negated earlier in the text: "He does not have a religion, there is no ritual he can follow to lull himself into sleep, there are no words he can utter, formulaic and patterned, to relieve himself of the responsibility of thoughts." However, he nonetheless feels a "sense of not belonging, of being unmoored" which he understands as "the fault of his parents" (87).

[151] The quote's emphasis, which stresses "man" in "man's image", is taken directly from the original text.

possible if we deny the constitutive ambiguities of the text. The impetus to read this particular motivation into the text is also textually prefigured in the novel when, after Lydia has had her breakdown, Silas calls for an ambulance and is immediately subjected to the suspicion of the phone operator that he must be responsible for his wife's injuries, that his is "just another case of domestic violence" (18). This scene is then instructive upon two fronts – in suggesting that domestic violence and sexism are prevalent enough to trigger such a response, while contrarily noting the violence committed by assuming this interpretation.

In fact, this becomes particularly evident in contrast to critics' register of certain characters "silencing" others (Gunne, 2009; Miller, 2008; Strauss, 2005; Mack, 2011). When Silas recalls the mythologizing of orientalism and conquest culture associated with his seeing the Chinese Frances Dip's vagina ("Gong cunt" [105]) in the township, Lydia's response is to chastise him for "racial stereotyping", asking "why would she willingly degrade herself" (106). However, while Silas offers a number of responses (106) to Lydia's rhetorical question, it is when he finally speaks with Alec, free from Lydia's judgement, that, rather than his relationship with Frances Dip being exploitative, we learn that he was infatuated with her (102). It is within the precepts of this discussion, then, that Silas is able to answer Lydia's question, conceding to Alec that Frances's sexual organs exposed the fact that she had been the victim of sexual abuse. That her "willing[ness] to degrade herself" was a means of showing the scars to Silas. "[S]he was trying to tell me something," Silas says to Alec, "but I was too stupid to know" (108). In this instance, Lydia's chastisement, easily taken as proto-feminism is as repressive as the puritanical hypocrisy of the "dry-titted nuns and paedophiliac priests" which stymied her youth (107).

Later, Lydia will actually deny the existence of Frances Dip completely, recalling or crafting a fantasy of her own about a young Chinese woman called Cathy (118-119), signaling her own pain and thwarted homosexuality. Similar to the "moral war" in which Silas as a government spin-doctor is embroiled (109), the narrative of Lydia's violation and silence appears to drown out several others (113). [152]

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[152] The discourse around 'silencing' is thoroughly undermined by Dangor's characters' interior voices. For one thing, this internal chatter is the rope with which Lydia hangs herself. While Lydia sexualizes and admires the nun Sister Catherine's profound "self-denial" and the "steely virtue that held together her disparate parts" (115), she also thinks:

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Thereby the multivocal narrative overwhelms the reader by providing a surplus of conflicting information without the organization of a clear moral argument. Confusion, rather than clarity, emerges from confession, so that characters' inner lives cannot lead to a final conclusion of culpability. This aspect was famously captured by John Weightman when he called Camus's *The Stranger* "one of the first modern books—perhaps the very first—in which the Absurdist awareness of the absence of any settled moral truth is worked into all the details of the story" (Wieghtman, 1972).[153]

In this way the fragmentation of charaterisation and narrative that desire produces undermines the mastery of the narration. Even if the narrative is focalized through various narrators, it becomes clear that just as none of the characters has the omniscience required of a realist narrator, neither do they have mastery over their own desires or motivations. In this sense, following Barthes's conception, the realist novel "reflects and confirms the hegemony of the new capitalist class that was convinced of its power to shape history" (cited in McCarthy, 2004:21). Dangor, like Camus, however, undermines this sense of mastery. Correspondingly, literature exceeds the confines of politically didactic or "ethical communication (the notion of 'engaged' writing)" rather abolishing the presupposition of "this type of bourgeois mastery" (Sontag [1967] 1970:xxii). What is exposed is a new elite in South Africa, immersed in a world that remains beyond its control or mastery.[154]

> She no longer needs to protect herself from her rapist, from her husband's fierce but all too transient desires. She wants to be lowered into an abyss of the flesh, unquestioned and unquestioning, to descend as if she is drowning, she wants the death of her sexual being, and thinks it could only happen dramatically, sinful and sinned against, sacrificed like Sister Catherine on the cross of her Christ's disembodied lust. (248)

[153] Ana Miller has equivalently noted that "the novel's use of free indirect discourse inhibits the reader's ability to draw simplified conclusions about trauma in South Africa" (148). However, this awareness does not inhibit Miller from reducing these ambiguities by positioning Lydia as resistant victim and Silas as having appropriated the colonial gaze.

[154] The frustration of the new national elite will further be symbolized in Mikey's attempt to birth himself –albeit violently through the murder of his father, an act which stands in allegorical relation to the ambivalent relationship to history taken up by postapartheid nationalism. His later descent into his mythical origins – those of Ali Ali and those offered by a radicalized Islam – confirms the inevitable failure of this attempt.

This anxiety around mastery and control presents itself equivalently in Wicomb's *Playing in the Light*, where readers are again denied identification with characters as well as the satisfaction of redemption or heroism that is required by the optimism of new South African nationalism.

Playing in the Light

Zoë Wicomb's short story, "Another Story" ([2004] 2008), written around the same time as *Playing in the Light*, presents a parallel meditation on narration, mastery and legitimacy. The narrative, set in apartheid South Africa, follows Deborah Kleinhans's trip from Kimberley to Cape Town to visit her niece Sarah, a lecturer at the University of Cape Town who is interested in documenting their family history. During the plane journey to the Cape, Deborah responds to a white traveller's bigotry with a self-defeating sense of propriety. Along with the uncomfortable English she speaks, "like the Lycra step-in" which "pinches" her (184), her deference and manners appear to re-inscribe her lowly position as a coloured woman within the apartheid racial hierarchy. Her vigilance about social mores is later both compared and contrasted to her niece's more politicized vigilance about avoiding the vocabulary and terms of apartheid categorization (182).

As the visit progresses, it becomes evident that the Deborah Kleinhans that has been summoned is in fact a descendent of that "long-dead European missionary" (181), Andrew Flood. It also becomes evident that Sarah intends to research and re-narrate the family history which Sarah Gertrude Millin famously appropriated in *God's Stepchildren* – evidently *the* story gestured to in the title.[155] However, when Sarah enquires about the family history, calling it "an interesting story that needs to be told," Deborah loses her patience – "[a]nd what would you know about it? ... It's never been interesting. Dreary as dung" (186). When asked about Millin, Deborah maintains that the appropriation of her family is an impossibility, specifically because she cannot imagine herself – or her family – as the protagonist of a story.

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[155] Wicomb's decision to name the niece "Sarah" creates a verbal correspondance between the niece and Sarah Gertrude Millin. Since there appears to be little biographical correspondence between the two figures; the parallel likely exists on the level of writing or narration.

> No, I don't believe it. What nonsense. Of course there was no such woman, no such thing. A book for all to read with our dirty Kleinhans washing spread out on the snowy white pages? Ag no man, don't worry; it wouldn't be our story; it's everyone's story. All coloured people have the same story. Not worth writing a book about (187).

Later, back home, Deborah narrates her Cape Town trip to her neighbor Dollie, explaining the visit's premature ending, after apartheid police barge into the house and arrest her niece. While the police are busy, Deborah, with customary deference and to Sarah's explicit condemnation, offers the policemen some coffee. Yet, inexplicably, upon the request that she serve his coffee "black and bitter" (189), Deborah pours the policemen's coffee down the drain. That this last heroic stand is a fabrication of Deborah's construction, though, is suggested when her neighbour's husband chastises her for changing certain details in her retelling (190). However, while the reader is left uncertain about whether her defiance is fabrication or fact, Wicomb's narrative suggests that Deborah's retelling of the episode, and her mastery of the narrative, allows her some redemption, some tentative power, within the otherwise humiliating episode.

While the exact nature of this mastery and its legitimacy is left in question, the short story, published originally in 2004, introduces some of the central themes in Wicomb's later novel, *Playing in the Light* (2006). It will provide a useful guide for understanding Wicomb's emphasis on the social significance of narrative, its capacity for empowerment, the conditions that underpin it and how narrative mastery registers problems of legitimacy in postapartheid South Africa.

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In *Playing in the Light* Marion Campbell, a white South African, discovers that her parents were "play-whites," that is, South Africans who were classified as coloured by the apartheid government, but who, through appearance and bureaucratic opportunity, were later reclassified as white – thereby assuming the advantages of whiteness against

the discrimination faced by the rest of the coloured community.[156] While Marion's discovery forces her to reassess her entitlement and privileged status in South African society, she also develops an uneasy friendship with Brenda, her coloured employee, who unwittingly helps Marion uncover her family history, pieces of which filter into the text through the memories of Marion's parents, John and Helen.

While the friendship between Marion and Brenda teeters uncomfortably along the exploitative employer/employee divide, much is made of the differences between them. Marion's leaden-footed privilege and prejudice is consistently set against Brenda's mental acuity and quickness. Playing out against the historical context of the TRC, the novel initially promises to follow along these lines.

However, searching for Marion's redemptive transformation is a reasonably thankless affair. Her racism does certainly shift: racist associations with poverty and animality, leading her to describe Brenda's "township" eyes as "bovine black" (27) are later dropped, nameless servants and beggars, "the cleaning girl"(3), "unsavoury creatures" (27) are later named, and her explosive racialized imperiousness ("she would want [to take] a life" for every stolen computer [14]) is later dampened. However, these changes hardly seem profound. When she confronts her father about their family history, she employs the same racialized apartheid-era categories and slurs, referring to him and herself as "hottie se kind" (182). And while she later questions her meritocratic justification of social inequality (170), there remain few signs that she has shifted from viewing coloured people as easily exploitable labour, as when she initially hires a coloured employee because "things [finances] were tight" (19).

As JU Jacobs perhaps more generously suggests, Marion's cultural repositioning is "an ongoing process, and one which is necessarily inconclusive" (2008:13). Either way, the reader's expectations are hardly repaid given the novel's earlier intimations towards the kind of TRC redemption narrative which is suggested by Marion initially being haunted by the spectral image of an ANC insurgent, Patricia Williams. It will later be revealed that Williams might be a distant cousin to Marion, but that is hardly the revelation for which the reader has been waiting.

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[156] For notes on the definition and my use of "coloured" in this thesis, refer to footnote 12 in the Introduction.
Zoë Wicomb has herself written quite significantly on the status of coloured-ness in the South African political ontology. Foremost in this sense is her essay, "Shame and Identity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa ([1995] 1998).

In fact, in Brenda's final monologue this expectation is dismayingly overturned, as the reader, in what emerges as an especially disorientating plot twist, finds that Brenda has secretly been writing Marion's family story. In this way earlier conclusions about Brenda's subordinate narrative role as Marion's helper are overturned. Brenda has the final word, and her speech suggests that she has in fact mediated, interjected and potentially constructed the narrative that we have been reading. And since the reader has been focused on the minor story of Marion's anticlimactic personal changes, we have missed the actual narrative, the significance of which whirls back to us in a triumphant example of delayed decoding.[157] Brenda's subordinate role as employee or helper has been subverted, positioning her as a rival for Marion's presumed mastery. Thus, while Marion has been on holiday, Brenda has taken over running her business, started an affair with Marion's ex-partner and appropriated her family's story. The textual mechanisms and stylistic peculiarities which delay our understanding of Brenda's centrality thus become the necessary entry-point towards understanding Wicomb's meditation on authority, rivalry and legitimacy in postapartheid South Africa.[158]

An initial attempt at uncovering this narrative complexity is provided in Andrew Van der Vlies's account which poses the question of who is telling the story, arguing that Brenda is the "chief focaliser, if not author" of the narrative (2010:595). Van der Vlies supports his claim by highlighting the various references to reading and canonicity which pepper the text, while the narrative simultaneously highlights Marion's weaknesses as a reader. Brenda's linguistic and cultural mastery, her honours degree in literature, and her identification of herself as a poet all serve to strengthen this claim (Van der Vlies, 2010:593). From this perspective, various observations initially attributed to Marion become ironic. When, for example, Marion muses, "a deep one, that Brenda" (20), the narrative appears to be foregrounding its artifice.

[157] The term, "delayed decoding" is drawn from Ian Watt's discussion of Joseph Conrad's writing. While in Conrad delayed decoding is used primarily as a defamiliarizing descriptive device, in Wicomb's novel it is achieved through "covert plotting": "a concealed plot-sequence" in which some of "its elements are conspicuous, either because of authorial strategies of reticence and elision or because they are occluded by the conspicuous linkages of the overt plot" (Watts, 1984:1).

[158] This interplay between the white subject and the objectified or subordinated black subject recalls Toni Morrison's argument in *Playing in the Dark*, however Wicomb's text clearly subverts the state of affairs Morrison is describing by covertly threading Brenda's mastery into the narrative.

It follows, then, that Brenda would become the central consciousness through which focalisation occurs. However, it is not clear that this is the complete mastery that Van der Vlies attributes to it. The short passages that appear to be narrated by John and Helen are indeed "open to being read as having been constructed by Brenda after extensive discussions with John Campbell and his sister, Elsie … while Marion is abroad" (Van der Vlies, 2010:594). And yet, in parts of the text where passages appear to be focalized through Marion, Brenda's voice appears more clearly as an intrusion, as a rival to Marion's thoughts: "The woman [Brenda] has a knack of getting inside her most secret being; why does she have the irrational feeling that Brenda knows things about her?" (78). In this instance Brenda's narration, with its implied strength or mastery, seeing further and deeper than Marion's, still appears somewhat anti-climactically to *compete* or rival Marion's for narrative mastery.

This minor adjustment of Van der Vlies's argument, from narrative dominance to rivalry, produces a reading in which the latent anxieties around mobility and legitimacy which pervade the text can be rendered manifest. And so, Van der Vlies takes the ostentatious artifice of the narrative, the canonical citations and ironic references to Marion's poor reading "as objective correlatives in Brenda's narrative" (2010:595) which "undermin[e] the veracity of any project pretending to truth … [and thus] the effect – and affect – of realism" (2010:596). Yet, an equivalent reading can identify these markers as nervous performances of cultural capital – akin, perhaps, to Deborah's vigilance around manners and propriety in "Another Story."

From this perspective, the tussle over narrative mastery which plays out in these pages points towards a contest between two differing factions of an elite, in which the polarities of race have faded, reduced to the narcissism of minor differences.

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While the racialized nature of inequality has persisted in postapartheid South Africa, inequality within specific racialized groupings has also increased. Thus, in terms of the cleavage between a largely white elite and a black majority, the landscape of South Africa has not changed profoundly since the end of apartheid. As Patrick Bond notes, there are structural reasons for this – "[w]hites kept the best land, the mines, manufacturing plants and financial institutions. They exported vast quantities of capital, and benefited most from the economic policies adopted during the 1990s" (Bond,

2014a:146). This fact is gestured to in Wicomb's novel, with Marion's humorously named suitor, Geoff Geldenhuys, whose surname, as John notes, denotes "a houseful of money" (180). Geoff is a successful white businessman, running a euphemistically-named workshop entitled "Delegating in the New South Africa" (24), registering the continuation of super-exploited labour that props up the South African economy.[159]

As noted earlier, through the political transition of 1994, the new South African economy retained the general shape of apartheid, despite various public exhortations about democracy and change. In this sense, as Bond notes, the new ruling party carried over from apartheid a "structurally dysfunctional economy that excluded 40 per cent of the working-age population from employment" (Bond, 2014b:176).

While the shape of the apartheid economy was retained, the ANC did attempt to redistribute "economic, social, cultural and political power and resources" through affirmative action policies, most notably Black Economic Empowerment (Alexander, 2013:134). However, as Neville Alexander notes, little progress was made towards enlarging the pool of skilled labour, and thus redistribution efforts mainly benefited "the rising black middle class and in effect deepen[ed] the inherited class inequalities" (Alexander, 2013:137;134). This is presumably what underlies Sampie Terreblanche's contention that "South African society has been transformed from a rigid racially divided society into a highly stratified class society" (Terreblanche, 2002:33; see also Bond, 2014a:149). As Terreblanche and Alexander both conclude, the distinctly racial character of socio-economic inequalities is being eroded, however, with a "symbolically important, ever-widening gap between the 'black' rich and the 'black' poor" now evident (Alexander, 2013:141; see also Terreblanche, 2002:29).

Indeed, Wicomb's novel can be read in the context of these class shifts – especially given the inclusion of the "tall, handsome and expensively dressed" Vumile Mkhise, a black businessman on the receiving end of "fast-tracked black economic empowerment" (108; 200). As part of the new postapartheid black elite, Vumi is internationally mobile, accruing large amounts of wealth as a member of "the Petroleum Board," consulting with Scottish businessmen about the potential extraction of oil and gas reserves on the west coast of South Africa (199). While Vumi's racial identity might remain an entrenched social marker, his status is clearly mitigated by his

[159] This lack of change is signalled in the text, when Marion notes that "delegation" is merely "a question of key-words, fancy new ways of talking about well-worn ideas" (24).

wealth. He also seems to have assimilated quite smoothly into the role of mediating for international extractive industry, "[m]an, we've got some business to do with each other" he gratifyingly notes.

But if striation has occurred in black communities, then it is also increasingly visible in coloured communities. As Adhikari notes,

> Although the skilled and well-educated Coloured middle classes have profited from the extension of civil liberties and many have been able to take advantage of opportunities that have become available to formerly disadvantaged people through affirmative action and black economic empowerment initiatives, the Coloured working classes have been victims of jobless economic growth and an increasing desire among employers in the formal sector to hire Africans in order to have a more racially representative workforce (2005:179).

Adhikari's point further highlights the carving out of new, small, intra-racial elites, still formed within the racial and discursive categories of apartheid (Alexander, 2013:134).

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To return briefly to Wicomb's short story, we might note that one aspect shared by Deborah and her niece, Sarah, is a particularly wary vigilance about language-use. For Deborah, this takes the form of using English, over "comfortable Afrikaans" (184), an English which "pinch[es] like the Lycra step-in that [her neighbor] Dollie insisted had to be worn for the visit" (184). Choice of language is dictated by norms of propriety, with social applicability prioritized over ease and comfort. While for Sarah, her oppositional politics are refracted through a form of "lexical vigilance" (180) about the use and circumvention of apartheid terminology. Thus construed as "a matter of mental hygiene, a regular rethinking of words in common use," the use of the term "coloured" must be supplanted by the term "so-called coloured" which stresses the category's discursive construction and "should [not only] be reserved for speech" (180).

Wicomb's novel shares this emphasis on linguistic vigilance with Helen and John's passing not only dependent on bureaucratic changes and social distance, but also on linguistic decisions which identify language as a marker of race, class, and the rural/urban distinction. Thus, one of the conflicts which sours Helen and John's relationship falls on the social significance of Afrikaans. Helen views English as a marker of social advancement, with Afrikaans either racialized as coloured or

designating the unpolished rural against the metropolitan. A distinction marked by the semantic slippage between “Afrikaner”, as someone who speaks Afrikaans, and “Boer”, an Afrikaans farmer. When John, in their newly constructed whiteness, is content to continue speaking Afrikaans, she considers him blind to the “finer points of advancement in the city” (127). She pleads with him to “attend to his language” (127): “why settle for being a Boer, when you could be anything at all? By which she meant English” (127).

Accordingly, the efficacy of Helen’s passing is measured in terms of her normative performance of English. As she notes, her job selling expensive laces and linen “alerted her to the many shades of whiteness” (128). “Polished and self-assured,” in her demeanour, her transformation towards “the brightest” whiteness is documented as “her Afrikaans vowels grew rounder and drawn out as a lady’s, while her English came on very nicely thanks to the SABC” (128; 125). In this way, her transformation from the flatness of Afrikaans vowels to the rounder forms of English finds its “project completed” in Marion, whose English is received as that of a native speaker (125; 18).

And yet, if Afrikaans is read by play-white Helen as a racialized defect, then the social pressure to speak English is shared by most of the coloured characters in the novel. Take for instance Elsie, Marion’s aunt, whose English is described primarily in terms of its “defects”, the level to which the Afrikaans under its surface emerges: “Her English is not as shaky as John’s, although guttural r’s do escape between chortles, and her syntax totters in moments of passion” (166). While Elsie depicts her rejection of Afrikaans as a form of political resistance, “the shooting of the Soweto children in ’76, and then my William shot dead by Boers” (166), her faulty production of the language is persistently accompanied by gestures signalling her discomfort – nervous laughter and a repetitive tugging at her clothes (166).

Another instance of the prestige associated with English in the coloured community is registered when Mrs Murray of Wuppertal insists on the point that Marion’s grandmother, Tokkie Karelse, was working in “a respectable position with English people,” adding that “[t]he Karelses were decent people, not the sort who went into service for Boers” (95).

Elsewhere in the novel, Brenda humorously highlights the common association of Afrikaans and authoritarian white supremacy. When she encounters the racist Afrikaner, Boetie Van Graan, he introduces himself with an air of formality, implying their respective positions within the apartheid racial hierarchy. “Brenda,” he says, “very

pleased to meet you. I’m Mr van Graan” (19). She responds to these implications of inferiority by mocking the respectful forms of address that are built into Afrikaans, lamenting “the lack of a respectful second-person pronoun in English… Here in South Africa we should invent our own equivalent for the Afrikaans U” (20). Later she zealously adopts the Afrikaans requirement that one elide the familiar second-person (jy/jou) for people in authority. In this way she parodies Boetie’s self-importance: “Mr van Graan, Brenda would say, would Mr van Graan please cast Mr van Graan’s expert eye over this document? In fact I’ll leave it for Mr van Graan to deal with” (20).

Language politics around the use of Afrikaans in the coloured community are reasonably well-documented. Adhikari, for instance, notes the historical class overtones of the two languages: “Afrikaans was associated with social inferiority, cultural backwardness, and Afrikaner racism in the minds of the Coloured elite, whereas English was revered as the language of culture, civilization and progress” (2005:170). He equivalently notes that the continued use of Afrikaans by the working class coloured majority was viewed as “a grudging concession to the prevalence and deep emotional appeal of the language,” however much “the modernizing elite… [wanted] to distance itself from ‘barbarous Cape Dutch’” (2005:170). Thus, “[t]he Afrikaans vernacular distinctive to the Coloured community and variously referred to as *Capey, Gamtaal* (language of Ham), or *kombuis* (kitchen) Afrikaans has […]customarily been stigmatized as a mark of social inferiority” (2005:17).

The elitism implicit in the use of English is equivalently encoded in its distribution; within the coloured population, mother-tongue Afrikaans speakers comprise roughly 80%, against a mere 20% of mother-tongue English speakers (Reagan, 2019:255). And while only 13.5% of South Africa’s total population are native speakers of Afrikaans, a meagre 9.6% grow up with English as their first language (Reagan, 2019:248).

As Reagan further notes, Afrikaans has historically been identified as the “language of the oppressor,” associated with apartheid policies and police oppression; this is contrasted with the view of English as the “language of liberation” (2019:266). However, this perception is misleading, since the majority of Afrikaans-speakers are

non-whites who were themselves discriminated against under apartheid (Reagan, 2019:266).[160]

Afrikaans is therefore not a straightforwardly colonial language. While clearly descended from Dutch, it has been shaped by multiple language contact within South Africa – these include European languages, but also various African languages, Malay and Creole Portuguese (Kirsten, 2018:15). This heritage confirms not only its wider popular adoption, but also the extent to which it has been vernacularized and adapted by various social groups. Afrikaans was later appropriated by nationalists as the language of "white Christian Afrikaners" in opposition to British rule, but early Islamic textbooks written and published in Arabic Afrikaans indicate the language's roots in the coloured community descended from Cape slave communities (Kirsten, 2018:22; Reagan, 2019:254).

Thus, while various characters' articulation of English suggests status or mobility, the ready adoption of English can be read as a form of deprivation in which the more organic and popular language of a marginalised community is passed over for that of the dominant classes. In the process speakers are deprived of a language which might more effectively capture or, to paraphrase John Berger (1967), "clarify" their experience. Adopting a new language affects both the speaker's capacity for personal mastery while also erasing the specific cultural codes of that linguistic heritage.

One way this is registered in *Playing in the Light* is through the direct translation of Afrikaans idioms into English. Phrases like "[a] mouth full of teeth" (34), awkwardly transposed so that they are emptied of their significance, suggest the extent to which meaning is lost in the imperative to speak English.[161] Another instance of idiom translation significantly occurs when John opines about the physical difficulty of pronouncing English words. Here, again, the incomplete translation results in semantic loss, indicating English's incapacity for capturing his subjective experience: "He [John] said it was too hard, that he simply could not get his tongue around the *hand and tand* of a language that required you to part your jaws so unnaturally wide" (130; my

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[160] Njabulo Ndebele has cautioned against accepting English and its presumed neutrality uncritically, noting that through language use, speakers "absorb entrenched attitudes." "In this regard," he notes, "the guilt of English … must be recognized and appreciated before its continued use can be advocated." (Ndebele, 1987 cited in Reagan, 2019:266).

[161] The Afrikaans original, "*mond vol tande*", directly translated as "mouth full of teeth", signifies having nothing to say or having an air of defeat.

emphasis).[162] Equally telling, then, are moments of humour in the novel which reside in the interplay between Afrikaans and English, where a lack of familiarity with Afrikaans renders a fragmented reading of the English. When Helen, for instance, chastises John by saying "you've just fallen with your bum in the fresh butter," the phrase shocks John because of Helen's uncharacteristic use of "rough language" (126). John's response appears dissonant, unless the reader is already familiar with the original Afrikaans idiom which uses "gat" (closer to the English "ass" or "asshole"), rather than the poorly (and politely) translated "bum."[163]

The nexus between race, class and language choice becomes especially significant in Brenda and Marion's encounter with Outa Blinkoog – a scene which various critics have identified as being central, either for Blinkoog's mediation as a figure of bricolage (Coetzee, 2010), cosmopolitanism (Gurnah, 2011), or his relation to light and surface as a form of reading (Samuelson, 2016). As Jacobs notes, Blinkoog's "exotic, almost mystical presence" highlights the notion of "essential cultural identity…as a strategic fiction" (2008:13-14). However, Blinkoog's disruptiveness is as equally tied to Wicomb's depiction of language and mastery. As a start, Blinkoog's itinerant and marginalised status is curiously tied to his inability to read English:

> The school inspector says, read from the English storybook, and then you must learn to read: Joe doesn't know; Joe can't read. And then the constable pulls your ears… So you see, I do the travel; I go where I please, all over the show, and no constable can move me on. (88)

It is in Blinkoog's clear lack of conformity to metropolitan cultural codes of English that we see Brenda stumble for the first time in her self-presentation as cultural mediator and guide. For when Blinkoog introduces himself she struggles to find the appropriate form of address – stumbling through the English, "Mister", and then onto the more familiar and respectful "Oom [Uncle]" (87). Yet Blinkoog rejects both and insists on being called "Outa", a racially-coded title used to designate an older coloured man, signalling respect, but a respect located lower on a racial hierarchy. Brenda's initial response is congruous with her earlier response to Boetie van Graan, "Ag no,

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[162] Here, the Afrikaans "*hand en tand*", directly translated as "hand and tooth" and semantically similar to the English "tooth and nail", is only partially translated into English as hand and "tand".
[163] The peculiar prepositional phrasing of "you've… fallen *with your* bum" is also representative of Afrikaans-inflected English.

Oom… no need to call yourself Outa. That's not nice at all." However, her utterance reads as an awkward condescension, as though she were correcting a child, she has to restrain herself from completing her sentence "—for such a beautiful man" (87). And yet, once Blinkoog asserts his choice to use the name, she awkwardly falls back on using the Afrikaans forms of respect that she so mocked Boetie Van Graan with, "[d]oes Outa know…" (88).

In this way, Brenda and Blinkoog's encounter indicates the extent to which the rural countryside remains remote from the centralised power of the city. Brenda is unable to marshal the specific cultural codes which she has mastered in the city, falling back on stereotyped notions of closeness and reliance on the earth which are swiftly and embarrassingly denied by Blinkoog. "Does Outa know all the plants, the ones you can eat or the ones that can cure diseases?" she asks him (88). But her attempt to understand him in relation to the land falls short, "who eats veldkos these days?" he responds, "I for one am too busy" (88). He equivalently dismisses the Bushman paintings that Brenda has positioned as part of his cultural heritage (90).

Elsewhere in the novel it is precisely Brenda's ability to manipulate the social undertones of language that is fundamental to the mastery which Van der Vlies (2010) and Hoegberg (2018) have highlighted. The social value of her articulacy is also registered through her command of the workplace, her "impressive diplomacy" (17), her presentation of an efficient volubility and the sophistication required to "tread so delicate a boundary between respect and mockery… Her speech is melodic; she knows just how and when to linger over a sound" (20). She notably wins over the office cleaner, Tiena, so that she is served directly after Marion (17).[164]

Thus, a fissure opens up in which the reader starts regarding Brenda's social position not only as a racialised person, but as a person who is classed within that ostensible coloured community – distinguished by her use of English and her location as a city-dweller. As will become evident, her cultural capital, itself, follows particular codes which are not applicable to everyone.

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[164] This is equivalently evident in Brenda's canny awareness that some circumstances require that "[you] pay [your] dues with banter" (34).

From a discussion of how language reveals the vagaries of class, race and rural/urban polarity which animate the text, we must turn to a crucial scene for understanding Brenda's positionality, the textual politics of the novel and the layers of amiability and antagonism which constitute Marion and Brenda's relationship. Due to the centrality of the novel's delayed decoding, which concludes the narrative by exposing the covert plot of which Brenda is the dominant narrator, the crucial scene arrives, of course, at the end, with Brenda's final monologue. While Marion's narrative has denied readers the emotional resolution they were expecting, Brenda's final words foreground her ascendance as a writer and the terms by which she has accommodated herself to her world:

> Writing my own story, I know, is what someone like me is supposed to do, what we all do, they say, whether we know it or not, but Christ, what story do I have to tell? I'm not Patricia Williams, with adventures under my belt. Mine is the story of everybody else in Bonteheuwel, dull as dishwater. Or my sister and Neville, treading the boards between television and their double bed – why would anyone want to write about them, invent something around such tedious lives? So that tedium can be converted into something improving? That, I say, is the business of God. So that such lives, too, can be known about? I say they are known only too well; that people in Mr Mahmoud's shop will yawn and skip the pages in the hope of something beyond poverty and television and coloured people's obsession with food (217-218).

David Hoegberg notes in his analysis of intertextuality and authorship that Brenda effectively denies the simple relationship required of postcolonial writers to biography (2018).[165] His reading emphasises Brenda's empowerment, "[i]n choosing Marion's family as the subject of her fiction, Brenda has written a self-referential, intertextual novel that avoids simple autobiography while still addressing matters of South African political importance." (2018:500). However, if Hoegberg's account appears somewhat too celebratory, then it is because the terms in which Brenda describes her community, and her decision not to tell her own life-story, suggest disdain rather than mere writerly

[165] This has also been discussed by Wicomb herself in her essay, "Setting, Intertextuality, and the Resurrection of the Postcolonial Author" (2004/2005). My reading of *Playing in the Light* clearly negates some of the resonances which other critics have highlighted between this critical essay and Wicomb's novel. But again, as with Nadine Gordimer (Chapter 2), it might be a mistake to lean too heavily on an author's other critical, journalistic or scholarly writings in order to understand their fiction. Beyond confusing the generic differences between these different genres, any critical approach which interprets fiction as a mere application of an author's conscious and explicit theoretical principles both impoverishes the imaginative possibilities of the text, and denies the possibility that a fictional text may exist, not merely as an extension of other critical work, but as a counterpoint to it.

agency.[166] In this way her words closely parallel those of poor Deborah's from the short story ("Another Story") discussed earlier in this chapter. Across both accounts, the details and experiences of "coloured" life are summarily homogenised:

> Brenda: "Mine is the story of everybody else in Bonteheuwel"
> Deborah: "Ag no man, don't worry; it wouldn't be our story; it's everyone's story. All coloured people have the same story".

They are described as lacking the capacity for meaningful action, change or mobility:

> Brenda: "Or my sister and Neville, treading the boards between television and their double bed – why would anyone want to write about them, invent something around such tedious life?"
> Deborah: "Sitting day after day waiting for something to happen, listening for hooves or the roll of cartwheels".

And in the last instance, are experienced as tedium, flourished with an alliterative simile of drudgery or excrement:

> Brenda: "dull as dishwater"
> Deborah: "dreary as dung".[167]

In this way Brenda's depiction of coloured life resembles that of Deborah, whose internalisation of apartheid hierarchies has positioned her "colouredness" as a lesser state which must be overcome – in her case by being "decent and God-fearing" (2004/2008:176). While Brenda is presented as socially mobile and mastering the urban postapartheid environment, her final depiction of coloured life as "poverty and television and coloured people's obsession with food" indicates that her expectations and empowerment are diametrically opposed to that of her community, which she perceives as inert and immobile.

This is evident in her contempt for the local shopkeeper, Mr Mahmoud. She bemoans "being subjected" (63) to renditions of his poetry which she describes as

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[166] Equivalently, Hoegberg eloquently chronicles the literary terms and references through which Brenda constructs herself in the narrative: ranging from William Hazlitt, T.S. Eliot, Sophocles and Louis Leipoldt (2018). While Hoegberg interprets this as her empowerment, her reliance on Eurocentric and white authors can equivalently be read as a sign of her disempowerment.

[167] The first quotation in every instance is taken from Brenda's speech at the end of *Playing in the Light* (217-218); whereas the parallel quotation is taken from Deborah's responses to her niece in "Another Story" (186-187). Additionally a near anagram is contained in the two names – Brenda/Deborah.

"nostalgia for the bad old days of resistance against apartheid" (63). Brenda's impatience is thus not merely with poetry itself, but with what she perceives as Mahmoud's working-class sentimentalism and a distrust of poetry as a popular form. Her elevated status is confirmed by his valorization of her as "an educated person who can appreciate poetry" (64), and her elitism further registered in her description of the gathered crowd (who appear to enjoy his poetry) as "the skollies on the stoep" who "shout encouragingly," but are depicted as lacking the sophistication to appreciate poetry, "[s]kiet hom bra… daai's what Mr Mahmoud need" they shout (64). In response, Brenda witheringly notes "as if, like her mummy's curry, the poem is short of a dash of chilli" (64).

This summary dismissal of the popular is connected, more than once, to the distinction of having attended university. While Brenda initially identifies as a poet (85), a memory recalled from her studies centres a poem from a Contemporary South African Literature class "about the vulgarity of Cape Town culture… about offensive designs for the masses" (65). By contrast it's notable that Mahmoud's list of potential poetic subjects include "violence, the lack of community spirit ... the fecklessness of township youth" to "celebrat[ing] sex" or "Table Mountain" (64). These subjects cohere within a larger discourse of social or collective improvement, recalling the mass politics of the 1980s – a discourse which, as I later discuss, Brenda clearly rejects.

While Mr Mahmoud's poetry is offensively designed for the masses, Brenda's family remains, in her depiction, offensively unrefined. Relaying her sister's criticism of Brenda's snobbery, her "airs and graces" (65), Brenda's narration represents her sister Shirley's criticism by including a language error which transposes the Afrikaans construction of "teach" *(leer)* into English. In this way, the narration emphasizes the limits of her sister's linguistic capacity precisely as she is attempting to critique Brenda's pretentiousness – "Is that what they *learn* you at university?" (65; my emphasis).

From this angle it is often unclear whether it is Marion or Brenda who produces the elitism for which Brenda appears to criticise Marion. This is partly achieved through the ambiguity of free-indirect discourse, which obscures whom certain racist or classist terms should be attributed to. In the following description of Bonteheuwel, Marion appears to be focalizing the prejudiced language and derogatory terms used to render her memory.

> It took less than a year to fall out of love with Christ, a process accelerated by the grim surroundings of the church and the unashamed gaze of the brown skollies who came leaning over the church wall to stare at the girls. The snot-nosed children could not be relied on to learn their texts… they clamoured to know what their Christmas presents were going to be (67).

The description attributes only venal interests to the coloured children of the suburb and relegates the people in the vicinity to passive criminality ("skollies).[168] Brenda responds in near-reported speech with characteristic irony "[w]ell, who would have thought of you as a do-gooder?" (68). However, the same terms and constructions are repeated a few pages later, this time focalized by Brenda, without any obvious irony:

> Her [Marion's] frown tells Brenda that this is someone for whom only the material exists; no doubt the adolescent flirtation with God was where her spirit bit the dust – in the dusty streets of Bonteheuwel, witnessed by skollies and snot-nosed children who nevertheless looked upon her with envy (78)

That Marion's frown is "tell[ing] Brenda", places us firmly within Brenda's consciousness; however she repeats the words which are initially attributed to Marion ("skollies" and "snot-nosed children").[169] Notably, though, her own individual attribution is her reading of "envy" into their gazes – a projection which appears as likely to characterize Brenda's feelings towards Marion as Brenda's own notion of her individual distinction.

This vision of ascendance with its emphasis on an individual rising above their community is reminiscent of Marion's mother, Helen, specifically her dogged commitment to social advancement. Brenda's desire for autonomy and privacy, her

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[168] The term skollie refers to "a stereotyped Coloured figure, a male hooligan, unemployed, drunk, prone to violence and gangsterism, who haunts their attempts at what Jensen calls "dignity"" (Durham, 2012:651-652). The skollie, in contrast to the designation of "tsotsi", which suggests violence, might be considered as a coloured type of "laddism."

[169] This could rightly be discussed as a form of echolalia. For Krowiak (2019), echolalia dramatizes a subjectivity of "in-between-ness" in a postapartheid South Africa not yet freed from its apartheid past: "a subject that is both speaking and mimicking, recognizing and being aggressively stereotyped, and owning and fastidiously disowning" (2019:363). "[T]he echolalic subject" he notes, "finds herself enunciating the other's discourse in the very moment that she is emerging as a someone capable of having a discourse proper to herself" (2019:366-367). This insight is clearly applicable to my discussion of Brenda as a "bourgeoisie in miniature"; however, Krowiak does not engage the sharedness of discourse between Marion and Brenda, rehearsing rather an academic discourse on South African history (miscegenation/colouredness; property and the plaasroman) which has already been discussed into its entrails. To my mind this is a lost opportunity, given the ample evidence of polticised repetitions throughout Wicomb's text.

frustrations with the "forced intimacy" (65) of her family's cramped Bonteheuwel house and the way she "luxuriat[es] in the new single bed" she has bought herself (64), therefore suggest not only the claustrophobic effects of poverty, but also the future prospect of autonomy and isolation which characterize Marion's life. While Brenda initially describes her mattress as a mere "vulgar, affordable foam mattress *of her very own*", the linen in which she wraps it is notably distinguished as coming "from Woolworths" (65, my emphasis; 66).[170] Later the mattress, quantified and individualized as her space, her property, will figure as the first step in a plan towards escaping her surroundings by increasing her wealth.

> Lying stretched out and wriggling her bare toes on the *two-meter expanse that is inalienably hers*… Next year, perhaps with a new job or pay rise, she'll be able to move out, fix up *her own place in her own taste*… Her mother and Shirley will be wounded, but no need to think of that as yet. There is no chance of getting away while prices in Cape Town continue to soar (66; my emphasis).

That Brenda's aspirations and economic plans may come at the expense of her family is evident in her recognition that they will be hurt by her departure. Thus, while her purchased single mattress may be contrasted with Marion's excessively large and suffocating fairy-tale four-poster bed (2), success is firmly quantified within the same terms. This unstated aspiration to accrue the wealth of the white elite, a mobility measured by autonomy and isolation, recalls Fanon's withering characterization of the ascendant postcolonial bourgeoisie, a miniature mattress for a "bourgeoisie in miniature" (1965 [1961]:174).

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If Brenda's decision to write about John's whiteness measures her distance from the community, then her decision to forgo writing a socially improving narrative implies a critique of the didacticism of much South African literature:

> why would anyone want to write about them, invent something around such tedious lives? So that tedium can be converted into something improving? That,

[170] Not to be confused with the now defunct F.W. Woolworth franchise in the UK; Woolworths in South Africa is a chain of luxury supermarkets which caters to the elite.

> I say, is the business of God. So that such lives, too, can be known about? I say they are known only too well (217-218).

Thus, Brenda's coupling of didacticism, "tedium… converted into something improving," with a corresponding lack of belief in the value of depicting normal life, resurfaces the problems discussed in Chapter Three, where narrating township life is instrumentalised towards "improving" its inherent deficiency. Thereby in one line Brenda produces a less euphemistic account of the class politics gestured to in Ndebele's "Return to the Ordinary".

Beyond the question of didactic distance or condescension, Brenda's statement that "such lives [those of her community]… are known only too well" (218) rehearses a particular form of cultural deprivation, the marginalisation experienced by communities which have been excluded from cultural recognition. John Berger, in another context, describes this state as follows: "[a] great deal of their experience – especially emotional and introspective experience – has to remain *unnamed* for them."(2016 [1967]:101). The point, then, is that rather than being known too well, their lives are not known at all, and that this lack of cultural mediation materializes as a lack of appreciation. This is evident earlier in the text in the response of Mrs Murray when she is asked about the Bushman rock paintings near Wuppertal. Though it is evident that she has never seen the paintings, she dismisses any interest in them as a transient fashionableness (93), perplexed as she is by "foreigners'" interest in these "quite unremarkable things, quite lacking in artistry and… hardly visible anymore" (93).

Mrs Murray's conclusions appear to be linked to apartheid notions about cultural superiority, shared by Deborah in "Another Story." However, Brenda, with her university degree, has equally not been able to draw on a culture which renders the specificity of her life – or that of her community. It follows, then, that insofar as Brenda achieves some level of empowerment and mastery in the narrative, this legitimacy remains defined within the terms of a prevailingly colonial cultural and English linguistic dominance. This dominance is what leads her to quote TS Eliot and William Hazlitt as a means of depicting her world (see footnote 166; Hoegberg, 2018), rather than Alex La Guma, Dennis Brutus, Richard Rive or Peter Abrahams.

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We must return, though, to a peculiar moment which will clarify the links between dominance and reading in the novel. This is when, towards the beginning of the novel, Brenda "admits" to Marion that, having omitted this fact in her job interview, she actually has an honours degree (27). The moment is notable, because in a novel, where Van der Vlies (2010) and Hoegberg (2018) have noted that Marion is portrayed as an especially poor reader, she correctly infers that Brenda is attempting to leverage her degree for a pay rise (27). We realise this because she tells Marion that she is under financial pressure to support, among others, a brother who is attending college (27), though later it becomes evident that no such brother exists. Marion, of course, armed with a tight-fisted business acumen reads the situation correctly, and so manipulates the conversation to avoid conceding Brenda's veiled request.

This presents a different kind of reading to that outlined by Van der Vlies and Hoegberg, but one which Brenda is clearly mastering throughout the novel, as when she finally tells Marion that she intends to use John's story, "his pale skin", "as capital, ripe for investment" (218). Notably, alongside this, from her initial identification as a poet (85), with its evocations of Mr Mahmoud's popular productions, she shifts towards writing prose. That this writing will also be done within the space of Marion's offices further emphasizes the clear financial incentives which she is learning to follow through her work (217).

In this sense, the context of the travel agency and the actual business of tourism, beyond its significance for transnationalism in Wicomb's writing (Driver, 2011; Gurnah, 2011), provides an important material context from which to approach the novel. For beyond the political context of the TRC, the booming tourism industry also highlights the postapartheid and late apartheid turn towards "neo-liberal macro-economic management" (Bond, 2014a:145). The introduction of the equally neoliberal Growth Employment and Redistribution policy (GEAR) with its prioritization of "international competitiveness" and outward-looking policy was equally congenial to the development of postapartheid tourism (Bond, 2014a:145). [171]

[171] This is borne out in accounts of the period. In 1999 the government allowed for capital to flood out of the country when "[they] gave permission for the relisting of financial headquarters for most of the largest companies listed on the London Stock Exchange" resulting in the largest companies moving their loot from apartheid exploitation "offshore" (Bond, 2014a:151). In Patrick Bond's description, this move was in line with governmental "obeisance to multinational corporations" (2014a:145) and the increasing privatization of the public sphere. These moves were justified, along with costly megaprojects which

For Marion the growth of the tourism sector is concurrent with the visibility and encroachment of poverty. She notes that the city has become "a haven for ragged people standing about harassing car owners." However, she notes that "things are better now, for instance, things like tourism. She certainly can't complain about the boom in travel; it's just that these layabouts catch you off guard so early in the morning" (28).

Thus while Marion's travel agency, "MCTravel", unmistakeably recalls the multinational McDonald's "Golden Arches" design with its "crisp new gold lettering" (26) affixed to the front of the building, just so, the Cape is largely viewed through the commodifying eye of tourism. It is described as "overrun with foreigners" (83), "more beautiful than the brochures" (44), with the "heart-tugging" views from Marion's apartment and the Camps Bay promenade foreshortened and collapsed into a "postcard view" (3; 78).[172]

And of course, the use of English itself becomes implicated in the neoliberal environment, with English put forward as the language of business and commerce in the novel (18). Elsewhere Zoë Wicomb has noted a complacency surrounding the adoption of English at the expense of indigenous languages. Her perspective, given the recent agitation against Afrikaans as a medium of teaching at some universities, is that English is clearly preferred as "the language of economic advancement" (2018:266).

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From this perspective, it's useful to consider Brenda as one figure who, like Silas, Mikey and Lydia in Dangor's novel, represents the new elite – albeit one which is in the process of becoming, rather than already lodged within the system. This is epitomized in the final scene of the novel where Brenda locks Marion into her own car – a reversal of a more standard chain, where an individual is kicked out of a car by the driver who locks it from the inside. In this obverse instance, control of the car and hence mastery is ascribed to Brenda, yet with Marion remaining in the privileged

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primarily benefitted the elite in that they would "stimulate foreign investment" and tourism (Bond, 2014b:184).

[172] It's equivalently telling that while Marion recognises "MCTravel, one of the few independent companies left" (16), she later has little compunction or hesitation at considering selling it off to "corporate syndicates that have been hovering like wolves… determined to squeeze out small businesses" (185).

position of driving and owning the car, suggesting that Brenda's mobility remains, at best, partial.[173]

This is equivalently the discomfort about Brenda's decision to tell John's story. It is not merely her anxiety to escape her own community or her view of her community's social existence as antithetical to meaningful narrativisation, but the crude way in which she describes her extraction of value and the financial register which is employed in her description. Consider the way in which John's story, its personal and historical value for Marion, but also John as a person, has been reduced to a commodity, with "his pale skin as capital, ripe for investment…" (218). This, again, bears a striking resemblance to Helen who thinks of the paleness of her skin in terms of "the many shades of whiteness" of the fine linen she sells at her work (128).[174]

It seems impossible then, not to infer that Brenda's advancement follows the logic of a neoliberal and extractive capitalism, to which her newly formed relationship with Marion's previous partner Geoff, "the houseful of money", is clearly integral (215-216; 180). For if there are elements in Brenda's final speech that are uncomfortably cynical, then this is equivalently the case for her decision to lean into the continuing racism implicit in the economic quantification which values John's whiteness over her colouredness. Her decision is to exploit this state of affairs, rather than resisting or circumventing it. In this way an analogy is created between Brenda's trajectory and that of Marion's parents, particularly her mother, who claimed the privileges of whiteness, adopting the racial logic and epithets of apartheid, thereby "[thinking] only of their own advancement" (122).

It is equally evident that English, the language of empire and economic advancement, has determined the trajectory of Brenda's thought. Thus, while critics have been quick to note Brenda's linguistic and narrative mastery (Van der Vlies, 2010;

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[173] However, the question about who is driving the car, who powers the momentum of the narrative and whether this momentum is liberatory is problematized by the fact that Brenda's agency is eventually one of locking, or rather, exclusion. Ahead of Brenda and Marion's encounter with the near-mystical Outa Blinkoog, both Marion and Brenda, upon his approach, experience "[t]he instinct to lock the car door [which] comes and goes in a flash" (87). And yet, the ensuing encounter is unambiguously positive, a suspension of social identities, categories and hierarchies as Gurnah (2011), Jacobs (2008) and Coetzee (2010) have noted.

[174] Another echo is presented when the novel depicts Helen being accused of having "airs and graces" (110), the exact wording which, as was discussed earlier in this chapter, has been used to describe Brenda (65).

Hoegberg, 2018; Propst, 2014), they have also generally ignored the limitations of that mastery.

This is perhaps most evident in Lisa Propst's otherwise perceptive analysis, where she recognises the "battle for control over narrative" (2014:205), but celebrates the ending of the novel, noting "it is difficult not to cheer for Brenda when she resists further vulnerability and walks away with dignity" (2014:210). Yet, by the end of the narrative, I would argue that the exact opposite is the case. The very terms of Brenda's mastery, her apparent "resist[ance] [of] further vulnerability," relying as it does on the valorisation of English, its elite status and its subsumption in the class apartheid of the South African economy, does not so much establish Brenda's "dignity", but rather the individualised and bourgeois limits of her project of advancement. As I have shown, this is anticipated earlier in the novel by Brenda's encounter with Outa Blinkoog, in which her self-presentation as guide or mediator to coloured culture falls apart under the strains of the linguistic and urban-rural divides. It is precisely this conception of advancement, mastery and success which is embodied by Marion as "Helen's achievement" (150), "her project completed" (125) and to which Brenda is headed.

Thus Brenda's final words act as an indictment both of the lack of collective ethos in postapartheid economic advancement and the lack of cultural codes and depictions which might reflect the totality of South African experience. Her impoverishment lies precisely in the continued prominence of a colonial or apartheid cultural imagination which leads so smoothly towards an exploitative and extractive logic. This is reflected in the novel both by the incapacity of English to effectively translate characters' experience, but also by the limited literatures and imaginaries which fuel Brenda's own problematic narrative construction. That her immediate movement is towards occupying Marion's place: romancing her jilted partner, running her business, driving her car and telling her father's story, suggests less the creative autonomy of the ideal postcolonial writer, and more the failure of imagination with which Fanon characterized the postcolonial bourgeoisie (1965 [1961]:160). In this sense, we might wonder whether it really matters who is supposed to be narrating the novel; in the final instance, the two narrators become indistinguishable.

Legitimacy

The similarity of Dangor and Wicomb's treatments of postapartheid South Africa then lies in the stark discomfort produced by a missing identification with their characters, thereby denying the reader any heroic narrative of "the new South Africa." In both novels this emerges in a shared scene which highlights their thematic and formal structure of consciousness: a beggar emerges at the door, interrupting the domestic dramas of each novel and suggesting an exterior to the bourgeois consciousness which is their primary focus.

In *Bitter Fruit* it is the spectre of a beggar that appears as Silas is attempting to make sense of his domestic troubles. The doorbell rings and Silas, filled with irritation at the prospect of "a beggar's pleading voice" or "someone selling brooms in order to survive" goes to the door only to realize that it is his friends, Kate and Julian (43). Silas's assumption, then, in Dangor's characteristic sleight of hand, lands similarly to the assumption of the phone operator who thinks that Silas is beating his wife, pointing to poverty as another unacknowledged presence in the unfolding domestic narrative. In *Playing in the Light*, a knock on the door at John's house is followed by a beggar asking for food. The beggar says that he is "[n]obody baas… Please, great sir, the voice whines, I just want some food. Please groot-baas, can I wash your car for some food?" (181). The episode ends with a confrontation between Marion and her father about his racism.

In each instance, the beggar's appearance punctuates the personal crises experienced by the protagonist. For Marion this involves the negotiation of her father's self-image while she grapples with the implications of her newfound identity and family history. In response to her father's hysterical racism, "donnerse" "lazy kaffirs" (181; 182), she produces what is clearly the most vehement acknowledgment of her parents' racial passing to her father: "It wasn't a kaffir, it was a hotnot… We Campbells can't mind hottie se kind, can we now?" (182). While for Silas, the ghostly beggar appears to materialize the crisis of his familial situation, in particular, the paralyzing guilt he appears to experience in the face of their misery: "he was not responsible for all the poverty and misery in the world, and would they go away, for

fuck's sake, as he was facing the crisis of an inscrutable son and an inconsolable wife" (43).

While the pervasive and grinding extremity of poverty is alluded to in these scenes (note the excessive deference that Wicomb's beggar employs, "baas", "great sir", "groot-baas", and its performance of inferiority), its presence is finally disavowed, fed as it is into the domestic and personal intensity of the characters' lives. From one perspective individual struggle appears inseparable from wider social problems, and yet equally stark is the sense that the beggar at the door symbolizes the relative futility, insignificance or meaninglessness of the protagonists' domestic struggles against this backdrop of economic inequality.

We see this in *Playing in the Light* where the consistent to-and-froing over race is embodied by the squabbles and mating of guinea fowls, with their black and white (read multi-racial) and "declassified" plumage (1). The guinea fowl, a minor, perhaps ridiculous, wild animal often found in the wealthy suburbs of Cape Town, thus appears both to symbolise the discursive difficulties of race, while also suggesting its inconsequentiality.

This interpretation is borne out when Marion notes, shortly prior to the appearance of the beggar, that the ghostly body of the dead guinea fowl at the beginning of the novel has indeed disappeared after her asking "the girl" who cleans her house to take it away (1). "Why had she left the bird for Maria to dispose of?" she now asks herself (178). Marion's emerging awareness of her historical privilege has now sufficiently developed that she is able to name the unnamed "girl", and in recognizing Maria she necessarily fills out the index of poverty which was initially disavowed by refusing her name,

> What had Maria done with it? Soup for her family of ten, fifteen? … she hasn't actually seen Maria for months… perhaps Maria too has become a paper-thin, arthritic old woman with snow-white horns of hair peeping from her doek, a frail creature steered by a Hoover across Marion's gleaming floors (178).[175]

In this way, the fractious chattering classes, caught in their own cycles of indictment and violence, appear to deflect from the intractable problems of poverty and degradation faced by the majority of South Africans. In this way the stylistics of dis-

[175] Again, like Brenda and Deborah, the name "Maria" with its similarity to Marion, is likely purposeful.

identification and the uncomfortable un-likeability of the characters register this problem. It is clearly not that as readers we cannot sympathise with the protagonists' problems, but rather that there is an absence suggested in both texts: there are no heroes and there is no redemption. This absence underlies many of the errors, catalogued within this chapter, which critics have read into the two texts. This absence suggests both the persistence of various forms of apartheid and that the potentially revolutionary consciousness, with which the reader might identify, remains outside the text.

Each novelist's representation thereby invokes Fanon's excoriation of the national elite as a "bourgeoisie in miniature that thrusts itself into the forefront [and] is condemned to mark time, accomplishing nothing" because of their isolation from popular consciousness (1965 [1961]:174; 148).[176] Equivalently, its lack of economic power distinguishes it from the comfortable legitimacy experienced by the Western bourgeoisie (1965:149, 153). In Fanon's view it is a class which is incapable of innovation or discovery, its sole redemption lies in repudiating its own nature (1965:153; 150). In this sense, it is characterized by decadence, ear-marked to die when at first it emerges.

This, in *Bitter Fruit* explains the contradictory descriptions of lasciviousness and aging which run through the novel, and which also characterize, in Fanon's account, the national bourgeoisie's "precocious senility" (1965:172). This is evident in Kate's preoccupation with her age in her relationship with Mikey, "her aging body… her breasts are sagging and her thighs are heavy" (132), her perception of herself as a "rapacious older wom[a]n" (71) and her fetishisation of his youth, "[s]he had never slept with someone so young. A nimble animal, not fully grown, still some evidence of the cub's softness" (79). It is also evident in Silas's fetishism of Vinu's youth (222-223; 274) set against his disgust at his own aging body, "too old, too tired" he notes at only 50 years of age (223).[177] As Fanon noted,

> In the colonial countries, the spirit of indulgence is dominant at the core of the bourgeoisie… In its beginnings, the national bourgeoisie of the colonial countries identifies itself with the decadence of the bourgeoisie of the West. We

[176] As an account of the actual black middle class in South Africa, this might as Roger Southall suggests, be somewhat reductive (2016:xiv). But Fanon's imagery (1961) nevertheless appears as a distinct basis of the dis-identification depicted in both texts.
[177] To this reading of decadence we might also add Lydia's tryst with the young Mozambican, João (266).

> need not think that it is jumping ahead; it is in fact beginning at the end. It is already senile before it has come to know petulance, the fearlessness, or the will to succeed of youth (1965 [1961]:153).

In Fanon's damning characterisation, this "good for nothing" (1965:176) or "harmful" (1965:175) bourgeoisie is reduced to playing the role of an "intermediary" (1965:152) between the old colonial powers and the former colony. In *Playing in the Light* this is implicit in the setting of Marion's travel agency and the businessman Vumile Mkhise's role in facilitating the neocolonial extraction of oil and gas on the West coast (199).

The relevance of this Fanonian approach is that it further elaborates the anxiety around legitimacy which dogs the two texts. This, for one thing, is why, instead of reading both novels solely through the lens of coloured identity, it is beneficial to return to the construction of colouredness and illegitimacy discussed in Chapter One. This construction is notably present, for instance, in Silas's consistent and uneasy identification as a "bastard" to describe both the absence of his father and his mixed-race parentage, referring to his derivation from "some kind of bastard strain" (107) and being "at home among his bastard kind" (148).[178] This also forms the basis of the racial panic implicit in Moulana Ismail's conclusion that "you conquer a nation by bastardizing its children" (204) or in Silas's mother taking his absent father's name, "because she didn't want Silas to be known as a bastard" (145). It would be a mistake to read this solely as Silas racializing himself. For while this is a trope which Millin (as discussed in Chapter One) adopts and popularizes, mobilizing it to delegitimise the incipient Afrikaner Nationalists shortly prior to her writing *King of the Bastards* (1949), the significance of legitimacy extends well beyond the denotative meanings of paternal lineage, highlighting also its connotative suggestions around suitability and justification for holding power. This is implicit when Silas wonders to himself what a nurse he encounters thinks of "people like him, the new elite who govern… the country" (95). This anxiety is also re-inscribed by Mikey's murder of his other father

[178] The term "bastard" is used quite consistently throughout the novel: "[the] existential dilemma of every bastard in the world… how they weren't white enough in the past, and how they're not black enough now" (215); "Millions of us, bastardized… The son of a slave-owner takes as his bride a captive slave child, they produce a bastard child, this bastard marries yet another child of master and meid… and so forth, ad infinitum" (101) and Vinu's "down of bastard gold… the gift of indelible beauty that we bushies carry about like a second skin" (274).

and his fantasy construction of a paternal line which links him to Silas's Muslim heritage.

A similar anxiety pervades Marion's initial sense of her origins. This presents itself through a typical Freudian family romance which connects the search for one's parents to the mythological legitimacy of kings. Marion's initial suspicion that she may have been adopted is thus fleshed out as her being the secret offspring "of a prominent, wealthy family in Constantia… for whom their housekeeper Tokkie had a perfect solution: her beloved, childless Helen" (78). This fantasy of legitimacy thus highlights the irony inherent in Geoff's idealised reflection on postapartheid South Africa that "[i]llegitimacy is an old-fashioned notion especially in this country, where everything that once was correct, ordered and legitimate turns out to have been nothing of the kind" (77). Geoff's point, of course, is that if apartheid has been proved to be illegitimate then legitimacy as a concept has been destroyed. And yet, these novels – and subsequent South African history – have indicated that this is not the case.

Conclusion

This study has attempted to highlight the historical prevalence and significance of legitimacy as a central concern in the development of South African fiction. While, for reasons of scope, it could not present a complete and continuous development, each chapter has depicted a particular formulation of legitimacy that is emblematic of its place in the history of South Africa's political development. In this way I have sought to show how these various authors and texts metabolise the social pressures underlying claims of legitimacy – determined primarily by inequality and filtered through relationships between the elite and popular. In response to these social pressures, texts have represented counter-claims, instabilities in the discourse or they have degraded and decentered the construction of legitimacy itself.

Since this approach to legitimacy is based on the Weberian contention that dominance, and by extension inequality, produces the need of powerful classes to justify their position, South Africa, with its extensive and intense economic inequality, becomes a particularly apt model for analysing legitimacy. To delimit the length of time and various lenses through which legitimacy could be considered, this study takes as its historical departure point the initial moralistic claims of apartheid itself. From this initial historical context I have investigated a chronology of moments in which discourses of legitimacy have been intertwined with the moralization of race and racism, and how this has often tended to obscure the highly unequal social context of South Africa.

In the literature, the most obvious way in which moralism appears is through a particular form of didacticism – evident as much in Sarah Millin's racist warnings about the apparent social danger of miscegenation as with Miriam Tlali's disciplinary nationalist narrative, where certain individuals are morally predisposed to anti-apartheid leadership while others are simply in need of it. That racism and anti-racist

politics tend to be filtered through a moralized discourse of legitimacy necessarily brings forward larger questions about moralism and the political ends that it serves.

This issue was recently picked up by Steven Friedman, in an article for *New Frame*, entitled "morality vs moralizing in SA" (2020). In it he directly addresses this question, specifically focusing on media representations of corruption in South Africa.

> Corruption is even more fertile ground for moralising. Once again it is reduced to a question of other people's choices. The debate is, in the main, largely a competition to decide who can use the most words of condemnation to denounce the behaviour of others. .... A search for solutions might ... shine a light on how much "normal" behaviour in society makes corruption more likely. These include the constant messages stressing that material success is the path to respect and the fact that forms of corruption are deeply embedded in economic life in the country, which may be why a company found to have grossly overcharged for face masks during a pandemic attracts little attention. The company is one of "us", not the "them" about whom we moralise.

The problem of inclusion and exclusion in moralistic representation is similarly one of the issues that my thesis, however circuitously, attempts to address. From this standpoint, moralising and outrage deflect from progressive social analysis and action. This is particularly the case when an emphasis on evil, greedy or racist individuals leaves the structural causes of these phenomena unexamined. This is the recognition which John Miles stages in his novel when Tumelo John realises that it is not only some policemen who are racist, but the whole police force and society within which they operate.

This is even more the case for structural forms, like the market, from which it is difficult to extricate any particular individual. In this way an obvious historical example of obfuscation emerges in the liberal conception of apartheid as the sole product of a backwards, racist and morally-bankrupt group of Afrikaners. This is discussed in the introduction and first chapter. Thus, while the mythology of Afrikaner nationalism clearly contributed to this obfuscation, the perspective of Afrikaner blame obscured the way in which all white South Africans (and South Africa's various international trading partners) relied on the vast pool of precarious and super-exploitable labour that apartheid laws maintained.

Moral clarity and detachment are, of course, easier to claim when the historical development of apartheid is framed in this way, with the structures in which most commentators are implicated excluded from analysis. In a similar mode, the

postapartheid nation would be rendered legitimate through individualised moral exercises, like the TRC, which deflected from the political transition's missed opportunity for economic redistribution or restitution.

From this perspective, Sarah Gertrude Millin presents a useful starting point for this project. As an elite in the earlier Union government, destined to give way to the Afrikaner Nationalists and their vision of apartheid, her work highlights the rivalry between English-speaking whites and Afrikaners which structures her own moralized and racialized account of legitimacy. Her work becomes central, then, because her two most significant novels, *God's Stepchildren* and *King of the Bastards,* cover the period in which the political transition between these two political elites occurs. Her writerly posture – that of a neutral, educated and English observer of the periphery thus becomes instrumental to her literary representation of legitimacy. This formal emphasis on narration and character is dealt with in later chapters – often becoming an important pivot from which writers explore their own implication within structures of oppression and inequality.

It follows that by the time Nadine Gordimer is writing, not only has Millin's particular brand of legitimacy – that of a neutral observer for the metropolitan centre – become dominant, but so has a form of national and international quietude over apartheid. Following the violence of Sharpeville and the apartheid government's repression of dissent, Gordimer's initial work undermines the legitimacy of the ostensibly neutral observer, evident in her short story "A South African Childhood" and novel *A World of Strangers*. From here she turns towards representing an inaccessible and ostensibly legitimate consciousness, but one which remains outside the grasp of her own white South African perspective. By the time of *The Late Bourgeois World*, this consciousness can only be conceptualized as something which lies on the periphery of the narrative, a collection of undisclosed secrets.

By the third chapter, a shift towards narrating the popular and anti-apartheid consciousness, largely relegated to shorter forms of literature (poetry and drama) has re-emerged in the novels narrating the 1976 Soweto Uprising. Since longer-form prose requires both formal education and spare time, the pressure exerted upon these novels' constructions of anti-apartheid struggle tends towards legitimizing the perspective and leadership of township elites. Drawing on discourses of elite mediation and popular discipline and consent, a form of didacticism emerges which produces accounts of the uprising that serve to valorise the leadership of the nationalist elite while conversely

diminishing the role of spontaneous popular mobilisation. While Miriam Tlali and Mbulelo Mzamane's novels reproduce these discourses, Sipho Sepamla and Mongane Serote's novels represent the conflicts and tensions involved in locating and representing a popular consciousness that remains outside the grasp of Nationalist discourse. Where in Sepamla's *A Ride in the Whirlwind* this is evident in the clashing perspectives brought forth in the polyphony of his novel, Serote's *To Every Birth its Blood*, I argue, comes closest to depicting the unaffiliated consciousness through its representation of laughter as a metabolisation of terror, emasculation and resistance.

Throughout the novels surveyed in Chapter Three, the figure of the black policeman emerges as a symbol of collaboration and complicity – as an antagonist, anomaly or outcast. By contrast, John Miles's novel draws the figure of the black policeman to the centre of its narrative in order to interrogate the diffuse and structural nature of collaboration and complicity in late apartheid society. In this way, the fourth chapter turns toward the dominant voice of the apartheid state of the 1980s to consider the forms of self-deception and denial which plague not only the openly-colluding black policeman, but the quiescent white, and ostensibly reformist politics of late apartheid society. In this way, Chapter Four notes the capacity of legitimacy to shift and absorb other discourses – drawing on the historical shift from the government's "moral" justification for apartheid towards a technocratic and seemingly de-politicised discourse of concessions and reform. While John Miles's *Kroniek uit die doofpot* effectively tracks this change, it also unearths the means by which reform managed to obscure structural racism by dissolving it into a subjective question of specifically bad people and specifically discriminatory laws. The force of this sleight of hand materializes in the 1994 political transition, with its overwhelming focus on legislation, trauma and subjectivity as the loci of apartheid oppression, thereby deflecting from structural questions of labour exploitation and economic redistribution.

From this standpoint, the fifth chapter addresses the literary representation of this deceit along with its implications for the legitimacy of the "new" elite. Since the exclusive shape of the apartheid economy has been retained into postapartheid, *Playing in the Light* and *Bitter Fruit* plot the dissolution of a mass and collective politics into the selective enrichment and stagnation of a somewhat more representative elite. In this way, Zoë Wicomb's novel plots the way in which individualized conceptions of upward mobility and the development of intra-racial inequality contest the legitimizing constructions of freedom and success in South Africa. Achmat Dangor's novel registers

the way in which the class striation papered over by nationalist didacticism in Chapter Three returns to plague the "new" nationalist elite, faced with the bitter fruits of their ostensible victory.

Both novels thus confront continuing inequality and the developing illegitimacy of the postapartheid government by undermining dominant representations of nationalist heroism, victimhood and reconciliation. In this way, similar to Liz's narrative in *Late Bourgeois World*, both Dangor and Wicomb undermine the reader's identification with their protagonists, insisting on a legitimate reality or consciousness outside of the intra-elite rivalry and domestic dramas of their protagonists.

Beyond sketching the general chronology and trajectory that I've described above, three attendant findings emerge:

Firstly, that race or whiteness is not the master-key to understanding either inequality or legitimacy within South African prose narrative. The context of racism can neither elucidate the didacticism of Miriam Tlali's novel nor the dis-identification that is formally staged in Achmat Dangor or Zoë Wicomb's projects.

Nevertheless, one area in which race remains central is through its deployment for legitimising rivalling factions within the ruling class. In this way, race fulfils a similar function among the fractiousness of apartheid-era elites as with those conflicts between the old and "new" elite in postapartheid. This is evident as much in Brenda's self-congratulatory construction of herself in *Playing in the Light*, as with *King of the Bastards*' attempts to delegitimise the incumbent Afrikaner nationalists. Again, these two exceptionally divergent claims and discourses can be tied together by what they side-step: the question of class, and thereby the social inequality within which these social actors are implicated and within which they attempt to exert some measure of power or control.

This leads, then, to the second finding that South African writers, faced with the pressure of inequality, have often had to adapt or adopt a variety of ways to circumvent the representation of a "legitimate" subject. In formal terms this is encoded in one of two ways: either by distorting the traditional role of the narrator as an honest or privileged observer, or by undermining the importance of identification within the narrative. To achieve this, authors have devised various distancing techniques – in some cases drawn from modernist writers, like Albert Camus or Joseph Conrad, producing obscurity, secrecy or covert plots which serve to push legitimacy towards the margins of the narrative.

An attendant effect of this move is that hasty readers have often projected a locus of legitimacy onto these texts which is not there. This emerges as one way in which critics have also sought to deflect the peculiar sterility or coldness of South African literature under apartheid and its subsequent continuation into postapartheid. While this is the charge most often levelled at Liz's narration in *The Late Bourgeois World,* this sterility appears just as disconcertingly at the end of *Playing in the Light.* While initially the reader expects Liz in *The Late Bourgeois World* to clarify and evaluate Max's story, she appears increasingly opaque and withdrawn as the narration develops. Similarly in Wicomb's novel, an initial expectation of racial reconciliation results in a frustrating rivalry over economic power which suggests not victory but stalemate.

In this way Gordimer and Wicomb, particularly, emerge as recipients of similar mistakes in reading. A critical reliance on the non-fictional output of either writer, that is, Gordimer's political essays or Wicomb's scholarly writing, appears often to have led critics to assume an easy or uncomplicated correspondence between the two. Though it requires further study, this link suggests that the distinct difference between fiction and non-fiction in these writers' oeuvres lies precisely in the representation and enunciation of legitimacy. It is also, of course, a warning to scholars to reconsider the weight that an author's non-fictional work is given, within a wealth of other extratextual sources.

A similar misreading appears, perhaps more predictably, to emerge from the imposition of liberation discourses onto the representation of the novels. This is particularly evident in Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* where feminist critics have sought to rehabilitate the evident lack of a moral and legitimate centre within the novel. In my analysis I have shown how this reading that celebrates Lydia's ostensibly feminist silence, is already anticipated at the beginning of Dangor's novel – when an ambulance operator assumes that Silas is beating his wife. In this way, the rehabilitation of a hero – whether nationalist or feminist – constitutes just another form of violence in a novel which actively distances itself from asserting the legitimacy of any of its characters or their positions.

In terms of legitimacy, then, the fractured chronology which this thesis presents suggests that as the literary representation of South African society becomes more sophisticated, so does the tendency to avoid any clear depiction of legitimate heroism or victimhood. In this sense, the limits of realist representation within the South African literary context appear to be marked by the intensity of South Africa's long history of

inequality. A decidedly materialist vision is put forward: South Africa is a society so determined by the demands of global capital that bourgeois agency, and hence morality or legitimacy, is undermined from the start. There is no moral victory.

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