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'HISTORY LIVES IN THESE STREETS'

**Reading place and urban disorder in three post-apartheid
Johannesburg novels**

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Abstract

In the following thesis I use three post-apartheid South African novels, namely Ivan Vladislavić's *The Exploded View*, Marlene Van Niekerk's *Triomf* and Kgebetli Moele's *Room 207*, to argue for the persistence of geopathic disorders in post-apartheid Johannesburg. I use the protagonists in the novels and their intertwined relationships with setting as nodes through which to examine the complex and disordered *place* of this contemporary urban environment and to show how the city's apartheid history informs the present. I suggest that these narratives portray conflicted instances of integration, inhabitation and navigation within this city because of the presences of historical forms and patterns which continue to colour the experience of life within the changing city. I argue that the past is still present within the built structures of the city and in people's perceptions of space. The characters and their city carry with them memories, ideas and psychological burdens of apartheid spatiality. I closely analyse three key layers from each text where this process can be seen: the relationship between the characters and their domestic environment, the characters' patterns of movement and navigations of public space and lastly, their appropriation of defensive urban personas. I show how the texts depict how characters and the city are intertwined in a reflexive cycle of affect so that the traumas and displacements of each, both in the past and in the now, influence and inform the other. This reflexive relationship is emblematic of an idea of 'lived space' – a Lefebvrian term which I use to guide the frame of my argument and also to explain the reciprocal relationships between character and setting. In marrying theories about cities and fictional settings to make my case, I emplace my study within a zone of transdisciplinary research. I try not to argue for a reductive vision of post-apartheid Johannesburg nor advocate a pessimistic angle on African urbanism, postcolonial/ post-apartheid societies or literary production. Rather what I aspire to do in this thesis is make a case for the importance of reading the disorders of the post-apartheid, to be ethically, critically and creatively engaged with the painful stories in this city and country in this contemporary moment, as a therapeutic act of engagement with our socio-spatial history.

Contents

<u>Introduction: Mapping the Zones</u>	5
<u>Section One: These Four Walls: This House</u>	
Introduction	39
<i>Triomf</i> : The Edgy house	46
<i>The Exploded View</i> : Suburban Bliss	64
<i>Room 207</i> : Slum Living	87
<u>Section Two: Patterns of Movement: Immobility, Ellipsis and Return</u>	
Introduction	107
Mobility and the City	111
<i>Room 207</i> : Wanderers	121
<i>Triomf</i> : Short circuits	138
<i>The Exploded View</i> : Passing by	151
<u>Section Three: Tactics and Personae: Accentuating the Disorder</u>	
Introduction	171
<i>Triomf's</i> Hillbillies: the past as keepsake	175
<i>Room 207's</i> Hustlers: Masters of marginality	191
<i>The Exploded View</i> : The City as Object	210
Conclusion: Writing the Zones	
List of References	240

INTRODUCTION: MAPPING THE ZONES

Triomf

Jo'burg's like that. It's hollow in the inside. Not just one big hollow like a shell, but lots of dead mines with empty passageways and old tunnels. Treppie says that's why it's become so expensive to get buried in Jo'burg. There just isn't enough solid ground left for graves. And even if you do get a grave, he says, you still can't be so sure, 'cause most of the corpses fall through after a while. Coffins and all. And the headstones sink at a funny angle into the ground. Or they fall right through, onto the coffins. Getting buried in Jo'burg is a waste of time and money, Treppie says. After you've lived in this place there's not much left of you in any case.

(Marlene Van Niekerk, *Triomf*, 1994: 195)

The Exploded View

They turned into Hani View. The main road has been graded recently and spread with gravel, which rattled against the underside of the car. The whitewashed pegs along the edge of the roadway, where a ridge of sand had been piled up by the graders, suggested they would be tarring soon. It would make a difference, it would damp down these shifting sands, fix things in place. He turned left into a side street again, left again, following the thrusts of Mazibuko's manacled hand, passed between rows of identical houses, and drew up on the verge of the block.

(Ivan Vladislavić, *The Exploded View*, 2004: 57)

Room 207

[...] if there is anyone you know, always telling you that they have lived in the ins and outs days and nights of Hillbrow, they are lying. Most of them don't like it there; they hate the place. Everybody is on their way out of Hillbrow.

(Kgebetli Moele, *Room 207*, 2006: 62)

[...] So what did you see?

People living?

Yes, people living out there. Is that all?

People living in rotting streets and buildings. That is a good one! And what have you observed?

Your observation is that you can't tell if they are happy or just pretending to be happy.

(*Room 207*: 169)

Shared conflict

These three extracts are taken from three novels written and set in either the nascent or the middle stages of Johannesburg's post-apartheid era. The first extract is from Marlene Van Niekerk's *Triomf*, a novel that takes place in 1993/ 1994. The original Afrikaans version of the novel was published in 1994 with the English version following in 1999. Ivan Vladislavić's *The Exploded View* was published in 2004 and is set roughly in the year 2000. Kgebetli Moele's *Room 207* was published two years later and also takes place in approximately 2002. While each narrative's chronotope sits within the greater urban nexus of this metropolis, each text depicts one distinct area on the city's socio-spatial map. *Triomf* details the eponymous Afrikaner suburb, Triomf, on the north western fringes of the city. *The Exploded View* revolves largely around the city's developing peripheral suburbias, areas that have come to straddle the space between Johannesburg and Pretoria, such as Midrand and Centurion. One narrative strand in this novel is set in Greenside, an older and more established area of the city, also typically suburban. Lastly, *Room 207*, as the excerpts indicate above, revolves around the now-infamous inner city semi-suburban district of Hillbrow. While these areas may be isolated in each novel, read together, these three texts show ways in which these spaces and people overlap forming a heterotopic mapwork of post-apartheid subjectivity and place.

Each extract above provides a small window into the fractious psycho-social and physical experience of living in contemporary Johannesburg. I use these extracts to introduce the questions lying at the heart of my thesis: what uncomfortable patterns do such literary spaces or settings reveal about the post-apartheid urban condition and the relationship between subject and space in Johannesburg? How can these three novels, when read together, generate a deeper understanding of this highly complex and contested city, one that even as it pushes forwards into the future, is still deeply grooved with disturbances that stem from its colonial and apartheid history? How does one speak about these lingering disturbances without typecasting Johannesburg and South Africa as eternally damaged?

Each novel that I analyse in this thesis confronts the sense of resolution that the post-apartheid period of reconciliation claims to have ushered in. By depicting buildings, routes, neighbourhoods, people and social practices marked by disturbances each text compels the reader to consider how the legacy of our spatial history plays itself out in both visible and invisible ways in the contemporary moment. By presenting fraught subjectivities within this place, the texts question the possibility of a reconciled city, presenting a Johannesburg marred by the past and still in need of reforms and revisions, but psycho-spatial ones that are less easy to implement. Challenging the post-apartheid ‘New South Africa’ narrative, these texts bring our attention back to the grit and tremors of everyday hardships, reminding us how contemporary spatial subjectivities are still determined by patterns created by the former state’s oppressive and dislocating socio-spatial strategies.¹

In *Triomf*, the Benades, a white, Afrikaans family, live in a suburb that was built expressly for Afrikaans working class people over the course of the late 1950’s upon the ruins of a former township, Sophiatown. The family’s story is set in the transitional period marking the shift from the apartheid to post-apartheid. The Benades capture the imagination in the way that they are constrained by their prejudices and their defensive reactions to the changing city. Their ‘cityness’ is also defined by fear: they are haunted by Sophiatown and by their own perverse familial and national legacy, all of which entangle them further in the layers of their environment and their practices therein.

¹ When I speak about the ‘former state’, I speak about the apartheid government, its administrative and institutional base as well as its policies, legislations and ideological frameworks. In particular, I am concerned with the apartheid state’s spatial and social strategies in Johannesburg between 1948 and 1994. I also examine the rise of the Afrikaner state in the 1930s when discussing *Triomf* and address how the legislation, policy and ideologies of the state extended existent, colonial patterns of control in Johannesburg. While it may be misleading to treat apartheid as monolithic and fixed over forty years, from the mid 1950s to the early 1990s, at its height, I recognise that the city was systematically and relentlessly mapped according to divisive and racist policies and that while the fine print may have changed with different statesmen, the basic tenets of apartheid remained constant. I also read apartheid Johannesburg as an industrial giant which relied on a vast number of migrant labourers, of all backgrounds and ethnicities, but of course, of a vast black majority. I see this industrial and mining legacy to have defined Johannesburg from its inception to today, but I see the height of its industrial prowess in the most literal sense of the word to have evolved with the apartheid state’s conception of progress and modernity which were based on inherited western models.

The Exploded View's four male protagonists are all educated, middle class, conservative types who interact with and/or live in exclusive suburban enclaves in the city. Each protagonist is also an engineer of some sort, either in the most literal sense or symbolically: a census drafter, a sanitary engineer, an artist and one protagonist who erects billboards. As the urban terrain changes, each man's experience of space becomes tinted with feelings of redundancy, even worthlessness. As a desperate response, each character develops a more fixed relationship to features or signs of the former city, which in turn inhibits his capacity to be fluid within Johannesburg.

Room 207's six young black South African characters live in a converted hotel room in the inner city. This part of Johannesburg is known for its clusters of high rises and interlocking neighbourhoods once reserved for 'Europeans' but becoming increasingly 'Africanised' since the early 1990s. For Noko, *Room 207*'s narrator and a representative voice of his peers in the text, life in the inner city, especially the infamous area of Hillbrow, is defined by poverty, displacement and thwarted desire, a place of ambiguity and doubt. Each 207 in the novel is actively engaged with trying to claim an authentic and autonomous modern urban identity, however these attempts are complicated by the difficult conditions of the inner city. As the story depicts, each 207's convoluted and uneasy relationship to urbanity and urban modernity can be traced to former generations of black migrant workers and their historical relationship to the city.

While each novel presents a particular vista of the city and is organised around a district within Johannesburg, the characters themselves embody the complexities of the city's urban history within their subjectivities. Each character or set of characters bears less visible legacies of spatial oppression and disturbance than the settings in which they live but are bound to their environments in intimate and difficult way and are produced by their histories. Moreover, each of these characters is involved in actively creating their immediate worlds in the city, through their daily practices and perceptions of their urban place. As a result, character and space become so intricately entwined that it becomes almost impossible for them to gain an objective perspective of their own process. This amplifies the fractures of their psycho-spatial relationship.

In *Triomf*, the protagonists battle with feelings of imprisonment, haunting and exile. They are caught in a tension between rejecting and embracing Triomf and Johannesburg and, in turn, between being rejected and embraced by them. Even while they recognise the precariousness of their situation and have insights into the limitations of their approach to daily life, they are unable to alter their sense of displacement. By living in Triomf they have become marked by its history. In *The Exploded View*, the characters are intertwined in false fortification and become hemmed in by an artificial or outmoded view of themselves and the city. An underlying sense of instability pervades their everyday interactions with peripheral and suburban Johannesburg and its people which reinforces their failing senses of control and belonging. The four men are unable to alter their perceptions because their very subjectivities have evolved through a trusted spatial relationship to themselves *within* the city. Even while they become increasingly unhinged they hold on to their historical views of how they should be in the city. Lastly, in *Room 207*, the young men struggle with impermanence and entrapment – the inner city is unpredictable and hazardous and yet, they are determined to claim it as their own – at cost to their personal integrity. Even while each central character understands that the city is failing him, he is unable to separate himself from the desire to be there, compelled by the struggles of former generations of black South Africans to gain freedom and wealth from this space. This desire, coupled with the failings of the inner city, fracture the 207s' ability to create a sense of belonging and place² in a part of the city that, ostensibly, should be most welcoming of them and their generation.

The foundation of my argument is that each novel's characters and urban settings are so deeply, reflexively intertwined that the possibilities of undoing this historical relationship is almost impossible. I make this argument in 2012 when the people of this country and city are still struggling to develop a sense of place and belonging and when issues around place-attachment have yet to be resolved. I see these novels to be offering insights into how one might go about reasoning with the fraught nature of this national moment. In a sense, I have a psychoanalyst's preoccupation with how the past infects the present and how past trauma is deeply embedded in this moment. While I do not take a

² I shall be explaining my usage of the term *place* in the next section of this Introduction.

psychoanalytical literary approach to these texts in the strictest sense, underlying my readings of these novels is the basic tenet that this great, wild metropolis, and these Johannesburg novels, can be treated as one might a person: composed of a confluence of memories, imaginations and ideas, sometimes repressed, sometimes at the surface, features that are produced by and call attention to the past, even as the city is in transition and becoming a city of the future.

In this thesis, I shall examine both physical – that is geographical or built – and psycho-social – that is social, psychological and everyday, practical – instances of exclusion, estrangement and displacement in each novel. To do so, I rely on the *affective* aspect of urban social life. I interchange this term with ‘spatiality’ which also how space and people are entangled within a complex dialectical³ performance of influence and affect. I see these dialectical patterns as producing what I shall call ‘geopathic disorders’, in alignment with Una Chaudhuri’s invocation of the term ‘geopathology’ to describe the ‘problem of place’ (Chaudhuri, 1997: xxi). For Chaudhuri, a scholar of drama, issues around place inform modern post-colonial theatre to such a degree that contemporary genres have evolved through it. The primacy that Chaudhuri gives to the problem of place is mirrored in my own study here. I use the phrase ‘geopathic’ to speak about these novels’ portrayals of disturbances in the dialectical exchange of space and the self: the way in which disturbed self and disturbed space recreate each other in a pathological way.

I make this argument while I acknowledge that Johannesburg can be treated as a site of flows and hybridity, as has been suggested by a growing number of contemporary urban and urban literary scholars. I contest this view in this thesis not because I feel that the city is defined absolutely by constraint and disorder but because these novels present these parts of the city and the disturbed ‘psycho-geographies’ (Titlestad, 2012: 679) of the protagonists in ways that demands the reader’s and the urban scholar’s attention. I see

³ When I deploy this term in my thesis, I use it to refer to a pattern of exchange between elements: the productive tension and interaction between states, zones or things, such as between space and character. In using this term, I imply that space and subject reproduce each other: i.e. in a dialectical performance of influence.

these texts, especially if one reads them in relation to each other, as providing a different kind of literary potential: a chance to engage with how the post-apartheid city is still in the process of resolving its past through the actions of its people. The process of change is lengthy and fraught. For the country to understand its own process and the failings of the post-apartheid moment Johannesburg's psycho-spatial traumas should be acknowledged and their embodiments in the city and in the city's residents need to be witnessed. These texts provide an instance in which this is possible.

Although each set of characters and places in each novel represent separate parts and places within Johannesburg, these three novels function in conversation with each other and show shared patterns of discomfort and conflict that draw the everyday experiences of disparate places, people and histories together in a poetic conversation. Thus, while each of the settings and character types portrayed in these three novels reflects distinct historical stories about this city, the contemporary moment is shown to be one where issues of belonging and place resonate with each other along the wide expanse of the city, suggesting that there is a general affliction permeating the 'real' post-apartheid city.

While each novel speaks to the others' portrayals of displacement, suffering and loss in the city and, in my mind, asks the reader to recognise their conversation in relation to the real, the novels also constantly play with the reader's sense of reality by presenting such deeply complex psycho-spatial processes and exchanges that it seems to be the *inner* world of the characters emerging along these pages. Indeed, the complex and reciprocal relationship between character and setting is so rich that drawing the one away from the other becomes impossible. The complex and intimate ways in which each is portrayed as influencing and giving life to the other in the novels makes the city familiar and yet also unnervingly strange. Through the narrative strategy of detailing the interwoven nature of subject and city, these novels allow the reader to grasp the subjective processes of each character and also of the personality of the city and of city life and consider what lies beneath the surface of this material reality in the present day.

The layers of influence that disturb the places of these characters come to disturb the reader's assumptions about this city so that the reader's own everyday understanding of this city life becomes altered and reshaped through the contrasts, contradictions and intimate portrayals of the lines of damage that run through the metropolis' built and social stories, both on the surface and beneath. Thus, the novels do not reveal a fixed portrait of Johannesburg but rather a window into the complex depths of an urban historical legacy.

Literary Settings

Essentially, my argument is for the power of setting to create and curate alternate understandings of a familiar, external, social urban reality. In order to call attention to the relationships I have mapped out above, I rely on an idea in narrative theory which posits that settings are sites of physical context as well as of narrative action, discourse and character development and are thus inseparable from the subjectivities of the characters. Bakhtin's classic notion of the chronotope, for instance, presents the ideas that space, time and agents in novels have 'analytically complementary ways of presenting the same web of relationships: every agent creates around her/ himself a chronotope [...] and every chronotope has agents correlative to it' (Darko, 1987). In these three South African novels, as I have argued above, one cannot separate the way the urban setting is portrayed from the perspectives of the main characters – most of whom act as narrators and whose minds and personalities, constructs as they may be, are the lenses through which setting is created. Narrativist, Michael Toolan writes that:

In simple terms, the relations between setting on the one hand, and character and events on the other, may be causal or analogical: features of setting may be (in part or at least) either cause or effect of how characters are and behave, or more by way of reinforcement and symbolic confinement, a setting may be like a character or characters in some respects.

(1988: 104)

This understanding of character and setting within a novel mirrors the way that city space is created through social action, thought and practice.

In fact, Toolan suggests increasing animation in literary settings comes in part from the rise of the city:

In many modern novels, where the humane cohesion between members of society of a similar rank is displaced by a widespread atmosphere of alienation, anomie and interpersonal relations made more complex by industrial and technological developments that have depopulated the country while turning cities into monstrous battlefields, the situation is different. Setting here is more than a backcloth: it is instrumental (like another character) in leading a character to act in a certain way. This quasi-animate, menacing or soothing, chorus-like or emblematic goes back as far as Dickens in English novels [...]

(Toolan: 103)

Seeing setting as ‘quasi-animate, menacing or soothing, chorus-like or emblematic’ reflects the ambiguities of the urban experience, as I shall explore throughout this thesis. A number of literary critics have become fond of these resonances between textual urban settings and lived urban space. This has generated exciting movements in the field of literary studies, giving birth to terms such as ‘literary geographers’. I turn here to one such literary geographer, Sara Blair, to further elucidate how settings in fiction can come to mirror the intricate interplays between the external and internal realms of the worlds and people they represent. She observes that:

in a moment when readers of culture are preeminently committed to the study of what Lefebvre calls *l'espace vécu* the simultaneously abstract and material lineaments of our social emplacement, a locatedness and relationality at once lived and socially constitutive – imaginative texts represent a wide horizon of possibility. They testify with particular acuity to the relations between space and place and the conditions under which both are made; they excavate intricate strata of alienation, amnesia and resistance underlying a “jigsaw” of human uses and notions of space (Zukin 195). And they frequently achieve the desideratum of cultural geography as a mode of social critique: they begin to imagine how such practices of location, reterritorialization, and boundary making can be differently situated and thus reinvested with social agency.

(Blair, 1998: 557)

Blair's observation that imaginative texts 'excavate intricate strata of alienation, amnesia and resistance' points to the fact that fiction can unearth the layers in the subjective and the objective components that constitute urban place. Blair adds:

It is for this reason that fictional works may serve a cognitive function by helping urbanists come to an understanding of the emergent spaces of the African city, just as literary critics, in turn, may arrive at a better account of the generic and characterological peculiarities of contemporary fiction by attending to recent work in urban studies.

(Blair: 557)

In South Africa, the field of literary geography is strong, which is understandable given the pivotal role that space and place have played in our history and in our understandings of our national and literary conditions, both past and present. I shall use a number of local literary geographers in my thesis in order to expound on how these three texts 'serve a cognitive function' in helping readers comprehend post-apartheid Johannesburg and its people.

Particularly helpful to my approach has been the work of Loren Kruger (2001), Meg Samuelson (2007, 2008) and Sarah Nuttall (2004, 2008) all of whom often tease out the nuances of Johannesburg settings and poetics through the black South African experience of urban space. I have also relied on critics such as Rob Gaylard (2006), Ralph Goodman (2006), Michael Titlestad (2003, 2012), Titlestad and Mike Kissack (2006) and the likes of Stefan Helgesson (2006), Shane Graham (2006), Richard Samin (2000) and Shameem Black (2008) whose works on *The Exploded View* and Vladislavić's oeuvre have helped frame my address of Vladislavić's urban vision and characterisation. Critics writing about *Triomf* and the Afrikaans experience of the post-apartheid, such as Lara Buxbaum (2011), Jack Shear (2006), Matthew Brophy (2006) and Nicole Devarenne (2006) have assisted me as I have explored alternate ways of understanding the Benades and their ambivalent place within the city. Of the smaller collection of critics writing about *Room 207*, Sam Radithlalo (2007) and Bheki Peterson (2003, 2010) have shed light on the fraught condition of the inner city and the 207s' disordered relationship to place. Other literary critics such as Shaun Irlam (2004), Ashraf Jamal (2009) and Leon de Kock (2005) have

helped me frame my argument in relation to some of the bigger issues facing literary production around the city and around its disorders in the post-apartheid era.

Some of these critical voices herald the dynamic and creative potential of contemporary Johannesburg and some have had more damning insights into post-apartheid city life. I have found both useful as I have constructed my approach. While my own approach is to draw out the disturbances in these settings and in these characters' relationships to their surroundings, I do not dismiss critical voices that take a more 'fluid' approach to the post-apartheid moment and these novels and who see the city as a space of boundary crossing and alternation and not one of crisis or stagnation. In fact, it is very difficult to speak about Johannesburg without acknowledging how its shifting nature and surfaces confound any one reading of it as a city. Likewise, it is almost impossible to read a novel in one particular way. Many of the critics whose work I speak about focuses on the contradictory aspect of the lived space of this city and its combination of both crushing and enabling features and patterns.

However, as I have already stated, the problematic of how to speak about the less inviting or reassuring aspects of the city experience demands more attention. Thus, while I acknowledge ways in which the individual is able to overcome patterns of the past, my concern here is what to take from these texts' socially real invocations of psycho-spatial disorder and rupture and the picture that all three novels present in relation to each other, as poetic sites. These three novels ignite a vision and conversation about the city that challenge any post-apartheid myths the reader might have about our post-1994 urban moment. The general public is increasingly aware of the failures of the post-apartheid state to implement necessary reforms that tackle issues like poverty and societal divisions. Policy makers, public servants, civil bodies, activists and academics have worked hard over the last nineteen years to explain the trajectory of the country and the effects of its history on the 'new' nation's institutions, structures and peoples. Still, issues of a psycho-spatial nature, although they reside at the core of South Africa's national history, are that much harder to tease out, especially when one considers that the

dominant public focus is on structural progress and reform and that psycho-geographies are not always easy to see or read.

An ode to literary traditions of the city's past

I have selected these novels because of their deftness in revealing the complexities of human subjectivity and emotion through space. As a trio, these novels actively construct a spatial metaphor that allows for the reader to engage with the embeddedness of history within the contemporary city and subject and to ask questions about the evolution of the urban self in Johannesburg over time.

The terrors of colonial and apartheid Johannesburg have been preoccupying themes for a wealth of South African city fictions in the last century, especially those wanting to publicise the plight of the oppressed black South African. Like a number of recent Johannesburg novels, these three novels resonate with a long tradition of social realism and powerfully allegorical literary outputs which portray Johannesburg as a contested site, one of constraint, guilt and fear as well as desire, greed and luxury. I would like to briefly discuss a number of key texts, both from the more distant past and from the contemporary scene, before continuing with my theoretical framework for this thesis. By briefly contextualising this field, I seek to justify why I have selected these three novels for my analysis.

Perhaps one of the most famous city genres within the city's historical literary tradition is that of 'Jim goes to Joburg'. Novels such as R.R.R. Dhlomo's *An African Tragedy* (1928) created a precedent for representing the disabling migrant African experience and the hazards faced by aspiring young Africans seeking out the oppressive and racist city. Later novels such as Mongane Serote's *To Every Birth its Blood* (1981) continue this trope and depict the horrors of township life in Soweto under apartheid. Poems such as Serote's 'City Johannesburg' (1972) or Mbuyiseni Oswald Mtshali's 'An Abandoned Bundle' (1972) also capture the contradictory and painful everyday situations of black South Africans who rely on the metropolis for their livelihoods and yet are broken down by the realities of their existence. Included in this historical timeline of Johannesburg fiction is a

novel like Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter* (1979). Written after the Soweto uprisings, *Burger's Daughter* documents the experiences of a young white woman grappling with apartheid rule in Johannesburg and her own place within the racial order. This novel captures the harsh realities of Johannesburg life under apartheid using the force of poetically charged political commentary. Similarly, Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948) further draws on the black 'Jim goes to Joburg' motif but is known for drawing out a sensitive and troubling reading of the increasingly oppressive city and its racial and spatial orders and the effect of urbanisation on South African citizens, both in the city and outside of it.

The texts mentioned above starkly capture the tensions around Johannesburg's colonial and apartheid modernity, the allure and pitfalls of 'the place of gold'. This tension runs through much of Johannesburg's earlier realist fiction, from Bosman to Gordimer and captures the spirit of this fractious urban hub. Post-apartheid Johannesburg presents different kinds of challenges to the urbanite and to the urban writer. But, reminds Michael Titlestad, 'the spectre of Serote's Golden and Dark Cities continues to haunt the present' (2012: 678) and it is this haunting which I have found to be starkly portrayed in each novel. Even *if Room 207* is only one of my selected novels which actively conjures the black, migrant experience, within the Jim trope lies a predominant theme of this city: a place of opportunity as well as of conflict.

A range of contemporary novels written after 1994 capture a similarly complex experience of city life and continues the traditions established by these earlier writers while introducing post-apartheid themes and patterns, especially that of the clash between the 'old' and the 'new'. Two of Ivan Vladislavić's other post-apartheid novels, for instance, *The Restless Supermarket* (2001) and *Portrait with Keys* (2006) show some of the anxious processes that dealing with change entails for those who have long considered Johannesburg their home. The character of Aubrey Searle in the former novel and the autobiographical voice of Vladislavić in the latter reveal the experience of loss that has accompanied the city urbanite's passage into the 'now'. Searle's neuroses that his claims to the city and to its languages will be threatened in 1993, as a 'European' who

benefited from apartheid, are aligned with the Benades' anxieties in *Triomf* and reflect a characteristic response by some white South Africans to the political shifts of 1994. Searle's upset is portrayed satirically but in *Portrait with Keys*, Vladislavić paints a much more disconsolate impression of how once lively and well-kept urban neighbourhoods, like Yeoville, have fallen to disarray in the last decade. A lamentation on altered landscapes, *Portrait with Keys* offers a melancholic portrait of the post-apartheid urban place. Other novels, such as Niq Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog* (2004) portray the fractious nature of the young, black township experience after the end of apartheid. The city met by student and Soweto resident, Dingz, is a hostile and unpredictable one, a solicitor of bravado and chance – a very similar Johannesburg to the one the reader encounters in *Room 207*. A novel such as Zakes Mda's novel, *The Heart of Redness* (2003), portrays a central character, Camagu, who arrives back in Johannesburg in 1994 and quickly becomes disillusioned with the nepotism of the new, democratic order. Johannesburg is portrayed as a city poised for change but the urban modernity it offers the former exile is not able to satisfy his desire to understand his own self within the country. *The Heart of Redness* taps into an existent, constructed split between the rural and the urban, a result of apartheid ideologies and restrictions on black urbanity.

While the rural zone offers Camagu the depth of experience that he seeks what remains unresolved is the question of what post-apartheid Johannesburg can offer a new generation of South Africans. The impasse between city and country is also central to another key post-apartheid fiction depicting the urban struggle in Johannesburg. Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2001) is a pivotal text portraying the onslaught of the city on the urban migrant and the effects of rural prejudices about the urban on those who seek out the city. Mpe's novel implores the reader to recognise not only the pitfalls of superstition and intolerance but also the realities of the inner city. Hillbrow is shown to be a zone of precarious and harrowing scenes, violence and shame, as well as love and aspiration. Some see the underlying repeat in the text of 'welcome', to be implying that reconciliation and growth can be achieved by being hospitable within the inner city (Nuttall, 2009) But, the refrain is also a cautionary reminder of the pain involved in seeking out city life and the frailties of the post-apartheid city community.

Within this literary tradition, the three novels in question are by no means unique in their depiction of the city and city residents. However, the novels, arguably more than others in the same field, pivot their narratives on spatial engagement in ways that potently depict the psycho-social process of the urban experience, post-apartheid. Each of these three novels draws out the social realities of particular zones with such acuity that when read together they command such as urgent image of city Johannesburg in the 'now' that their combination brings the situation into stark relief. Each novel's construction of a particular site within the city very clearly reiterates a socio-spatial patterning from the apartheid era and so allows the reader to trace history through poetic detail. They all deliberately evoke Johannesburg and recognisable spaces and places as the city undergoes change and yet still remains the same. These novels work well in conversation because they detail three key South African demographic zones and subjectivities: the 'European', English/ colonial, (*The Exploded View*), the black South African (*Room 207*) and the white, Afrikaans (*Triomf*). Each of these subject types, as I explain more intricately in my final section, is historically bound to the places in which their plots develop. There is a similar pattern of community and communal space in all three too. Each centres on a group of people, either family, friends or co-urbanites, working through the layers of urban experience, continuing apartheid spatiality not only in their own lives and actions but in relation to each other within space. There is a direct bridge between subjectivity, setting and Johannesburg's urban story in these three novels that enables and propels forwards this thesis' exploration into historical patterns and society in the contemporary space.

Each text's almost obsessive quest to portray the city's life and lives space makes all three ideal to study in relation to the theoretical questions surrounding the pervasive nature of apartheid era spatialities. More so than any of the other socially real novels from this contemporary literary scene these three struck me as complementary and have provided me with a balanced and nuances frame in which to elucidate my ideas about how the heterotopic city can still be a place of limitation because of the influence of history on space and people.

In choosing these three novels, I inevitably leave others out. One could argue, for instance, that Zakes Mda's novel, *Ways of Dying* – considered to be prime example of novels portraying the contested and erratic post-apartheid urban scenario – compliments my study. However, in that Mda does not actively locate the narrative in Johannesburg but rather keeps the urban location undisclosed means that this novel does not make as much of direct demand on the reader's understanding of this city and therefore does not provoke the same intense reading of it as these three particular texts do. Furthermore, Toloki lives in a new informal area, a place that has no historic, built elements that visually represent the old, apartheid city. Thus, this novel does not provide the same literary template as the others do.

Similarly, one may have wanted to include Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* in this study since it is a key text within the contemporary urban literary terrain. However, of the two novels, *Room 207* and *Welcome To Our Hillbrow*, I feel that the former offers a less resolved version of the inner city and is even frustrating in its contradictory portrayals of inner city life and so offers a chance to explore more fractious ideas about black migrant urbanity. Furthermore, *Welcome To Our Hillbrow*'s characters are viscerally and emotively intertwined in the inner city chronotope, they are ultimately dead. *Room 207*'s four characters and their hustler styles vividly resonate with the lively, lived energies of Hillbrow. Of the two novels, the latter gives a chance to consider the trajectory of a group of men trying to survive this life, and this is what makes the story so compelling and poignant. I do make reference to Mpe and Mda, for instance, in my thesis though and in this way try to incorporate these texts as part of a more general conversation without moving away from my intense focus on the three in question.

In sum, *Triomf*, *Room 207* and *The Exploded View* provide a complex and complimentary window into the nature of apartheid spatialities and a template for teasing out the nature of spatial trauma and affect.

Apartheid era spatialities

Even though apartheid was not monolithic and was often composed of slippages in state

policy, contradictions in the implementation of regulations (Posel, 1991) and instances where divided elements, people and practices merged and cross over (Nuttall, 2008), apartheid was, without question, a most dislocating and suffocating system. Perhaps it was because of the inherent fragility of its absurd taxonomies of race and society that the state sought additional control through space. Indeed, a major form of its ‘governmentality’⁴ was to make all South Africans part of its ideological and socio-spatial overhauls of cities and land. One of the apartheid state’s most effective modes of control was its scrambling of links between the self and place. As I shall detail in each subsequent section, the construction of the apartheid city was something of a science, a reconstruction of the urban space that filtered apartheid ideology into the mechanism of the city. Its aim was to establish a surveillable, mapped and mediated cityscape (Robinson, 1992), a city that would come to manifest and be inscribed by its authority and reflect so-called ‘natural’ divisions between people and between people and their environments.

In prescribing the terms of spatial occupation and residence in Johannesburg, the state constructed what I call the *conditions of emplacement* for South Africans. These conditions were gradually accepted, they became ‘internalized as the “belief systems” of [...] society’ (Converse, 1964; Danziger, 1971 in Manzo and McGowan, 1992: 3). In my following section, I explore how this occurred through the state’s manipulation of relationships to residential or domestic space and in its control of movements through space. Johannesburg’s residents, permanent and transient, evolved their relationship to the city, through these terms. For some, this meant wholeheartedly believing in these conditions, and for others, this meant building up defenses in response to them. Either way, these responses evolved through apartheid Johannesburg’s physical and ideological, human and material urban geography. The power and ‘legitimacy’ of the apartheid city was sustained through its regulation of idiosyncratic immersions into space, rendering Johannesburg’s ordinary peoples perpetually seeking to belong or to define their own terms of urbanism. Apartheid rule was directed most explicitly and violently at black

⁴ Cf. Foucault, Michel. ‘Governmentality and Critique’ (2002)
[http://www.andosociology.net/resources/Foucault\\$2C+Governmentality\\$2C+and+Critique+IV-2.pdf](http://www.andosociology.net/resources/Foucault$2C+Governmentality$2C+and+Critique+IV-2.pdf)
Accessed: 10/10/2010.

South Africans. But, the construction of Johannesburg and an ideology that supported the autocratic, racist, capitalist policies of the state produced the whole city, accordingly. Johannesburg's urbanity was designed to keep the *entire* urban population contained and under control (Bremner, 2010).

While the most powerful members of society, the urban elite, might have been able to objectify apartheid ideology, the ordinary people within the system would have been susceptible to it— both those designed to benefit from it and those groups directly repressed by it. In the same way that the 'subaltern' who lacks the power to resist hegemonic inscriptions on her person embodies ideology, so too do those who seemingly benefit from an ideological system. Kate Manzo and Kate McGowan, again, explain this dynamic:

these ideologies of domination become internalized so rendering widespread repression unnecessary; but many have argued that they are more likely to bind together the dominant [group] itself and convince it of the naturalness of its rule.

(1992: 3)

This is not to say that white South Africans 'suffered' as much as black or coloured South Africans. But, if one maps apartheid on spatial lines, as I do in this thesis, living in the city meant living and internalising the laws of containment set out by the state. 'Ordinary' people, such as those seen in each novel: the poor white Afrikaner, the black migrant labourer or the white, English sub-urbanite, all of whom would have been constructed as linguistically, ethnically, racially different to each other within apartheid ideology, all shared the effects of this oppressive urbanism. At the centre of this historical dynamic and the struggle for the city was the struggle for legitimate territory, as it is now in the post-apartheid era when the city's people are still fighting for a right to call Johannesburg their home, on their own terms.

In short, the apartheid state and system abstracted space and people in order to segregate and control them. It disturbed the subtle and nuanced inflections of behaviour and practice that would normally have informed the city. This aspect of the apartheid urban

plan strongly reflects a debilitating modernist logic which, as Kevin Robins comments, used ‘efficiency, functionalism and impersonality’ to manipulate place relations and which, ‘as it eroded the sense of place so it undermined a sense of identity’ (Kevin Robins, 1993: 310). One sees this, for instance, in *Room 207* with the group of young, black migrants in the inner city who struggle, like their fathers did, between being urban and being rural and who carry with them the idea that these two places and their ascribed identities are incommensurable with one another. The historic denial of this creative tension between settlement and mobility and the regulation of place-making still permeates feelings and practices around settlement and mobility in the city, manifesting in the characters’ struggles with claims to passage, territory and belonging.

The disordered relationships between characters and environment seem to be worsened by the fact that each set ‘lives’ in the earlier stages of the post-apartheid era, a time when liberation narratives and revisionist state rhetoric were at their most idealistic and extreme. These sets of characters are in the midst of a chronotope where the full impact of our inherited disorders was still hidden in spectacular stories, usually optimistic ones.⁵ In today’s city, public languages are more engaged with the failures of the post-apartheid era, in all its spheres. The expectations and fears of the protagonists in *The Exploded View*, *Triomf* and *Room 207* of the changes around them, and their senses of alienation and displacement seem aggravated by this, for different reasons. For the Benades in 1994, the future city and its narrative threaten to erase them. For the young men of room 207 the liberated 2002 inner city is still crippling, materially and socially, and thus falls below the revisionist ideals promoted by the post-apartheid story and their expectations thereof. For the four men in *The Exploded View*, the city is shifting and being rebuilt, but there exist jarring, agitated clashes between the old and the new, not the merging of structures

⁵ Bheki Peterson’s critique of post-apartheid South Africa frames this situation quite neatly. He argues that the post-apartheid space is a repressed one. In a recent paper (2010) he argues that our history and its legacy have been smoothed over in order to maintain the fallacy of restoration and transformation. He calls state-sanctioned imaginaries ‘hollow’ since, in their attempts to map new futures for the country and its peoples, new futures founded on ‘unity’ and ‘forgiveness’, they insist on a suppression of contradiction and painful memories. Along a similar vein, Jeremy Cronin too, in his harrowing post-apartheid poem, ‘Even the Dead’ calls the post-apartheid state an amnesic one because of the tendency of state narratives and other local, social discourses to promote a distancing from the difficult continuations of the past into the present. Bhekizizwe Peterson. ‘Dignity, Memory and Truth Under Siege’. Paper delivered as part of a seminar series at Stellenbosch University, May 2010.

and ideas that one might have imagined of the era of post-apartheid reconstruction. It's not that the government along with urbanists, planners, architects, social thinkers and the general population were not unearthing the layers of violence inscribed into Johannesburg's surfaces and depths during the first decade of democracy.⁶ Each novel centres on this very process. Many attempts to recall the past and bring it into the present have been performed over the last fifteen years. Streets, neighbourhoods, markets, monuments and institutions all over the city have been reconstituted. Triomf, for instance, was renamed Sophiatown. But, what becomes clear in these narratives is that the depths to which socio-spatial displacements lie within the lived space are often obscure and hidden not only by the spectral quality of history, but because the language for these slippages and disorders was not really developed yet.

From this point on in this introduction, I would like to outline some of theoretical ideas which the novels gesture to and which have allowed me to make sense of depictions of suffering, displacement and loss in the three novels. Over and above the literary geographers mentioned above there are several critical thinkers whose work is, like my own, transdisciplinary⁷ and grounded in a study of social or cultural patterns and productions. Furthermore, in order to express how I see my own study fitting into a much larger terrain of urban and literary studies, I work with ideas that are both local and international. There are some core concepts that can be traced back to their European roots but which have powerful resonances with local site and field of study. I would like to clarify below some of the ways I will be using terms *lived space* and *place*, before moving onto my literary analyses.

⁶ Cf. Boraine, Andrew; Crankshaw, Owen; Engelbrecht, Carien; Gotz, Graeme; Mbanga, Sithole; Narsoo Monty and Parnell, Susan. 'The State of South African Cities a Decade after Democracy'. *Urban Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 2, 259-284, February 2006; *Emerging Johannesburg: Perspectives on the Post-apartheid city*. Richard Tomlinson; Andrew Beauregard; Lindsay Bremner and Xolela Mangcu (eds). London, New York: Routledge, 2002; Pieterse, Edgar 'Exploratory notes on African Urbanism'. Online publication: June 2009: <http://africancentreforcities.net/papers/> Accessed: 25/04/ 2010.

⁷ By speaking about my approach as transdisciplinary as opposed to interdisciplinary, I invoke my underlying positioning and my understanding of how space and ideas are in exchange. By using a prefix, 'trans' that means 'across', I am suggesting that my method of research seeks to actively cross boundaries between literature, urbanism and local cultural politics and relies on the crossings between nodes of thought and thinkers in order to do so. Furthermore, by using this term, 'trans' I am indicating that I seek to situate this thesis as a map of how one may go about reading the city and its literatures in more complex ways.

Lived spaces and places

The concept of lived space is central both to my analytical approach and to the content of my study. This idea can be traced to French urbanist Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*, first published in French in 1974 and now a fundamental aspect of most studies of urbanism and spatiality. In principle, lived space can also be called 'third space' and refers to 'the space of social practice, the space occupied by sensory phenomena, including products of the imagination, such as projects and projections, symbols and utopias' (Lefebvre, 1991: 12).⁸ As a concept, lived space allows me to refer to the nuanced daily practices and perceptions within both the real and the textual city of Johannesburg and to tease out the intricate interplay between patterns of human behaviour and the built environment in each text. Lived space allows me to speak about the multifarious zone of experience that gives these versions of the city meaning, and through which I can frame the disorders that they depict.

When one uses the term, lived space, one immediately conjures up other related terms and approaches to social life that focus on the intersections between humans and their environments and the complex interplay between the two that *produce* society and culture. Lefebvre's study and other foundational texts of everyday or social space, such as the writings of George Simmel (1950) and Walter Benjamin (1982) and later, de Certeau (1984) and Foucault (1984) are centred on European modernity and early to mid twentieth century European and urban life. Still, many of their ideas have become universally applicable especially in relation to the study of the city. Playful concepts like *bricolage*, for instance, which relates to 'the creative arrangements and re-arrangements of heterogeneous materials' (de Certeau 1997: 49); or Benjamin's concept-persona, the *flâneur* who is as de Certeau describes him, 'the everyday man, the common hero, an

⁸ Another way in which one can understand how Lefebvre's three spaces work is to see 'first space' as the space of institution: space conceived and imagined as before the arrival of people. Second space is perceived space: how conceptions of spatial practice and built environments become built or interpreted by planners, architects and citizens. Lastly, third space is the space of the everyday: the combination of the first two spaces and the creation of a third through social practice and ordinary acts within space, thoughtless and haphazard movements and choices which make zones of habitation like the city a rich and diverse site of human interaction. Besides the original publication, Edward Soja in *Third Space: Journeys to Los Angeles and other Real-and-Imagined Places* (1996) summarises and applies Lefebvre's ideas to contemporary urban politics in an invigorating and insightful way.

ubiquitous character, walking in countless thousands on the streets', thereby gathering information and things to invest his space with meaning and information (de Certeau, 1984: V), provide themes and ideas to explain lived spaces and human geographies in multiple locations. Local urban critic, Sarah Nuttall comments that the *flâneur* is a figure who has multiple incarnations and who is, in fact:

as old as Christianity [...] in addition to the *flâneur*, there is the tourist (for whom the city is a spectacle; the player (who knows the rules of various urban games); the vagabond or vagrant (who moves at the borders of the establishment through the practices of transgression); and the commuter (who treats the city as a place you enter, park in, work and leave – an autopolis)*". We could add the figure of the *sapeur* – the figure of spatial transition, operating in the interstices of large cultures, participating in a cult of appearance, involving expensive French clothing; a mobile individual who, following Janet MacGaffey and Remi Bazenguissa-Ganga', creates ramifying networks extending through time, space and multiple cultures as he circulates between countries, pulling off *coups* in otherwise invisible spaces in and between cities.

(2004: 742)

As indicated by Nuttall's observations, the *flâneur* embodies the transitory nature of lived space and as an icon of urbanity, represents the universality of the urban migrant and urban mover. Conceived by Benjamin, perhaps, he has been appropriated by many a critic seeking ways to describe modern urban life and lived space. He is important to my study too in that I find that these three novels critique the usual associations of mobility and freedom that are attached to the figure of the *flâneur* or migrant. Even though Sarah Nuttall argues that in most post-apartheid metropolitan fictions the figure of the migrant/*flâneur* represents mobility, she also warns of allowing too much of an investment in a vision of this city as one of 'open flows and reflexivity' (2004: 742).

Still, such ideas around lived space provide the grounds for how one can go about understanding the depths to which these novels portray disruptions in the place-relationships of contemporary Johannesburg. And, of these earlier thinkers of lived space, de Certeau in particular has left a powerful mark on my own thoughts about the subject, not necessarily because I concur with all of his interpretations of lived space, but because the depth of his understanding and application, especially with regards to the relationship

between the city and the text, matches the heterotopic richness of these three novels when read together. Sarah Nuttall, whose work on South African culture and lived spaces – especially those of Johannesburg – and whose work, along with fellow Johannesburg and postcolonial critic, Achille Mbembe, has also contributed greatly to my own too, sums up de Certeau’s contribution to lived urban space as follows:

De Certeau’s key insight was that people use cities by constructing who they are, producing a narrative of identity. They write the city without being able to read it – they don’t know how their individual paths affect the city as a whole. They make a sentence or a story of particular places in the city, while the city is not available as an overview – the city is the way that it is walked.

(2004: 741)

One sees in this citation an emphasis on the intersection between external, hard space and the agent or urbanite who interacts with this space and makes it his own through the way he ‘walks’ and by developing a grammar for his urban ‘sentences’. De Certeau himself argues that urban society is:

composed of certain foregrounded practices organizing its normative institutions and of innumerable other practices that remains “minor”, always there but not organizing discourses and preserving the beginnings or remains of different (institutional, scientific) hypotheses for that society or for others. It is in this multifarious and silent “reserve” of procedures that we should look for “consumer” practices having the double characteristic, pointed out by Foucault, of being able to organize both spaces and language whether on a minute or a vast scale.

(1984: 49)

His idea here that lived space is a site of resistance owing to these ‘multifarious’ procedures suggests that being in the city is powerful for the social person, whether he is the ambling *flâneur* or the social activist deliberately trying to alter the status quo. For this reason, postcolonial urban-social thinker, Edward Soja, describes lived space ‘as a *strategic location* from which to encompass, understand, and potentially transform spaces simultaneously [...] the space of all inclusive simultaneities, perils as well as possibilities, the space of radical openness, the space of social struggle’ (Soja, 1996: 68).

These kinds of ideas about lived urban space have been important for a number of critical thinkers trying to reformulate ways of understanding postcolonial sites. Some scholars of urban social forms and lived space, invoking the figure of the moving urbanite, will argue that cities are produced by a productive tension between containment and mobility, between staying put and flowing (Simone, 2004; 2005, Robins, 1993). In the contemporary scene, African urbanists, for whom Johannesburg is a rich site of exploration into contemporary Africa, focus on the interrelations between flow and stasis and see the tension between the two as a site of creativity, potential and reinvention. Critics such as AbdouMaliq Simone (2004, 2005), Okwui Enzwezor (2002), Onookome Okome (2002), Anton Bouillon (2002), Graeme Gotz (2003), Sarah Nuttall (2004), Achille Mbembe (2004, 2008), Meg Samuelson (2007, 2008) and Rory Bester (2005) enjoy this creative idea to counter the negative stereotyping of Africa and its spaces by detailing the vital potential of African cities.

Informing these scholarly approaches are concepts such as hybridity, third space and entanglement that have become central to conversations about the postcolonial and the post-apartheid. Each of these terms describes a state of being that is composed of the intersections and flows between things. 'Hybridity' is a term expounded upon by postcolonial scholar Homi Bhabha (1990, 1994). Now integral to postcolonial studies, 'hybridity' invokes the way that postcolonial subjects formulate a sense of self and a place within their immediate cultural space by drawing together both indigenous and foreign influences and forms. Through the embrace of alternating social practices and performances, postcolonial subjects can blow open established cultural and social sites, reinvent them and in so doing, can override the institutional or historic prescriptions that may be attached to them. The state of being a postcolonial subject is always a hybrid one, therefore, since the history of colonised spaces is one of the clashing and merging of discourses, people and practices.

Hybridity is thus both a state of reinvention and dislocation, a splitting as well as a potentially dynamic reformulation of the self within the postcolonial sphere. Deployed in

this way, hybridity has also become a powerful analytic tool within the post-apartheid moment. Hein Viljoen and Chris Van de Merwe emphasise this when they write that:

the hybrid or creole has come to play a seminal role in the new South Africa, which is at present a testing ground for new possibilities. In the time of apartheid, when differences and divisions were emphasized, the hybrid had an unenviable position, not properly belonging anywhere. But now the hybrid is at the heart of search for new personal and communal identities; his “third space” (Bhabha, 1994) is a center of creativity where opposites meet and where new blends take place. The “in-between space”, previously rejected by all, has become a liminal space, a melting pot of creativity [...] Creolization suggests a way out of the old dividing structures of the past as well as out of the impasse of being caught on the threshold between past and present. It points the way to a continuing liminal process of death and rebirth where ends are also beginnings, and stories are never-ending.

(2007: 2)

If the goal is, as Van de Merwe and Viljoen remark, to find a ‘way out of the old dividing structures of the past’ then hybridity invokes a way into the future, one that is not dependent on the binaries of the past. Similarly, in her study of South African race and culture politics, *Entanglement* (2009), Sarah Nuttall develops a similar conceptual framing to describe how no entity one is examining – whether political systems, discourses, ideology, temporalities or people – exists discretely or has total power over another. She cites a range of scholars, from historians, such as C.W. Kiewiet –writing in 1957 (Nuttall, 2009: 2) – to contemporary scholars of Africa and its diaspora, such as Paul Gilroy (1994), Carolyn Hamilton (1998) and Achille Mbembe (2001) who argue for entanglement. Nuttall uses six rubrics to show the entanglement as a concept and mode developed in relation to society and history, especially in relation to colonialism and apartheid, systems which attempted, but often failed, to establish total hegemony, *because of* the multiple ‘interpenetrations’ and disturbances of the total order by those or that interacting with it.⁹

⁹ David Attwell’s careful study of colonial, apartheid and post-apartheid literary outputs, *Rewriting Modernity* (2005) develops an analogous view. In his book, he describes the mergings that occur between language, forms and ideas in new and different terrains and labels this, ‘transculturation’. Cf. Attwell, David, *Rewriting Modernity*. Kwazulu-Natal: University of Kwazulu-Natal Press, 2005.

I bring these up here because it is impossible to speak of hybrid and entangled states and the post-apartheid without acknowledging the significant contribution made by Bhabha and Nuttall and the relevance of their work in my attempt to understand these city novels as reflections of contemporary ‘geopathic disorders’. I also use these ideas as a point of departure. Despite my agreement with the underlying tenets of these ideas, I take a more critical view of post-apartheid Johannesburg. This city, or the postcolonial or post-apartheid urban space, even though a heterogeneous and multivalent site, does not always provide the means to empower the self or overcome the overarching or institutional space around one. One only has to think of Benjamin’s scavenging ragpicker of industrial modernity (Benjamin, 1998: 114 in Highmore, 2002: 63), the blasé nature of the *flâneur* or the displaced and hungry African migrant to see that as much as lived space is composed of resistant tactics, hybridity, flows and entanglements, it is also an ambivalent, perfunctory and often crippling, alienating zone of random exchange.

Thus, where I use the word ‘entangled’ in this thesis, I do so to describe the reciprocity of the characters and their settings. I do not try to simply advance Nuttall’s argument even though I find her body of writing stimulating and important. Differently to Nuttall, I use the term to help frame my argument about the pathological dialectics of place-making in the transitioning city and how difficult it is to undo the effects of apartheid spatiality, even during periods of change – because the present is bound to the past. Thus, when I use the word, ‘entangled’, I invoke the inability of the characters to extricate themselves from their settings because of the reflexive integration of subjectivity and place and the persistent influence of history on the present.

It may seem reductive to argue that there is no way of overcoming the layers of disorder in Johannesburg’s contemporary lived spaces. But, to override or ignore the legacies of the past within the city would mean erasing history to such a degree that the city would not exist. For, in my understanding of lived space, one cannot erase history from spatiality, and one cannot do this particularly in a city that evolved through forced removal, segregation and division. In this introduction, I shall be explaining further how I see this to be possible and each section that follows is an application of this central

premise. I therefore try to take what local and continental critics have called attention to and argue for the importance of reading these texts' poetic lived spaces as charged with disturbance and injury.

I am making a case for reading the city and these city novels through a splintered lens, aligning my study with a metaphor expressed by European critic and philosopher Theodor Adorno when he wrote that 'the splinter in your eye is the best magnifying glass' (Adorno, 2005 (1951): 50). Adorno, in *Minima Moralia*, suggests that one needs to exist in the world where the inconsistencies and breakages inherent in society can be acknowledged. Implicit in Adorno's phrase is the idea that through an acknowledgment of the fractured state of modern society we come face to face with our own humanity and its place through history. In my project I make a call to witness the fractured states in everyday life in this city and its poetics – an act that I consider to be therapeutic in the sense that it brings what is repressed or ignored into the conscious mind where it can be observed. In my mind it is productive to draw from the splinters that rest in our national past and to recognise the presence thereof in our national psyche.

I do not wish to dismiss critics who advance the idea that the colonial or apartheid subject was not entirely limited or oppressed by the state or regime of power. However, I do critique how often these ideas tend to create a romanticised image of the fluid postcolonial or post-apartheid subject, one who seems to exist in a vacuum of self-individuation or narcissism. Even though many current contributions to African urban scholarship, from various fields, are reformulating the way African spaces are perceived and studied, I have found that calls to 'alternate urbanisms', based on the premise that the individual can overcome the limitations in the city, draw attention away from the embeddedness of colonial and apartheid residues in a city like Johannesburg. The apartheid state's interruption of the creative movements to and from and within Johannesburg pervade it still and render it a site of conflict and anxiety. Thus, while a number of African urbanists valorise the heightened flows and exchanges in urban sites (in particular the contemporary ones) and in so doing develop different and urgently

necessary narratives about Africa, my concern is that the depth to which apartheid-era patterns are embedded in the 'now' tends to be overlooked.

Michel de Certeau's collaboration with Pierre Mayol and Luce Giard, in the second volume of *The Practice of Everyday Life, Volume 2: Living and Cooking* (1991), has been invaluable to me as I have endeavoured to show the patterns of the past in how the novels' characters go about interacting with social urban space and how these interactions, in turn, invest these spaces with meaning. The essays in this book have a universal application I have found, and while their sites of study are mostly foreign, the basic functions of society and the little ordinary habits that they describe are valuable to a reading of these three novels.

This volume complements pivotal local studies on lived urban space, such as Mamphela Ramphele's *A Bed Called Home* (1993) and Lindsay Bremner's brilliant collection of essays, *Writing the City into Being* (2010), and her earlier *Johannesburg: One City, Colliding Worlds* (2004). These three texts have been particularly useful to me because of how each author approaches the city using the dialectical principles of lived space. Even though the periods in which Ramphele and Bremner are writing in and the foci of their studies are not the same, one can trace the same core elicitation of the idea that people *make* space and that the city evolves through the interactions between institutional, ideological, built and quotidian practices. Other notable local scholars who have spent time deciphering Johannesburg using these ideas, such as Meg Samuelson and Loren Kruger (2001), provide more detail to my explorations. So too does Carrol Clarkson's work and her deployment of the term, contingency, in her studies of post-apartheid Johannesburg texts (2005, 2007, 2008). Clarkson draws attention to the reflexive relationship between people, space and things in the city. Through her study of Vladislavić's and Mpe's texts, she reveals lived space is contingent: relativity, exchange and reciprocity engender and are engendered by daily exchanges between people in space, producing a human geography that is never static.

Underlying my discussions of each novel's setting is the idea that while one can generate resistance to the status quo within one's everyday life, in small yet significant ways, one is not always in control of these exchanges, especially in a city where the presence of a traumatic history is very much embedded in one's claims to the very spaces in which one moves, and within the spaces themselves. Indeed, one cannot speak about lived space in a city like Johannesburg without imagining and enunciating the depths to which the people living in the city are still affected by apartheid spatiality in its many forms – material, ideological and psycho-social.

Place: the link between the self and space

Lived space informs my usage of the term, place, in this thesis and in my address of these novels. I see place, like lived space, to emerge through the dialectical exchanges between a subject and the spaces around her, that is: place is the actualisation of space by a subject, and vice versa. Scholars tend to use the term in different ways. Michel de Certeau's definition, for instance, is the inverse of how I use it here: he defines 'space' as actualised place (1984: 118). While I am indebted to much of de Certeau's incisive framings of society within space my use of this term is more in alignment with Lefebvrian lived space or what critic Rita Barnard, in her study of post-apartheid literary places, recognises as a fundamentally 'socio-spatial dialectic' (Barnard, 2007: 4). In this framework, where space can be seen as abstract and quantitative, ready to be filled and interpreted and made human, place is space made qualitative and meaningful through perception and human experience.

My invocation of the term *place* in fact departs from the concept of lived space in that I use it to refer to how exchanges between subject and space produce and invest empty spaces with meaning, and how these in turn influence a person's sense of self. These three novels capture the complex and fraught performance of place-making in Johannesburg. I want to trace how their geopathic disorders are aggravated through their desire to be *emplaced* or to be homed in a way that goes beyond the ambivalent site of everyday or lived space and into a site of yearning and the need to reconcile their senses of self with an environment and history.

My usage of the terms place and place-making in my explorations of each novel thus harnesses the analogous relationship between the desire for self and self in space. To do so, I go about what Gaston Bachelard in his evocative *Poetics of Space* (1964) defines as topoanalysis, or ‘the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives’ (Bachelard, 1964: 8). I am indeed interested in the *intimate* ways in which all of these characters struggle for a way to claim the city as their own. Therefore, when I speak of place I conjure what Timothy Oakes refers to as ‘a sense of territorial bond’ between humans and their environs – the desire to be interconnected with a specific location’ (Oaks, 1997: 510). In that place and subjectivity are so intricately bound up I see the characters’ desires to be *emplaced* in Johannesburg as a desire to know themselves and to have their subjectivities recognised, as elucidated by J.E Malpas here:

Place is [...] that within and with respect to which subjectivity is itself established – place is not founded *on* subjectivity, but is rather that *on which* subjectivity is founded [...] In grasping the structure of place [...] what is grasped is an open and interconnected region within which other persons, things, spaces and abstract locations, *and even one’s self*, can appear, be recognized, identified and interacted with [...] the structure at issue encompasses the experiencing creature itself and so the structure of subjectivity is given in and through the structure of place.

(1999: 35-36)

Approaching place in this way fits into South Africa and Johannesburg’s politics since this is a country whose history is defined by the contestation and assertion of different social groups’ attachment and rights to the land and the city. The struggle for place and the right to live and be in this city is still ongoing, as is the battle for subjectivities that are not disempowered or constrained by apartheid’s socio-spatial legacy. Defining the claim to territory and to home is very much part of the post-apartheid condition.

As I argue for the importance of recognising the importance of the struggle for place within this city I am reminded of the range of feminist, marxist and poststructuralist voices that would argue that the links between rights and territory are dangerous and only perpetuate regimes of power and social ideologies of exclusion. Critics such as Michel

Foucault (1967), David Harvey (1989), Tim Cresswell (2008), Doreen Massey (1999), Edward Soja and Barbara Hooper (2002) amongst others warn about the dangers associated with the protection of a discrete place or position, even if this is part of a subaltern group's resistance to the status quo or the dispossessed person or people's attempts to reclaim what has been taken from them. For the radical thinker, exposing the dangers of historical and contemporary claims to power through claims to place is paramount. Fundamental studies of global spatial politics such as Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and later postcolonial investigations into space, culture, power and the diaspora, such as Gayatri Spivak's *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (2009) or Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994), have also demonstrated the misuse of spatial thinking in attempts to gain or maintain power. Indeed, in the field of postcolonial studies of Africa, one of the first sites of critique has been of colonial spatiality, including how conquered territories were mapped and organised according to imperialist and hegemonic discourses.¹⁰ Many postcolonial critics occupied with space argue for a "progressive" sense of place [which] is [...] always in process and never "finished" (Cresswell, 2008: 7). I bring this up here because I too place my study within a field of spatial and cultural thought that seeks to critique the rigidity of systems and spaces, especially those seen within colonial and apartheid discourses. Despite this, I have found that these novels insist on recognising how the fight for home and belonging is a defining feature – and limitation perhaps – of the post-apartheid condition. The issue of being 'unhomed' is central to each of these texts and each set of characters is immersed in attempts to settle in the city after or during the transition.

¹⁰ Cf. J.B Harley, Deconstructing the map; *Cartographica* Vol. 26. No 2. (1989): 1-20; Thrift, Nigel and Pile, Steven (eds). *Mapping the Subject*. Routledge: London, 1995; Garuba, Harry. 'Mapping the Land/ Body/ Subject: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies in African Narrative' in *Alternation*, Vol. 9, No.1, (2002): 87-116; Soja, Edward and Hooper, Barbara. 'The Spaces that Difference Makes: Some Notes on the Geographical Margins in the New Cultural Politics' in *The Spaces of Postmodernity: Readings in Human Geography*. Blackwell Publishers: Oxford, Massachusetts, 2002; Gibson, Nigel. C. 'Mapping Africa's Presences: Merleau-Ponty, Mannoni, and the Malagasy Massacre of 1947 in Franz Fanon's *Black Skin: White Masks*' in *Contested Terrains and Constructed Categories*. George Clement & Nigel. C. Gibson (eds). United States of America: Westview Press, 2002; Jacobs, Jane. M. '(Post) Colonial Spaces' in *Spaces of Postmodernity: Readings in Human Geography*. Michael Dear and Steven Flusty (eds). Oxford & Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2002; Kruger, Loren. 'The Drama of Country and City: Tribalization, Urbanization and Theatre under Apartheid' in *Journal of South African Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 4, (Dec, 1997): 565-584.

Yet, the condition of being ‘unhomed’ need not be interpreted so literally as to be completely reductive. Homi Bhabha’s notion of ‘the unhomely’ is useful to this assertion, especially with regards to my following section that deals more directly with the place of the house or domicile. Bhabha’s notion of the unhomely goes beyond the physical to include a general state of disorientation affecting the postcolonial, or in my case, the post-apartheid subject. He writes:

To be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the 'unhomely' be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres. Rather, the unhomely is that condition when the recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions. In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting.

(1994:13)

This state of displacement need not be crippling, and can be also seen as the fodder for a potentially creative and empowering engagement with place and culture on the part of the postcolonial subject. Importantly though, while one can interpret the ‘unhomed’ condition as a site of possibility, it can also register as a state of alienation and a separation from one’s self in space – a state that is central to Johannesburg’s contemporary scene and the novels in question.

Viljoen and Van de Merwe, for example, admit that while ‘liminality’ may be a powerful state or concept in post-apartheid South Africa, the ‘experience of the unfamiliar world beyond the threshold often causes anxiety, even the desire to return to the familiar life of the past’ (Viljoen & Van de Merwe, 2007: 2). Despite my skepticism of fixities and binaries in all their forms, I have found that in order to speak about the struggles with place in each novel, I need to be able to critique this notion of liminality or hybridity, and entanglement. This is so I can argue for the fact that a major part of the post-apartheid experience is the struggle for the very thing that made the apartheid urban plan and its exclusive and divisive strategies so powerful: claims to place, to territory and to home. In my reading, as I shall explain in each section, the characters’ disorders and feelings of

displacement come from the fact that they are not willing or able to negotiate liminality or uncertainty since they have evolved as socio-spatial beings through a need for their place to be validated. Bearing the burdens of a historical relationship to space, they all fight against dissipation and dislocation and yet, ironically, this is a fundamental part of their geopathic relationship to their environment and to themselves.

Speaking about emplacement in this way conjures a mythical dimension and evokes Martin Heidegger's notion of dwelling. For Heidegger, to be in one's 'dwelling' is a state of authentic continuity between one's self and one's environment, a state of being *homed*. Being emplaced, according to the Heideggarian frame, also means being connected to one's environment in which one dwells (Heidegger, 1951: 3). In an article on the politics of dwelling and emigration in South Africa, Dominic Griffiths and Maria L.C. Prozesky expand the idea of dwelling and write that:

Dwelling is more than just living, and more even than simply living on the land one happened to be born on. It means relating to that land as a homeland, a dwelling place. To dwell is to be cared for in the dwelling-place, and to care for the things of the dwelling place [...]

(2010: 30)

I bring this up here, even though I do not use Heidegger in my thesis beyond this point, to bring attention to how the yearning to be connected to place or land has a quasi-mytho-ontological status. Furthermore, the idea of a primordial link to the land was a very powerful ideological tool within the Afrikaner Nationalist Party and rationalised their attempts to eradicate the claims made by indigenous people to the land of South Africa (Beningfield, 2009). In addition, the idea of a primordial home or a natural home space was twisted to suit the ends of the apartheid state as it disordered and essentialised place-identities to empower some and disempower others. Being bound to Bantustans or townships, for instance, located black South African place-identities in the rural or the transient. Again, the idea of a fixed or rightful claim to a territory can be seen as dangerous but this is perhaps what makes these three novels so compelling in their portrayal of states of alienation and displacement in the city. At the core of the characters' daily practices is a defensiveness about where they belong, even though this

response comes in part from a skewed idea of place and belonging, perpetuated by the apartheid system.

The desire to be homed or emplaced can be seen to have taken on a greater urgency in the aftermath of apartheid, despite the fraught nature of our current society and the potentially reductive nature of such desires. Natasha Beningfield, whose historical study on Johannesburg, *The Frightened Land* (2009), has been very useful to me, writes that:

While South Africa has had a democratically elected government since 1994, the decades of control by the National Party government, together with the centuries of white control before 1948, have meant that what is at stake in the transformation of South Africa is not only the physical form of the land and its inhabitation, but also the imagination of it and the way in which this will determine the choices that are made in South Africa's future. Central to this reimagination and remaking is the issue of the land – how it should be inhabited, who should inhabit it, how cities should develop, how rural land is to be used and cultivated – concerns which exist alongside an awareness of the inequitable distribution of land in South Africa's past, and the need both to redress these imbalances and to re-present a different, more inclusive vision of what it may mean to be a South African.

(2009: 3)

This is the scene that these novels present: a mesh of characters who are all struggling to locate and claim a connection to the land – this case, is the metropolis. Beningfield's study is at its heart a historical one and her reference to the land as frightened alludes to apartheid times. However, unquestionably, as I shall show, the effects of apartheid are portrayed as deeply embedded in contemporary city, creating states of dislocation which make the possibilities of an 'inclusive vision' extremely difficult as well. Therefore, while I seek to validate the need for place, depicted in these three novels, I also hope to open up a space of debate where one might critique this desire in later studies of these novels.

Legacies of the past: shared disorders of the present

This conception of place and setting as actualised through subjectivity and practice allows me to explain how the past city can be seen as infecting the contemporary in these

urban novels, even while Johannesburg's contemporary urban moment is characterised by change. In that the city is produced by social patterns as much as it is by institutional ones and in that everyday life is never static but is entangled with memories and markers of former patterns that are social as well as institutional, the contemporary space is always a testament to its history. Furthermore, I shall explain further, because apartheid's socio-spatial strategies were so insidious, these markers and traces are deeply embedded within the city and within urban practice. While the space is being reconstituted daily by people, these residues continue to pervade the contemporary experience and makings of everyday life in Johannesburg so that the self *in* or *as* place evolves through such historical patternings.

I am also concerned in my study with what I see to be the reiterations of apartheid's affective influence on the urbanites's relationship to the built environment. Vladislavić, in an interview with Christopher Warnes comments that 'the actual physical structures of apartheid are going to be difficult, if not impossible, to erase, and that we're going to be living within those structures for a very long time' (Vladislavić, quoted in Warnes, 2000: 278). I use the fuller version of this comment in one of my later discussions, in a section on his novel, *The Exploded View*. For Vladislavić, the site of historical repetition comes through the built environment. Architecture can be seen as a site through which the materiality and spatial psychologies of the past are continued, embedded in the structures around the city.

I shall discuss this more in the following section, with the aid of critics such as Achille Mbembe and his work on the 'aesthetics of superfluity' (Mbembe, 2004) in his and Sarah Nuttall's edition of *Public Culture*, entitled 'Johannesburg: the Elusive Metropolis' (2004). Other interdisciplinary scholars such as Loren Kruger, Jennifer Robinson (1992, 2002, 2009) and Lindsay Bremner (2004, 2010) also draw on the constructed edifices that bear markers of history and thus affect and influence daily life in the present. However, the affect of history is often invisible. I would like to use a description of Johannesburg from Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall's article 'Afropolis' to elucidate the 'palimpsestic' (Huyssen, 2003; Samuelson, 2008) and often hidden remains of the past.

Mbembe and Nuttall's article is written from the perspective of their drive through Johannesburg. Through the multiple zones they cross in their car, Johannesburg materialises as a city of:

Surface and depth: a city of shallows and depth [...] a once-supple skin now hardened by violence into keloid scars, of free-floating signifiers, detached and unanchored from a scandalous signified, now inexactly remembered. A city of surfaces, capitalist brashness, in which only some want to remember, or in which the past appears fleetingly, glimpsed as parodic reference or embedded in a space or a face, an ash drift, an exfoliation. A subliminal memory of life below the surface, of suffering, alienation, rebellion, insurrection – the powerful forces contained in the depths of the city. There can be no surface without an underground.

(2007: 286)

This sketch of the city as a place layered with both visible and invisible traces of the past evokes what they call the 'viscosity of an unresolved history' (Mbembe, Nuttall: 286). Described in this way, contemporary Johannesburg can be seen as imbued with memories and markers of apartheid spatiality. Considering Johannesburg's history, this description of the underground is an allegory for the oppressed or silenced masses, for the repressed apartheid psyche, and also for the city's legacy of mining, extortion and labour. Since its rise from the gold reefs, Mbembe and Nuttall remind us of the fact that Johannesburg's wealth has always been at the expense of workers toiling away beneath the crust of the earth. Below one's feet in the city lie former shafts, yet the fullest extent of this history is concealed from the visible. This hides Johannesburg's full personality, making it a city of invisible memories and histories, even as it is a city of objective contests and bursting energies. This allegory also suggests how the residues of the apartheid plan are located in the less visible zone of lived space in Johannesburg – embedded in the daily practices of urbanites and their relationship to place. In that place is so deeply imbued with both conscious and unconscious forces of behaviour and patterns, these residues are often imperceptible to those performing them or are often unseen by the eyes of the new generation – even though teasing out the effects of apartheid on place, belonging and everyday life is of central concern for most of the city's and country's residents. Poetic language evokes these layers and constructs a narrative about their overlaps, which can then be deciphered, as I shall show in each novel.

While the city or city novel tells a story of the past it also reveals the extent to which the city can carry with it the burdens and traumas of that past. Consider, for instance, Johannesburg's façade, evoked in *The Exploded View*. As Vladislavić argues, while being reused and remade, roads and houses, monuments and state buildings bear inscriptions of former times. This is evident in elements that have not been actually been changed – road names, the heights of walls, the colours and uses of buildings. But even those that have changed, such as reconstructed areas like Midrand and Centurion (fortified suburban developments, as articulated in *The Exploded View*), still seem to perpetuate the built environments and structural ethos of the former regime of power, albeit in a contemporary disguise. Of course, even if one were to completely tear Johannesburg down its underground history would still serve as a haunting reminder of how the city became the 'Mecca of Africa'. This is an idea that each novel portrays: that the very fabric of everyday life on the surface is a testament to what lies below – both allegorically and literally. The spectre of the apartheid era haunts the city, breathes through it.

Reading these novels in this way, I attempt to talk about the past in ways that might not be perceived simply as negative or crippling. For Samuelson, writing in 2008, this need to turn to the past is:

as much a global as a local phenomenon. Marshall Berman's defining study of the experience of modernity notes a late 20th-century shift away from efforts to "[wipe] away the past" towards "attempts to recover past modes of life that were buried but not dead" (332). Similarly, Andreas Huyssen, who also employs the concept of the palimpsest in his reading of urban space, notes recently "a turning toward the past that stands in stark contrast to the privileging of the future so characteristic of earlier decades of twentieth-century modernity.

(2008: 11)

If indeed one can say that we are experiencing a shift towards validating the effects of history on the present, these novels embody this zeitgeist by reminding us of what still needs to be resolved.

On the seam

I would like to return to Homi Bhabha's idea of the 'unhomely' to show how representations of these disorders act as invitations to engage with the realities of life in contemporary Johannesburg. Earlier, I mentioned that the 'unhomely' describes the disruptures that can exist between elements in one place or in one moment, the contradictions and ambivalences that are present in the postcolonial cultural and geographical space. For Bhabha, this concept also applies to postcolonial literary production and the aesthetic process. I have found this application to be extremely useful in encapsulating the intentions (and tensions) of my project. Bhabha writes:

Although the 'unhomely' is a paradigmatic post-colonial experience, it has a resonance that can be heard distinctly, if erratically, in fictions that negotiate the powers of cultural difference in a range of historical conditions and social contradictions.

(1991: 142)

He suggests here that fictions that seek to reflect the discontinuities of such experience bring about a reckoning with these contradictions. For example, these three novels, by bringing together an image of collective suffering shared by the victims, oppressors and middlemen of apartheid in the post-apartheid era, are curating an unhomely space, a literary space of ambivalent energies and contradictions. In other words, by yoking these three novels together in the way that I do, I too am creating a zone where my audience is forced to consider the spatial particularities of everyday human suffering.

In bringing attention to the overlap of history with the present and the overlaps of each set of characters' places and stories, I hope to add to other projects whose scope incites the chance for 'the very historical basis of our ethical judgments [to undergo] a radical tension' (Bhabha, 1992: 146). Therefore, I see these three novels, combined, as being situated 'on the seam' (De Kock, 2005): occupying and representing a space of ambivalence and struggle and drawing attention to the diasporic and fraught politics of place in the post-apartheid city of Johannesburg, across the racial, social and spatial divide.

A novel conversation

Aesthetically, these three novels can be seen to function quite differently. *The Exploded View* is descriptive and objective. Written in the third person, each of the four narrative strands offers a detailed meditation on the city and the urban experience. *Triomf* is visceral and immediate; the narrative changes according to the character whose voice focalises the action. The narration is highly subjective and, at times, seems to border on stream of consciousness. A shifting and often unreliable narrator recounts *Room 207*, yet Noko has a keen eye for detail and observation and is the reader's guide through what is, in reality, an impenetrable space for most. Each of these discursive styles and narratorial voices mirrors the part of the city in which the novel is set: *The Exploded View* is about controlled and visible developments and men who are trying to hold onto the known 'sign' of Johannesburg. *Triomf* is about a family who exist on the fringes of society, whose emotive states and very existence are bound up with the city and its history. As it changes, so their instability is brought into focus. Raw and disjointed at times, *Room 207* embodies the inner city's capricious energies. The changes in pace and tone in the novel reflect the city's uncertain patterns and the 207s' own stops and starts as they try to make sense of their surrounds.

Thus, while using different aesthetic styles, each text conjures the place and psycho-geographies it relates to, so that setting and character, pace and narration are shown to be deeply entwined. At the heart of each story is a similar concern: to reveal the persistence of socio-spatial trauma within the human and built environment and to illuminate the dialectic relationship between space and subject. The reader is able to see into the complex psychologies of each set of characters through the nuances of each narrative setting. The city in each novel becomes imbued with the subjectivities of the characters so that the text creates access to the notion that people can exist as place and place, too, can exist as people. I have mentioned already that character and setting are often judged to be contingent with one another. I have also suggested that in each novel, it is as if the reader is confronting a subjective world, an inner city of pain and ambiguity. Indeed, these novels push the boundaries of this contingency by suggesting that the external realities and people they represent as discrete novels are in fact part of the same zone.

Moreover, even when each novel seems aesthetically distinct from the others, each has a similar structural gesture that reveals the palimpsestic nature of the city. *The Exploded View* shows four different versions of the gated communities and new suburban developments on the city's fringes. Each story adds narrative and poetic depth to the last so that in the final pages of 'Crocodile Lodge' the reader's sense of the complexity of this particular urban pattern is heightened. *Triomf* is organised around the different voices of the family and each chapter is focalised according to Mol, Pop, Lambert or Treppie. Again, what emerges in reading is the sense that Triomf, the place, is constituted by layers of perspective and subjectivity and exists as multiple, co-existing and complimentary versions within itself. Each chapter creates strata of space and subjectivity, layers of psycho-geographies, both past and present, so that the experience of living here is revealed in all its confusion and depths. *Room 207* is also organised into distinct chapters around the array of protagonists, as well as around key events in the narrative in which various actions take place and advance the story. This organisation gives the reader, again, the sense that the inner city is composed of multiple strands of performance and perception, sheets of spatiality that overlap and create this space, as it exists in the time of the novel. The inner city emerges as a heterotopic zone of affect. By building the narrative *as* the lived city, each novel evokes a sense of the complex interplay of surfaces and depths, of history and the present, of character and environment so that the traumas of this urban chronotope can be understood as constituted by these same patterns. Considered as a cluster of spatialities, the reader can work towards understanding the spectrum of Johannesburg's geopathologies.

Each novel performs a similar narrative gesture: inviting the reader to move through the text and engage with its depictions of place to make meaning from the overlaps between the character's voice, senses of self, the place in which they find themselves and the city they reside in and to see it as one fluid interaction. Simultaneously, each novel asks the reader to consider what it is not, what it could be, and the story it may tell when read in relation to alternative sites and psycho-geographies.

‘Literature’, as Michael Titlestad argues, ‘is well placed to mediate between the analytical maps and particular pathways of meaning’ (2012: 679). Creating new pathways of meaning by bringing together these maps of the city, these three novels demand that all of Johannesburg’s faces be seen, even if for just a moment. And in so doing, new pathways of meaning can be mediated, across the seam. Understanding the social psyche and inseparable to spatiality is essentially at the heart of the spatial turn. Understanding that the modern individual is ultimately the urban individual is central to contemporary urban studies. And, treating Johannesburg as a microcosm of the national space is central to understanding the post-apartheid socio-spatial landscape. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, the role of setting within the modern fictive text is seen as a powerful narrative device wherein the nuances of protagonists’ psychologies can be implanted and deciphered. It is becoming more common to use languages of space or environment in conversation with the language of human expression and experience and within this moment, modern literature provides a rich space in which the limits of both these languages can converse with each other and even inform the other. This is especially so in novels like these that emphasise the subject/space or character/setting dialectic and illuminate the intricate ways in which South Africa’s national psyche is inextricable bound up within its real and imagined landscapes and within notions of place, belonging and locality.

These texts also work well together since they all have a similar technique of manipulating what is considered to one temporal frame or historical moment. As I shall explore, this textual trio presents overlaps of the past with the present in both the psycho-geographies of the characters and in the space of the city. This renders the reader’s sense of temporal and spatial linearity disrupted, replaced (even if temporarily) with a circularity and repetitiveness that destabilises the temporal notion of the post-apartheid as well as of progression – whether in the political sphere or in the narrative one. The concealed and invisible repetitions of history demand recognition of the fact that a formidable and painful spatial narrative gave life to Johannesburg, as we know it today. This brings to mind Roland Barthes’ argument that ‘the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer but a producer of the text’ (Barthes,

1973: 3). Indeed, the strength of these three novels is their combined capacity to disorientate fixities and create a dynamic space through their foregrounding of the character/setting dialectic – a third space wherein the crossings between the visible and invisible in Johannesburg’s *espace vecu* can emerge for the reader to start to make sense of (or not).

One could argue then that these novels, with their differences and resonances, capture the élan of Njabula Ndebele’s call to the ‘ordinary’ (1986: 143): the ability of the creative text to reflect sensitive human patterns, to illuminate the complex and contradictory textures of daily life. These texts reveal the city’s known, overarching narratives without giving these priority over the complicated poetry of the invisible and everyday or the important action of the reader as she searches for psychological meanings amongst the poetic signs of the city.

Section Outline

I use three spatial and subjective sites to initiate my discussions of geopathic disorders in the everyday. In each section, I match an aspect of setting with a particular site of lived space in Johannesburg and the groups of people historically associated with those sites with the characters in each novel. I map how the lived space was used or manipulated during apartheid and how these manipulations are still inscribed into the built structures of the city, the social space of each neighbourhood and the human practices therein. I use the three post-apartheid novels to show how these patterns are still present in each set of characters’ performances of place and the places themselves – in a manner particular to the specific site of each novel, as well as in relation to the city as a whole.

In Section One, entitled ‘These Four Walls’, I look at each novel’s representation of the house and of disturbances in the domestic lived space. I first describe some of the archetypal associations with the house and perceptions of one’s relationship to the domestic space. I then outline in detail how the house and the relationship to the house were disturbed and manipulated by the apartheid state system before proceeding to explore in detail, within each text, the continuations of disordered patterns in this most

intimate of lived environments. In my discussion of *Triomf*, which continues from that above, I explore the Benades' dual desire to build and destroy a sanctified familial environment in Martha Street in Triomf. I explore how their disordered domesticity is a result of their disturbed urbanisation and rural displacement, as well as of the family's historically unstable claims to the city, including its appropriation of the house in Martha Street. I treat the Benades' house as a site of imprisonment and haunting and trace ways in which the family struggles with and tries to escape from these disturbances. My discussion of Ivan Vladislavić's *The Exploded View* and its four, intersecting narratives extends my analysis of the house to residential construction sites, informal housing, newly built and designed houses in gated communities in the city's peripheries, as well as to the archetypal middle class suburban home in changing Johannesburg.

The unstable and artificial qualities that are embodied in these private home spaces, in suburban parts of the city, reveal drives for privacy and protection that are not in keeping with the transitioning urban order but rather, are an extension of apartheid-like and colonial expressions of elitist exclusion. My discussion of Kgebetli Moele's *Room 207*, pivots on the central characters' (referred to hereafter as the 207s) life in a tiny flat in poor, overpopulated Hillbrow. The right to live in the inner city is one of the freedoms associated with the dismantlement of apartheid urban policies. However, for the 207s, their presence in the inner city is defined by their fractured claim to it, by feelings of impermanence as well as by poverty and frustration. I analyse how this plays out within the room and the building in which the friends live.

In Section Two, entitled 'Patterns of Movement', I examine how the apartheid state immobilised urbanites' movements and limited public and private passage through or into the city. I explore different measures that were taken to ensure a limitation on physical mobility and how this affected the experience of the neighbourhood and wider city under apartheid. I then move onto each novel and explore some of the intimate and often contradictory ways that each set of characters' patterns of movement in the post-apartheid city mirror and repeat apartheid restrictions. In *Room 207*, I look at the ways in which the 207s hustle the streets and how their movements through the inner city bring about collisions with iterations of socio-spatial constraint that affect their assimilation into the

post-apartheid inner city. I explore how their passages into and out of the city reveal these patterns further and how the freedoms they seek through mobility are constrained by often-undetected barbs. In my discussion of *Triomf* I address how the Benades, through their neighbourhood and towards other, connected parts of the city, reflect their historical transience and their culpability in the history of the area and in apartheid's spatial ideologies. I address how this relationship surfaces in their relationship to cars and automotives and show how the family has suffered at the mercy of an industrial system that promoted growth and movement. In *The Exploded View*, I examine how the characters spend much of their time traveling between specific sites in cars and along highways. I argue that despite the distances each man travels and his roles in the public arena, Egan, Budlender, Majara and Duffy traverse as spectators, not as participants. Their itineraries and modes of travel are contained within certain established routes that keep them separate from the hubbub of everyday street life. Thus, although they are constantly moving, I suggest that their dislocation from the outside world defines them.

In Section Three, 'Tactics and Personae', I conclude my literary analyses with an exploration into how the characters, in their attempts to grasp and understand these disturbances, develop defensive tactics that reinscribe them within an archetypal apartheid persona and subject position. This section offers something of a rounding off to the previous two and takes the idea of lived space further into the realm of the psycho-social. I show how the experience of disturbed domesticity and restricted or disordered patterns of movement manifest within the subject, affecting his or her place, and keeping him or her bound up with past patterns. In my examination of *Triomf*, I discuss how the family responds to the fragility of their urban situation by invoking connections and attachments to the past. These connections are to the former place of the farm, the family's rural heritage and a quasi-mythical time of Afrikaner origins. I identify some key areas where the Benades' continued attachment to the past affects their everyday lives, and argue that this deepens their dislocation from Johannesburg. In my discussion of *Room 207* I analyse the 207s' adoption of the hustler persona. I treat the persona of the hustler as a function of their need to be independent and 'mainstream' as well as a defensive response to the unpredictable and transient post-apartheid inner city, a mode

that resembles typical migrant responses to the urban under apartheid. Lastly, in relation to *The Exploded View*, I examine how each of the four men, in response to the unsettling experiences around them, seeks out ways of reifying and keeping their place steady within it. I explore how they tend to objectify the space around them, even when their traditional or 'reliable' frames for the city are proving to be unsuitable for what they see and experience around them and thereby cast themselves in the position of the reserved colonial observer.

On the whole, I treat each text as a space where I can investigate evidence of certain textual configurations of 'real' patterns. While I reach deeply for the particularities in and of each narrative, I tend to group the characters together and treat them as representative of groups of people in the post-apartheid city. Thus, in *Room 207*, I explore each 207 as an individual but also as part of a conglomerate social psyche and unified collection of practices. In *Triomf*, I observe that each character plays an alternating role, but I handle the Benades as a family and treat them as one symbolic and practical unit. In my analyses on *The Exploded View*, I break my sections down into each narrative strand, but I see each protagonist as an extension and reflection of his textual neighbours and treat them all together as representative of a certain type of urbanite and urban experience.

SECTION ONE

THESE FOUR WALLS: THIS HOUSE

Mol stares at all the stuff Lambert has dug out of the earth. It's a helluva heap. Pieces of red brick, bits of smooth drainpipe, thick chunks of old cement, and that blue gravel you see on graves. Small bits of glass and other stuff shine in the muck.

(*Triomf*: 1)

You could hear things breaking to pieces when the bulldozers moved in. Beds and enamel basins and sink baths and all kinds of stuff. All of it just smashed.... The kaffirs screamed and shouted and ran up and down like mad things. They tried to grab as much as they could to take with when the lorries came.

(*Triomf*: 1)

Introduction

Triomf, Johannesburg: 1994. I bring these excerpts into focus to begin my conversation about the house. In the first extract from *Triomf*, the matriarch, Mol, watches as her son, Lambert, digs up the remnants of the previous human settlement, the township, Sophiatown – bulldozed in the mid 1950s and now buried beneath the concrete and houses of Triomf. The 'muck' reminds the Benades and the reader that the present whites-only neighbourhood rose out of social and political rupture and the strategic racialisation of space and people. In this sense, Sophiatown is Triomf's 'other': a haunting symbol of apartheid, from which it was born. Simultaneously though, the debris reveals the continuities between this past settlement and the present one. Sophiatown is reduced to rubble but the debris that Lambert is digging up is not particular to the former township. Graveyard gravel, cement, standard blue plastic piping and bricks: these are the basic signs of habitation. Lambert Benade, acting as a scavenger, picks up what he finds familiar. The unmarked, excavated building materials, the remains of bathrooms and brick walls, graves and windows, markers of private spaces and family life, these are the elements of basic everyday experience and domestic life in a house and neighbourhood. Thus, while the home lives of the inhabitants of Sophiatown and Triomf are infinitely

different, and the rubble is emblematic of strategies that separated the people of Sophiatown from the people of Triomf, Lambert's treasures call attention to the lines that bind these two places. This unsettles the space of Triomf and the place of the Benades from the very start of the novel.

The effect of this is emphasised in the second extract. Mol, acting as the mouthpiece in these opening excerpts, surveys these disturbing and broken yet easily identified signifiers of everyday life. She envisions the confusion and horror of what happened during the forced removal and although she uses the word, 'kaffir,' one senses a humanist impulse in the way she envisions the families' desperation, because it resembles their own. Mol's alertness to this part of the neighbourhood's history indicates her sensitivity around dislocation and the loss of place, and acts as a prolepsis of sorts to the Benades' own story. Her focus on the sad remnants of the area's former lives aligns her with the setting around her, reminding the reader that the Benade family are also blighted by the country's socio-spatial and political history.

Carrol Clarkson in, 'Visible and Invisible: What Surfaces in Recent Johannesburg Novels?' (2005) draws on these same opening pages in *Triomf* to begin her discussion of how objects and artifacts from Sophiatown – the former 'unknown civilization' (2005:84, citing Maurice Merleau Ponty) – reveal the 'shared humanity' (Ibid: 95) of these two cultural sites and groups of people. One can see in Mol's vision of these remains that she feels compelled to sympathise with those of Sophiatown – to a degree. Her sympathy is erratic, scrappy and here in these descriptions above we see how her subjectivity is mirrored in her space, how space and character reveal each others' nuances. As the novel progresses, the reader notices how the Benades' lived space is composed of scraps. Both physically and metaphorically, their house and their lives within it are jumbled together, pieced together in a haphazard and sometimes schizophrenic way. My argument moves on from Clarkson's insights to suggest that while these acts of excavation above may instill a sense of pathos in Mol, they are also a jarring reminder of her own situation. Furthermore, while the debris draws her and the former residents' basic human existence together and thus could instantiate an act of witnessing and engagement with the 'other,'

the space of Triomf, the house of the Benades and their experience of home are deeply unsettled by this ‘sedimentary patterning’ (Clarkson, 2005: 85) to the point where their everyday domestic life becomes disturbed by it. The Benades are then partially disabled by their disturbance that makes it more difficult for them to gain perspective on the fundamental relationship between themselves and the area’s former residents – enough to sustain their sympathies towards them. This is evoked strongly in the vivid and erratic relationship between character and setting in the text itself.

The uncomfortable house

I have chosen these extracts from *Triomf* to begin my discussion in this chapter of how in the transitional period of 1994, as the family fears for the future, their sense of domestic place is also in jeopardy as Triomf’s historical ‘layers’ threaten to erupt beneath them. Ironically, as the city changes, traces of the past, and their roles within it, seem to become more visible and striking. This affects the Benades and unsettles the surfaces of their existence. Similarly in *The Exploded View* and *Room 207*, the reader is exposed to the experiences of a cluster of residents in the changing terrain whose practices within the city and relationships to the urban home are marked by history and its increasingly vivid translation into the present day.

The psycho-social states of the protagonists reproduce an anxious relationship with the house, owing to their respective relationships with apartheid history; ‘Inhabited space’, as Mamphela Ramphele argues, ‘has a major impact on the self-image of individuals and their perception of their place in society (Hayden, 1984: 40; Moore, 1986:167)’ (Ramphele, 1993: 7). Inversely, as these novels show, one’s place in society and in history has a major impact on the relationship to the home, its materials and its location. In this section I show how the burdens and traces of the socio-spatial history of the city manifest in the characters’ relationships to the house in each novel. Also evoked in the novels are the depths to which apartheid corrupted the domestic area through spatial planning and construction. The material forms of each novel’s domestic settings replicate and reiterate apartheid spatiality so that even while the characters may have moments of

distance and self-reflection, on the whole they are immersed in strata of affected space and practice.

In my discussion of *Triomf*, which continues from that above, I explore the Benades' dual desire to build and destroy a sanctified familial environment in Martha Street in Triomf. I explore how their disordered domesticity is a result of their disturbed urbanisation and rural displacement, as well as their historically unstable claims to the city, including its appropriation of the house in Martha Street. I treat the Benades' house as a site of imprisonment and haunting and trace ways in which the family struggles with and tries to escape from these disturbances, even while their very selves are inextricably bound to them.

My discussion of Ivan Vladislavić's *The Exploded View* and its four, intersecting narratives extends my analysis of the house to residential construction sites, informal housing, newly built and designed houses in gated communities in the city's peripheries, as well as to the archetypical middle class suburban home in changing Johannesburg. As I shall explore, the unstable and artificial qualities that are evoked in these private home spaces, in suburban parts of the city, reveal drives for privacy and protection that are not in keeping with the transitioning urban order but rather, are an extension of apartheid-like and colonial expressions of elitist exclusion.

Kgebetli Moele's *Room 207*, discussed last, pivots on the central characters' (referred to hereafter as the 207s) lives in a tiny flat in poor, overpopulated Hillbrow. The right to live in the inner city is one of the freedoms associated with the dismantlement of apartheid urban policies. However, for the 207s, their presence in the inner city is defined by their fractured claim to it, by feelings of impermanence as well as by poverty and frustration.

Domestic retreat and sanctity

The portraits of domestic place in each novel become more disturbing if one considers archetypical associations with the house and the nurturing environment it is usually considered to represent. The house in contemporary urban society can be perceived, in

relation to the melee of the outside world, as a repository of family customs, privacy, intimacy and even of safety. It is both a site of the imagination, a place invested with meaning, via subjectivity, and a centre of social and cultural praxis.

Gaston Bachelard's treatment of the house as the 'tool for analysis of the human soul' (1994: 37) evokes the idea that house is an intimate and protective 'shell,' or 'bosom' in which one's subjectivity is housed: 'our house is our corner of the world' (Ibid, 4). Nostalgically, Bachelard suggests, as we get older, the house is remembered as our primary place in the world. The 'humble home' (1994: 4) links us to our 'humble' origins, ostensibly before we become affected and shaped by the less comforting outside world. The house, then, is the space that we invest with meaning and attachment if we feel threatened. For this reason, one can think of the house as an extension of the body. Urban critic, Donatella Mazzoleni (1993: 292) writes that 'the walls of the house carry the same function as [...] the skins of our own bodies'. Preserving the house and preserving the body emerge through the same gesture of the protection of one's sovereignty so that, writes Lindsay Bremner:

at moments when the body threatens to become topographically discontinuous – as at birth, death, or in sexual intercourse – the house substitutes for the body, providing its continuity and ensuring it does not disintegrate...(houses) contain catastrophe and compose chaos.

(2010: 204)

Houses, and their gardens and even the neighbourhood then, as imagined, idealised and lived domestic environments, represent sovereignty, familiarity and boundedness– a place where one truly belongs.¹¹ Allegorically and materially, socially and psychologically, houses are universally seen to ground humans in space; they are primary sites that produce and are produced from ordinary life, composed, of the 'rituals of

¹¹ Heidegger's 'dwelling' has a similar connotation: a place that is made by humans in the world, a term meaning, 'to dwell, to be set at peace, means to remain at peace within the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its nature. *The fundamental character of dwelling is this sparing and preserving.*' (Heidegger, in Meagher, 2008:122. Heidegger, Martin. 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking' in Sharon Meagher (ed). *Philosophy and the City: Classic to Contemporary Writings*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008.

domesticity in their cyclical, repetitive ordinariness' (Mezei and Briganti, 2002: 842).

In this way, the house can be seen to operate not just as an ideal, but as a reflection and site of the profane and banal poetry of the everyday, so much so that:

houses, body and mind are in continuous interaction, the physical structure, furnishing, social conventions and mental images of the house at once enabling, moulding, informing and constraining the activities and ideas which unfold in its bounds.

(Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995: 2)

As an intimate site, the residential space is where 'one can finally feel secure' and is 'a personalized private territory where are invented "ways of operating" that gain a defining value: "For me, this is how I do it...we always do it this way"' (De Certeau and Giard, 1998: 147).

If keeping or maintaining one's house can be seen as an act or an attempt to recreate or preserve safety and intimacy in the face of dispersal in the outside world, one can imagine that this threat seems greater in the city, owing to the shifting patterns and unpredictability of public urban life. In fact, the house takes on greater significance as a private and comforting site in relation to the often 'hard' (Raban, 2002) energies of the external urban world. The urbanite looks for intimate, private space like the house to fend off the onslaught of the greater reaches of his or her environment. In the words of Pierre Mayol:

Faced with the totality of the city, obstructed by codes that the dweller has not mastered but that he or she must assimilate in order to live there, faced with a configuration of places imposed by urban planning, faced with social unevenness inside urban space, the dweller always succeeds in creating places of withdrawal [...]

(1998: 10)

Each novel depicts the difficulty of this action. If one considers the three sectors of society and urban sites represented by each novel – namely poor, white Afrikaners from

Triomf, middle class white English South Africans in suburbia and poor but aspirational black urban migrants in the inner city – each draws attention to the fraught narratives historically associated with the act of making a home in these areas and the affect of this on the psyche of its respective residents.

In that the home is usually seen as sacred, and in that this was so ambiguated through apartheid, the domestic places in these three novels reveal one of the most important sites in which one can trace historical patterns in Johannesburg's contemporary lived space. These novels do not suggest that every domestic site or domestic place under apartheid was totally controlled by the state. As discussed in my introduction, owing to the nature of lived space and the 'entangled' apartheid situation, many Johannesburgers would have subverted the totalising spatial system of apartheid in minute, often-invisible ways. Many houses or domestic spaces afforded South Africans respite from the brutality of the political situation.

On a day-to-day level, for example, the surveillance of private human life was practically impossible. The urban community of Sophiatown, for instance, is cherished as a most famous story of everyday resistance to the state (Kruger, 1997: 576; Samuelson, 2008: 63; Beningfield; 2006: 220). The dense inner city from as early as the 1900's housed thriving residential 'slums' – informal hubs of racially mixed, creative activity (Parnell: 2003). And certainly, as resistance to the state grew after the 1960's and by the 1970's, 'the city's divisions had cracked wide open' (Tomlinson *et al*: 2003: 5) and so reclaiming the domestic space was increasingly possible.

However, with the acknowledgement that apartheid was not monolithic, these narrative sites create insistent pictures of wounded domesticity and beg the reader to recognise the insidious nature of apartheid spatiality, especially its creation of false borders and zones for living, as argued by Lindsay Bremner:

Apartheid illustrated what happens when the kinds of violence that concentrate on borders (selection, separation, differentiation, confrontation, blockage) are generalised across political space as the permanent precondition for its

reproduction. More than simply external, its walls became internal realities, 'invisible borders [...] everywhere and nowhere' at the same time.

(2010: 169)

In each novel, the private space of the house is shown to mirror the exilic character of external life under apartheid. Imbued with ambivalence, each house bears the marks of fear and mistrust, even while the characters long to treasure or cherish it or even if this is concealed. This unsettled character of domestic place I associate with Homi Bhabha's 'unhomely'. He writes:

the unhomely is that condition when the recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions. In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting.

(1994:1)

While I have used Bhabha's concept of the unhomely as a metaphor for the post-apartheid experience in my introduction, I draw your attention to it here to as a frame for negotiating each novel's portrayals of domestic place and how this sanctity has become polluted by invasion and displacement, both materially and in the minds and actions of the protagonists.

Each novel aesthetically evokes the sense of historical burden within space and psyche with the use of rich, detailed descriptions and visceral evocations of the spatial experience within the language of the characters and narrator(s). The reader is plunged into the immediacy of the environment as well as into the layers of history within this palimpsestic site through the authors' mergings of subjectivities and places in image and metaphor. Read alone each novel brings the fraughtness of the domestic scene into relief. Read together, the intense predicament of unhomeliness is evoked as being a shared experience, spanning the separate reaches of the city, touching three different yet interlinking zones of apartheid inheritance.

Triomf: Edgy house

So much rubbish. Next to the rose bush on one side lies a bathroom cabinet, the one Lambert ripped right off the wall the other day when the mirror didn't fit. And next to that, a few odd planks Lambert wants to use for a bigger and better bathroom cabinet. Always wants to be bigger and better, that's Lambert for you. On this side of the kitchen, three used-up Dogmor tins and a crate of empties. And on the other side, three old GTX-tins and a box of empty Klipdrift bottles... Then there's Lambert's old bed, with its imploded legs and its exploded stuffing, pushed up against the other wall.

(Triomf: 322)

Introduction

I return to 127 Martha Street's state of dereliction to introduce some of the core tensions that produce the Benades' dysfunctional domestic place. As poor, drunk, fearful Afrikaners, the family seems to have little regard for the structure of their house. However, as I shall discuss in this section, their behaviour holds within it traces of their dark family history and a historically fraught relationship to Johannesburg. They are viciously attached to their house and to the surrounding white neighbourhood but are also apprehensive of it and repelled by it, owing to their own mistrust of the state and their damaged relationship to the world around them. These contradictions give rise to the Benades' paradoxical relationship to their residence's structure, its symbolic value and their practices within it. The reader can look to the house for clues as to how to understand the family's subjectivity.

Marked by removal: Sophiatown and Triomf

Before I explore these tensions in more detail I would like to illuminate key aspects of the area's historic legacy and the shift from Sophiatown to Triomf's housing plan. The threat of the Sophiatown of the 1940s and 1950s was its dynamism and mobile energy and the fact that it greatly undermined the increasingly popular ideology of separate development. A predominantly African but mixed suburb, roughly seven kilometres from the centre of the city, Sophiatown was the antithesis of apartheid urbanity. It was famed for 'its richly heterodox population [...] and its transnational stylizations' (Samuelson, 2008: 63). As a mixed and dynamic community, its 'swarming, cacophonous, strutting,

brawling, vibrating life' (Nkosi in Beningfield, 2009: 177), embodied fluid urban social forms¹² that were not part of the state's apartheid vision. Loren Kruger, describes the early days of this multi-racial environment as:

Part ghetto, part urban bazaar, a meeting place of black radicals, bohemians of all colours and organized and disorganised criminals, Sophiatown was an actual but thoroughly imagined place that came, despite the violence perpetuated by police and tsotsis, to symbolize a utopia of racial tolerance and cultural diversity, crushed by the apartheid juggernaut and later buried under the weight of more militant times.

(1997: 576)

Forcibly removing the Sophiatown population in 1955 was part of the state's strategy to erase black Africans' ties to the city and the black South African population's attempts to reclaim urban '*civitas* and citizenship [...] from an apartheid state attempting to return them to rural idiocy' (Kruger: 776). Despite the potency of Sophiatown, resistance to the forced removals was overcome easily and its families were moved to locations situated further away from the urban hub. The newly built Soweto was constructed as a response to mass evictions throughout the city and was the first major development in the township phase of the state's plans for 'separate development'.

Built on the ruins of Sophiatown, Triomf was intended to be a 'triumphant symbol of Afrikaner racial domination' (Sparks, 1990:187). Primarily, it was built to deal with the crisis in housing that began 'with the rapid urbanisation of rural Afrikaners during the 1930s and 1940s' (Beningfield, 2009: 176). For clusters of poor, depression-era Afrikaners, forced to the city from the *plaas* that has been the cornerstone of Afrikaner national identity, Triomf was seen as the end-point to the long, arduous passage into urbanisation. As the site was claimed for Afrikaans families, it was strategically

¹² Sophiatown's magic, according to Can Themba, was that it allowed for the movement to and between everyday activities that were culturally and socially varied. He writes that: 'You don't just find your place here, you make it and you find yourself. There's a tang about it. You might now and then have to give way to others making their ways of life by methods that aren't in the book, but you can't be bored. You have the right to listen to the latest jazz records at Ah Sing's over the road. You can walk a Coloured girl of an evening down to the Odin Cinema, and no questions asked. You can try out Rhugubar's curry with your bare fingers without embarrassment. All this with no sense of heresy'. (Themba, 1972: 107, in Beningfield, Jennifer, 2009: 177)

‘integrated into the historical narrative of white occupation of the land’ (Beningfield, 2009: 176) in order to ensure the loyalty of displaced families, like the Benades. Giving such families ‘their own piece of land in the city’ (Beningfield, 2009: 245) not only supplanted a thriving site of African urban modernity with an Afrikaans one but also welcomed the steadily growing white labour force into the burgeoning apartheid city. As most black South Africans in the Sophiatown were poor labourers, Triomf in the middle of apartheid ironically resembled the neighbourhood it had replaced.

These parallels could also be seen in the physical structure of the houses. While overt signs of the former neighbourhood, such as actual structures and street names, were altered or eradicated, the houses that were built were similarly single-storied and lain over the same grid as Sophiatown’s. The resonances between both two sets of houses remind the reader of the ironies of apartheid and of the fact that Triomf’s houses were far from ‘triumphant’.

Beningfield writes:

The single-storey buildings are pulled apart on their sites: in a dream of post-war suburbia, open ground separates each family home and gives a front and a back garden. The working drawings include a fencing plan – wire and not walls surrounded each small territory. The four different house types were designed around the family unit, with bedrooms, living room, kitchen and bathroom. The different units were repeated around the regular street pattern, the majority of which was retained from the days of Sophiatown. After the long verandas and densities of Sophiatown, the buildings and the spaces in which they are sited seem naked and exposed. The abundance of internal space in the plots and the decrease in the density of the population changed both the use and meaning of the streets. The infertility of the debris of the removals has ensured that little vegetation has softened Triomf, even decades after its construction.

(2009: 246)

Thus, physically, Sophiatown haunts the house and the family. Furthermore, more so than simply being haunted by the shadowy presence of the former townships, the domestic debris of Sophiatown undermines the boundaries between the Benades and the removed

black families by reminding them of their own historical itinerancy. The traces of Sophiatown mock the family's claims to the land and the city and also expose the brutality and absurdity of the Afrikaner regime of power, which the Benades and Triomf signify. Triomf, as Beningfield reminds us, was an empty, desolate space where 'the poverty of its materials, the monotony of the architecture and the socio-economic profile of the inhabitants creates a sense of quiet but watchful desperation' (Beningfield, 2009: 246).

Their house reflects the ambivalence of the state and its policies too. The bungalow on Martha Street is their 'rightful' home, given to them by the state. But, the novel's detailing of the loss of their family farm and their subsequent urbanisation into a dreary and dark poverty shows that the Afrikaner state, in its drive for industrial modernity and power, also had a hand in the Benades' psycho-spatial suffering. Triomf, like Vrededorp, where the family lives immediately after coming into Johannesburg, was developed as a poor, working class catchment area on the urban fringe – a neighbourhood tinged with an aura of neglect, poverty and even shame. The house in Triomf is a symbolic prize and a reminder of their own sorry lot within the apartheid city. Moreover, unbeknownst to many incoming white families, its original growth as a black residential zone in the 1920s was due to its location: it lies very close to a large sewage works and refuse dump (Samuelson, 2008: 63) and was seen as unfit for the white families who lived there in the early 1900s. So, in addition to its bleakness, the house's location and the position of the neighbourhood in relation to the lay of the city literally stinks, as seen in this vivid description from the novel:

The houses lie in a hollow between two ridges. On days like this it smells of tar. Tar and tyres. And if there's a breeze, then you also smell that curry smell coming from the Industrial side. Pop says it's not curry, it's batteries.

(31)

The wretched stench infects the area's houses just as it did in Sophiatown's time. This further undermines the very idea of a pure or pristine zone of habitation. Sadly too, the Triomf the reader meets in the novel lacks the former settlement's colourful and vibrant

culture. This reminds the reader and the Benades that this is a ‘mock-paradise’ (*Triomf*, 91) a badly designed and poorly positioned peripheral area and a thinly veneered dumping ground for poor white Afrikaans families. The Benades’ house becomes imbued with the stench of this convoluted history, disturbing it. Reciprocally, the family sustains their dislocation from it through their daily practices so that the two entities, family and house, give rise to and feed each other’s dysfunctionality.

This is not to say that the family is not deeply attached to their domestic space. They often reject the daily reminders of the township in their space, just as they resist the evidence of their social marginalisation from greater Johannesburg society through reinvented stories about the past and attempts to integrate themselves within their community. I explore some of these attempts in more detail in the following section. In relation to their domestic selves and space, these same energies are evident in their prevailing sense of ownership and pride about Martha Street. While they are aware of the ironies in their situation – the systemic origins of their destitution and shameful existence – they are still proud of the fact that the house in Martha Street belongs to them. Mol’s memory of Sophiatown’s screaming families and their destroyed belongings was formed when the Benades came to survey the site in 1955. Even as they witnessed the destruction around them, they were emboldened by a sense of propriety over the future suburb. This was partly produced through the apartheid state’s construction of a narrative of the Afrikaner’s rights to geographical inheritance and partly by their own desperate need for a place of safety and privacy. Treppie’s insistence that ‘he didn’t want to hear any of them complaining that they weren’t going up in the world’ (*Triomf*: 2) asks the reader to consider the Benades’ passage into the urban world and the fact that as a family, they choose to ignore or miss evidence of their own unhappiness.

New Home?

The novel draws on another spatial relationship to depict how the Benades’ history in the city has been defined by destitution and misery, as seen in descriptions of their first house, the ‘semi’ in Vrededorp. This area was for railway workers and the first point of entry in the city for the old family in 1938 coming from the family’s Klipfontein farm.

The family stayed in the Vrededorp house for two decades, despite their misery and the fact that it was seen as a provisional solution to their housing problem:

his father said it was temporary – after a week they'd have the whole semi to themselves. Two bedrooms, a kitchen and a bathroom [...] In the end they spent more than three full years sharing half a house with the Beyleveldts. And it wasn't even a proper half-house. There was a passage linking it to the other half, where three more families lived. All with strapping children who were so famished, they stripped the Benades' food cupboard bare [...] They all lived in one room. The children saw everything the grown-ups did [...]

(124)

This description develops an analogous relationship between the Benade family's dejected and disturbed state in Triomf and their introduction to urbanism. From this point, the family is shown to be migrants, a group of interlopers who have to scavenge for shelter and work and who become emblems of a generational Afrikaner malaise that began with the Great Depression. When Old Mol and Old Pop die, the causes of their deaths are linked to the space around them: Old Pop hangs himself in a train carriage, the symbol of the forms of labour that both saved and destroyed the family unit. Old Mol expires from tuberculosis, a disease notoriously afflicting poorer families in dense and overcrowded houses and lived areas.

As the narrative progresses, the reader comes to understand that it is in this depressing house that Mol, Pop and Treppie begin their incestuous affair. The underlying idea generated in these details is that the Benades' subjectivities were nurtured through the loss of the rural home, their harsh urbanisation process, as well as through the insulated and suffocating environment of the old Vrededorp house and surrounding neighbourhood.

After these flashbacks to the family's earlier experiences in Vrededorp, the reader comes to recognise the depressive dereliction in the Triomf house. 127 Martha Street is also filthy, cramped and misused however, for the first time in their history in Johannesburg, the Benades have ownership of a home. Here at last is their *own* 'roof over our heads' (115) – the shelter that Old Pop repetitively reminded them that they should consider

themselves to be blessed with. Typical of Van Niekerk's narrative gesture, this idea of a 'roof over their heads' is not uncomplicated. Surfacing in numerous instances throughout the novel, the simple lines 'a roof over our heads' reminds the reader of the Benades' desperate yearning for safety after decades of itinerancy. It also signifies, despite their struggles in the city, their belief in the primacy of a domestic family unit – both their own and that of the 'Afrikaner family' that they feel affiliated with. But, in that the Benades' lives in the city have been marred by poverty and dysfunction even under the protective sheath of apartheid, this phrase becomes a glaring reminder of the family's paradoxical situation: their desire to protect a dream has blinkered their understanding of the reasons behind their miserable existence. With the exception of Treppie, the family largely exists without an objective understanding of its place within the more sinister apartheid narrative.

An early moment in the novel, focalised through Lambert, emphasises this tension. Mol, Pop, Lambert and Treppie stand outside the house and after calling Treppie calling Triomf 'Shitfontein' and 'Crapville'. Pop reminds them that:

'at least we still have each other, and a roof over our heads.'
That's what Old Pop always used to say, too, way back in the thirties when they kept seeing their arses so badly in Vrededorp. Time and time again.
So when Pop came out last night and asked, 'what you all looking at,' he took the gap and said to him, very nicely: 'We're looking at each other, Pop, and the roof over our heads, cause that's all we got left to look at.'

(115)

The need to hold onto these four walls and keep themselves within them translates as a wish to protect their tenuous claim to the city and their insular and prejudiced views, even when this is also the cause of their dilapidated and conflicted existence. It is not by chance then that the roof itself is described as follows:

Some of the roof's corrugated strips have come loose. Every year a few more.
She's going to have to put down empty tins and buckets all over the show again.
Leaks. Just leaks all over the place.

And then there's also the overflow that keeps on dripping. So bad, all the wood's peeling off. Here and there the wood's rotted through completely. Loose pieces hanging from the roof.

(9)

Here the reader senses that the structure that holds them together is falling apart. The idea that they are protected by the symbolic and material 'roof over their heads' is flawed. Like the loose pieces of wood, the Benades hold onto a weak narrative that has become further tested by time. As the novel continues, the reader understands that the state of the house and the state of the Benades' relationship to each other within the house are wound up in a fraught and confused pattern of attachment and detachment, conceptually configured in this idea of a 'mock' or fictitious paradise.¹³

Lying beneath the ground

A further irony comes through the fact that the derelict state of the roof, taken to represent the ragged but intact 'family' unit, in fact reinforces the Benades' connection to Sophiatown. On the plot level, the roof description cited above occurs shortly after Mol comes in from watching Lambert excavate the ruins of Sophiatown. The textual proximity of the opening scene of the novel documenting the destroyed remnants of Sophiatown with this description of the house merges Mol's sense of disquiet over Sophiatown with the domestic space of the family so that these two spaces become inextricably linked to each other. This suggests that the house is corroded by their appropriation of this neighbourhood and by the traumas of the sediment on which they built their precious roof over their heads. It also shows how they are unable to extricate themselves from this history.

The presence of Sophiatown's debris evoked here in the detail of this passage makes the Benades fear more for the loss of their place. The objective visibility of the debris mirrors the impression that the details and 'debris' of the past will continue to affect the present. As the threat of the future and a new political and socio-spatial dispensation encroaches –

¹³ The idea that there is a thin veneer covering the horrors of the Benades' history also emerges in the characters' consistent references to the Triomf as 'wallpaper' – suggesting that it is, as Treppie argues, a 'mock-paradise' (91) I discuss this further in relation to this novel in Section Two.

one that will possibly resurrect the Sophiatown of old – the Benades become defensive and contract their grip on their abode. For Meg Samuelson, the act of digging up Sophiatown can be read as ‘an extended metaphor of the need for whites to encounter and come to terms with the black presence cleared but not expunged from the city’s surface’ (2008:70). However, in my reading, despite what the presence of Sophiatown potentially signals for the family, they are clouded by their desire to protect what is theirs: the only home and place that they have, not just in the city, but in the country too. Disinherited from the quasi-mythical place of their forefathers – the farm – the city has become their land now. But, the Benades are like Coetzee’s farmer who, although he has lost his connection to the land retains his relationship to it, to that which has been lost. By consequence, he becomes defined by a displaced longing (Coetzee, 1988). While the Benades are dislocated from this idyll, they transpose it onto their home in Triomf, and desperately seek to protect a previous ideal, even when this impulse threatens to destroy them.¹⁴ They become ravaged by the image they impose on the house, unable to truly create what they lost years before.

In fact, the human debris underneath the Benades’ house undermines their connection to mythical *plaas* by parodying the ‘signs of lineage’ normally found on it. Coetzee, in his study of the *plaasroman* in *White Writing*, explains that traditionally, the farm is ‘an area of nature inscribed with signs of the lineage: with evidences of labour and with bones in the earth’ (1988:109). The bones in the earth are usually the bones of the ancestor’s forefathers, and act as a reminder of a lived historical heritage and connection to the land. But, as Lara Buxbaum explains, Triomf subverts this:

While the ancestors of the farmer in the *plaasroman* haunt him to remind him of his duty to perpetuate his lineage [...] the Benades are 'haunted' by ghosts of black residents forced off their land.

(2011: 34)

¹⁴ This is another paradox of the apartheid story: as the Benades invest in their claims to the urban space they become more restrained by their desire for the lost rural idyll and are unable to move fluidly into the contemporary moment. I investigate this dynamic and its effects on the family in my last section.

Severed from their connection to the farm, ‘dumped’ in Triomf, and belonging nowhere else, the Benades are both interlopers and refugees. Sophiatown’s sediment may reveal the overlaps between the ordinary lives of the people of Sophiatown and those of this Afrikaner family, as Clarkson earlier suggests, but the act of coming to terms with this historical reality threatens the family with effacement and inspires its eschatological nightmares. Thus, while the Benades’ domestic situation shows the weaknesses in the myth of Afrikaner dominion, it also shows how the family’s relationship to place is produced by anxiety about further exile. Jack Shear comments that:

Triomf, then, can never truly be a blank slate on which to inscribe an urban planning ideal. The ground that the new residencies are built on is already compromised; paradoxically, it is comprised of both hollows and rubbish, haunted by presence and absence. Either of these qualities on their own would be enough to taint Triomf, but the suburb’s foundation keeps sinister secrets.

(2006: 78)

The notion of a racially clean ‘blank slate’ has already been undermined by descriptions of Triomf, but Shear’s comment reminds the reader of how the spectre of Sophiatown affects the family’s impressions of their lives on the surface. The Benades’ distrust of Triomf and their disappointment in this ‘mock paradise’ because of its role within the overarching apartheid narrative, sustains a hollowness in them which erodes their trust in the larger city. For them the city comes to embody their growing, but already existent, sense of absence so that the patterns of urbanity around them come to remind them of a *lack*:

Sirens wail all over Jo’burg. Shots go off on Ontdekkers.
‘Who’s shooting?’ his mother asks.
‘Those are just the taxis that are missing, Ma.’
‘It’s Jo’burg that’s missing,’ Treppie says.

(285)

This lack pervades their sense of place so deeply that they family transfers their own state of being onto the city, unable to distinguish where they and it begin or end. Suddenly it’s Jo’burg that is missing and not their own safety or sanity. As their fear grows about the

future city, they transpose their feelings onto the city, as a way of evading the fact that the heart of their instability is within the four walls of their home and in their everyday practices. Jack Shear writes that:

With this uncertainty of future in view, Johannesburg takes on an atmosphere of apocalyptic possibility. The city becomes a World Serpent, waiting to swallow Afrikaner culture whole: as Treppie observes, “Jo’burg’s like a big massive iron dinosaur devouring itself, tail first, screws and brackets flying through the air”

(2006: 89)

The family incarnates their fear into a mythical monster, a ‘massive iron dinosaur’ that is both an insignia of the future and an embodiment of the family’s pathological state and their attempt to refuse culpability. Johannesburg is the monster, not the state they support and not themselves. The fierce image of the dinosaur takes on historical and ironic weight if one considers that in its mechanical form, it resembles industry and the pull of the urban, which marked the beginning of the Benades’ suffering. Simultaneously prehistoric, obsolete and futuristic, the dinosaur embodies the Benades’ own terrible anxiety about the city and their future in it. It also reminds the reader that they are inseparable from its clutches since they evolved into their current form through its maw.

Their fear of the future and their own urban selves is so great that the family has already planned its escape, envisioning itself as a group of *trekkers* (pioneers), freedom-seeking *boere* (farmers) who can escape persecution by overland migration and resettlement. The fact that the Benades would abandon their house shows a conflicting interplay between historical associations of the Afrikaner legacy and contemporary ones. One of the cornerstones of Afrikaner nationalism is the ‘Great Trek’ of the 1830’s when a large group of Afrikaners broke away from away from the British colony in the Cape and settled in the inhospitable north, creating a new, free state or *volk*. For the Benades, imagining leaving Johannesburg is a way of tapping into a story that is part of their cultural archive and this empowers them to a degree. However, it becomes clear to the reader that ultimately, the Benades are so deeply tied to 127 Martha Street, that leaving is

impossible, even as life there is difficult and is a constant reminder of their dislocation from Afrikaans society and from mainstream urban life.

Visible cracks in the house's walls mirror the brittleness of their current situation. Mol's emotive discourse and attention to minutiae draws our attention to the analogous relationship between house and family. So too does the cynical voice of Treppie remind the reader how these cracks are synonymous with the Benades' relationship to their immediate environment:

'Cracks she says. 'Just look at the cracks.' She wipes her hand over the wall, once, as if she wants to wipe away the cracks.
He remains seated for a long time in Pop's chair. He looks at the hole in the wall where the plaster fell off, at the cracks all around it. One by one he looks at the cracks, how they run up the wall, until he can't see them anymore, until they disappear into the high-gloss paint.
But he knows, under the paint they go on, invisible to the eye. Once it gets going, a crack in plaster is something that keeps running. Once it starts, you can never stop it!

(113)

The cracks in the house cannot be halted, just as the cracks within the family in this place also cannot be stopped. This description crosses the boundary from setting into characterisation and the reader comes to understand that the cracks in the house are a metaphor for the state of the Benades' relationship to ancestry, to home and to the urban.

Violent internalisation

As the novel progresses, the reader comes to see how the family's self-destructive behaviour is symptomatic of their inability to separate themselves from these conflicting dynamics. This is embodied in the text's portrayals of actions around and within the domestic sphere. Lambert, in particular, has bouts of rage where he burns and trashes household belongings, pieces of the car and the garden. If Lambert represents the 'seed' of the family, then one can see his aggression as an embodiment towards the house of the kernel of the family's conflicted relationship to their dwelling. Lambert's actions add to the house's ruined state. While the other Benades live in fear of him, he is not the only

one who acts out his frustrations on the house or the only family member who is self-destructive within the site of the home. Treppie incites violent exchanges amongst family members and often eggs Lambert on, charging him with insults and stories, drawing him to the brink of a type of physical and mental delirium tends to trigger his rage and also, his debilitating epilepsy. Mol and Pop are placid in comparison to these two but both are prone to bouts of heavy drinking and get caught up in the domestic dramas that play themselves out on the property. From the beginning, the house is a site of carnage on both major and minor scales, ranging from wild, joyous inebriation on the lawn and in the lounge, to hellish scenes of flames and smoke.

Involved in a twisting, turning self-perpetuating cycle of affect, the family recreates, time and again, a danger zone in which they are at once welcomed and repelled. But, through their acts of violence the family seems to be trying to amplify its connection to its immediate environment. Their antics, a product of their class, one could argue, also seem to be attempts to make themselves known or present in the face of their marginalisation and fragmentation. By leaving their mark so clearly and extremely on the facade of the house, the Benades show their need to prove themselves real in the face of both the historic and renewed threat of erasure. Moreover, in that their dwelling is a poor and generic state model, their destruction of the house can be seen as a perverse way of crafting and claiming their space. In a way, they are making the house their own, distinguishing it according to a domestic aesthetic thought which their urban subjectivities have evolved. This kind of perversity is a function of the fact that they lack both the material and psycho-social means to alter their existence. Their treatment of the house is thus both a response to and a cause of a historical cycle from which they are unable and reluctant to extricate themselves. This is mirrored in the narrative structure where voices and spaces overlap and repeat each other, creating a sense of circularity and containment, thus evoking the seen and unseen layers of geopathic disorder.

Generally, the family does not attempt to conceal its outbursts in the house and in the garden. The exterior garden often becomes a communal meeting place for the family, a public arena for their screaming fights and is also Lambert's workshop and the arena for

spectacular showdowns like Lambert's burning of the family car and his fights with the 'Fort Knox' neighbours. While their antics in the more public region of the garden ensures their ostracisation from surrounding families, the Benades' visibility in these scenarios also allows them to lay claim to their domestic space. After one of the many incidents where the Benades have disrupted the peace, the Fort Knox neighbour shouts:

'We're going to put the municipality on you! Do you think you're the only people in this street, hey?' Just look at the mess here again. Everything is full of soot and smoke! My carp can't breathe in this air. They're still going to come and take you away here, the whole lot of you and all your fucken rubbish. You're worse than kaffirs, you lot! Blarry filth. A plague. Sies! Siesa! Don't you have any shame?'

(242)

However, in claiming their territory through violent and drunk action the Benades mock the very concept of domestic territory in the city. Indeed, for the neighbours, the Benades are threatening not simply because their deranged antics spill over into the yard next door but, more importantly, because they violate the flimsy surfaces of the Afrikaner state's spatial plan and appropriation of 'home'. The Benades' delinquency disrupts the legitimacy of their neighbour's claims to decency and supremacy and undermines the basis of their presence as remind the whole neighbourhood of the violent displacement that facilitated their settlement.

The heart of the home

Compared to the exposed mayhem outside in the yard, the interior space of the house is characterised by a suffocating insularity. The interior is not safe though, even while it may offer protection from the outside world and from an environment in which they feel increasingly alienated from or haunted by. The darkened rooms of the house also signal a major source of the Benades' shame. Mol is habitually raped by all three men, either in the back rooms or underneath the house in her son, Lambert's den. This is the site of incest, where the secret of the family's lineage remains concealed.

The interior of the house may offer them respite from the outside world, but it keeps them bound up in claustrophobic, destructive patterns. While the Benades have created this

atmosphere with their behavioural patterns, the house becomes analogous with the family's burdens and takes on an ominous character at times, as can be seen in Mol's observations on Guy Fawkes' night:

The house is dark and closed. She can see the cracks on their outside walls [...] the house is just a shell. But she knows the stuff inside that house is thick. Thick and quiet from all the things that have happened. All that escapes from the thick stuff inside is the flickering blue light of the TV [...]

(255)

The 'thickness' of the house and the repetitive use of the word, 'thick' reiterates the claustrophobia of the family's internal world, both domestic and mental. This amplifies the intensity of Mol's rape and the family's incest, and the presence of old feuds and bitter rivalries, sad memories of the past and the heavy weight of a family unable to bring itself out of the cyclical pattern they have been in for two generations. The rooms of the house hide their sins, but also incubate their distortions, evoking Treppie's words that '[e]veryone looks for fucken shit and that's just about all you'll ever get around here, too' (115).

This 'fucken shit' pervades the interior of the house in tangible and poetic ways. The communal spaces inside the house, living room and the kitchen, bear the signs of slovenliness – milk crates and bottles adorn the floors in the lounge, the kitchen is dirty. As the novel progresses, and the Benades' fears grow, these rooms start to bear the signs of the family's heightening frustrations. The kitchen becomes gradually filthier, the communal rooms increasingly trashed. By November, 'there's so much stuff lying around on the floor, the door won't open properly' (253). The door of Lambert's den, too, has a heap of 'rubbish and scrap iron' blocking the door. The bathroom is in a similar state of disarray. The interior of the house begins to mirror the Benades' feelings of entropy, soaking them further in the debris of their past.

One particular scene in the novel draws the reader's attention to the textures of the family's domestic disorders. Treppie is in the bathroom. He sees an incongruously placed

‘soft rubber tube they use for siphoning petrol on the nail behind the door’ (323) and the family’s misshapen personal objects, like ‘their toothbrushes, warped and lopsided [...] three bent-open hairpins. Two buttons’ (323). These flimsy, sad artifacts are layered throughout the house: ‘you’ll find their personal effects all over the house’ Treppie mutters, ‘[t]heir spit and their blood and their breath’ (323). In the bathroom, he sees, ‘paw-marks all over the walls. Yellow afternoon light shines through the bathroom’s frosted window, making a dull spot of light on the wall. Just there, someone’s oily hand touched the wall’ (323). In the description above, the house reflects the ‘warped and lopsided’ presence of the family in Triomf. There is some ambiguity around the presence of both ‘paw marks’ and the ‘oily hand’ print. Both invoke the presence of wild beasts or animalistic behaviour. Moreover, these pieces of domestic life within the house are strikingly evocative of the debris from Sophiatown residents’ lives. These descriptions pull the two sites together, destabilising their differences and reminding us of the penetrability of the present by the past. The Benades, for the most part, try to ignore or stamp out these reminders of this paradox. However they are immersed within constant reminders of it and even while they evade it, they are bound to it.

The interior of the house also reveals the familial order. There exists a strange nuclear family arrangement in the house and an order of domestic hierarchy. A number of critics have commented on how the Benade family is a parody of the archetypical Afrikaner nuclear family (Devarenne, 2006; Shear, 2006; Brophy, 2006). Van Niekerk uses this incestuous, broken family to undermine the familial motifs and religious ideologies at the heart of Afrikaner Nationalism. But, the Benades’ desire to play certain roles within the home also shows a desperate need for closeness and familiarity, things that were lost during their urbanisation. In their attempts to play ‘happy families’ they entrench themselves further within a stagnant arrangement, one that began in the bedroom in Vrededorp when Mol, Pop and Treppie were young children. I discuss the Benades’ stagnation further in the following two sections, but the oppressive character of the house reveals how their attempts to create a semblance of safety and familial closeness is both a response to the threat of the external world and a trap that keeps them unfit for it.

Each member of the family has access to a private bedroom: a zone that is at once a sanctuary and a grotesque and distorted version of a safe, personal hideaway. Lambert's den is a diabolic lair ruined by his fits of rage and epilepsy. It is also his private artistic place. His painting of the family on the walls and roof of the basement is harrowing and bizarrely comical, an interpretation of his home, his family and his continent. While comical, it threatens to consume and overtake the empty spaces of the walls¹⁵, but recounts to the reader how the narrative of the family is imprinted on their space, is embedded in the walls and textures of their family home. Lambert, by creating the painting on the walls, defies a separation from them and thus binds the family to the site of 127 Martha Street and to the fierce interiority of the family history and home.

Mol and Pop share a derelict room, Treppie has his own. Like the others, it is filthy, sparsely decorated and almost uninhabitable. The resemblance to an ordinary familial situation is disconcerting and also serves as a poignant reminder of the family's search for security, even if this search creates a claustrophobia from which they struggle to remove themselves. One can trace this tension in 'BATH' (261), one of the most evocative and tender scenes that takes place within the house's interior. Pop and Mol are in the bathroom, washing by candlelight, almost in total darkness. They come to this room, temporarily safe in their confinement from the rest of the family and from the tumult of their lives. Neither their bedroom nor bathroom has curtains. This is unsettling for Mol, for there is a chance that someone on the outside might see them. Her nervousness reflects the family's fear of invasion and detection. This fear is organised around what they are to the world – incestuous and ill-fitted to modern urban life. It is also important to both Mol and Pop that their tenderness is concealed. They have spent their lives hiding their incestuous relationship. However, the need for darkness also speaks about the place that is reserved for tenderness within their house. The darkness permits a secret engagement in the way that light or being in the world and part of this damaged family seems to deny.

¹⁵ I examine the significance of this mural in more detail in the last Section, treating it as a metaphorical template for the Benades' ensnarement in history.

For Mol, the darkness becomes like a balm:

Mol goes and fetches the towel in the bedroom, feeling for it in the dark. She doesn't want to put the light on. Why not, she can't understand. Maybe the dark's like warm water. And maybe that's also what Pop's thinking. Maybe he's thinking it will make them feel better after this day.

(264)

Seen in this way, the recesses of the house provide a private sanctum for rare instances of softness. And so, while the house is a site of violence and intense insularity, it is also a site for escape and concealment. This tension is evoked further in Treppie's habits too, such as the way in which he conceals himself within the toilet, to read and to think and write poems. One can see this same pattern in Lambert's retreats to his dungeon-like den. His art and antics down there are private acts performed in his own room, away from the family. Moreover, the sign of these private moments, afforded by the shelter of the house, forms a stark contrast to the spectacular antics that occur in plain sight within the rest of the house, often spilling from one room to the next.

Despite the 'untriumphant' quality to Triomf, the Benades have invested a desire for permanence in 127 Martha Street, and this desire is powerful. The family is bound to the house and is fiercely protective of it, even while they are haunted by what their house represents. The complexities of their relationship to their house are encapsulated in Mol's invocation of a tabernacle – a spiritual home for displaced people. The house, she thinks, has become a symbol of their 'struggle by the sweat of their brows to dot the i's and cross the t's', it's never too late to build a tabernacle' (322). The Benades' home, like the built structure of a tabernacle, represents both uncertainty and the possibility of an anchor. Neither a completely safe haven nor the wasteland in which the biblical tabernacle was built, the house is the container for their fears and yearnings for place, a broken down, unfixed, yet potentially potent site in which their humanity and subjectivity resides. The family is inextricably bound to it as if their breath, blood and urbanism are rooted in its foundations or its very presence.

Conclusion

The Benades' fear of imminent change, and their fraught urban history manifests in their defensiveness and insularity. But as one can see in the space of their house, they create a fearful situation within their four walls as well. The burden of their situation is compounded by a dreary and poor existence in a suburb that is spilling over with the ghosts of the past – both their own and those of Sophiatown. Inside the house, the secret documents in the living room, discovered only when the family inadvertently agrees to have the whole house painted, send Lambert into a rage. He murders Pop in his chair in the living room. The family brings upon themselves the Armageddon they feared from the outside. The house becomes the site of their imprisonment. In this act though, the contradictions of their domestic situation come to light again. After Pop's death, the idea of leaving is no longer entertained. Treppie's words, 'No more North' (474) and the final lines of the text, 'North no more', signal that the Benades, in all their disturbances, are in the only home they have. Becoming emplaced or feeling at home in the changing terrain would mean coming to terms with the manifestations of political and personal history within their home and neighbourhood.

The ending of the novel leaves the family standing in their yard, casting their eyes to the skies. Whether this signals their end, or the possibility of new beginnings remains deliberately ambiguous. The Benades stand little chance of integration and change and yet their little house and their little family remains planted firmly in the ground, on top of the debris, still standing in the face of the oncoming future and the imprint of the past on their space and themselves. This final image also suggests the survival of the Benades' story within the historical narrative of South Africa. This reminds the reader of the vital place this family and this text have within contemporary South African letters and their role in recounting this version of the city's history. In stark contrast to the intense debris of the domestic space, the Benades stand looking into empty space and skies. Here is an underlying suggestion of release from the past not simply through the passage of time and the changes portended by the future but through the act of storytelling and creating an audience for the Benades' situation. Van Niekerk, in putting this narrative into the public space of the country, permits an avenue for an interrogation of history through the space

of the text, even if this interrogation is uncertain in the eyes of the Benades or in the 1994 moment.

The Exploded View: Suburban Bliss

[t]he boundaries of Johannesburg are drifting away, sliding over the pristine ridges and valleys, lodging in tenuous places, slipping again. At its edges, where the city fades momentarily into the veld, unimaginable new atmospheres evolve.

(The Exploded View: 6)

Introduction

The passage above evokes the kinds of urban replacements, displacements, slippages, erasures and renewals that signal the energies of change within Johannesburg's landscapes, post-transition. In terms of prose, this kind of detailing of absence, of 'edges' is typical of Vladislavić's narrative style and evocation of space. Vladislavić's evocative introduction to this novel belies his portrayals of the city's suburbs since both the settings of the city's suburban peripheries and the leafy northern residential area of Greenside are depicted as fortress-like, cordoned off from the rest of the city. Indeed, while Vladislavić initially describes the boundaries of the city as slipping away, he constructs in the rest of the text strangely familiar, archaic suburban structures resembling the old-world, gardened homes of the wealthy colonial and apartheid elite. Unlike the bleak and inhospitable suburb of Triomf, areas like Greenside and the lush, gated communities of Centurion and Midrand present an idealised vision of human inhabitation. But, the increasing fortification and artificiality of these settings continue the architectural and social language of apartheid. In this way, these parts of the city and the characters within the stories are shown to be disturbed by a reiteration of past patterns, just as Triomf and her residents are. While not as ridden with cast away objects and debris or as neurotically charged as the setting and narrative delivery in *Triomf*, these poetic spaces still contest the idea of the smooth transition to the post-apartheid city and show how the country and citizens are tied to rehearsed patterns of spatiality.

The shapes and aesthetics of these new, fortified residential projects can be seen as a ‘hysterical’ reaction, as Achille Mbembe argues (2004), to the threat of change to the spatial order felt by those who benefited most from apartheid spatiality. Each of the four characters is ostensibly middle-class, educated, and an established individual in the city. They have therefore not evolved through the same kinds of urban traumas, as have the characters in both *Triomf* and *Room 207*. However, this does not mean that they are unaffected by their inheritance of a particular way of thinking about space and society and that this way of thinking is not crippling. In fact, *The Exploded View* depicts how the seemingly disaffected individual is *affected* by developments in Johannesburg on both a conscious and unconscious level. Each man battles with the suburban enclaves with which he is affiliated even as he subscribes to the ethos of these areas and what they tend to represent. These tensions can be traced in complex ways in this novel and reveal much about the process of transition and the anxieties it has produced.

Vladislavić’s treatment of the residential dwelling in each story highlights the design, planning, representation and consumption of the house structure as well as its symbolic value within the urban political landscape. Of the four strands, three of them, namely ‘Villa Toscana’, ‘Afritude Sauce’ and ‘Crocodile Lodge’ most clearly deal with newer developments on the city’s fringes. ‘Curiouser’ stands out since Greenside is a more central, older suburb closer to the former heart of Johannesburg. ‘Curiouser’s’ protagonist, Majara, is the only character in the novel who is developed most visibly ‘at home’. He is also the only black character. The three other protagonists, Budlender, Duffy and Egan, are intertwined in the project of building and documenting residences. They do not *live* in the houses that they encounter, but as a narrative tactic, this fact allows for an (ironic) objective distance that gives room for the uneasy nature of the city’s newly evolving peripheral structures to be evoked. They are, however, implicated in the construction, perpetuation and recording and thus validation of the environments in which they work. Their sense of place is affected by their engagements with these houses.

If houses are ways that we ‘make sense of the world’, a means to ‘construct ways of being at home in a world from which we feel estranged’ (Vidler, 1996, 7-8 in Briganti

and Mezei, 2002: 840), then the houses depicted in this novel are meant to provide respite for the urbanite who feels increasingly estranged from the Johannesburg s/he once recognised and felt safe in. But, if one surveys the suburbs in the novel and considers edifices like Villa Toscana, Crocodile Lodge, Hani Views, Hani Extension 1 and Greenside, then one can trace a more complex pattern in operation where both old and new residents of the city are being grouped into housing estates that are regulated and mapped – to their detriment. These patterns are characteristic of apartheid urbanism rather than alternate forms that should signal the energies of post-apartheid Johannesburg. Each protagonist's sense of unhomeliness is generated by their distrust of these dwellings and of what they represent, so much so that their experience of the city as a whole is also affected. As signs of wealth and fear, these exclusive housing projects embody and (re)create division and paranoia.

Through these different built and social environments, an underlying sense of 'wrongness' or artificiality is evoked. Unlike *Triomf*, and its focus on the lived experience of a haunted house and domestic life, this novel's expression of feelings of the unhomely comes from strongly through the stale atmospheres of these cordoned-off residences and the rigidity of the architecture and characters. This reflects Vladislavić's sense of how urban structures and designs embody the mark of the past. He comments:

as people write about the making and re-making of South African cities, the question of what's changed and what hasn't becomes urgent. What the project of editing the anthology *Blank* confirmed for me is that the actual physical structures of apartheid are going to be difficult, if not impossible, to erase, and that we're going to be living within those structures for a very longtime.

(Vladislavić in Graham, 2006: 50)

In my discussion I will be arguing that not only are the physical structures of apartheid being replicated but the protagonists carry with them a historical relationship to houses and space which restricts and inhibits their ability to form alternate ways of seeing the post-apartheid city and themselves within it. This creates a sense of stagnation and spatio-temporal fixity within the novel's chronotope, which actively calls into question the claims made about the fluidity and renewal the post-apartheid city and its residents.

Vladislavić evokes this with a detached and wry narrative voice which suggests that below the surface – of language, of the land, of society –these old pathologies lie. Before I embark on how *The Exploded View* invokes the fortified spaces of apartheid’s exclusive suburbias to document four post-apartheid subjectivities, allow me to outline what these areas and houses represented during former times.

Suburban enclaves

The presence of landscaped estates and high-walled family homes were as much a part of the apartheid city as were townships, slums and poor areas like Vrededorp and Triomf. In contrast to the conditions of the townships and poor white areas like Triomf, wealthier suburban homes belonging to white families maintained the aura of colonialism and the Eurocentric idyll within the apartheid city. As a counter-point to the unsettling and ‘chaotic’ native space, white suburban estates afforded the racially and economically privileged ‘respite’ from the outside world. In an essay entitled ‘Game Lodges and Leisure Colonialists,’ Njabulo Ndebele’s observation about the space of the lodge draws remarkable parallels with the suburban settings that Vladislavić creates in his novel. Ndebele writes:

The pleasure of the game lodge lies in its ability to provide personal conveniences and luxuries far from home [...] Signifying the success of conquest, they are the concrete manifestations of the movement of the dominant culture across time and space and its ability to replicate itself far away.

(1999: C10)

The suburbs and white areas negated black urbanism and were established to counter the threat of ‘native’ space and represent the dominant order. These types of ‘leisure lodge’ suburban homes were constructed on an ‘artificial sense of dwelling’ (Griffiths and Prozesky, 2010: 31). This artificial nature of these built environments filled the walls so that the very cores of white suburban residences were brittle with the violence of their own existence. Like the township house and city slum, the suburban house under apartheid was totally imbued with the system that permitted and sustained its existence.

Even as these houses afforded reprieve from the brutal environments like those of the townships, white suburbs and homes, as the counterpoint to the township's existence, were part of the same urban system of spatial control. Wealthy private space was also under surveillance of the state. Consider, for instance, that in many private homes, the monitoring of people's activities behind closed doors was commonplace especially as resistance to apartheid grew (Matthews, 1986:179). But, the real pathologies of these domestic environments came more from their exclusivity and defensiveness. The fear of the other – in Johannesburg's case, the indigene or the unruly 'native' – was ingrained into white residences. Such a neurosis, especially as resistance to apartheid grew, ballooned into a 'growing sense of imminent collapse' (Jurgens, in Bremner, 2010: 191) and most white suburbanites – certainly in the 1980s lived with a heightened 'persecutory anxiety' (Bremner: 191). This, arguably, has been amplified in the political transition, where the established ideology and social imaginary of white spatial privilege seemed to come under threat. Ironically, as I shall explore in all three novels, but especially in *The Exploded View* the result of the shift in access to city living and the seeming 'chaos' of the post-apartheid city has, for many white South Africans increased the desire for the sanctity of 'white paradise' (Bremner: 191), where the threat of the other can be warded off with gates, high walls, increased security and even more ironically, increasingly fortified and fiercely bordered residential communities (Bremner: 227).¹⁶

Newly built up sections of previously undeveloped veld, mainly between Johannesburg and Pretoria, spaces like Midrand and Centurion, point towards something of a new urban order: post-apartheid urbanism built on a *tabula rasa*. However, as Vladislavić explores, (Moele does so similarly in *Room 207*) these spaces are ersatz palisades, classically designed but absurd impressions. Moreover, as Mbembe has commented, the monolithic office parks and stereotyped townhouse mansions and residential cluster complexes of these new neighbourhoods are aesthetically superfluous (Mbembe, 2004), standing testament both to the capitalist expansion of the post-apartheid state and city and to efforts to ignore any negative effects of the post-apartheid order on those who benefited

¹⁶ Furthermore, as shown in *Room 207*, urban aspirants from their position in the slum-like post-apartheid inner city look outwards towards the nouveau riche interstitial enclaves of Midrand and Centurion as their final residence.

from the former one. New informal residential settlements are also springing up in these areas, in addition to government housing programmes aimed at correcting the housing deficit for working class black South Africans. Despite being built on previously undeveloped ground, these areas contain the tremors of the city's past. In their location on the peripheries, they conjure images of the housing estates and programmes once used by the apartheid state to control the city and the black population's relationship to the urban through the construction of locations, townships and hostels. It is to these spectacles that *The Exploded View* speaks, asking the reader to consider the disturbed psychologies and historical patterns ingrained within such edifices.

'Villa Toscana'

The first story, 'Villa Toscana', Vladislavić takes the reader into the faux-Tuscan, eponymous residential complex in Midrand. Although Villa Toscana is a hard and visible built edifice, when census-drafter Les Budlender visits it to retrieve a draft of his census from continuity-presenter Iris du Plooy, a 'strange sensation had come over him [...] a dreamlike blend of familiarity and displacement' (6). This description alerts the reader to the core of Budlender's experience in this story and in this setting: a growing sense of displacement that comes from encountering that which is both known and unknown, stable and drifting. At this point in the story, this tension can be noted in the complex's design: it is a faux-Tuscan collection of houses with ersatz elements that replicate a former time. Waiting at the heavily guarded 'fortress-like' (9) gate to the complex, Budlender notices that:

the tones and textures were passable, clumpy wooden beams, pastel plaster flaking artfully, yellow stone... But the scales were all wrong. Things were either too big or too small. In the door of the guardhouse was a keyhole so enormous he could have put his fist through it [...] He wondered whether the beams jutting from the stone really extended through the walls. They had probably been screwed on afterwards.

(9-10)

Budlender's detached viewpoint and tone belies his growing discomfort. Villa Toscana is a generic, eurocentric 'Prince Valiant on the continent' (9) in Johannesburg, a housing

complex that sports features of Classical architectural forms, made to resemble a far away, fairy-tale-like realm from a time past. However, the way in which this estate has been built, and the way of life it symbolises actually undermines the possibilities of a fluid or incorporative meeting of time and culture in the city (Clarkson, 2005). Instead, this type of structure represents the disconnection of one space from another and the separation of one group of people from others within the city.

These kinds of architectural phenomena in Johannesburg in recent years have captured the imagination of a number of urban scholars, a move inaugurated by Achille Mbembe in his essay, 'The Aesthetics of Superfluity' first published in the special Johannesburg edition of *Public Culture* in 2004. Mbembe characterises this type of architecture as 'the result of a painful, shocking encounter with a radical alterity set loose by the collapse of the racial city' (Mbembe, 2008: 62). For designers and residents of Villa Toscana, like Iris du Plooy – members of the city's wealthier aspirant set, most often white (Bremner, 2010), but always wealthy – living here grants them a way to remain safe within a city that is becoming increasingly difficult to 'know'. In that a complex like Villa Toscana reflects the insecurity around Johannesburg's changing urban geo-politics, Mbembe interprets it as a hysterical reaction to the loss of the established urban order, even if this order was brutal and oppressive. Mbembe explains this metaphor further:

faced with the sudden estrangement from the familiar resulting from the collapse of the racial city, this architecture aims to return to the archaic as a way of freezing rapid changes in the temporal and political structures of the surrounding world. It is an architecture characterized by the attachment to a lost object that used to provide comfort.

(2008: 62)

In this story's setting, this hysteria can indeed be traced within the walls of this theme park-like façade. As a response to the new urban system Villa Toscana continues and reinvigorates apartheid-era neuroses and idealised models of urban life which signify the colonial desire to keep the unwelcomed, uncontrollable indigenous space without. But now, the new threatening 'Other' is the post-apartheid city and its political and socio-spatial reformations. However, while the building complex may keep people 'safe'

within it, this is in an illusion. Its artificiality can be traced in its fragile veneer and small evidences of shoddy reproduction, suggesting that the social ideologies it represents are equally vulnerable. Budlender, by extension, is also a fragile unit, made of old allegiances and orders now becoming redundant; encountering Villa Toscana is like encountering himself.

The effect on Budlender is particularly interesting. The villa's fakeness spills out of the walls confronting his gaze as the onlooker. Budlender is the witness and the outsider but, and here is the source of his unease, he is also a complicit agent. This building continues apartheid white suburban spatial sensibilities into the present and is disconcerting for Budlender. But it also draws him into its web since it is not totally alien to him, nor he to it. His own history is familiar with this kind of response to the threat of the outside 'native' world. A white, middle class character, Budlender's life and career involve legitimating people and residences and keeping the unruly at bay. The villa becomes an uncanny reflection of Budlender's own uneasy grip on the changing city. He sees through its façade yet its existence confirms his own position in the city even while it displaces it by being a reproduction, a fake. As he comes nearer and 'the fortress-like atmosphere of the place' (9) dissipates, he becomes increasingly unsteady, knowing that his own understanding of the 'new' city is based on inherited forms, just as this is. The line separating him from this place becomes thinner and his sense of self – as part of his experience of place – is deeply affected.

Perhaps it is because of this growing unease that he attaches himself to Iris du Plooy. However, she too is slowly revealed to be artificial. Like her plush interior, Iris is uniform, neat, groomed and generic. Her house's rooms are 'small, square and white' (12), and her behaviour too is controlled. She is distant, colourless, uninterested in divulging aspects of herself in the census and in her conversation with Budlender. His sense of this environment is described as similar to 'the unsettling feeling that he has strayed onto a page in a book, one of those picture books that were more interesting for adults than the children they had apparently been written for' (12). Vladislavić's textual metaphor for a spatial experience brings the reader's attention to the idea that while more

must lie beneath the surface of this space, Budlender is unable to decipher it yet. And, while he knows that there must be more to what he sees around him the possibilities of this and what it could mean for him frightens him. Unearthing or turning over these generic bits and pieces might reveal something so disturbing to dislodge Budlender from the world he knows. Indeed, his vision of Iris's house reproduces what he had begun to experience when at the exterior of the house: a growing sense of discord with his surroundings and the uncomfortable feeling that as this world peels away what is left is an unknown and unknowable space in which he too has no place.

He searches the house for missing details, for pieces of life that will somehow reveal something more authentic about this environment. In seeking signs of lived, human space he shows his desire for affirmation of his own historical relationship to the city. He scans Iris for signs of the ordinary, fixating on the way she traces a line on the page, on the physical appearance of her hands. But, they show no sign of 'the way she took hold of the world' (11). Like her person and her home, her hands are like seashells, 'as finely moulded as plastic' (13). Later, when Budlender steps into her bathroom, he is met with more examples of an eerily constructed world. Below him, through the window, he sees in the garden a bag of grass clippings but no sign of a lawn or lawnmower. The garden lacks its function, its grit. The house is also soundless, surrounded by electric fencing and open veld, it is insulated from the outside; pre-packaged to weather the insult of exterior life, double-glazed against the threat of whatever lies beyond the boundaries of the gates. Like the Villa, Iris and her life embody an absence. They are pastiches of recognisable elements fitting together that create a human or material form, but beneath them, there lurks a threatening lack of substance. Villa Toscana and Iris represent a dual state of repression and anxiety that can only ever exist at odds with the world around them.

While he remains purposefully transfixed on Iris, it is in watching her on television that Budlender begins to confront his feelings and find a way of placing Iris and her home within his own cognitive map of the city and society. Her work is to smooth transitions and awkward moments. Her job is to merge elements, to act as a beautiful bridge between frames. But she is not active. She seems, Budlender notes, 'suspended in empty space,

waiting for an appropriate world to embrace [her]' (43). In seeing her, Budlender understands that the same forced connectivity can be found in everything in her house – the white lounge, the ‘cobbled courtyard’ the ‘rotary washing line’, ‘gas braai’ (35) as well as the very site in which she exists and into which he has stepped. The entire world of Villa Toscana is a series of tangible, recognisable pieces put together to give the impression of continuity and human life, a recognisable story, but on closer inspection expose a hollowness and a defensiveness that disrupts rather than holds life together.

This growing understanding about the villa is further illustrated in Budlender’s census draft itself. Its purpose is to record physical and observable people and places. However, within the language of the census, Iris’ house and Villa Toscana become indecipherable, unsayable. Budlender’s questionnaire asks: is it a ‘Main place (city, town, tribal area, administrative area)?’ Or, is it a ‘Sub-place (suburb, ward, village, farm, informal settlement)?’ (28). Neither Iris nor Budlender can choose a category. Indeed, Villa Toscana and the lifestyle and psycho-social orientation it represents is clearly not flowing with the changes in the city. But, this moment in the text shows that the taxonomies of the census do not allow for nuance either. In preparing this draft, Budlender has shown that he also subscribes to a way of socio-spatial and linguistic thinking that is outmoded and rigid. He draws on apartheid categories and generic urban terms to which Villa Toscana cannot be aligned as it was designed to be separate from the space and time as well as the local terrain. Its chronotope jars with the idea of the post-apartheid city. In fact, this phenomenon is one of the elements that mocks the very possibility of there existing a post-apartheid chronotope that is anything but dislocated and jarring.¹⁷

Moreover, Budlender’s census shows how a language for the new city has yet to be developed fully. Words like ‘tribe’ and ‘informal settlement’ indicate both the old and the new order of South African society. Yet, the census seeks to recover particularities that are falling away and becoming redundant. Even though Villa Toscana embodies a social group’s desire to contain themselves within a constructed space, it risks becoming

¹⁷ In fact, this phenomenon is part of what makes the contemporary city so difficult to understand and so compelling to study and engage with.

liminal, slipping away into an interim area without appropriate language and place. Instead of seeing the limitations of his census and the artificiality of the residential complex as markers for the opportunity to start dismantling his own more traditional approaches to his urban world, Budlender becomes unhinged. His very existence draws from inherited models of place on such an intricate level that he cannot detect his own downfall through his use of them. The site of domestic intimacy and private ownership is still permissible, even while this one threatens to dislodge his knowledge of the accepted urban order. The reader leaves Budlender caught between these zones.

'Afritude Sauce'

This first story ends by questioning the impulse to rely on the past to mediate the present. As Vladislavić encourages certain questions from the reader, he moves quickly into the next narrative setting and story of another white South African man working within Johannesburg. While this prevents the reader from making any lasting judgments about Budlender's fate, 'Afritude Sauce' brings similar issues around post-apartheid space and place to the fore. Egan is a 'sanitary engineer' who works on large lower class housing developments, in this case, Hani View, being built on the fringes of the city. In the sequencing of these two stories lies the suggestion that these two spaces and these two men are linked. Even though Hani View and Villa Toscana are worlds apart it seems, they are both being developed in the emptier spaces between Midrand and Johannesburg. Both are an answer to the need for more housing in the post-apartheid city. And both seem to be part of a movement amongst planners, engineers and architects to produce mass residences for Johannesburg's urbanites using methods that smooth over nuance and individuality.

As the reader comes to know Hani View better, and its shadow version, Hani Extension 1, she sees that these residential developments replicate patterns of restriction that characterised the apartheid city's suburban areas. Even though garden paradises and barren locations were constructed antithetically to each other, as were the people who lived in them, aligning these settings in this way suggests that an undercurrent or sameness runs through them. Just as Triomf and Villa Toscana upset the image of the

suburban idyll, Hani View and Hani Extension 1, in conjunction, upset the idea of mass development by showing their limitations – both as concept spaces and as zones for human habitation.

In this story, Egan, like Budlender, finds himself at odds with his knowledge of the urban. His uneasiness comes from the fact that he does not know how to interpret the needs of the human, social order in which he is placed. Egan has two primary encounters on the site of the housing estate that challenge his understanding of this housing project and his subjective role in it. The first encounter involves Hani Extension 1, the informal settlement springing up on the opposite side of the freeway to Hani View. The second involves a disgruntled resident of Hani View.

As he arrives on the site of Hani View, close to Kempton Park on the Eastern ridges of the city, near the Johannesburg airport and vast swathes of industrial, Egan's eyes settle on a disturbance:

From a distance, he'd thought there was a veldfire blowing smoke across the road or something burning in the shack settlement he'd already noticed on the left, a patchwork place of the kind that still make him uneasy, no matter how often he came across it. But as they approached the crossroads, he saw that it was dust from the gravel that traffic between Hani View, on one side of the road, and its informal satellite, on the other, had scuffed over the tar. Both areas were fenced off from the main road and there was just a single dirt track leading off to either side.

(55)

The juxtaposition of these two sites brings the paradoxes of this housing project to the fore. Through Egan's eyes, there are clear differences between the informal settlement and the formal housing estate on the other side of the road. However, these differences are undermined by the physical proximity between the two settlements and the dirt road that has been made, linking them. Their differences are undermined by the paradoxical lack of actual separation. This raises questions about the social needs of the city's residents. The sites proximity mocks municipal and public reform which claims to

understand the needs of the people. On their own account and terms, the lives of the people from each settlement have begun to overlap:

Although Hani Extension 1, as it soon became known, was nominally under the jurisdiction of Midrand, its proximity to the housing project on the other side of the municipal boundary effectively connected it to the neighbouring council. The people from the shacks sent their kids to school in Hani View, they bought their broken bones and whooping coughs to the Hani View clinic, they drew their water there and carried it back across the road in tins. If these people were *ours* it would be different, ran one editorial in the *Express*, but they've been left on our doorstep.

(56)

The *Express*'s editorial protests mentioned above reflect a typical social response to the increase of informal settlements in the city and in the country. However, this is not an issue of grabbing land. Rather, as the narrator tells the reader: 'The squatters had been dumped there by the Midrand council, on a tract of waste land acquired from the province' (56). Hani Extension 1 has developed opposite Hani View because no municipality would house them elsewhere. Dumped onto wasteland, they become another council's problem and while imagined as imposters and invaders, residents have children who go to school, who drink water, get sick – just like residents of Hani View, and for that matter, just like families in Villa Toscana. This basic evidence that the domestic lives and needs of the families in Hani Extension are basically identical to those of Hani View unravels the differences between the two communities and points to a deeply flawed, inherited logic on the part of urban planners: that city can be developed into separate pieces and that institutions can decide what people need.

As for Hani View, it too has been built on the barren spaces on the city's periphery. Its houses seem to lack depth. Just as the tin shacks opposite do not meet the needs of families and are flimsy, so too the houses here are '*fucked*', as Mrs Natlaka vigorously repeats during Egan's tour of her home and as she rams a broomstick into the structurally weak parts of her roof and points out cracks in walls. The houses have been built too quickly and are technically flawed, despite what would have been perfectly orchestrated

and delivered plans. Planning, as Egan comes to realise, cannot predict or embody the needs of people within space:

Egan always found it strange to set foot for the first time in a place he knew from the plans. It was like folding out of two dimensions into three. You could almost hear the creases popping as you broke through the barrier. Sometimes it was disenchanting. You had convinced yourself, looking at the neatly inked blocks on the paper, at the street names, the community facilities, the cookie-cutter trees, that the place was rather pleasant. You imagined gardens, shady avenues and parks. And then you got there and found rows of impossibly small houses, not a leaf in sight, dust everywhere, shadowless walls, and the immense blue well of the sky, which reduced the earth to sediment.

(57)

Even in the language of this description, Egan cannot imagine the house as anything but constituted by details and objects, an indication of this abstracted relation to space and people. Mrs. Natlaka's outrage comes from the fact that the house does not live up to her expectations of a symbolic, post-apartheid city story, but also, from the reality that that the 'impossibly small houses' do not accommodate her. Her bedroom is suffocating: 'there were two beds pushed together. Queen-size, Egan thought. A dressing table packed with shiny bottles and animals, a porcelain woman with a parasol, more swans. There was not much room to pace in here [...]' (66). Evocative of Iris du Plooy's abundant array of perfume bottles, Mrs. Natlaka's personal belongings mark this room as her own but the room is bursting at the seams, too small and ill-formed for Mrs. Natlaka's personality and girth. Iris du Plooy's house is too large for her, uniform and complete, whereas Mrs. Natlaka's is cramped and falling apart. But both houses embody the same loss of particularity within the generic domestic model.

Pierre Mayol writes that 'the more exterior space is made uniform in the contemporary city, and restricting [...] the more one's own space becomes smaller and valued as the place where one can finally feel secure, a personalized private territory' (Mayol, 1998: 147). If this private territory is marred by methods that do not fit the specific demands of the moment, then the result is a sense of displacement and loss *within* this territory. The effect for residents here, represented by Mrs. Natlaka is a sense of emptiness but also

basic *lack*. This jars with expectations around material and imagined houses in post-apartheid Johannesburg.

The main problem with her house, which implicates Egan directly, is that her toilet is too high. The scene in Mrs. Natlaka's house reaches a comic crescendo when Egan and his two fat-cat colleagues, Ramaramela and Marakabane, are squeezed into the tiny lavatory. The photographer wants to take a picture of Egan, the two representatives of the Residents' Association and Mrs. Natlaka around her toilet that might have 'suited a giant' (68). While Mrs. Natlaka has been 'making do', no doubt, even this most intimate of domestic environments is affected by the disconnect between post-apartheid urban planning and actual lived space. Crammed around the toilet, Egan is brought face to face with the spatial limitations of his relationship to the urban.

To correct the historical legacy of this pattern would take an overhaul of the practices of conceptualising city space. The incident with Mrs. Natlaka does incite some thinking from Egan about how the problem might be corrected. He recalls his experience with a 'black architect' (73), Meintjies, some time earlier in Cape Town. Egan remembers his realisation that in order for the world of conceived space to represent the idiom of lived space more fully – especially in a city with a spatial legacy like Johannesburg's – plans and models of housing schemes would need to become more location-specific, positioned actively towards the particularities of the changing socio-spatial terrain. Meintjies, encountering similar issues with the tools available for the preliminary construction of low-cost housing, points out that the flaw in their work is that they are using European images and pieces to make plans and models of South African urban society. Egan realises that the 'idiom' of their planning is imported; their pieces are vestiges of an imperial and apartheid order, unmatched to the production of space within the contemporary local environment:

They were not just white, they were European. The benches looked French, the lampposts Italian. Was it possible? Shouldn't everything be American? But no, there was a European signature on the plans. Perhaps that was half the reason people were disappointed in reality? Letraset or someone should produce a line of

black people, of poor black people, a couple of waxy sheets of barefoot street children, barbers with oilcan chairs, coat-hanger hawkers, scrap-metal merchants with super-market trolleys full of stolen manhole covers. Why not braziers, bricks, rickety wooden benches hammered together out of packing-case pine instead of this wrought iron street furniture that made every corner of the world look like Green Park or Tiergarten? Let's get real. Let's have more realism at the planning stage. That's what you need if you're going to do your bit for reconstruction and development. Realism.

(75)

Note the language of this description. The realism in Egan's pondering analysis cements his perceptions very much in the material and observable reality. While questioning the superficial elements of modeling, he still inserts a material order onto immaterial spatiality or lived space. This epitomises what Stefan Helgesson calls 'the historical burden of a colonial/ apartheid history obsessed with imposing a Western order on African territory' (Helgesson, 2006: 31). The narrative voice shows how this burden is enacted through an inherited language of urbanism, too. As a counter-measure, Egan wants to change the appearance of the material order. However, transplanting African urban pieces into models of a South African residential neighbourhood is still 'off the mark' since this act reflects presumptions about how space can be mapped and decided upon, before it has been lived and shows a disconnected understanding of words, space, ideology and place. The complex lived processes that are necessary for the creation of a meaningful relationship to place can never be represented or pre-empted on a plan or in a formal urban language from another idiomatic system, even if the details that should constitute the plans are close to what one finds in 'real life'. Egan's conception of 'realism', as evoked in this passage, does not fit the task at hand in the post-apartheid city, since so much more is needed for the historical legacy of the city to be reworked in order for the likes of Mrs. Natlaka to feel 'at home' and 'emplaced' in their abodes. This challenges the realism of Johannesburg post-apartheid, as well as the realism of the text, provoking the reader to start seeking meaning in metaphor and allegory as well as in the visible signs of setting and characterisation.

This is further evoked in his clumsiness at dinner, at the Africa-themed Bra Zama's restaurant. He is the only white man at the table and he is linguistically and socially at the

margins of the conversation with his colleagues. Furthermore, the fake Afro-aesthetic and the curio masks adorning the walls mock the artificiality in his work and remind him of his failures at Hani View and his clumsy grasp of the new order. While the narrative does not slip from descriptions of 'real' places, the text starts generating a symbolic potency where the disconnect between Egan and these people and spaces begins to echo the situation in South Africa and Johannesburg, in general. Back in his hotel room, a room he liked before he started this day, Egan starts to notice the artifice in his room too. Little pieces of comfort and detail are used to deliberately disguise the room's shabbiness. As he reads the previous tenant, Van der Haas' list of complaints (that he ignored at the beginning of the story) the sense of counterfeit is overwhelming. He realises that 'every homely touch was calculated to conceal something' (97). The hotel room represents what he himself has just encountered at Hani View and in the restaurant: the corruptibility of space by what has come before. The story ends with a disturbing description of Egan making himself small on the bed, watching a Robert de Niro film on television. The volume control doesn't work but still, the actor's 'cursive exclamations of blood and saliva' (98) resound through the room, breaking the barrier of the screen and infiltrating Egan's intimate world, like the realisation that his methods and his very conception of an urban self are being chipped away by this new city.

'Curiouser'

The next story, 'Curiouser' continues the novel's tracing of the burden of history on the sign and lived space of the suburban house. The narrative focus of this story is Majara, his work as a visual artist, and the controversial reputation he has courted with his *Genocide* series and the eponymous mask series, *Curiouser*. Majara's story also continues Vladislavić's exploration of artifice within the suburban home.

Rob Gaylard suggests that this story gives the novel 'a sense of creative possibility that would otherwise not have been apparent' (Gaylard, 2006: 68) in the novel. It does so because Majara's house and Majara himself are produced by patterns that do not seem to match his cultural profile as easily as the others. Besides that he is the only protagonist who does not operate on the city's fringes, Majara is also not a public contractor in the

literal sense that the other three protagonists are. He is also the only black protagonist, firmly implanted in a suburb historically reserved for whites. Majara's story encourages the reader to ponder how restrictive urban frames are appropriated as well as inherited. Majara is not the hysteric type, nor is he the obsessive quantifier, outmoded engineer or the Mrs. Natlakas of this city. He is, however, entrapped within his setting and in the world that he has created even if he is at odds with it. The story, depicting an evening at his home with friends, is layered with recollections and peppered with small acts which reveal how Majara is disturbed by this controlled, suburban life.

The unhomely nature of his place in the city emerges in the overlaps between his audacious work and the sterility of his dwelling and domestic life. On the whole, he seeks, in his art, to shock his public and disturb the status quo. *Genocide*, for instance, is an installation of stolen remnants from a site of mass death in Rwanda. He recreates the moods of this site in disturbingly intimate scenes back in his gallery space of Johannesburg. Similarly, his work on *Curiouser* seems to challenge the Eurocentric touristic gaze in that his distorted masks parody the curio as well as the carving up of African spaces typical of apartheid and colonialism. His latest project, *Bullet-in* is meant to be an archive of photographs of bullet holes in war zones around the world. However, this exhibition, like his *Genocide* and *Curiouser* series, exposes him as an artist who seeks to control and manipulate the spectator. In his portrayal of simulated horrific sequences, he shows a propensity for artifice and his own touristic gaze. As I explore in more detail in the rest of this thesis, he steals from the original site in Rwanda, and uses his own body as a model for the shrouds he creates. *Curiouser* mocks the immigrants whose masks have provided him with his raw materials. Remember too that most of *Bullet-in* was created in his studio. As the story progresses within this setting, the reader comes to realise that his house mirrors the façade he appropriates as a public artist. In its sterility, Majara's megalomania is exposed. While one cannot say that he is this way because of where and how he lives, what is evident is that he has ensconced himself within this suburban idyll and comes to embody the artifice that lies behind his work and his environment.

Vladislavić ensures that the descriptions of Majara's home evoke the trappings of bourgeois luxury and 'superfluity' (Mbembe, 2004). His domicile is reminiscent of the kinds of housing loved by the 'global' (western) leisure class, typified for instance in Duffy's *Popular Mechanics* magazines of the novel's next narrative strand. Majara's pool, for instance, is 'vividly blue in the twilight [...] A liquid lozenge of California on the crust of Gauteng' (109). Around the pool are palms and a grassy lawn. They have 'arranged the garden furniture around the braai' (113). This garden scene strongly resembles Iris's outdoor setting at Villa Toscana, and while it is analogous of Majara's character, it also evokes Budlender's observation that: 'You might have thought it was made of cardboard and paper, as if the building contractor had taken the architect's model too literally' (45).¹⁸

As this domestic space is constructed in this way, cracks within its veneer are also exposed. This duality is also part of what makes Majara's character so complex and disconcerting. This duality is created and reflected within the space of the home. As he walks down the path of railway sleepers in preparation for the evening, he kicks at them with the toes of his trainers and notices (perhaps for the first time) that '[t]hey were not sleepers after all, they were not even made of wood, they were pre-cast concrete paving blocks, grained and chipped, made to look used and weathered' (120). He continues with his task of hanging some uncut masks up on the walls as lanterns, seemingly unperturbed. But, the confluence of these two actions unsettles the space and so too creates an avenue for Majara, his intentions as an artist and the stability of his urban place in Johannesburg to be questioned.

One sees as similar reminder of artifice soon after this. The lanterns that Majara proceeds to hang on the garden wall are made from left-over masks from the *Curiouser* exhibition, an exhibition which symbolically mocks the very leisure class associated with this kind of setting and lifestyle. Majara and his home represent a glaring contradiction and predicament: investing in his luxurious surroundings and his prominence as a renowned artist, Majara has become arrogant, disconnected. Yet he is also actively mocking the

¹⁸ There is also an allusion to Egan's planning predicament.

world he has come to inhabit in the way that he deconstructs ordinary objects, like the masks. It is as if Majara is impersonating a character within a space, creating a version of himself, a stolen remnant from the past. Majara also represents the schizophrenia of an outsider attempting to impersonate a person or position in society. I am reminded again of Ndebele's essay, 'Game Lodges and Leisure Colonialists' (1999) and a passage where he describes the experience of being a black tourist in a game reserve, in what is ostensibly a European zone:

The black tourist is conditioned to find the political sociology of the game lodge ontologically disturbing. It can be so offensive as to be obscene. He is a leisure colonialist torn up by excruciating ambiguities. He pays to be the viewer who has to be viewed. He is expected to engage in conversations around the campfire, about bush stories and lion kills [...] He is expected to be knowledgeable about 'white things', at the same time he is transformed into an informant about 'black things' [...] He can only experience himself as a caricature of a tourist.

(1999: E10)

The similarities between Majara and the black tourist are striking. This description shows how Majara straddles more than one position and space, and the state of unease this suburban caricaturing brings him. It is not that a black South African cannot subscribe to these suburban, Eurocentric patterns, but if one holds his suburban identity in a metaphorical relationship to his art and his attitude, the overriding sense is of impersonation and artifice.

One can see the parallels between the evening's braaivleis and the description of the ubiquitous bush fire in Ndebele's words above. When 'everyone is...gathered around the table in the garden' (132), cooking the meat, although Majara is the host and ultimately, the topic of conversation, he distances himself from this scenario and leaves the braaivleis to watch his friends from inside. The reader senses that this distance gives him some respite from the conflicts that pervade his place in this leisurely environment. What this scene suggests, and the story on a whole – as with Ndebele's tourist – is that this kind of space, this protected, cocooned existence has a certain legacy in Johannesburg's

history¹⁹ and this legacy confronts Majara in minute but visible ways. Majara occupies more than one cultural and socio-spatial terrain. He is black, but ‘with a private school accent’. He is the ‘Young Lion’ of the art world, a fetishised black artist but also brilliant star mocking the ‘civilised’ bourgeois society he exhibits for and lives amongst. Still, he is not fluid, but rather jars with his surroundings, senses its fakery (as seen in the scene with the railway sleepers) and yet continues to ignore the signs of his unease within this place he has constructed as part of his urban persona. Indeed, his situation is worsened by the fact that while he may recognise the artificiality of his life here he is prevented from changing it since it has become his own private retreat wherein he has power.

In one of the last scenes of the novel, the setting and the interactions between the characters suggests that not only is this kind of domestic set up artificial, it is also violent. After supper, some of the guests are slumped on sofas and chairs in the TV room watching a news report. Majara, watching again from some distance, notices that the programme shows rebels fighting in an African country. The safety and banality that a reader would associate with lying watching television is destabilised by the invasion of these televised scenes. Visions of assault interrupt the room. The emissions of violence from the TV break the surface of the fake homely atmosphere by creating a symbolic tension between the suburban house and the warfare that is being screened. Violence enters the room reminding the reader that the house represents control and violence and replays patterns of exclusion and distance in the city’s past. Majara is part of this dynamic. Even in this moment, when these images penetrate the room, Majara tries to distance himself from the space around him. He imagines himself killing everyone. This desire, fictional as it is, reveals a need to be a master of his surroundings. It also reveals his desire to succumb to an act of destruction that will shatter the veneer of this existence. Perhaps too, in that what is on screen is a display of war and aggression associated with a postcolonial country, Majara finds himself wanting to recreate himself as an agent of

¹⁹ Greenside’s very existence evolved through the bordering of space and the spatial mapping of race. Majara’s house represents a way of living and being that is deeply linked to colonial displays of power and neurosis and that reflects the same patterns in the present day city. Even if the reader is unaware of the extent to which Vladislavić is commenting on the real urban terrain, what is clear is that in order to live here, Majara seems to need to impersonate something or someone. He comes across as uneasy and the house itself, so similar to Du Plooy’s, comes across as artificial.

disorder to challenge the complacency of his existence in this post-apartheid moment. Or, he wishes to silence those who would challenge him.

Instead of killing everyone, Majara he leaves seeking distance from this scene in the quietude of his studio – a space attached to the garden, one filled with his artistic artillery: ‘damp plaster, sawdust, creosote, glue’ (155). This is a familiar territory of creation and control. He starts to imagine future work. He sees, ‘sequences and series, objects and their names, stamped with Roman numerals like the descendants of a single forebear’ (155). Here, at the end of the story within this place, Majara reveals his fear: that he is marked by history too, that he will continue to be caught between opposing spaces and inhabiting more than one world. His response, however, is not to explore what this may mean but is to retreat behind closed doors and lose himself within a subjective and physical place which is the very source of his disjunctured position.

‘Crocodile Lodge’

The last story of the novel, ‘Crocodile Lodge’, continues the novel’s expression of the idea that suburban spaces or residences in the city enact and repeat legacies of exclusion, division, fortification within the post-apartheid city. Residential complexes such as Hani View, Villa Toscana and Majara’s suburban hideaway, are repetitions of old forms and ideologies, and can be seen as a reaction to the changes that the uncertainty and post-apartheid has ushered in. With this last story, Vladislavić delivers a final description of the pervasive nature of these repetitions with the development of the psycho-spatial relationship between new, peripheral suburban enclaves and a typical middle-class, westernised character, Gordon Duffy, whose livelihood is invested in them and who is intertwined in the history and current ‘hysterias’ they represent.

Duffy is a sign builder. His latest project has brought him to Crocodile Lodge, an Africa-themed sister project of Villa Toscana. As a public contractor, Duffy represents an everyday man in the city. ‘Not quite ‘the success he wanted to be’ (172), he is a somewhat disgruntled worker who, we learn, has tried his hand at many things and is not quite satisfied with where his life has progressed to. But, where one might think that

Duffy is a man disappointed by his life choices, his generally disheartened personality seems to be linked to the site he is working on. Crocodile Lodge is going to be a gated residential community themed as 'native space'. However, it becomes clear that Duffy's state of unease and discomfort comes from a much more general disconnect with the city he lives in.

In the story, Duffy is defined by a longing to go home. The narrative begins with him eagerly driving to his house. Earlier in the day, he also 'wanted to go home, but they wouldn't let him' (176). When he discovers that his phone is missing, he thinks immediately of his wife and whether or not he will make it home for supper. As his anxiety mounts in the story, he is sent back into a nostalgic reverie about his childhood domicile. One can read his condition of homesickness as part of a deeper, more permanent feeling of displacement, one that has origins in a domestic ideal from his youth and which is aggravated by his encounter with the image of Crocodile Lodge on his billboard and the site itself.

Duffy seems to idealise a classic, westernised image of houses. He expresses a love for order and constructed suburban beauty like that typified in the architecture and aesthetics in his father's *Popular Mechanics* magazines that he devoured as a youngster. A longed for house in the magazine had:

surfaces airbrushed to perfection, gleaming with old-fashioned optimism; and its inner workings laid bare, frankly and practically, as the product of enterprise and effort. This double world expressed itself in two languages: the patter of leisure and convenience, of patios and porches, rumpus rooms and dens, pool tables, lazy Susans, TV trays; and a deeper music of planning and building, of lathes and drill presses, bandsaws and welding irons, bits and gauges.

(171)

Duffy's domestic ideal, by his own admission, is 'caught between those pages, preserved there as a kind of fate, like a timetable left behind in the nineteen-fifties. A bookmark' (170). As a teenager Duffy 'would go through them again and again, until he knew the images by heart' (170). The relationship between his spatial language and the pages of

the magazine suggests that he is bound to a textual story that has remained intact and unchanged for years, a book-marked archive that sustains the vividness of these early, utopian impressions of domestic bliss and amplifies his disconnect with the post-apartheid city.

Furthermore, his memorisation of these two-dimensional sites occurred in the enclosed suburbia of his parent's home. Encased in his typically sunny South African home with 'sun beating down through the window' (170), Duffy is surrounded by reverberations of this aesthetic and technical ideal. The symbolism of this act is rich. In the South Africa of Duffy's youth, this kind of suburban idyll was reserved for the privileged whites and so, like the images in the *Popular Mechanics* magazine, this would have been an exclusive zone which encouraged certain kinds of domestic behaviours and impressions of life. His aspirations towards the perfection enclosed in his magazines are supported by his immediate home space as a youth. Spatially, these ideas become embalmed within Duffy's subjectivity so that his ability to see their limitations becomes difficult.

At the same time, as with each of the other threads of this novel, Duffy's relationship to domestic space is also the source of his growing unease. As he pieces together Crocodile Lodge's billboard, Duffy is transported back to one particular image: 'a holiday house on the cover from the mid-fifties. Except for a chimney stone, the place was made entirely of wood [...] and stood on the edge of a lake'. For him:

this place, impossibly distant and unreal, filled him with painful longing, an ache for containment that was peculiarly like homesickness. To be bathed in these colours, held by this light falling benevolently on every surface, aglow with prosperity and happiness.'

(175)

In his encounter with the image of Crocodile Lodge, Duffy recalls his foundational desire to be within a 'perfect' private space. But, as he starts thinking about what the lodge actually represents, he is disturbed by its perverse reproduction of pre-colonial, rural African village life, mocked up in a 'world of watercolour and stippled ink (187):

Crocodile Lodge parodies his nostalgia for the perfectly replicated home. Looking at the

image he realises that his own yearnings are mirrored in the lodge's crass design and concept. Crocodile Lodge awakens the 'same pangs' (175) in him but it is also 'all wrong'. If he were to reside in the lodge, he would be 'surrounded by electrified fences' (177) in just another gated complex built to ward off the uncertainty of the contemporary urban moment. As he casts his eye across the valley he takes in the highways upon which Budlender, Egan and Majara have ridden, which link other similar suburban developments. From his position on the site of Crocodile Lodge, he absorbs the sight of the Riviera-themed Cote D'Azur complex on one ridge and the Italian Villa Toscana on the other and the emptiness of these reconstructions. Crocodile Lodge, in its bizarre capturing of the African rural within the African urban becomes 'stranger than these European Islands' (177). Duffy sees how these sites are attempts to contain the city and contain life within the city and that they do so by regurgitating a way of life that is performatively at odds with the contemporary city. However, they also remind Duffy of a historical line in which he has partaken. The imagery of the site on his billboard mocks his memory of the ideal home and reminds him of the inherent fallibility of what he saw in the page of his magazine and of how he has learned to link himself to space. The result is the loss of his connection to his place within the city. Thus, his anxiety about returning to his own house, his 'home', appears as an emotional response to his interaction with this setting.

Duffy chooses to respond to these feelings in a paradoxical way. He returns to the site at night and when he encounters a group of thieves, instead of running or driving away, he remains outside of his car and faces them. Perhaps one can read this as an unconscious suicide, a surrender to what he has begun to understand and a surrender to a city that should not be predictable and ordered, but violent and uneasy. But, through this act of bravado, he martyrs himself too, fighting for the right to be on that site. His fighting of the thieves can also be seen as a desperate attempt to protect what the site stands for: the known historical order and his place in it.

At question here, as with all the novel's protagonists, is Duffy's position in relation to built forms of exclusion and prosperity and what it means when these structures begin to

reveal their artifice – either because of other social forces or because of unexpected changes in the built environment. An overriding sense of loss and unhomeliness pervades Duffy’s experience of Crocodile Lodge. In his interactions with the city, both old and new, he becomes caught in a clash of ideas, memories and aspirations. His sense of loss reflects all four protagonist’s responses to their own limitations, both structural and social.

Conclusion

Owing to their responses, experiences of home become fractious and unsettling. Men like Budlender, Majara, Egan and Duffy are implicated in reiterations of historical patterns of residence and enclosure but they are also cast out and displaced by the changes in the urban landscape. Each story ends with the protagonist experiencing some sort of slippage from reality, from the established sign of the city and his place within it. This suggests that the process of renewal or change must involve an exiting of the city or a total loss of one’s sense of place therein. Through language and setting, the text questions the relationships between self and material world, order and perception. With these men, as I shall explore more in the next section, their patterns of movement and their defensive reactions to their situations compounded by their unhomely and uncomfortable experience of place makes their chances of reinvention all the more difficult since they are unable to gauge the extent to which their everyday place making depends on outmoded urban practices and perceptions.

Room 207: slum living

This room is our safe haven during the lighted dark night of dream
city [...]
[...] The place is rotting

(*Room 207*: 13)

In the above citations, one can track *Room 207*’s main characters’ contradictory experience of the inner city – made manifest here as a physical encounter with their room. The 207s are entangled within these duplicities and their experience of domestic

space and patterns therein reveals tensions and strains around being a young black migrant in the post-apartheid city.

As briefly outlined in my introduction, *Room 207* is set in the inner city in roughly the year 2000, well into the period of post-apartheid adjustment and transition. The characters, six young, South African migrant men, have come to Hillbrow to realise their 'dreams'. They are newcomers to this part of Johannesburg, drawn here by their aspirations to leave their historically poor and oppressed backgrounds and reclaim urban space and modernity. The narrator, Noko informs the reader of this early on:

It's dream city and here dreams die each and every second, as each and every second dreams are born [...] However beyond counting the dreams, they all have one thing in common: Money. Respect and worship are the ultimate goals; everybody here is running away from poverty.

(19)

Noko's words suggest that life in the inner city is seen as a gateway to wealth, freedom and new spatial relationships with the city. However, in the use of the word, 'dream', he indicates a troubling aspect of their relationship to the lived space of Johannesburg. Dreams are, as Noko suggests, unstable and the inner city, as the novel reveals, is highly unpredictable. Dreams that are founded on the lust for money and wealth are fragile ones, especially when performed by a group of young men who are unable to remedy past patterns of urban dislocation. The 207s' relationship to urban space, and to themselves within this space, is defined by ambivalence: they are both propelled to succeed by their desire for an alternative future, but they are also crippled by the city's system, the fickleness of their aspirations and the historical legacy they bear within their sense of urban place. This informs their sense of self within the contemporary city and so in turn affects and creates their place within the post-apartheid city.

While many of the issues the 207s face have evolved within the more contemporary moment, their fractious relationship to the city, embodied powerfully in their relationship to their domestic environment, resonates strikingly with the effects of apartheid era limitations on black urban psycho-geographies in Johannesburg. Before I continue

discussing this in relation to the eponymous room, I would like to outline how African city dwelling was mapped out by the state and how this generated disturbances between the black South African and the urban environment.

Townships/hostels/locations

Being a black South African under apartheid meant being strung between the positions of the insecure yet necessary, ghettoised migrant or the ‘nativised’ rural Bantu without access to modernity and rights. Through these conditions of residence, the black South African urbanite in the township or hostel inhabited a fraught position as a repressed insider/outsider in a city that was becoming defined by separate development.

By the 1950s in South Africa, the Group Areas Act had been formally introduced and this allowed for the removal and relocation of any population group not classified officially as ‘white’ from central urban areas – as seen in the case of Sophiatown’s residents in *Triomf*. Attempts to ‘rebuild South Africa’ after the depression (2010: 12) focused heavily on ‘coherent residential communities separated by green belts with carefully located employment sites and transportation between them as the model for reconstructing South African cities’ (2012: 12). By 1945, the state, as Bremner writes, had become ‘increasingly concerned with reconstruction [...] planning, as both the technical administration of urban space and instrument for racial restructuring, permeated reconstructionist thinking’ (2010: 12). After the Nationalist government came into power in 1948, the state applied its focus on housing as a way of controlling the city’s growth and racial profile. Townships such as Orlando, Soweto, in the south of the city, mirrored the city’s need for ‘coherent residential communities’ but were underscored with the state’s sinister agenda.

While planners developed models of rows of ‘bucolic bungalows’ (Bremner, 2012:13), in reality townships were made of small, uniform and closely packed rows of houses. Materially, city living for black South Africans under apartheid meant living in ‘cramped residential zones’ with a ‘constant sense of restricted movement’ (Lee, 2005: 620). Writer Sindiwe Magona’s description of township houses captures their bleakness: ‘same-

looking matchboxes, soulless and soul destroying. Sub-standard. Uninspired. Hopelessly uninspiring' (Magona, 1951 in Lee, 2005: 612). In addition to this, township houses were humiliating for large families. As Rebekah Lee observes:

A sense of openness was deemed a negative feature of these houses. The lack of privacy and separation (between male and female, older and younger) was often cited as one of the greater indignities African families had to bear in urban housing.

(2005: 619)

On a social and ideological level, setting the townships on the peripheries of the city deliberately regulated Africans' access to the urban hub and to a modern, urban identity. Relocations were a central strategy for the 'manipulation, domination and control' (Robinson, 1992: 297) of the black population but also ensured their reliance on the state for work and access to the city. The migrant labour system meant that black South Africans were dependent on the city for their livelihoods. For a black South African, living in the city in the height of apartheid, even in its peripheral townships, was legal only if one had the correct documentation and proof of work. These conditions of urban occupation defined the terms of their urban engagement and kept the black South African on tenterhooks within the apartheid city.

As a counterpart to this urban relationship, the state created Bantustans – supposedly 'native' homelands where Africans were 'legally' allowed to live freely. In the same way that the distance between townships and the hub of the city created strained urban subject positions, so did the distance, both geographical and symbolic, of the Bantustans to the metropolis. Similarly oppressive and restrictive were migrant hostels for African migrant labourers. Situated close to the mines, these hostels were reserved for single sex workers, so as to 'discourage permanent settlement of those Africans escaping the pass law net' (Ramphela, 1993: 18). Hostel residences for the migrant black labourer were ones of transience but also had prison-like qualities, with men packed into shared rooms, lacking in privacy.²⁰

²⁰ There are striking similarities to the hostel system and the room of the 207s in *Room 207*, a parallel I shall be discussing in my analysis of the text.

Within the apartheid city, the inner city came to symbolise all that had become off limits for the black population. With its vibrant history and long-standing promise of wealth and jobs, it was patterned for a time with mixed communities of urbanites. But while it may have symbolically place of money and enterprise, residential occupation and access to the inner city, for a large part of the twentieth century was reserved for the racially privileged. While the inner city did not have the luxurious wide spaces or lateral units of some of the housing estates along the peripheral parts of the city, it was one of the first areas to become 'Europeanised' (Tomlinson *et al*, 2003). The inner city of this real African metropolis was available for residents from 'anywhere, it seems, but Africa' (Mitshikiza, 2004: 483).

As Johannesburg grew and became wealthier, so racial laws became more stringent. Made up chiefly of multiple housing units and apartment blocks, inner city suburbs were organised around beautiful greenery, like Joubert Park. The dense housing and the ubiquitous high rises gave the inner city areas and suburbs a global, western appeal, as did the prevalence of Art Deco architectural styles. Off-limits but emblematic of an urban modernity denied to the majority of the population, the inner city possessed an allure which continued to appeal to black South Africans looking for opportunity. Ironically, the density of the housing units allowed for transgressions and by the late 1980's, the inner city had 'greyed' considerably. Residential occupation in the inner city was regulated, however and despite these transgressions (and owing to them too) inner city neighbourhoods systematically evolved according to the apartheid plan.

If the inner city of Johannesburg has always been the 'city of gold', nowadays the neighbourhood Hillbrow holds a large part of that potential. But, like the city of olds, it has retained its ambivalent energies. As the Mecca of the post-transition period for many African urban pilgrims, Hillbrow and its surrounding areas do not yield and empower its residents easily. As much as it is accessible and vibrant, this part of the inner city is also tumultuous, filthy and dangerous. The intersection between visible and invisible practices makes it a space in the city where anyone can try to make a living, both formally and informally. But, competition is steep, crime levels are high and living conditions are often

dire (Morris, 1999; Murray, 2008, 2011). Hillbrow is also ostracised from the rest of the city because of these conditions, earning a fierce notoriety within the local and global imagination.²¹ Many people coming into Hillbrow are uneducated and illegal and become trapped in a cycle of urban poverty – a situation aggravated by the socio-spatial and psychological distancing that the inner city is generally subjected to by those on the outside. Daily lives are mediated through the disjunctures between what these new urbanites thought the city could offer them and what it actually can/does.

Despite their initial energy and dreams, the 207s' aspirations are slowly eroded by the harsh everyday realities that confront them here. Living in Hillbrow, post-transition, is portrayed as a highly unstable experience in *Room 207*. Their fractious relationship to the city and to self in the city is produced in response to ambiguity. In the novel, Moele makes it difficult to disentangle the 207s' experience of place from the place itself, and for the entire novel the characters are mediated through the intersection between the perceptions they bring to the inner city and the material and socio-political conditions in which they live. Their time in the inner city is fractured and through the course of the novel, they become equally so. Hillbrow, suggests the text, may no longer officially be striated along racial lines, but the area is not simply a *tabula rasa* whereupon new urban stories can be constructed. It is a deeply layered space where the new intersects with the old in ways that challenge the post-apartheid South African's claims to the space. Furthermore, the 207s carry with them the former generation's uneasy relationship to the urban and perform the ideological and social effects of these intersections within their lived environment. While they attempt to embrace an urbanism that is not ideologically or historically charged they are unable to separate themselves from the repetitions and new formations of past patterns, in both themselves and the space around them.²²

²¹ The complexities of this ostracisation is tragically evoked in Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* wherein the central protagonists contend with the stigmas attached to them as they try to make a life in the inner city. Mpe portrays the force of these stigmas coming from Tiralong, a rural community outside of Johannesburg and maps how it construes associations between city living and the contraction of bodily disease, like HIV and AIDS as well as the loss of community, tradition and even sanity.

²² For further reading on the sociological and socio-spatial changes in the inner city, please see Alan Morris', *Bleakness and Light: Inner City Transition in Hillbrow, Johannesburg*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1999; *Emerging Johannesburg: Perspectives on the Postapartheid city*. Richard Tomlinson; Robert Beauregard, Lindsay Bremner and Xolela Mangcu (eds). London, New York: Routledge, 2002; Murray, Martin J. *Taming the Disorderly City: The Spatial Landscape of Johannesburg*

Unhomely surfaces

The novel's chief setting, room 207, is the site in which many of these complex dynamics can be traced. The room is depicted as a haven for the friends, an intimate retreat where they feel protected from the inner city. Although the 207s consider themselves to be street-wise, and on the streets are filled with arrogance and bravado, they are deeply attached to their cloistered one-roomed home in the city. When Noko first leads the reader into room 207 he refers to it as the 'safe haven during the lighted dark night of dream city' (13). This reference to the 'lighted dark night' evokes an image of a sinister city, suggesting that the 207s are hounded by a kind of urban darkness, caught in both the light and the dark of their situation. Against this lighted dark night, the room becomes their refuge space. However, while it is a haven, the room is also depicted as a claustrophobic environment from whence the 207s struggle to separate themselves, and which they ultimately reject, or are rejected by. Furthermore, as much as this dwelling place is their refuge, it is also defined by impermanence.

These contradictions resemble the experience of domestic space in the notorious migrant labour hostels and the township houses of the apartheid era. Fundamentally, as I have mentioned earlier, hostel living and township living was defined by impermanence and a disrupted sense of belonging (Ramphela, 1993). A similar dynamic underscores the 207s' relationship to their inner city apartment, and can be traced in both the 207s' engagements with the room and its physicality, as well as their development of urban subjectivities.

It is clear from the descriptions of the interior space of their room that this is where the friends try to cultivate a sense of emplacement. One can trace their desire for safety and inclusion in the creation of patterns of domestic habits or 'life narratives' (De Certeau and Giard, 1998: 145) therein, as well as in the physical intensity generated by six men

and After. Cape Town: Cape Town University Press: 2008; Hilton Judin and Ivan Vladislavić (eds).
Blank: __Architecture, Apartheid and After. Rotterdam: Nai Publishers, 1998, Beavon, Keith.
Johannesburg – The Making and Shaping of the City. Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2004.

(and often their girlfriends) living side by side in a small space. Noko's descriptions of the room captures this, evident in this descriptions of the bathroom:

Some of the tiles have cracked and some have lost their grip entirely and fallen off. The cream-white paint is cracking, showing the old paint underneath and the bad paintwork done over the years. The air is humid and heavy because the small window is rarely opened and, if you do open it, you will lose your soap or maybe your toothpaste.

(13-14)

These intimate details of a personalised space create a sense of attachment despite the filth and decrepit condition of the bathroom. The bathroom is one of the most private parts of any residence. Think of Les Budlender sneaking off into Iris du Plooy's bathroom – the only part of the house where she reveals aspects of her self and personal habits. Think also of Mrs. Natlaka and the embarrassing situation of the toilet. In *Triomf* also, it is in the bathroom that Mol and Pop find the seclusion to see each other naked, and act tenderly towards each other. If the house represents the most intimate part of a person's place in the neighbourhood and also can be seen as an incarnation of his or her self, then the space of ablution incubates some of the most private of domestic acts. Noko's tour is an intimate invitation into this private space. The 207s have tried to make it habitable but it is very clearly decaying. The bathroom represents the most extreme version of the friends' fractious place within the inner city. At other times in the novel when this relationship is more ambivalent, the bathroom serves as a reminder of the difficulty of transforming or eradicating the tarnish of the city's socio-spatial and political history from lived space.

Noko goes on to describe what lies behind the bath, beyond what is visible: 'Right above the back of the bath is the geyser – rusty, leaking, with exposed electrical cables' (14). The ceramic coating of the bath itself 'is scratched and has, over the years, fallen victim to its own predators (whatever they are)' (14). This suggests that despite the attempts of the friends to remake this flat, its very structures are decaying. Underlying this description is an idea that the 207s, despite whatever attempts they may make to remodel

themselves are bearing the scars of a psycho-spatial history and that these scars pervade their ability to claim the city in the present.

Noko goes on to describe the kitchen and the reader is introduced to further evidence of a functioning but unsteady domestic space:

that is our kitchen. This is the hotplate. As you can see there's no refrigerator. That, the sink, is always like that. The dishes are washed only when we are about to have our last meal of the day which, sometimes, is our first meal of the day but the last anyway. After that we just put our dishes there until the next meal, then we wash them and put them there again, but there are no cockroaches here. (15)

Moments later, he maps out the 'study cum dining room cum sitting room [...] our cum everything room' (15), where one can sit on 'this single bed' or 'that double bed', or on the floor. From these descriptions it becomes clear to the reader that the friends have established idiosyncratic, familial patterns within the flat: they wash their dishes in particular ways, they shower and share the bathroom according to little rules, they have options to watch television or listen to the voice of the radio, and they change, eat and sleep according to customary motions within the shared room. Through these practices, the room becomes an extension of their desire to create a space of safety within the hostile inner city, a 'safe haven here in Hillbrow.' (19) And yet, the reader is reminded of the fact that these friends are far from comfortable or secure here.

In these descriptions of space and community, one can read Moele's intertextual conversation with Phaswane Mpe's novel, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*. Moele's novel, like Mpe's, calls into question the very possibilities of the collective and the potential of acts of reconciliation and renewal to alter the post-apartheid inner city. Both document the yearning for a safe place within the chaos of Hillbrow as well as the sacrifices made by migrants as they come into this area. Where Mpe draws on the rhetorical and spectacular to evoke the contradictions of inner city living, Moele's text is constructed so that the reader is immersed in a confluence of paradoxical and nuanced phrases and portrayals of space and character. By implicitly referencing Mpe's text, *Room 207* encourages the

reader to scrutinise the frameworks for the black migrants ability to create a different type of city and city experience.

With the tragic tale of *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* serving as a complimentary template, the 207s' bravado is put further into question. As one reads on, it becomes clear that despite its being constantly described as a haven, the room is heavy with the 207s' anxieties about the inner city, reflective of the precariousness of their claims to post-apartheid urbanity. Consider the friends' 'Wall of Inspiration' (16) adorning the communal space of the room. In the cutout photographs are freedom fighter, Che Guevara, sexy kwaito singers, Boom Shaka, and successful businessman, Herman Matshaba. Noko offers that these people are there for their 'spiritual and soulful support,' (17) and are 'not role models at all but people like you and me, who, in their very own ways and byways, made it to the top' (16). From this combination of images, one can assume that 'making it to the top' for Noko and his friends involves wealth attainment and becoming popular. Yet, the wall also embodies the duplicities of their immediate space. When one of the friends is feeling despondent about his life in the inner city, he can 'look at them, because some of them have lived through this Hillbrow, lived to get out of it' (16-17). This last line suggests that despite their nesting in the room, their presence here restrains the attainment of their dreams. Abandoning the area and its conditions is the ultimate goal. This urban environment is therefore not, in fact, their final destination or home. Their room is a temporary shelter. While they remain here for far longer than intended, their place here is unsustainable and undesirable in the long term. Thus, they also treat it like a 'locker room away from home' (13), a material place that they can leave at any moment. As Noko informs the reader, 'We stay there, although we don't really say we stay there: it's a temporary setting, since and until [...] I can't tell. What I do know is that we have spent eleven years not really staying there' (13).

Patterns of past rooms

If one considers the squalor of the flat, it is not difficult to believe that the 207s aspire to leave it behind as soon as they can. They certainly 'make do' in its conditions, but such

dereliction also disrupts their ability to feel at home. This resonates with the experience of the migrant hostel:

Hostels represent physical space that is not only limited but also limiting. It is limited on a number of levels. The quality of the facilities, such as the state of the buildings, leaves much to be desired. The squalor of the surroundings, with unpleasant odours [...] the inadequate ablution facilities...

(Ramphela, 1993: 30)

These parallels are unsettling, and while the 207s do not seem to make a direct link between their space and black apartheid housing like hostels or township dwellings, the relationship is uncanny and the reader is compelled to see the parallels between their urban selves and the former generation of migrants.

The 207s fantasise about other kinds of houses – mainly ones in housing estates like those in Vladislavić's novel that, compared to their room, are pristine and beautiful. This desire is a highly complex one though. Considering the 207s' aspirations, residential complexes on the outskirts of the city epitomise nouveau riche lifestyles. More significantly perhaps, Midrand and Centurion are situated away from the melee of the inner city and do not reiterate historical spatial traumas in the way that this inner city apartment and its surrounding area do. Moreover, in the contemporary city, these suburban enclaves represent permanence. Hence, one could thus also read the 207s desire to move into these areas as the same desire that occupied displaced urban workers, migrants and hostel dwellers: a longing for settled life within the urban. This desire is ironic, however, because access to the inner city is a recently won freedom for the protagonists. Living in Room 207 is meant to represent 'urbanity, modernity and freedom [...] officially denied [...] through retribalization' (Kruger, 1997: 576). Their experience of living in the inner city makes them hanker after a different ideal, one far away from the original heart of Egoli. Noko cynically confides this to the reader:

If there is anyone you know, always telling you that they have lived the ins and outs, days and nights of Hillbrow, they are lying. Most of them don't like it here;

they hate the place. Everybody is on their way out of Hillbrow.

(62)

Their immediate home environment in the city represents confinement and impermanence – a tumultuous combination that propels the 207s into a fractured state that makes them lust after a different version of urban bliss. Later in the novel, reflecting on the 207s planned departure from Hillbrow, Noko argues that he ‘won’t want to miss out on anything Hillbrow because there is nothing to miss. Missing something about Hillbrow would be a step backwards into slavery’ (196). This statement implies that inner city living denies the ability or the need to *want to* be emplaced. And yet, this is ultimately what the 207s desire for themselves. Noko and his friends skate between altered states, both hankering after the city, and being repelled by it. This pattern has roots in the past.

One can trace this fractured state further in the destructive way the friends behave in the flat. The 207s hold raucous parties and with their heavy drinking, like the Benade family’s, they disrupt the sanctity of their home space, and yet are enlivened by their actions. Their parties pour out into the passageways of the building. At their parties, the 207s dominate the public space of the building, emerging into passageways with little respect for their neighbours. As they spill out of their room, they seem to be enacting their own displacement too, a paradox that they do not notice in their ‘wars with Isando’.

This dynamic can also be seen in the way the 207s decorate their room with markers of their personal and physical prowess and machismo: beautiful women, pictures of stars, their own naked bodies. Superficially this solidifies their presence in the room. On a deeper level, exerting such spectacular displays of physical power reveals the fragility of their claims to the room – as if by making themselves more present, they can somehow fill the absence that they feel within the room and their immediate environments.

Their room is uneasy for another reason. While it offers them respite from the public world outside in the streets it is not private. On the one hand, the 207s openly embrace the materiality and the idea of shared space within their flat as it contributes to their identification with each other and the closeness of their brotherly bonds. The room’s

sleeping arrangements are determined by the size and shape of the room, and by the socio-political and economic situations of the friends: for the duration of the story, they remain generally broke, frustrated and without access to better or more private dwelling spaces. Performances that take place on the bed in room 207, like sex or waking up, overlap and in doing so, the boundaries of the private self become porous. This disturbs the relationship between the 207s and their home even more.

The situation in the flat is evocative of a similarly defining detail of the apartheid hostel, as Ramphele comments here:

The common denominator of space allocation in the hostels is a bed. Every aspect of life revolves here around a bed. Access [...] depends on access to a bed; it is the basis for relationships within the hostels [...] one's very identity [...] depends on one's attachment to a bed.

(1993: 20)

In addition, Ramphele writes that the hostels' 'limited facilities also did violence to the primary purpose of housing, which was to delineate domestic space as opposed to public space' (1993: 30). If the site of refuge does not afford the privacy or security that one would normally associate with it, the very condition of the refuge is corrupted.

The conditions of the flat, even though its decrepit state is given a poetic quality in this text, replicates generically cramped, poor township housing conditions (Lee, 2005), conditions from which each of the 207s is trying to escape by coming to Johannesburg's inner city, but which they fail to notice extend into this latter environment, even though Noko identifies a common socio-spatial legacy amongst the friends. This is shown in these words:

Your mother works as a washerwoman. Your father, at fifty-one is on the blue card, leaving his house every morning to take refuge and comfort his mates in the war against alcohol [...] then there are seven of you. Your two older sisters, who are sitting at home with one-year computer certificates waiting for that job, which let's be honest, isn't coming.

(34-35)

These links between the room and historically oppressive domestic spaces like the hostel or the township residence destabilise the 207s attempts to forge new relationships with this urban environment, suggesting that the city's socio-spatial history still defines the urban nexus and the black migrant's experience of place. On a metaphorical level, these parallels indicate the limitations that life in post-apartheid Hillbrow puts on the resolution of the past within the contemporary city and within this private space.

This pattern can also be traced in the 207s' leasing of the room. Their arrangement, while vague, is part of a formal operation – at the end of the month, in the 'shutdown days' (73) when they usually face eviction, they are visited by the 'landlord's slaves' who are depicted as working 'according to rules, regulations and procedures' (77). These landlords are deliberately faceless since this lends a certain dramatic irony to the protagonists' situation. These 'absentee landlords' (Murray, 2011: 169) are also typical of the inner city's post-apartheid ghetto-style leasing arrangements where unused, cheap or derelict space is appropriated and subdivided into smaller units²³ and rented out cheaply. Tenancy is relatively easy to get, but one is at the mercy of this extortive system.²⁴ The conversion of a previously white hotel into a housing block for black South Africans and Africans reflects how the built environment is being reshaped to fit the needs of a burgeoning post-apartheid inner city demographic. However, the invisibility of these landlords, along with their possession of the building, conjures a disturbing phenomenon where the ownership or running of a building has merely changed hands from one urban elite to another. Neglected buildings have remained a feature of the inner city, and repeat the complex, racist urban patterns of the past. The 207s have no real claim to ownership

²³ After the relaxing of urban control laws, and the Abolition of the Influx Control Act in 1986, the inner city became a point of entry for many Indian, coloured and black South Africans seeking access to the city. The 'greying' of the inner city, however, had started earlier. In the early 1980's, swathes of whites (and their businesses) moved into the Northern suburbs as a response to increasing threat from the townships. This 'opened up' the inner city to a steady wave of non-white South Africans. But, as Loren Kruger points out, since they were contravening the Group Areas Act, (abolished in 1991), their vulnerable status was taken advantage of by landlords, who made rents higher, but did little to maintain the upkeep of their buildings. Cf. Kruger, 2006.

²⁴ For more reading on this, see: Murray, Martin. *City of Extremes: The Spatial politics of Johannesburg*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011. Morris, Alan. *Bleakness and Light: Inner City Transition in Hillbrow, Johannesburg*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1999.

here, just like their forebears in the apartheid city and are at the mercy of an urbanity which threatens to oust them at almost every turn.

Absent and shifting blocks

The building that houses the 207s' flat can also be seen as inseparable from historical patterns that have characterised African urban experience over the last century. An overriding sense of placelessness permeates the structure of the building itself. Noko links this to its history:

It used to be a hotel, back in the days of ... you know, those days which the rulers of this land don't want you to forget. Corner of Van der Merwe and Claim, there used to be a hotel. Once. Then. And now it's a residential. I stay there in room 207.

(13)

In this description of the building's position, the reader can track how inhabiting the built city means inhabiting a weighty, symbolic historical archive. The position of the building, for instance, gives some indication of this. It is on the corner of two of the busiest and most visible roads in Hillbrow: Claim street runs directly through this previously white residential enclave, and is a main taxi thoroughfare now. Many of its hotels have been converted into apartment blocks – some formally, and others, informally.²⁵ Even while the apartments and blocks are being used to house black South Africans and the inner city is being carved up along new lines of contact and access, the looming structures of the past are embodied in the buildings' facades and the oppressiveness of the apartheid city is still captured in the factious and transient energies of the new renting system.

²⁵ Some old hotels in the city have been appropriated by slumlords, rented out to illegal immigrants, subdivided into small units with little or no amenities and light. Others have been turned into inner city housing developments by private and public organisations, redesigned for the vast amount of migrants coming into the inner city. See, for instance, the Johannesburg Development Agency. www.jda.co.za. Others still are inhabited by African foreign nationals and are seen to be epicenters of illegal trades like narcotics and prostitution while reflecting the migrant energies of the city. Cf. Gotz, Graeme & Simone, AbdouMaliq. 'On Belonging and Becoming in African Cities' in *Emerging Johannesburg: Perspectives on the Postapartheid City*. Tomlinson *et al* (eds). London, New York: Routledge, 2003. Noko reflects on this when he journeys to 'Hotel Lagos' (161), further up into the reaches of the inner city.

In this introduction, one can also notice that their apartment block is unnamed. Again, while this suggests the possibilities of revisioning the inner city through the erasure of the past, the anonymous building also registers an absence and a sense of desolation and loss – as if the building and its residents do not quite exist, or as if they are too generic to be nameable. This is also seen in the name of their room. Identified numerically, the haven of the 207s is a just another unit in another high-rise building. The characters' lives become enveloped in the ubiquity of their residential block. The symbolic blanking out of the city's history through this un-naming in the novel also blanks out the 207s' presence here, rendering them invisible and indistinguishable.

On a fundamental level, being subsumed within a generic, unnamed space seems to limit the feeling that the 207s can create opportunities for meaningful self-determination and emplacement within this environment. One could argue that such a condition produces the mobile and creative energies within the post-apartheid city. Certainly, if one considers how space and passage here were once regulated and controlled, acts of erasure enable the process of re-inscription. However, the sense of absence and erasure that is held in these details suggests that the Noko and the 207s are also somehow absent, unable to make their mark on the city and to make it their own, thus echoing the ambiguous urbanity of their forefathers. Noko and his friends are aware of this, as seen in Noko's reference to history: 'you know, those days which the rulers of this land don't want you to forget'. Noko reminds the reader of the reiterations of the geo-political struggles of the past in the 207s' patterns: trying to find a home, to feel at home in the city, to find a way of claiming the city that empowers them socially, economically and politically.

Feelings of impermanence and dispensability pervade the friends' relationship to their apartment block, traced, for instance, in their repetitive entrances and exits through the security checkpoint. Often, the friends 'pass through the checkpoint without saying a word' (149) to the security guards. The friends have little regard for the boundaries of the building or those who safeguard its portals. Their dismissiveness belies their desire to belong but is also a product of the fact that they have no real sense of propriety here. This same lack extends to their attitudes towards their monthly evictions. In 'Shutdown days,'

the friends are unflustered when they are locked out – casually shifting over to a friend’s studio while they gather rent to move back in. Matome’s business partner, Wada, rents the flat. The friends’ familiarity with Wada and the house suggests that they have been doing this for a long time. Noko describes his homes in the following way:

Wada’s homes were always in the city centre. When I first knew him he was staying at Pan Africa House, on the corner of Troy and Jeppe Streets, then he moved to Lekton House in Wanderers Street, on the corner of Bree Street, and from there, to Johannesburg Park Station. This is where we are now...

(79)

Wada’s itinerancy and the state of his room mirror the 207s’. In Wada’s house, the friends sleep on the floor as they do in their haven. Noko comments that ‘there’s nothing that has to do with hygiene here’ (80) – a description which could be used for room 207 too. He adds that here, ‘everything is for survival’ (80), again suggesting that there is little here that makes one feel at home. This room’s discouragement of comfort and permanence mimics that of room 207 and suggests that the condition of placelessness extends to all of Hillbrow’s black, migrant residents. This idea is made clear in Molamo’s argument that:

We have been, as black people, suffering for as long as there has been history. Everything bad happens to black people and even if I was a billionaire, living the life of a king, with slaves and servants, there would always be something which would remind me that I’m black and don’t belong.

(144)

As the 207s move through the city, they bring with them their distrust of the post-apartheid city as well as the burden of their historical relationship to Johannesburg. Their discomfort is worsened by the fact that they struggle to digest absorb or face the full implications of history in this urban space and on themselves. As Noko tells the reader, ‘What is done is done, blamed or blameless, we have to keep on living’ (132). The 207s are constantly seeking ways to move forward into a new dream home, outside of

Hillbrow, a new residential haven that will prove to that they have ‘made it’.²⁶ The teleological nature of their spatial aspirations is symptomatic of their growing understanding that the post-apartheid city is not all what it is meant to be, that the transition has not brought about a total revision of the past, and that they are irrevocably caught up in a repetitive cycle of displacement. When most of the friends do leave, they find these dream homes in established upmarket suburbs like Victory Park and Illovo. Molamo goes to the northern suburbs and Modishi and Lerato move to Midrand. This move to a totally different urban zone helps them to blank out their feelings of unsettlement and lack of belonging.

After moving into these spaces, the close friendships that the 207s had with each other fall away. This suggests that their decade in Hillbrow has eroded their capacity for any kind of lasting bond. Or, perhaps in their final exodus, they realise that there is no way of translating their Hillbrow selves beyond the boundaries of that place. In fact, in these safer settings, the 207s seem to have lost all sense of ethnic community. In this way, as attested to in Vladislavić’s novel, these post-apartheid dream homes prevent the friends from actually assimilating into the city and includes them in an existing historico-spatial narrative. In their oppressive form and position, these suburban homes negate the safety and success they were thought to represent by replicating the very segregations that enforced the apartheid migrant’s distance from urbanity and permanence. The friends fall prey to the mythological ideals attached to privileged post-apartheid suburbs even though these places produced to counteract the unknown elements of the African terrain. The fact that the 207s hanker after these forms means they still identify them as a desirable alternative to their existing psychos-spatial subjectivities. So, even though they have met with failure and disappointment in Hillbrow, they perform the same patterns in relation to the suburbs: hankering after an idealised zone which will allow them to escape the traumas of the past. Unfortunately, these traumas are reproduced by the very notion of escape and the myths of a better place.

²⁶ Of the friends who do not leave, Zulu-Boy, the only 207 who truly seemed to embrace the inner city, dies of an AIDS related illness. One could say that the inner city literally kills him.

Noko's trajectory out of Hillbrow is more complex. First, he stays in the area, moving to a single flat in Joubert Park – just next to Hillbrow. His loneliness here and eventual exit from the city are a result of his inability to make a home-space after leaving room 207. Noko feels abandoned and isolated but his sorry state at the end of the novel reflects a deeper psychological malaise or geopathic disorder. He registers his departure from Hillbrow as a form of exile, of not belonging to this urban scene. However, he fails to see that his state of unbelonging is an extension of a deeper and more profound lack of place, generated through a decade in Hillbrow and its reiterations of history's denial of a secure relationship with residence in the city.

Conclusion

In all three novels, the house is a primary symbol for the unhomey experience. I have discussed how each set of protagonists acts out and is entangled with disordered domestic spaces and spatial practices. By carrying with them inherited expectations and perspectives – psycho-social and ideological – the characters repeat historical iterations of discordance in relationship to the house. Built environments and the institutional and social forces that make or shape them create arenas where history can be seen to be 'repeating' itself. In turn, the fraught psycho-social subjectivity of each character becomes ingrained by this discordance, in reproducing disruption both in the everyday patterns of the character and in his or her bonds with 'home'. Each novel uses the space of the house as a metaphorical device for this process, revealing how the intimate space of the subject is marred by his or her disordered relationship to the historical city and to him or herself within the current one.

Where one might expect the claustrophobic or insulating experiences of these patterns to be alleviated outside of the house, in the next section I show how the characters' itineraries outside of the house repeat forms and patterns and so reveal the effects of apartheid spatiality, as well as reinvigorating it. Experiences of dislocation and feelings of uneasiness or anxiety around belonging and being emplaced in Johannesburg can be traced in the characters' trajectories through the city, the routes they take as they move

between their houses and work, and the modes of travel they use. As I shall explore next, the limitations in their patterns of movement compound the geopathic disorders of place that have begun in the house.

SECTION TWO

PATTERNS OF MOVEMENT: IMMOBILITY, ELLIPSIS AND RETURN

Let's take a midday walk around. Let us take a walk to...
Well, we'll see where we end up [...]

You are in Van der Merwe Street, walk to your right, cross Claim, cross Quartz, Twist, King George, and a left turn into Klein. Please notice and observe. Pass Pretoria, Kotze, Esselen, then turn right, keep walking, notice, see and observe with me here, jump a street into Captain. Notice this building on your right, the Hillbrow Theatre [...]

Looks dirty?

Didn't say that you should comment.

Pause.

Thank you.

Turn right into Twist, walk with me here. Relax, you aren't in any kind of danger. Walk like a true Hillbrowean. Walk it like it belongs to you, because, me and you, we have inherited this. It's ours now. Pass one street, pass another and then make a left turn into Wolmarans [...]

(*Room 207*: 157-158)

Introduction

This is an excerpt from a chapter in *Room 207* called 'A Sad Tale' where Noko, the story's narrator invites the reader to accompany him as he traces a familiar circuit through the inner city. He weaves through the streets, from the 207s' 'haven' on the corner of Van de Merwe and Claim Street, in a westerly direction across the grid of Hillbrow. His language is immediate and urgent and his instruction matches the energies of the streets. His words are also repetitive and this evokes another energy: monotony or repetition.

It is worth mentioning the parallels between Noko's circuit and the narrator's in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*. In Mpe's novel, the narrator leads the reader through the same strata of inner city streets and its interlocking corners and pavements. Read in relation to each other, Moele seems to be evoking Mpe's suggestion that as much as this grid can be

reworked and rehashed by new migrants, these streets are also replete with old social and economic patterns. This can be traced in the violent scenes of Mpe's novel and Refentse's circuits through Hillbrow as he hankers after a new direction in the urban space, ultimately falling victim to his connections to his rural past and to the whiles of Hillbrow. In *Room 207*, Moele invokes Mpe by welcoming the reader into his walk around the city and so invites us to create links between what befalls both sets of characters from each novel. As *Room 207* progresses and the fate of the friends becomes clearer, the reader understands that the repetition in Noko's instructions and the reiterations of street names echoes their own rhythmic entrapment within the material and cognitive map of the inner city. Indeed, embodied in his words is the 207s' lack of sustained and liberated engagement with place in this urban zone.

By the end of the second passage above, Noko is near Ellis Park station in the east, on a street called Nugget (on Johannesburg's grid, Windybrow Theatre sits on the corner of Nugget and Pieterse Streets). Noko's entire journey is not included here – although I shall be discussing more of it in this section. I have selected this passage by way of introduction to this section since it shows how Noko and his friends' routes and destinations within the inner city evoke and produce further disturbances around place-making in the city. One can notice that in Noko's wandered route and the places he chooses to visit above, the contradictions that permeated the 207s' abode have found branches in the public arena, taking on different forms and iterations, but revealing the pervasiveness of the friends' geopathic disorders within another area of everyday life and practice: movement and passage. Noko's itinerary: where he chooses to go, why he chooses to go there, and how he chooses to move towards his destinations, is made up of complex tensions between the past and the present and repetitions of historical relationships to immobility.

For instance, Noko's passage is undetermined here, as indicated by the sentence, 'we'll see where we end up'. He has already been established as a young man in search of work and so on a story level, it is not unexpected that he has nowhere in particular that he has to be. On a day-to-day basis within the narrative, this allows him a certain amount of

freedom to move through the city, as he likes. Theoretically, his route is new: his passage through the city scrambles the existing map (and the ideologies attached to it) and reinvents the inner city according to his whims, bringing about a reconstruction of these historical layers. This act of walking and spatial reinvention is therefore emblematic of ‘the transgressions of national space and identity, often under conditions of need, linked to survival itself’ (Nuttall, 2004: 23-24) linked to peripatetics of contemporary Johannesburg’s migrants.

However, his lack of direction in these passages and his varying responses to what he sees around him show also a scattered and uncertain search for meaning and context in the contemporary inner city. Noko is tracing a route through and across known roads with historically established names and so while his movements are largely undirected in this part of the novel, they take place on existing pathways, loaded with historical meanings and associations.²⁷

I use *Room 207* to begin my discussion of each novel’s construction of immobilities affecting the characters as they move through the city. In this section I suggest that while the post-apartheid city is often imagined as a space of heightened mobility, the protagonists’ itineraries within their relevant areas seem to repeat past patterns of constraint, separation and anxiety. I argue that their movements are in conflict with the energies normally associated with a changing, and changeable, urban space. I explore key aspects that reveal these conflicts, namely, the streets or roads upon which they enact their routes, and their choices of destinations. I also examine their modes of passage: walking, driving, public transport and the ways in which they move through the city as well as in and out of it.

In each analysis, I try to show how movement and change is limited. This seems

²⁷ If one considers for a moment what a street name is meant to do, then one can see this relationship more clearly. For instance, a synonym for ‘street name’ is ‘odonym’. The prefix ‘odo’ is a shortening of the Latin word for navigate, ‘hodos’ (Oxford English Dictionary). Thus, the word ‘odonym’, and therefore the phrase ‘street name’ is idiomatically suggestive of the act of navigating through the reading of proper names. If Noko is using existing street names to navigate his way through the inner city grid, in essence, he is reliving the past. His itinerary is therefore produced through history.

paradoxical given that heightened mobility and access to previously controlled spaces are considered to be two of the defining conditions of post-apartheid Johannesburg. Shane Graham writes, ‘the major promise of post-apartheid urban regeneration was for the liberation of space’ which ‘in turn [...] demanded the concomitant liberation of mobility’ (Graham, 2006: 5). Indeed, with the end of apartheid, routes, public spaces and the transport industry were opened up to a diverse array of peoples and practices, and transport systems like the taxi industry.²⁸ The multifarious enunciations of everyday life along routes and in public spaces, once previously ‘immobilised’ by state systems, should have signaled the ‘new’ city’s potential for fluidity, regeneration and reconciliation.

While ‘increased mobility is synonymous with the engagement with ‘otherness’ and ‘the kinds of possibilities never permitted by differences that remain apart’ (Bester, 2005: 15), each novel’s presentation of movement in the city generates the sense that even in a less tangible realm to housing, the post-apartheid zone is laden with historical burden. This burden is carried by and affects the characters to such a degree so that they are unable to generate alternatives to existing limitations. As I shall argue, the character’s patterns of movement draw attention to the fact that, Johannesburg profile as ‘a city of shallows and depths [...] memory of life below the surface, of suffering, alienation, rebellion, insurrection’ (Mbembe, Nuttall, 2007: 286). The movements of the characters activate these memories in the city so that as they map out their routes, they awaken the city’s, and their own, spatial traumas. The characters reinscribe their own fraught narratives about passage and motion onto the city space and thus reinstate their dislocation.

²⁸ In the last two decades, the taxi industry has risen to become the most prolifically functioning ‘informal’ transport system in South African cities, catering to the needs of the majority of South Africa’s working class urbanites and travelers between urban and rural areas. The minibus taxi industry’s deregulation coincided with an increasingly charged political scene in the late apartheid years. By the late 1980’s, the state had pulled out of the industry entirely, leaving it open for the beginning of the industry as it exists now. Highly competitive and often violent (rival taxi factions have been waging a ‘war’ against each other and against the formal transport system since the early 1990’s) the contemporary taxi industry also operates along the seam between legal and illegal (many drivers operate without a drivers license, vehicles are often dangerously neglected and tend to be overloaded with passengers). Despite this, the industry facilitates the informal economy that characterises much of Johannesburg’s centre nowadays. Cf. Dugard, Jackie. ‘From Low Intensity Wars to Mafia War: Taxi Violence in South Africa (1987- 2000)’ in *Violence and Transition: Series 4*. Centre for the Study of Violence and Transition (May 2001). www.csvr.org.za. In addition, Nicholas Mhlongo’s novel, *Dog Eat Dog* details in emotive detail the terrifying experience of riding in a taxi between city centre and the peripheral township.

In the previous section, I identified particular histories of housing pertinent to each novel's setting. In this section of my thesis, I have found that each novel touches on similar areas where relationships with mobility are concerned. For instance, all three sets of characters have explicit relationships to cars and automobility. Likewise, roads and highways feature in each character's negotiation of the city and their relationship to it. Issues of passage and migration too are brought up in each novel. For this reason, my discussion in this section follows a slightly different structure. Therefore, as I discuss how the apartheid state's strategies affected physical movement and relationships to mobility in the city, I note how each novel links to this before I proceed with my close readings of the novels themselves.²⁹

Before I begin my analysis of each novel, I would like to discuss the ways in which the apartheid state manipulated mobility and movement in the city so one might read the significance of these three sets of protagonists' itineraries.

Mobility and the City

Modernity and mobility are usually twinned conceptually (Beckmann, 2004: 81). Mobility is generally accepted as one of the defining features of a modern globalised and capitalist world society. Being mobile, being able to or having the right to 'move' – both physically and symbolically – denotes social agency and choice³⁰ or the right to direct oneself and one's own action within social space. The city, a defining vehicle of modernity, epitomises movement in its confluence of transports, markets, media, people, neighbourhoods and lifestyles – so much so that as Sarah Nuttall asserts, the city is often thought of as 'a metaphor for motion, mutability' (2003: 19).³¹ The city has become,

²⁹ In a sense, this structure mirrors the difficulty in trying to pin down motion, or have it locked into a particular position or zone. I thus see this issue as being constituted by the object of my examination in this section and for that reason, conceptually apt.

³⁰ Mobility, configured in this way, should be treated differently to exile or displacement. These are also defining features of the modern world, but are associated with being coerced or persuaded to move because of mitigating circumstances.

³¹ For more readings about this relationship on a global scale, see for instance: Williams, Raymond. *The City and the Country*. St Albans: Paladin, 1975; Ghent Urban Studies Team. *The Urban Condition: Space, Community and the Self in the Contemporary Metropolis*. Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1999; *The Practice of Everyday Life, Vol. 2*. Michel de Certeau, Luce Giard, Pierre Mayol (eds). Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998; *The Spaces of Postmodernity: Readings in Human Geography*

therefore, a primary sign of flux and action.

People enact urban exchanges physically through everyday public acts like walking, talking, eating, driving, working, and so on. In return, the city has come to be defined ‘not only through the production of space, but also through its re-production in the movements of the body in space’ (Bester, 2005: p 10). Being mobile and urban thus denotes being modern, and also suggests a kind of everyday power. Having a place in the city invokes a claim to this feature of urban life. The very term, ‘upwardly mobile’ for instance indicates the accumulation of personal success that is associated with taking advantage of opportunities that modernity, and thus the urban, offers.

In many ways, the mobile figure of the migrant, the commuter or the everyday city dweller has become a symbol of this potential. Consider the classic urban trope of the *flâneur*, likened by Michel de Certeau to a storyteller whose:

networks of [...] moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces: in relation to representations, it remains daily and indefinitely other.

(1984: 93)

The trajectories and daily acts of the mobile streetwalker or migrant city figure are seen to create alterity within demarcated space along public routes so that the city becomes a composite of innumerable acts of pedestrian negotiation. For numerous scholars, moving through the city on street level is seen to undermine the overarching order of a city, since the intricate mappings of alternating routes and destinations through ‘minor, consumer practices’ (de Certeau, 1984: 49) constantly disrupt, disorder and re-order the institutionally established or total environment. Owing to these resistant and creative energies, the ‘street-level city’ and its ‘pedestrian enunciations’ or ‘sidewalk ballets’ as Jane Jacobs dubs them (Kruger, 2001: 238) is ‘the fundamental ingredient of urban

Michael Dear and Steven Flusty (eds). Oxford and Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2002; *Under Siege: Four African Cities*. Okwui Enwezor *et al* (eds). Documenta 11, Platform 4. Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2002.

vitality' (Kruger, 238).

Owing to the urban's association with progress, modernity and social agency, mobility was one of the key areas targeted by the apartheid state in its bid to control Johannesburg. As the apartheid state's industrial capital and a rapidly evolving and increasingly heterogeneous space, Johannesburg was an ideal site for harnessing the country's growth and paradoxically, for controlling its citizens. Johannesburg had always been a fast evolving, 'instant city' (Mitshikiza, 2004: 481), a wealthy hub born out of migratory energies and industrial pursuits. While its own growth epitomised these energies, changes in global urban patterns also coincided with the national party's rise to power in the early part of the twentieth century. By the late 1940's, the state's spatial strategies, and paranoia, evolved to meet South Africa's surges in urban development. As Beningfield writes:

In the mass move to the cities that occurred in the first half of the twentieth century the politics of the fatherland were forced to confront an urban context which itself was unfamiliar ground. As a result, the myth of the merging of nation and landscape was exposed to stress and contradiction in the proximities and complexities of the city. The urban environment offered new challenges, both to an Afrikaner workforce that was forced to compete with black workers, and to the myth of the segregated landscape and the 'natural' identities that were part of it.

(2009: 180)

For an ideological system that relied on the stratification of space for its control of society, people's movements and the fluctuating patterns in Johannesburg were threatening. But, in regulating movement, labour and access in the face of growing numbers seeking work in the cities, the government felt it could control the very thing that could undermine it.³² This desire took on a particular kind of urgency since in reality

³² The state's conception of mobility can be seen to be linked to modern conceptions of evolution and historical progress, which rely on chronological or linear conceptions of social development. 'Historical time,' and evolutionary time order the development of society according to what Johannes Fabian calls 'sequence of unique, unrepeatable events'. The linearity of this notion of temporal passage defines temporal relations as separate and progressively demarcated. This model thus formed the development of the binaries underlying apartheid discourse, such as traditional vs. modern society, literate vs. preliterate people, savage vs. civilised man and thus justified the supposedly natural dominance of some over others. Cf. Fabian, Johannes. *Time and the Other: How Anthropology makes its Object*. New York: Columbia

physical boundaries within the city were often ‘fluctuating, porous and ill-defined’ (Bremner, 2010: 161), especially in denser areas. Spatial control was not always possible, so a space like the street or public route, for example, became a key site for the enforcement of the apartheid state’s rule. Denying the non-white population’s rights to mobility enforced their socio-political domestication and more pervasively, kept the whole of Johannesburg in a cultural, social and political frieze, so that the movements of all urbanites became striated according to the state’s regulations. The state’s efficacy in corrupting urban movement deeply affected the fluidity of the whole city, so that the movements of most South Africans, even those not openly persecuted by apartheid laws, became part of a heavily regulated system. Such measures altered the fabric of everyday urban life, becoming internalised by Johannesburg’s peoples, so that everyday movements and spaces were produced by and reproduced a multitude of restrictions and anxieties that created a geopathic disorder of fractured and restrained mobility, permeating city life.

The streets

One of the state’s prime strategies was to remap the city’s streets into uniform, ‘domesticating grids’ (Bremner, 2010: 108). Johannesburg’s masses of city roads, about ‘9000 km’s’ of them were transformed from ‘haphazard and hastily constructed trails’ and the ‘common ground for public life’ into state-controlled thoroughfares (Bremner: 108) and sites of struggle and anxiety, or as Bremner succinctly observes: ‘symbols of oppression and sites of resistance. Forced removals, the movement of armoured vehicles, marches, roadblocks, running street battles: the culture of the street was a highly politicised one’ (Bremner: 108). In *Triomf* and *Room 207*, the characters spend a good deal of time traversing the neighbourhood streets and as they do, they churn up these former associations, revealing the extent to which these pathways and their own habits reinvigorate apartheid immobilities.

One can see this not only in the routes the characters choose to take but also in their interactions with road names and the grid systems themselves. One of the ironies evoked

for instance in *Triomf*, is how the road layout of the neighbourhood is the same as Sophiatown's. Likewise in *Room 207*, as I touched on above, Moele's protagonists make their routes through public avenues and sites that are still inscribed with the legacy of the colonial and apartheid city.³³ For instance, inscribing the city streets with nomenclature important to the ruling party and its history instated the history and the language of the ruling power into the city's fabric. Priscilla Ferguson points out that, 'nomination makes a fundamental gesture of possession, the naming of streets affords one more opportunity to affirm, or to contest, control of the city' (Ferguson, 1988: 386). In *Room 207* especially, the reader is asked to consider how the symbolic value of street names, especially those which remain unchanged, affects the daily lives of formerly oppressed people as they wander through Johannesburg.

Other spatial strategies that were implemented to regulate access and integration through the public routes of the city included 'pass books, spot fines, location permits, police raids, removal vans, bulldozers' (Bremner, 2010: 108).³⁴ While this kind of debilitating legislation was eradicated in the country's transition to ANC leadership in 1994, one has to question how the city has changed for the better in the aftermath. In all three novels, the city may be growing rapidly and passage in the city has been made possible for all citizens. However, comparing the freedoms associated with this political reality with the portraits of passage evoked in these novels evokes a disconcerting sense that while legislation may have changed, the effects of the past are still deeply embedded in street

³³ There is much debate to be had about what it means to change a road name and in recent years, the names of a number of South African streets and highways have been altered. But, while a large arterial route running around Johannesburg once memorialising Hans Strijdom may have been rechristened Malibongwe Drive or Verwoed Drive renamed Bram Fischer, the inner city's road names remain unaltered in the novel's chronotope. For more reading on policy around this issue in Johannesburg, see the archive document: 'Policy on the Naming and Renaming of Streets and Other Public Places', available at: <http://www.joburg-archive.co.za> Accessed: 12/08/2012.

³⁴ The infamous Pass Laws, perhaps one of the most potent symbols of the state's control of mobility, regulated black South African movements within the city, from the township to the city, as well as journeys between Johannesburg and the homelands. Itineraries were limited to employment status. Pass laws were heavily implemented during the height of apartheid and daily acts that would normally be associated with the fluidity of movement; commuting, walking and simply traversing the city and its surrounds were rendered onerous and difficult. Walking to work, or part of the way at least, was for most black South Africans, a normalised activity. 'Assuming race to be an adequate proxy for income,' and that 'wealthier pedestrians are not prepared to walk as far as poorer pedestrians' (Behrens, 2005: 172), non-white pedestrian commuters were highly visible to the apartheid police, ensuring the effective implementation of Pass Laws and the victimisation of black travelers.

acts and spaces. This comes out strongly, for example in *The Exploded View* where the streets are teeming with newcomers from all over the continent and country and yet where those on the street and those in cars, like the four protagonists, seldom intermingle. Issues of passage and migration are also key themes in *Room 207* and *Triomf*, which I duly explore. What comes out especially strongly in *Room 207* is how the apartheid state corrupted the normal creative tension between leaving and arriving by creating a geopolitical and spatial divide between ‘home’ in the homelands and ‘the city’.³⁵

Automotives/public transport

The apartheid state’s need to protect their expanding urban dominion affected automotive and train transport deeply too. In order to move workers ‘from their peripheralised sites of reproduction to centralised points of production’ (McCarthy and Swilling, 1985: 382), the state grew to monopolise the transport industry. In a glaring reversal of the heterotopic³⁶ affect of vehicles of transport, over the course of the twentieth century, but more acutely after 1948 (Pirie, 1992; McCarthy and Swilling, 1985), buses and trains – the main conduits of the city’s expanding labour force – were subjected to racial laws that prevented or greatly restricted different South Africans from sharing compartments or from sharing the same access points. This turned the public transport system, normally signifying urban motion and exchange, into a vessel of restriction, or what de Certeau refers to as a ‘rationalized cell’. A bubble of panoptic and classifying power, a module of imprisonment that makes possible the production of an order, a closed and autonomous insularity (de Certeau, 1987: 111). The rhythms and animations that would normally accompany ordinary peripatetic activity into the city³⁷ were suppressed.

³⁵ Each of the 207s reveals a difficulty in holding onto their connection to their former place while inhabiting the city and end up in a state of dislocation because of this split. I examine this more in the following Section. This is one of the conditions of the Jim figure – being caught between two zones, trying to work in both.

³⁶ Vehicles of transport – vessels of transition – bring the commuter into relationships with temporary sites and fleeting interactions: passing stations, strange commuters and unforeseen elements and changing landscapes that accompany the act of getting to one’s destination. Michel Foucault’s definition of heterotopias is of spaces that ‘suspend, neutralize, or invert the set of relationships designed, reflected, or mirrored by themselves.’ (1967: 3) Cf. Foucault, 1967. Public transport unfixes routes and experiences through its transitory nature, and thus changes the fixed relationships between the subject and his environment.

³⁷ In fact, the passing of legislation around transport was so successful that it allowed for the implementation of tighter control of other public spaces. Cf. Pirie, 2002.

This control of the nature of the public urban transport system was particularly ironic with regards to central Johannesburg: an area that had been the point of entry for generations of tourists, travelers, prospectors, continental and intercontinental immigrants, and migrant workers.³⁸ The ‘sign’ of the inner city through this became loaded as a place of limited mobility even while as an industrial hub, it epitomised motion and flux. This contradictory relationship can be seen as part of the inner city’s long-standing ambivalence for black urbanites, evoked strongly in *Room 207*. While the Benades in *Triomf* do not experience this relationship to public transport in the same way as the 207s, their fraught relationship with the city is embodied in their early passage into the railway district and their difficult urbanisation through this. Associations between the state-run railway industry and what they have become as a family are brought to the surface in the novel, as I discuss further in the succeeding pages. The protagonists of *The Exploded View* enjoy an unrestricted ability to drive through the city in their cars and do not have the same fraught relationship with transport. But, even while these men drive themselves around Johannesburg, their routes and modes of private travel reflect an inability to embrace the control and fluidity normally associated with driving.

Highways

This comes in part from the fact that each of Vladislavić’s protagonists drives along highways symbolically tied to the urban vision of the apartheid state. In seeming contradistinction to the limited freedoms of public routes and movement under apartheid, Johannesburg’s highways grew to encircle and stretch out from the city in all four directions, linking its expanses, and making it accessible from all parts of the country as well as for most modes of industrial and private transport. But the city’s freeways and peripheral roads facilitated the growth of wealth, industry and development and the careful institutionalisation of state practice and ideology in the greater expanse of the city too. Johannesburg’s arterial routes and freeways were designed to encapsulate the centre of the city and keep its central neighbourhoods increasingly reserved for middle-class

³⁸ This can generally be attributed to the centre’s large train station, Park Station, and its convenient position in relation to the rest of the city, and the fact that the inner city was the industrial city’s historic business district. Cf. Kruger, 2006.

white families, protected, practically, from traffic, but symbolically too from the ‘threat’ of the outer city.

The city’s highways were also constructed to connect the townships to the centre, ensuring the flow of labour into the city. Johannesburg’s ‘ring road,’ for example, connecting two main national roads, the N1 and N3 and a host of other smaller highways radiating from the centre, was built in the early 1970’s and circumvented traffic not intended for Johannesburg’s centre. In addition to this, it was built so that the South African Defense Force would have a quick route to townships, in the event of violence, and a strong position to defend the city in case it was attacked by supposedly hostile neighbours.³⁹

While the city’s highways render it skein-like, the history of Johannesburg’s highways points to roads as pathways of containment and can be seen as extensions of the apartheid plan. In a recent article, Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall describe the view from the city’s central highway:

If we take the highway around the city, we see the mine dumps, man-made hills of gold dust, yellow in the winter sun, relics of the old gold mines on which this city was founded, heaving earth to the surface, the debris of wealth extraction. From all around, among and beyond the gold dumps, the city rises.

(2007: 281)

These vistas, forming the settings and backdrops of Vladislavić’s novel, reveal Johannesburg’s history as a gold mining camp and remind the reader of the wealth that this industry brought: a glorious narrative of conquest and riches for some, but a traumatic one of appropriation and suppression for others. This is significant also in that the state’s capital city and seat of administrative power, Pretoria, is connected to Johannesburg along one of these massive highways, the M1 and is situated, in a gesture deeply reminiscent of the Afrikaner’s great trek to the promised hinterland, ‘North’ (*Triomf*: 474) of Johannesburg.

³⁹ <http://www.skyscrapercity.com>. Accessed: 12/04/2012.

Furthermore, as Behrens suggests, the apartheid city's highways were designed around the principle of directing smooth and steady automobile traffic and thus ensuring that 'motor-car traffic' ran 'more efficiently, safely and cost effectively' (Behrens, 168). Thus, the highway can be seen as a potent symbol of the apartheid state's vision of Johannesburg's longevity, organisation and prowess. Highways were also designed to provide carriageway for the increasingly large numbers of private vehicles in Johannesburg of the early twentieth century (Behrens, 2005: 167).⁴⁰ While there were no formal, racial restrictions about private vehicle ownership in South Africa, cars were (and still are) expensive. Given that that system of apartheid racialised the acquisition of wealth and the freedom to move, automobile owners and drivers were predominantly white, middle-class people (Graham, 2006: 72).⁴¹ Thus, in effect vehicles representing 'domination' (Urry, 2004: 25) were owned largely by the socially and politically dominant.⁴²

As Budlender, Egan, Duffy and also Majara drive around Johannesburg in their cars, they take advantage of a luxury that has its roots in this former system. Furthermore, their general dependency on the order and rhythm of the culture of automobility reflects their loyalty to a relationship to freeway travel that is inherently exclusive and exclusionary. As a commodity that grew out of and facilitated the emergence of the idealised, westernised suburban lifestyle, the private vehicle has become 'the major item of *individual consumption* after housing, providing status to its owner/user through its sign-values (such as speed, security, safety, sexual desire, career success, freedom, family, masculinity)' (Urry: 26). Just as the suburban idylls of Vladislavić's novel evoke the horrors of exclusion, so do the vehicles carrying his protagonists from place to place evoke tensions around freedom and security. This tension has a particular socio-

⁴⁰ According to Behrens, the city's highways incorporated key aspects of post-war British and American urban road design aimed at providing for the burgeoning 'European' middle class.

⁴¹ Sarah Nuttall writes that even as Johannesburg's 'suburbs deracialize, it is still the case that many in the middle classes seldom walk'. Cf. Nuttall, 2004.

⁴² In a now famous anecdote, retold in conversation to me by former Black Sash activist and literary critic, Jane Rosenthal, Winnie Madikizela Mandela describes a day in the late 1980's when she drove to the shops. A white policeman came over and asked her, patronisingly, 'does your Madame know that you have taken her car?'

ideological weight in relation to the country's history.⁴³

Automobiles

In interesting ways, this relationship with cars is parodied in *Triomf* where the Benades' Volkswagens and their frequent outings show a desire to believe that they have a 'good life' and are included in the life of the city. Indeed, in modern urban society, the private vehicle, writes Urry, has become 'the dominant *culture* that sustains major discourses of what constitutes the good life, what is necessary for an appropriate citizenship of mobility' (Urry, 2004: 25). However, as I shall argue, while they perform many of the acts of a 'happy family' they are in fact always on the peripheries of society and their excursions seem to amplify their exclusion from the world outside of *Triomf*. The value invested in such modes of travel and its association with the wealth and freedom of the historically elite can also be found in the 207s' glorification of private transport and vehicle ownership. Although here too in *Room 207*, the trope of the vehicle points to the 207s' lack of movement. As the young protagonists hanker after what has become a ubiquitous token of affluent mainstream society, their disastrous relationship to cars intensify their lack of direction and 'upward mobility' and their struggle to integrate their notion of 'dream city' with the reality that confronts them.

The 'ease of motion' (Sennett: 1977: 14) that driving afforded the driver stood in stark contrast to the experiences of Johannesburg's apartheid workforce who had to submit to the institutionalisation of public space and of motion, and whose movements, unlike the archetypal driver who 'subordinates the streets to movement' (Sennett: 14) were subordinated, in effect, by the law of the road. In *Room 207*, Noko in particular has a tense relationship with public transport and his final point of departure from a taxi rank brings up many of these kinds of issues.

While each set of characters replays and reinstates these issues in a literal way by

⁴³ It would be interesting to study the relationship between the masculinities of the four male protagonists and their relationships to cars. I do not touch on gender issues to any large degree in this thesis, but I am aware of the scholarly potential that this area holds too and look forward to further opportunities to examine it at a later stage.

engaging with cars, roads, transport systems and going on excursions along roads, metaphorically their itineraries reflect the continuation of a more generally fractious relationship with passage and access. Indeed, especially in novels like *Triomf* and *The Exploded View*, the characters are confronted constantly with the toll of entering the city, and the lasting effects of their own migration to the city on their psyches and relationship to city life in Johannesburg. Thus, on the whole, I read motion and mobility as an allegory for the evolution of each protagonist's subjectivity in relation to his or her setting and inversely, the evolution of the city through its people's experiences of history and space.

Room 207: Wanderers

[...] maybe you'll get to heaven, but I tell you we are in hell now. Who cares if it's from one hell to another? At least we should enjoy this hell the best way we can.

Cross the street and turn right. I like this street but I do not know its name and I do not care what it is called.

The trees?

I do not know what they are called either. No I just like it when I walk in this street, though I know your nose noticed that it smells of urine.

You're now looking at the Windybrow Arts Centre. It used to be called the Windybrow Theatre but [...] it's another sad story too.

(Room 207: 158)

Introduction

In this passage, which follows on from the passage at the beginning of this section, Noko is guiding the reader around ruined locations. His knowledge of street names, established earlier, seems to wane as he encounters markers of the inner city's deterioration. He has walked to an area whose street names he is less familiar with, although he knows the street since he recalls its smell of trees. He is probably near Joubert Park, which was once a lush inner city public garden, but which would have been derelict at the time of the novel's publication in 2006 and has been for much of the post-apartheid era. Noko seems to become less directed and sure of physical details as he encounters sights that upset

him. He visits Hillbrow Theatre and Windybrow. Describing them as laced with a scent of urine, Noko alikens them to 'hell'. Noko sees how his own trajectory into urban life is mirrored in the stories of these broken-down edifices. While Noko (and his friends) lay their own stories into the physical grid of the inner city, deeper historical imprints of continued suffering in certain public sites act as reminders of how the city has not granted the freedoms that were anticipated in the transition. Much of the inner city that Noko's generation has inherited is falling apart.

Noko's perambulations in the novel do not reveal a golden city of opportunity but rather instances of restraint and repetition. This is jarring for the 207s, especially considering that like their predecessors, the 207s, as Sam Radithlalo, have come here intent on 'making it good'—enacted by 'a desire for recognition, legitimacy, status, wealth, and, ultimately, being allowed membership of mainstream society (Radithlalo, 2007). Their constant movement through Johannesburg, usually by foot, and their hustler-style modes of being embody the migrant's potential to generate new patterns of meaning within the material and psycho-social space of the post-apartheid urban. However, their itineraries in the city – their movements, directions and destinations – evoke show how their mobility is contained and their expectations dashed. Their movements insulate them within their space and do not allow them to traverse the inner city or subordinate it to their own whims and needs. Thus, while the 207s may not be the 'Jim' figures of Johannesburg's apartheid stories, they are ostensibly very similar in the fact that their experience of Johannesburg is, by and large, crippling. With the Jim trope shadowing the 207s, the disappointment, immobility and frustrations they experience take on a greater historical significance and also plants this novel within a literary tradition which aimed to critique the status quo and emphasise the plight of the migrant. However, the classic Jim figure, Michael Titlestad describes as an 'uncorrupted black man' arriving from a 'rural context' who 'discovers a mesmerising but overwhelming Johannesburg' (Titlestad, 2012: 676). The 207s are not uncorrupted because they carry with them the burdens of their fathers and the former generations relationship to this place. Without realising, the 207s create patterns of containment in their movements because they have inherited a psycho-spatial pattern of entrapment.

Passage to Hillbrow

If one takes the 207s as a collective representation of a type of post-apartheid urban experience, then their trajectories into the city reflect the erratic, dislocated nature of passage faced by generations of black South African migrants coming into Johannesburg. Within the friends' migrations, one sees examples of active, visible journeys to the city from identifiable origins and journeys to the city where the characters' routes and histories are less objectively distinguishable and their origins more blurred. This is reflective of the general tensions faced by incomers to the city. Molamo, Zulu-Boy, and one of the subsidiary female characters, Ntombifuthi – one of the 'angels of the night' – have a clear link to another place. Others, such as Noko or Matome, appear to have just arrived in Hillbrow and emerge through the text without an identifiable original place.

These extremes raise tensions around what is sacrificed in the passage to the city. They also contribute towards the 207s' feelings of restriction and loss as they try to make it in central Johannesburg, feelings that seem to be symptomatic of a historically produced divide between the rural and the urban or between the township and the inner city. The migrant, in order to come into the city had to suspend his links to his original place-identity (the Bantustan or township) so as to embrace the urban (albeit temporarily). In this way, the 207s invoke the classic split between rural and urban self, captured in the cluster of Johannesburg novels discussed in my introduction. Like the narrator in Serote's 'City Johannesburg' or Refentse and Refilwe in Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, the migrant become defined by those links, so that access to the city is always a function of the fact that s/he could never entirely belong to modernity or urban life on account of his or her blackness and rural ties. I discuss this dynamic more in the third section. What I would like to stress here is the idea that there can exist a psychological embodiment of the constructed, ideological divide between place-identities powerful enough to disrupt the formation of an integrated, modern urban self in this post-apartheid city space.

Questions about this process arise when one considers recent work on Johannesburg's migrants by the likes of Graeme Gotz, AbdouMaliq Simone, Loren Landau and Irianne Freemantle. The former have addressed how urban migrants can choose between

associating themselves with an affiliated group or detaching themselves from known orders in the city (Gotz, Simone, 2003). Moving between these two positions has come to be seen as a tactical choice that the migrant urban actor can make in the city in order to embrace its unpredictability. Similarly, in their study of immigrants in post-apartheid Johannesburg, Landau and Freemantle have noted a similar, 'tactical cosmopolitanism' which they describe as:

distinctive ways of negotiating inclusion and belonging that transcend ethnic, national or transnational paradigms [...] immigrants have reacted with what we term 'tactical cosmopolitanism' to negotiate partial inclusion in South Africa's transforming society without becoming bounded by it.

(2010: 375)

Where Gotz, Simone, Landau and Freemantle describe these processes as empowering or necessary, *Room 207* portrays them as a struggle and an unavoidable condition that these young men face as they try to enter into urban modernity. If one considers Radithlalo's observation that the 207s are engaged in *uku panda* (Radithlalo, 2007, Peterson, 2003) in the inner city, which is, according to Bheki Peterson (2003) a defensive response to a hostile environment, then the friends' collective ambivalences over their roots points to the difficulty of being a part of Johannesburg. And, even though the friends experience this relationship differently, not one of them seems to leave the city unscathed by the psycho-social splitting that this experience seems to generate.

Matome, for instance, seems to embrace his new-found urban place and have very little concern over where he came from. Noko's idealisation of him seems to be because Matome is able to master this disconnection where Noko is plagued by it. Both come to the inner city to study sound engineering and music production. The means by which they arrive are unknown, as are the places they arrived from. It is perhaps this absence that brings the two together as close friends. In Noko's own words: 'I trusted him from the moment I saw him [...] we had been together from that first week, in our first year in dream city' (230).

From the moment the reader is introduced to Matome, s/he realises that his appeal to Noko is his changeable, trickster-like character and his agile negotiation of the *uku panda* lifestyle.⁴⁴ Considering where his character ends up, it is difficult to imagine that Matome disconnected himself from his roots out of will or desire. Rather, what is indicated by his blasé bravado is a deep need to reclaim something that was lost through the act of passage and urban migration. This suggests a complicated relationship with fixity and mobility – at the very least the idea that the two are somehow mutually exclusive. Coming to the city without a clear place-identity, Matome is unable to reconcile more than one aspect of these two states at one time and becomes, in a sense, strung between them, in a similar way that his forefathers might have been.

A character like Modishi has a much clearer link, both materially and sentimentally, to his former place and identity. The reader is told that he comes from relative wealth – his parents had a ‘four roomed house in Mapetla, Soweto’ (48), and also, they were farmland owners. On the death of his parents, Modishi inherits the farm, in addition to the Soweto house. He chooses not to rehabilitate the farm and live there but rather comes to Hillbrow to study, using the money from the sale of Soweto house. While Modishi holds these connections to the rural more openly than some of the others, they do not stop him from squandering his money nor from desiring the same outcomes as Matome– wealth, security and a plush home in the city’s suburban edges. To Noko, Modishi is predictable and ‘stupid’ (47). It is clear that he is not liked, as evidenced in this disparaging aside Noko makes to the reader:

Sometimes I wished he had not come to live with us. He was one of the people that your heart, my heart, just disapproved of from the very moment I saw him. The bad part was he never did anything bad to me. My blood jus hated his blood, and as the years went by, I never really liked him much.

(48)

⁴⁴ Despite his fluctuating character in the inner city, and his blurred background, Matome, like all the 207s, does in fact fixate on the idea of putting down new roots. He fantasises, as they all do, about owning a sprawling suburban mansion in the city’s new developments and a life of ease. When he does leave, he starts a family immediately and creates a life and a way of being that is the antithesis of what he had created for himself in Hillbrow.

Modishi is never able to seize the hustler mode in a way that is appropriate to the expectations of his friends⁴⁵ or the demands of the inner city. While in many ways Noko's feelings for his roommate are never resolved, the core of his dislike seems to Modishi's lack of urban guile. Considering how Noko adores Matome, who at least on the surface seems to embody a 'devil may care' attitude in relation to his roots, one cannot help but associate Noko's dislike of Modishi with his open attachments to a farm life. Modishi is threatening to Noko because he mirrors his own yearnings for home that he is never able to reconcile either. Modishi's eventual slide into misogyny and violence seems to come as a result of his choice not to return to the farmlands. Like the others, despite his open connection to the rural, he is affected by the seeming incommensurability of the city and the 'homeland'.

One could also read the characters' tenuous relationships to origins as part of their rejection of 'native' space, especially those of the Bantustans and the townships. However, if one considers where the characters end up – outside of the dynamic urban space and life that they sought through their passage and migration – and if one thinks about how complicated their place is within 'dream city,' then they seem in fact to be reproducing the dilemma of urban migration faced by apartheid's workers who were compelled to both reject and retain their connections to their original home-spaces as a way of survival in the city.⁴⁶

This dilemma can be understood further if one considers Noko's exit from the inner city at the end of the novel. He is standing at the Wanderers Street taxi rank. In Johannesburg, Wanderers street is in the midst of Hillbrow. As a central thoroughfare it feeds traffic into the city and is an ideal location for a bustling taxi rank carrying commuters into and through Johannesburg. Metaphorically, given its position and energies as a thoroughfare, and its high-rise buildings, Wanderers Street is a representative site for Noko and the 2007s' tumultuous and unpredictable Hillbrow experience. Its name is also deeply

⁴⁵ This manifests in other ways, as seen in his long-standing monogamy to Lerato, considered to be another weakness by the gang.

⁴⁶ For more on this dynamic, please see Ramphela, Mamphela. *A Bed Called Home*. Cape Town: David Philip Books, 1993.

suggestive since it is connotative of the migrant's itinerant experience here. Noko and his friends are 'wanderer' figures who have spent a decade negotiating the fluctuations and duplicities of the inner city, unable to settle and yet compelled by their passage through history and through the post-apartheid moment to claim the city as their own, to feel a sense of belonging here.⁴⁷ Given that Noko considers his own exit a 'failure' (233) and given the nature of the 207s difficult experiences of the inner city throughout the novel, Noko's wanderer status is thus conveyed as displaced and exilic,⁴⁸ signified in the name and energies of the street.

There are other taxi ranks in the inner city, so it is interesting and noteworthy that the narrator chooses Wanderers for his site of departure. Consider if he had chosen to leave from the Claim Street rank, for instance. He is not able to claim the city, or claim his place here. Rather, Noko is a permanent wanderer. His exit signals his lack of place. In his departure, he loses his claim to the city, and to the anticipated spoils of the urban. And, even though at the end of the novel he writes that he is going 'home', his arrival and time in the inner city demanded the abandonment of his ties to his former space. 'Home' seems to be a flimsy construct signaling the absence rather than the presence of a home-like destination outside of the inner city. And, by leaving Johannesburg by taxi, one of the primary symbols of the post-apartheid urban scene, Noko aligns his displacement with the contemporary migrant system while also mirroring past dynamics.

These final passages suggest to the reader that current urban relationships replay old fractures despite the city's reforms. Noko's position signals the tensions that have long existed between the migrant's relationship to his or her original social space and to the city, as well as the kinds of sacrifices and defenses that the migrant feels compelled to

⁴⁷ As I have discussed, the 207s are caught in a dialectical relationship with the inner city, at once attaching themselves to it, and detaching themselves, created by it as it is created by them. Think of when Noko is mugged in Hillbrow one night. He is told that he now belongs to the city, since his blood has mixed with the blood of the streets: "You and the city are in perfect connection with each other. Your blood runs in its veins as it runs in your blood Matome tells him (69) A little later, when he is in the library, he hears a voice saying, "Welcome [...] Do not let anything scare you, you are home now. Welcome" (70) Noko identifies this as the voice of Johannesburg. (71)

⁴⁸ And therefore, a counterpoint to the mobile character of the modern urban figure who is able to transgress the totalities of the city's structure's and institutions.

make in order to embrace Johannesburg's energies. Noko's predicament goes largely unnoticed by the people around him and the reader's impression here is that the transport of migrants to and from the city, and the difficulties this may bring to them, will continue regardless of what Noko's or his friends' personal circumstances are. In fact, the indifference of this transport system to the suffering of the 207s seems to produce their discomfort, distancing them further from the mobile energies of the city.

Automobility

These tensions play out also through the 207s' relationship to cars and to automobility. The text is peppered with references to the 207s' desire for private vehicles. Their perception of cars as status symbols reflects the automobile's universal signification of material success and autonomous mobility. The friends' hankering for cars and for driving responds to this but can also be seen as a product of their feelings of immobility and their lack of control over their situations in the inner city. Cars embody their desire to break the cycles of poverty and social immobility. Indeed, for the 207s, cars, as opposed to public, urban transport, represent freedom. Noko recalls his first day in the city:

We had just passed Witbank, we were running on the N12 in an aging Japanese-made taxi. Without any music and with fifteen passengers it was tense and kind of hostile. Nobody was talking. Maybe everybody was thinking about this great city, planning how they were going to do whatever is it that they were going to do there, do it better and in a quarter of the time. I smiled. Then I took a vow: When I come out of Gauteng I will be driving my own car. Well, I was still a teenager then.

(45)

Noko is brought into the city along routes determined by an unfamiliar vehicle – the 'aging Japanese vehicle' – within which he is just another anxious passenger, a new arrival in the metropolis. While he envisages the car as an expression of wealth and his ability to 'do it better', his resolution to own a private vehicle, rather than be carted around in a taxi, is an expression of his desire to direct his own route and to control his own patterns of movement and speed in which he manages to get out of the inner city. His sense of failure at the end of the novel can thus be traced back to this moment, from

the fact that he has lost out on what the car *represents*. He leaves penniless and disorientated. He has not been able to produce his own itineraries or direct his movements in the way that he imagined and becomes just another faceless passenger being driven out of Johannesburg in a taxi. The irony is that the fickle nature of his dreams contributes to his final exile. The car, representing a lust for wealth and success, does not offer itself as a conduit for meaningful engagements with the past or present city since it sustains the fragile idea the struggles of the past and the difficulties facing the young black South African in the present city can be simply and speedily circumvented. Noko's departure is made more painful by his inability to see that he has aided his own state of dislocation from the post-apartheid city.

This sense of irony can be traced back again to the figure of Modishi whose fleeting ownership of a car in the inner city shows an equally paradoxical relationship to urban mobility and self-direction. The brevity of Modishi's stint as a student in the inner city is equaled only by his short-lived ownership of a car. 'He took most of the money and invested it in a four-wheeler' Noko tells the reader, 'but that got written off in less than a month' (51). Considering Modishi's trajectory through the inner city and the abusive man he becomes once he leaves for the newly built suburbs, his violent car experience seems a powerful allegory for the violence underlying his sense of place brought about by his passage from the townships into the inner and into the suburbs. Like the others, Modishi has based his expectations of city life on the pursuit of happiness and wealth without considering the pursuit of more sustained narratives and practices that might add more balance to his performances in the urban space.

Molamo's relationship to automobility draws another layer to this allegory. Before coming to Hillbrow, Molamo is a successful tipper truck driver. He is portrayed as being a hard worker, enjoying 'just driving up and down' pushing 'the truck so hard that the manager didn't know whether to let him go or to keep him' (40). After a while, Molamo becomes afraid that the other drivers' jealousies over his power behind the wheel would incite one of them to kill him. After consultation with a co-worker, Molamo comes 'back to dream city to have it out with the city' (41). We meet Molamo as he is living with his friends in room 207. Molamo, 'the writer, the director, the actor, the poet, the comedian,

the producer' (40) is a multifaceted, street-smart, womanising hustler-type, His intense dedication to his chameleon-like urban persona echoes his ambitious truck driving days – a character trait that seems to have brought him out of rural poverty to become a self-directing man. However, while truck driving propelled him into the inner city, and although he comes across as wily and smart, he is now listless and fractious. He gains access to the city through driving trucks, but once there, seems to embrace a less active life trajectory, spending much of his time walking the streets or languishing in bed, lacking direction. Life in the inner city, although it is seen as a site of the acquisition of wealth and mobile agency seems to deny him this very thing.

Precipitating this denial seems to be his lifestyle and his rejection of loyalty to anything but the informal energies of his urban environment. This is indicated at a later point in the novel, when his ex-lover, Tebogo, brings their son to warn him about following in his father's path, Molamo's lack of a car becomes a device through which she navigates a comparison between him and her new boyfriend, Khutso:

Do you want to stay in a rented, single room with your five friends, like your father? Do not you want to drive very nice cars, have your own house and enjoy your own money like Uncle Khutso?

(43)

Noko also describes Khutso as, 'the black elite. Young, black, under thirty and successful in financial terms. He had the world and all. This black elite in particular had two townhouses, a four-by-four and a couple of sports cars' (44).

The introduction of Khutso is important since he creates a poetic counter-image to the 207s', one that helps the reader understand their failures. Khutso is 'upwardly mobile' while Molamo, according to Tebogo, is not – embodied here in his lack of a car.⁴⁹ Khutso is also described as having completed his degree at the University of Cape Town, which locates his success *outside* of Johannesburg. Most of the 207s' failed attempts to become successful are linked back to their thwarted attempts to continue studying in the inner

⁴⁹ As a cautionary measure, it is important to remember that this is described by Noko whose own obsessions with material wealth blind him to what really impedes Molamo's growth in the inner city.

city, either at Hillbrow colleges or at the University of the Witwatersrand.⁵⁰ This seems to create a causal link between their material failures and their site of residence and study. Certainly, one of the primary themes that Moele weaves into his novel is tertiary education and how the characters who are deprived of it are lacking the tools that will enable them to secure the jobs or the future they have always dreamed of. Moele places this lack within Hillbrow and the inner city so that Molamo's, or the majority of the novel's inner city characters' failures and lack of mobility is read as being intricately bound to post-apartheid inner city life. In other words, the 207s are limited by the act of coming into the city and by their choice to inhabit a space in which they have a difficult relationship. The idea of moving forwards, both literally and figuratively, becomes almost impossible since their daily aspirations reinvigorate the difficulties and ambivalences of the migrant experience they have seek to evade and change.⁵¹

If one imagines that public and private practice operate reciprocally, then the 207s' unstable sense of place is reproduced constantly by the tensions between estrangement and entrapment that both performative spaces generate. Owing to the circularity of their daily itineraries, evoked in the repetitive patter of the narrative, the historic street names and the grid system take on a more burdensome presence. The friends, despite their attempts to reinvent themselves through new routes, (both literal and metaphorical) are unable to simply shake off the affect of the past on their sense of direction and ability to move freely.

Walking and inner city routes

This sense of repetition pervades Noko's narrative and the events in the novel as well. The same themes and ideas are brought up and discussed, in a circular fashion. For instance, Noko and his friends constantly contradict themselves. Instead of seeing this as a problem in the narrative, one should read this as a function of the 207s' inability to

⁵⁰ WITS lies in Braamfontein, on the cusp between the old CBD and the highways that lead to the wealthier Northern parts of the city and the highways that point towards Sandton, Centurion and Midrand.

⁵¹ This same causal link is reflected in strong female characters like Tebogo, Basedi and Debbie who are all independent and mobile and who suggest to the reader that their freedom comes from the fact that they are not bound up in an idea about making it in the inner city, nor are they dependent on it for their livelihoods and well being.

establish consistent and reliable impressions of the inner city chronotope, and of themselves in it. This sense of repetition is vital to how one reads Noko and his friends' pedestrian routes in the inner city. Their movements map out elliptical itineraries and generate a repetitiveness that suggests that the friends create their own immobility even while they cross the physical borders and roads of which the inner grid is comprised. This sense of repetition is evoked in Noko's recitation of his route using historic street names. These names conjure the remnants of former times. In addition to this, as I have argued earlier in the section, by plotting his navigation according to markers that evince a historical or cultural past that has yet to be resolved fully, Noko is unable to begin a process whereby he gains enough distance from this past to assess how his everyday life is affected by such markers.

Furthermore, even if they wished to change their patterns, they are surrounded by derelict public sites that serve as constant reminders of the continuing poverty and neglect affecting residents in Hillbrow and other inner city suburbs. When Noko's path passes Windybrow theatre and he notes that it has fallen into disrepair,⁵² or when he announces that 'we are in hell now' (158) he brings our attention to the weight of afflictions in the inner city's present moment which began with the 'greying' of the area in the late 1980's and the subsequent rejection of the area by white landlords and tenants (Tomlinson *et al*, 2003) By insisting that we pay attention to these sites, Noko shows a desire to reckon with the contradictions in his setting, and thereby in himself. But, in that his observations are mapped out along a pathway of roads whose names evoke the inheritance of poverty and despair of a past system, the therapeutic potential of his walking and dialogue is undermined. His containment in the text and his circular narrative further emphasises his entrapment. Moreover, his mention of hell in these extracts accentuates a feeling of entrapment and imprisonment and hints at the idea that Hillbrow's residents have come to be enclosed by its social and material conditions and, even when possessing the language of sight to recognise their conditions, cannot begin to unravel the cords that bind them to this space.

⁵² This is especially ironic if one considers John Mitshikiza's comment that owing to the political tension in Johannesburg in the 1960's, the city saw 'a hemorrhaging of its black talent' (Mitshikiza, 2004: 484).

The claustrophobia of this place is amplified by the invisible boundary that seems to be drawn between the inner city neighbourhoods and the rest of the city. The ostracisation of Hillbrow adds to the sense of immobility that can be traced in the 207s' movements. Even if they can move freely in the inner city, this does not necessarily translate into the rest of the city. With this in mind, the inner city resembles the traditional apartheid township where the streets and neighbourhoods are alive with people but where the space itself is distanced and excluded from the rest of the city.

Noko also walks past various landmarks that have been appropriated and changed, but which even in being changed or re-used are heavy with a familiar, overbearing sense of containment and immobility. 'See that building?' he asks. 'That's Ponte. It's the building that Molamo's going to take a free fall from if he ever contracts Aids' (160). Ponte Tower is one of the defining marks on the Johannesburg skyline. Once a residential tower reserved for whites, it is the highest block on the Johannesburg skyline.⁵³ When Rita Barnard makes the comment that the high-rise is the 'new chronotope of African literature' (2007: 160), she invokes this idea that a building like Ponte represents the reappropriation of structures that once represented the might of the colonial or apartheid state. Within Barnard's statement one can read another key thought: the transience and reiterative energies embodied in the re-used and rehashed skyscrapers in the city are part of a new urban subjectivity, one founded on movement and change. However, as the 207s' paths indicate, this chronotope, when read within this novel, calls attention to a pathology of place that comes from the same energies. The highrises and their inhabitants in this novel reflect the inconsistency and instability of the contemporary moment and the stubborn trace of history on the urban landscape and lived space. No matter how Ponte

⁵³ A recent article in *The Mail and Guardian*, describes the tower's four incarnations, from prized white residence, to the 'den of iniquity' in the 1990's, to its present form as a low-cost housing project. Cf. 'Ponte's fourth coming: An urban icon reborn'. *Mail and Guardian Online*: <http://mg.co.za/article/2012-04-20-pontes-fourth-coming-an-urban-icon-reborn/>. Accessed: 20/05/2012. The appeal of Ponte has been its status as a long-standing symbol of African urbanity and Johannesburg. Photographer Guy Tillim's 'Jo'burg' (2004) and Mikhael Subotzky's 'Ponte City' (2011) series capture its residents and its iconic, derelict architecture. One can see Tillim's exhibition on the Michael Stevenson website: <http://www.stevenson.info/exhibitions/jhb/jhb1.htm>. For Subotzky's series, see his website: <http://www.subotzkystudio.com/ponte-city-dwt/>.

may be reinvented conceptually, it also acts as a reminder of the city's social and political past and reflects the tenuousness of its present.

Moele also invokes a vision of Ponte that draws on some of the negative stereotypes about the building: it is overpopulated, unruly, infected with social and bodily disease. Noko's comment about Matome also alludes to a habit that many Hillbroweans are reported to have – which is to throw heavy appliances off the tops of buildings, usually around holidays like New Year's Eve.⁵⁴ Ponte is ideal because of its height. However, more so than this, Noko implies that this emblematic figure of post-apartheid Johannesburg, a city that is no longer racially divided, is also a death sentence. While quite humorous to the reader, Matome's wish to fly from the symbolic Ponte suggests its association between crippling disease, decay and inner city life. Even in flight, Matome would be meeting his demise because of the intractability of this situation in the city. In this comment, Noko emphasises what he intimated in his discussion of Khutso: that the inner city and the mode it engenders in characters like the 207s, who seek it out as a passage to 'freedom', ensnares them in its grip and reinforces the pathologies they seek to erase from their own socio-spatial histories.

This pattern can also be traced in the 207s' relationship to immigrants on the streets. A few paces after this mention of Ponte Tower, Noko comes to 'Hotel Lagos' (161), named after Matome's derogatory slang for the Sands Hotel because of its Nigerian inhabitants. Although the inner city is being reshaped by flows of immigrants and their own practices, by sharing the public space of the inner city the friends come into contact with their own phobias of otherness. As has been documented (Morris, 1999; Simone, 2004; Landau, 2010; Tomlinson *et al*, 2002) the displacement that comes from migrating and immigrating can often incite xenophobia and tighter holds onto ethnic and national

⁵⁴ Cf. Prince Ofori-Atta. 'A strange new year's eve tradition.' *The Africa Report*: www.theafricareport.com Article link: <http://www.theafricareport.com/index.php/news-analysis/a-strange-new-year-s-eve-tradition-50178368>. Accessed: 20/01/2012; Johannes Myburgh. 'Hillbrow police prepare for the worst on New Year's'. *Mail and Guardian Online*: [www.mg.co.za](http://mg.co.za). Article Link: <http://mg.co.za/article/2011-12-30-hillbrow-police-prepare-for-the-worst-on-new-year>. Accessed: 20/01/2012.

homogeneity (Landau, 2010). Furthermore, the inner city is a contested space with a highly charged informal market in which anyone can compete. Not simply a place of difference and alterity, this market economy breeds unhelpful ethnic prejudices which compound the atmosphere of alienation that the reader gathers from Noko's walk through these public routes. Noko is further assaulted by elements that he cannot readily assimilate into his myth about wealth in this space and his disdain of otherness only estranges him more from the public community. Again, one gains the sense that despite his physical movements in this inner city promenade, Noko's itinerary reveals a lack of integration and mixing. This summons the spectre of apartheid, even if in a new guise.

A character like Zulu-Boy is very open with his ethnic and racial prejudices against outsiders. While Noko ascribes this aspect of his character to his Zulu 'tribe mentality' (65) it is also causally linked to his relationship to the streets, as seen in this passage:

But there was one man, a Hillbrowean in true nature, who not only lived the good life of the place but felt its painful existence as well. He breathed it and so it breathed him, it embraced him and he embraced it [...] Zulu is the unofficial language of the street, it rules the streets, has power and command in it [...]

(62)

Indeed, Zulu-Boy's reputation as 'a true Hillbrowean' (62) comes through his command of these public routes. Not only is he a master thief but he has also moved residences countless times: from Ponte Tower to the outskirts of Braamfontein, Brenton Manor in Captein Street, the Marriston Hotel on Claim Street, the Ambassador Hotel, and finally to room 207. Zulu-Boy's life in Hillbrow is defined by his daily engagement with the public conduits of the urban: running illicit activities like selling drugs, being arrested by police for looking, ironically, like a 'makwerekwere' (65), buying his clothes from 'a street vendor's stall' (63) and styling himself as a street-wise hustler. His dislike of foreign Africans seems to be tightly bound up with his embrace of this mode of being which in turn seems to offer that the inner city public life brings about a defensive mode that one would not associate normally with the energies of the street. Entangled in this paradox, Zulu-Boy cannot move forwards.

This is most profoundly encapsulated in his love of Ntombifuthi, a young Swazi migrant, who quite literally makes her living from the streets. After he falls in love with Ntombifuthi he moves out of the city. Eventually, when he dies of an AIDS related illness, he does so in a rural space, far away from the urban pathways and activities that once defined him. This self-removal suggests that street life and the maintenance of a deep human bond of the kind he has with Ntombifuthi are incommensurable with one another. Zulu-Boy's exit from Johannesburg's hub rekindles the historic divide between the site of family and 'home' and the city. By seeking out his former, rural place for love, burial and death, Zulu-Boy refuses the narrative that the post-apartheid inner city is a place of community and renewal as some have claimed, or a place new, lasting bonds can be formed with an alternative urbanism. Certainly, his end is also in keeping with a more traditional African approach to death and burial, where one's final resting place is close to the earth, to an established community and to one's ancestral home.

In much the same way that Refilwe in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* chooses to die and be buried in Tiralong also having contracted HIV, there is a renouncement of the city experience by those rejected by it or by the force of its complicated sign within the post-apartheid city. This speaks further of an unresolved rupture between these two spaces and types of community. This unresolved splitting between city and country can also be traced in a novel like Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* (2003), where the returning Camagu becomes disillusioned with post-apartheid Johannesburg and seeks refuge on the east coast amongst pastoral Xhosas. Camagu struggles to feel comfortable developing an urban identity within the metropolis, marked as he is by exile and by his own idealism. The novel evokes questions about the black South Africans ability to reconcile him or herself with the traditional homeland and the new urban space, as if one place-identity must be sacrificed to make way for the other.

Zulu-Boy's story raises similar considerations by questioning the very idea of a 'true Hillbrowean'. To be a true person of Hillbrow or its neighbouring suburbs in the inner city zone seems to mean that one has to forgo one's attachments to relationships or place-affiliations that are already established. This same sense of sacrifice surfaces later in

Noko's guided tour of other residences. When he instructs the reader, and by extension himself, to 'walk like a true Hillbrowean', he seems to suggest that one should *appear* as if one can traverse this zone, unaffected by anxieties about physical danger or the dismal state of the built environment, unperturbed by the feelings of estrangement and immobility that come from being in this environment. His insistence on appropriating the hustler or *uku panda* mode for public display and navigating the streets is in itself a form of geopathology since the appropriation of defensive modes of moving seems to only reinforce his and his friends' state of entrapment within this space and dislocation from other places. Furthermore, as we have just seen, the idea of a True Hillbrowean is a fiction, not only because the inner city is ostensibly a migrant site but also because at the heart of it, none of these young men think of Hillbrow as their home.

A further paradox about inner city subjects, communicated to the reader through this novels' depictions of public routes and environments, is that people are both transitory and trapped – waiting to get out once they have the means and seeing their situation as temporary but unable to effect this exit in a way that is empowering or progressive. As the 207s show, moving out of Hillbrow is difficult and it seems that the longer one remains here, the deeper one is affected by the inability to move. The vagrant figure of Justice comes to mind here and draws this dislocated relationship back to the streets. He, like the 207s, came to seek opportunity, but squanders his money and ends up homeless. The streets are commanded as a site of destitution and reinforce the plight of other street people in Noko's walk, the children or drug addicts who eke out an existence amidst the public thoroughfares. To the reader's alarm, he asks:

So what do you see?

People living?

Yes, people are living out there. Is that all?

People living in rotting streets and buildings...

Your observation is that you can't tell if they are happy or just pretending to be happy [...]

I have learned to be happy in all situations. This is a place where, when one sees his cousin he doesn't want to talk to him, but would rather run from him, and another brother makes you his bank in the dirty streets. It's all one big sad story

and so I have learned to be happy in all situations.

(169)

Whether one considers the hustling 207s, Ntombifuthi and her fellow ‘angels of the night’, street children, Justice, the faceless Nigerians or the hordes of others who are the ‘people living in rotting streets and buildings’– this novel shows how life here does not reflect the kind of ‘ordinary magic’ (Masten, 2001: 227 in Theron, Malindi, 2010: 717) that one might ascribe to these kinds of public spaces.

It seems that all of Hillbrow’s inhabitants in the novel are marked by lived experiences that contradict the narrative of the post-apartheid moment and the imagined freedoms that increased access to and movement in the city would bring. *Room 207*’s post-transitional chronotope of Hillbrow creates a resident or visitor who has to armour him or herself against the very streets that should represent this freedom. The 207s’ movements into and through the inner city reveal and provide the template for a rehashing of a historical cycle of frustrated movements and poverty, still affecting the majority of South Africans. Even in new forms, this cycle is uncovered in daily life here and is compounded by inherited associations between the city and the country. Moele’s novel reiterates the inner city as a space of desire and opportunity but also a space of terrifying physical and mental limitation and encapsulates this in descriptions of contradiction and psycho-geographical tension.

Triomf: Short Circuits

Wakey wakey!’ Treppie says. ‘All is quiet on the white side of Ontdekkers.’ The helicopter turns to the Bosmont side.

Martha’s Street’s residents go back into their houses. The moon’s sitting high.

‘They’re looking for a hotnot,’ says Pop.

They stand and watch for a while as the helicopter searches, up and down up and down, its red tail light flashing. The searchlight cuts Bosmont’s dark streets like a

thin, blue probe of glass. Sirens wail all over Jo'burg. Shots go off on Ontdekkers.

'Who's shooting?' his mother asks.

'Those are just the taxis that are missing, Ma.'

'It's Jo'burg that's missing,' Treppie says.

Her points are dirty. Her timing's out. Who'll give Jo'burg a service?

(*Triomf*, 281)

Introduction

I would like to use the above passage as a starting point for a discussion of *Triomf's* depictions of the neighbourhood, the family's passage in and around it and of their relationship to urban technologies of transport. Where the 207s' frustrated movements are the result of their desires to 'make it' in a city space that bears historic constraints, the Benades' patterns of movements show their struggle to separate or distance themselves from the neighbourhood even while they long for rest and stability within it and the city. Furthermore, their movements map out the historical tensions in their urban place and the crippling ironies underlying their position within the apartheid system.

As I have previously suggested, the family's experience of *Triomf* is double-edged. While they defend their claim to their home and in so doing, try to efface the claims of their predecessors by sustaining the myth of the Afrikaner's rightful place in South Africa, they are also deeply affected by the area's and their own fraught history and by impending political change. Their relationship to space in the text is produced by these contradictions and their movements through and around this version of *Triomf* and the greater city both establish and reinforce them. The passage above draws the reader's attention to how this relationship is continued in the family's connections to roads and to movement. In this textual map of *Triomf*, the reader is introduced to the paradoxes in the area's history. Ontdekkers is a main arterial road that runs out of Johannesburg into the western urban sprawl. During apartheid it was a racial borderline separating *Triomf* from Bosmont Hill, where non-white families lived. The proximity of these two spaces, separated only by a dual roadway, suggests the fragility and lunacy of the apartheid project. Mol comments about this in the novel's introductory section as she recounts a

time, in the early fifties, when the family saw anti-apartheid activist and priest, Father Trevor Huddleston leading his congregation out of a mixed church on the Martindale side of Triomf⁵⁵:

and there stood the priest at the door, greeting kaffirs and hotnots and whites all together. All smiles. And all with the same hand. Treppie says it's foreign to our nation's interests to greet other nations like that...he says there's a world of difference separating the two nations in that single sentence. But in Triomf, they know its actually just Ontdekkers that separates them. 'Cause across the road it's Bosmont, and in Bosmont it crawls with nations.

(4)

Triomf, even though its existence was a function of the destruction of Sophiatown, lies on the outskirts of Johannesburg and in the time of the novel was very close to other townships. The reader, like the Benades, comes to question the socio-spatial 'purity' of Triomf as well as the ideologies that supported its existence.⁵⁶ The action of the searchlight scanning over the dense spread of streets and houses, recreates the sense that neither side of Ontdekkers is distinguishable in the darkening night. This further exposes the fallacy of the racialised city. The blurring of spatial boundaries in the dark reminds the reader of the fragility and absurdity of racial exclusion and differentiation.

The road also signifies the deep associations between urban industrialism and the apartheid project: the city both controlled and depended on the black and white working-class labour forces. The name of the road, Ontdekkers, means 'prospectors' (Hippocrene English/Afrikaans Dictionary: 2000). It was laid when Johannesburg became a mining town and so represents the very beginnings of the city, before it became an apartheid

⁵⁵ Huddleston left South Africa in 1956, so this incident would have taken place as the neighbourhood of Triomf came into being.

⁵⁶ It is also worth reminding the reader here that Triomf's grid system is the same as Sophiatown's, as pointed out by Beningfield (2009). Furthermore, driving through this part of Johannesburg now, mapping where Sophiatown/Triomf ends and suburbs like Westdene, Bosmont, Newlands and Claremont begin is virtually impossible. During apartheid and the height of Triomf's time as an exclusive white enclave, the distinguishing marker of its separation from surrounding non-white areas would have been the ethnicities of its residents. Thus, as these spaces became distinctly racialised, so their similarities and proximities showed the absurdity of the racial construct and its inscription onto social space.

zone, but still conjuring the city's long history as a place of wealth, expropriation and exploitation, from colonial times to the present.

This heritage, when combined with the image of the road, invokes the overpowering might of the city's mining and industrial past and its historic inequalities and so emplaces Triomf within this historical nexus. In addition to this, some of the ambiguities around the city are also incarnated in this tarred surface. For instance, the reader is reminded that this road represents how Johannesburg has always existed as a Mecca to those seeking a better life in the city – a fact that blurs the socio-spatial boundaries between the Benades and Bosmont Hill even further and subverts the discreteness of these communities.

Ontdekkers also creates a powerful image of a desolate passage to a racial wasteland: an image which is supported at various points in the novel by the repetitiveness of the family's daily habits within the neighbourhood and the spectre of stagnation hanging over the area. The passage thus draws attention to various ways in which Martha Street and its community of people are determined by the history of the area – both geographical and ideological. This is one of the only times in the novel that Triomf families mix on the streets. Standing in the street to watch a helicopter search for criminals in nearby Bosmont Hill suggests that what draws these families together is their fear of the city and not a sense of community. Certainly, one of the features of the novel's chronotope is a sense that there is a distinct lack of communal bonds in Triomf – an idea which is expressed quite radically in the Benades' ostracisation from their immediate neighbours.

Also arresting in this passage is the way in which Johannesburg is compared to a car – a machine of transport and movement: *'Her points are dirty. Her timing's out. Who'll give Jo'burg a service?'* This is not the first time that the family has perceived Johannesburg as a machine of furious motion. At other times in the novel she is described as a powerful robot-like entity, a dinosaur of nuts and bolts. The analogy between Johannesburg and a machine of motion extends the family's perception that they are at the mercy of an overpowering system. However, this relationship is not one sided. The Benades' relationship to automotive technology also offered the family salvation. Old Pop's job on the railways saved the family from total poverty. But, it also accelerated the family's

ruin, as I observe in the previous section. This tension is extended in their relationships to cars. The Benades invest hope in their Volkswagen, Molletjie, hoping that she will carry them out of the city when ‘the shit hits the fan’. For the family, whose ‘son’, Lambert spends most of his time working on the family cars, automotive technology is also an area where they feel confident and is a source of pride. I explore this dynamic further in the following pages.

Outings

This metaphor of the road and the car embodies the Benades’ ambiguous relationship with movement. The family’s outings bring together both the act of driving and the complexities of their negotiation with the city and offer valuable insights into how the Benades create and sustain their alienation on a daily level.

For the most part, the Benades as a family ensemble negotiate the public spaces of the neighbourhood and the city in their car. This allows them a certain amount of freedom to observe the city and also enacts their desire for mobile agency. Their outings in Molletjie, their new Volkswagen, parody the classic family trips that one would associate with the suburban nuclear family. While the Benades embrace the chance to relieve themselves from the burden of their domestic space by traversing into open spaces like the Westdene Dam or the Melville Koppies, these outings do not allow them to disconnect entirely from their lives in Triomf. Their outings actually emphasise their embedding in their geopathic disorders.

While the Benades’ car gives them mobility and access to ‘other’ parts of the city, they often seem to inhabit these spaces as strangers, existing on the peripheries of the communal grounds that they visit. The family’s visits to recreational sites are enacted in relatively typical ways – such as driving to the *koppies* with *padkos*,⁵⁷ or going to the dam

⁵⁷ In Johannesburg, the ‘Melville Koppies’ (Melville Hills) are quite a famous set of small hills in the suburb of Melville, very close to Triomf. A section of wild section of dry bush, succulents, hills and rocks in the middle of a busy, built up and largely flat suburb, the *koppies* as they are affectionately known, offer access into unspoiled natural vegetation. Retaining their Afrikaans designation, the *koppies* bring to mind the Afrikaner’s attachment to the rural landscape as well as the fact that during the height of apartheid, they were off limits to ‘non-European’ families. The term *padkos* is another affectionate South African term

for a picnic But the reader does not generally have the sense that the family is included in these spaces they seek out. Metaphorically, this generates a feeling that the family remains affected by their relationship to Triomf, even when they are outside of it. Even in scenes which suggest that the family are able to transcend these limitations in their explorations of other parts of the city, as seen, for instance, in their star gazing from the Brixton Hill or in Treppie's touching poem composed on the banks of Westdene Dam, the family acts as a contained unit whose most poignant experiences tend to be contained within their own company.⁵⁸

Part of the reason why this is so is because the family often keep themselves apart with aggressive behaviour and acts of violence. One can see this in the novel's depiction of a visit to the library. Mol and Pop usually go to the library together, with Pop driving. When Treppie and Lambert decide to come along what is normally a gentle foray within a quiet public space is marred by a vicious public confrontation. In the library, Lambert and Treppie ask the librarian for books. Treppie, tauntingly, requests juicy books 'just for adults' (184). The librarian's tart response to the lascivious nature of Treppie's request is to mutter, 'ai, a librarian also had a dog's life in a place like Newlands with this class of people' (184). He responds by saying, 'Yes, he did come from Triomf, which used to be Sophiatown. He knew it was kaffirs who lived there, but in the early days Newlands was also full of kaffirs' (185). Treppie's crafty insult ruptures the calm of the library. The family leaves with the books that Treppie wanted but they have marked themselves as outcasts in this public space.⁵⁹ While Treppie successfully exposes the hypocrisy of the municipal establishment he has ruined the excursion for Mol and turned her harmless pursuit into a spectacle. Furthermore, one has to wonder what his challenge has achieved.

literally meaning 'road food'. Using it summons the long road trips that South Africans would make across this huge expanse of country. But, again, the retention of the Afrikaans word triggers thoughts about how leisure, holidays and travel were also racialised under apartheid. This is not to say that the word *padkos* or Afrikaans for that matter have not been appropriated by non-whites or non-Afrikaners. But, considering the relationship between language and power, as well as the history of the country's leisure class, this word draws up the very conditions under which people's holidays were taken— even if unconsciously.

⁵⁸ Furthermore, the Benades' hankering after and access to natural environments in the greater city emphasises the aridity of their life in Triomf, where plants have little chance of growing through the rubble and where 'new life' seems to be scarce.

⁵⁹ In addition to the force of this truth, the shock of his constant deployment of the word, 'kaffir' renders the librarian mute and succeeds in turning the scene to his favour.

By questioning the racial purity of Newlands, by inverting his usual disavowal of his ties to Triomf, he also demonstrates the extent to which the family feels marked by the area's history. In this moment, they cannot fit or belong in another public space or routine because of their connection to history. The family becomes a traveling space; they carry Triomf with them. In a sense, they have become the chronotope.

Ironically, Treppie wins the argument because he seizes on the family's association to a place and a history that has caused their dissolution – the very same association that prompts disdain from the librarian. He sings to the librarian an altered version of a traditional folk song, 'Hoe ry die boere/ This is the way the boere ride'. His version of the classic song is profane and sexualised (DuPlessis, 2009) but is also a reminder of the Benades' misshapen Afrikaans identity. In uttering this song, he suggests that the Benades are not only outcasts in urban society and space, but that they have lost the ability to 'ride' like the Afrikaners of old. Treppie's irreverence comes through his understanding that the folk song has lost meaning in the urban context, in the same way that his family has lost the means for forward motion, even while they possess a car and the desire to travel into other parts of the city.

This resonates with the overarching sense of immobility if one considers the association between the car and autonomy and freedom. Treppie conjures up an image of the Afrikaner as a pioneer in motion, riding to the new frontier and into the future. By contrast, the family has become stuck in their historic relationship with the city and this impedes their ability to move freely or cast new routes – physical and cultural, socio-political and familial or generational. This dynamic can be traced again in the figure of their car. Voyages in the Volkswagen mock the traditional Afrikaans narrative of motion since the car – representing modernity and urbanity and, therefore, in one sense, the 'corruption' of the Benades as well as the Afrikaans pastoral site – keeps them rooted in the modern, urban context in which they struggle. In relation to the traditional narratives embodied in the original folk song, their car counters the traditional rider's carriage and his ability to forge new ground.⁶⁰ However, herein one sees the typical paradoxical

⁶⁰ For more on this, please see Mathew Brophy's 'Shadowing Afrikaner Nationalism: Jungian Archetypes,

relationships between subject and object in this city environment for the car also symbolises their freedom to escape the city should it become the ‘dinosaur’ of their nightmares. Alternately, the very *name* of the car, *Volkswagen*, suggests that this clapped out old Beetle should be taken as a sign of the Afrikaner *volk* or ‘nation’ and its imminent paralysis through the vehicle of political transition. So, even if their car offers them an escape route it is a precarious one since the Afrikaner nation and its doctrines are in an increasingly weakened state.

This symbolism adds to the sense that the Benades are inadvertently stagnating even when they are moving or traveling. This is evident in Treppie and Lambert’s excursion to Northcliff. They tell Mol and Pop that they have gone for a ‘spin in Brixton’ but:

Treppie doesn’t drive to Brixton. He drives down Long Street, with a smile on his face, till he gets to the gates of the other big Jo’burg dump, the one between West Park cemetery and the police flats. That building’s so high you can see it for miles around. It even flashes a red light on top to warn aeroplanes at night. From its window you can see the dumps, the cemetery, and from Northcliff Hill all the way to Florida, where the water-organ plays. On the other side it looks out over the northern suburbs, right up to the Sandton Sun, which shines like a bar of gold in the night, also with a light on top.

(284)

Despite the length of this route and the expansiveness of the view, this description still reminds the reader of the Benades’ boundedness to Triomf. The rest of the city in this moment is like a beacon of golden light whereas the site they are on is dark and dirty. After breaking into the dumps by climbing over the gates, they navigate ‘high piles of rubbish’ (285), passing by the old black security guard keeping watch. The old man greets them. He is aware of their presence and yet does not see them as intruders. Perhaps the guard is unable to confront them because he is old or because he feels racially inferior. More likely, he recognises Treppie who clearly knows his way around. Metaphorically, the fact that they do not register as trespassers indicates that they

Incest, and the Uncanny in Marlene van Niekerk’s *Triomf* in *The Journal of Literary Studies/TLW*; Vol. 22, No. 1/ 2 (2006): 96-112 and Aletta du Plessis’ Master’s research into Afrikaans familial archetypes: ‘Between the Walls of Jasper, in the Streets of Gold’: The Deconstruction of Afrikaner mythology in Marlene Van Niekerk’s *Triomf*. Masters Dissertation. University of South Africa, 2009

somehow fit or match this landscape. Treppie and Lambert glide into this liminal urban dumping ground easily because their appearance – poor, dirty, misshapen – is similar to that of the dump. And Triomf, as we know, has also been described as one. When Lambert thinks, ‘the poor bastard must live here,’ about the old guard, this is startlingly ironic since it is clear to the reader that symbolically and to a degree, physically, there is very little difference between this man’s existence and the Benades’, in the same way that there is little difference between this dump and Triomf.

These places are, however, safer for the Benade family because they offer it invisibility. When compared to the scene in the library, or to a later trip to the Spur, the darkened dumps offer some respite from the public’s gaze. In fact, if one traces the pattern of the Benades’ outings, they seem to find most comfort in darkened or deserted spots and this pattern indicates not only how they see themselves within society, but also how their itineraries reinforce their isolation and alienation. Furthermore, as a way of balancing the intensity of their daily experiences of Triomf and Johannesburg, they seem to seek out environments that are close to expanses of stillness, like water or sky. Their trip to Westdene dam is one such example. Another is when they drive up the hill above the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) and look out over the expanse of Johannesburg. Perched above the city they are close to the stormy skies and they bask in the power of the rain and lightening. The space and isolation afforded by these outings gives the Benades a break from themselves, from their connection to Triomf and to their own past. Yet, through them, they are also cast as interstitial figures on the fringes of society.

Streets/Neighbourhood

Within Triomf, they are also alienated from surrounding residents. This is not simply because they are a family existing at odds with their community. Contact between neighbours in general seems to be scarce. Besides some obstructed interactions across fences and the occasional gathering outside the houses, there is a general dearth of community and public street life. Mol comments on this on Guy Fawkes Night:

It's just once a year that people in Martha Street come out of their houses and spend time together. They watch the fireworks and they talk. It's the only time they're friendly with each other, the only time they're interested in each other's fireworks and things. Just once a year. People say hello, even if they do not know you.

(284)

If one compares this to the renowned vibrancy of Sophiatown where the streets were alive with all types of passersby, the absence of community in Triomf seems to derive from the character of Triomf itself, suggesting, both metaphorically and materially, that the emptying out of the previous settlement has left a deep absence within the area. The sense of haunting that pervades the Benades' experiences of Triomf also contributes to this sense of absence – as if the street life can only exist in the whispering memory of former times, caught in the rubble that lies beneath the pavements and plots of Triomf.

This lack of community is also analogous to the sterility of the apartheid project and reveals the fallacy that state housing projects of this sort could simply insert human substance into an area. The reader is reminded that Triomf exists because of the effacement of human lives. Without a vibrant street life, the ugliness of the houses and the monotonous pattern of the street grid make Triomf an extraordinarily sterile and inhospitable suburb. The absence of bonds between residents and the lack of a thriving communal street life reinforces the claustrophobia and suffocation associated with the area that has been constructed through the development of the house in the novel. Without the differentiation and mixing that normally comes with communal street interaction, the sense of imprisonment and isolation that is deeply embedded in the Benades' domestic situation becomes a shared affliction, produced and reproduced by the deprivation and denial of street community that occurs in this sphere.

This is further illustrated by the increasing security fencing around Triomf. 'Mr. Cochrane's Security Fencing' has become popular in the Benades' area. Mol 'has seen a lot of houses with those spikes' (293) and while their own neighbourhood seems to be rapidly becoming outfitted with mean looking spikes, Treppie, always perceptive, comments that, 'it will not be long before they surround the whole of Jo'burg with that

fence' (294). In this way, Triomf does act as a foreboding of what is explored in *The Exploded View* – the increasing fortification of residential and neighbourhood space against the threat of change, and the effects of this on the psycho-geographies of future citizens.

Meanderings

In the novel, Triomf's streets and avenues are also not patterned with the fluid pedestrian meanderings that one would normally associate with communal space. Minor characters who do walk the streets do not invoke the mobile energies of the street-walker's 'pedestrian enunciations' (de Certeau, 1984) but rather seem to entrench the idea that Triomf is stagnant. For example, the Jehovah's Witnesses and the NNP⁶¹ propagandists habitually cross the streets and enter the different residences of Triomf. However, their walking and visits do not bring about exchange or revision of the streets or space, or of themselves. Although they are often shocked by the Benades and are subjected to the family's rants and obstructive behaviour, they remain largely unchanged by their encounters and stay rigid in their ideological or religious beliefs. They do not change the neighbourhood but rather imprint and repeat the uniformity of historical state policy or religious dogma into their routes and routines. The NNP's, in particular, map out attempts by the state to hold onto its overarching power and control and denounce the possibilities of change and renewal that the act of walking, and visiting, could portend. In this way, the poetic map of the area becomes imprinted with a historical archive of the real.

As for the Benade family, their peripatetic pedestrian routes reinstate feelings of enclosure in the neighbourhood. Most of their walks bring them into contact with 'otherness' that threatens to rupture their fixed ideological view and even seems to dispel their alienation from the outside world. However, a comment by Pierre Mayol indicates a slightly less optimistic interpretation of their acts. Mayol writes that 'the neighbourhood is also the space of a relationship to the other as a social being, requiring special treatment [...] it inscribes the inhabitant in a network of social signs that preexist him or

⁶¹ This is an acronym for the 'New National Party' a realpolitik response to the changing terrain of Afrikaner politics in the early 1990's. That the Benades taunt and reject the young pamphleteers comes in part from the fact that they have crossed the boundary into the Benades' private space. They are uncomfortably close to the family's most intimate space and for this reason, the Benades' repel their advances and their incursions.

her' (Mayol, 1998: 12). This raises an interesting consideration: the Benades live in a neighbourhood wherein the social signs that pre-exist them reflect constraint and oppression. Encountering real 'otherness' *within* Triomf is rare since the neighbourhood is constructed socially and spatially to reflect apartheid uniformity. Where there are interactions with other social beings and signs in the surrounding streets the Benades do not alter their behaviour enough to change. Thus, their outings do not seem to shift or alter the uniformity or emptiness that pervades the streets but rather, they act as vehicle for the continuation of such an atmosphere.

Lambert's epic walks around the neighbourhood also seem to inscribe an elliptical pattern into the grid. A self-appointed neighbourhood watchdog, Lambert's security patrols give him a sense of grandeur and allow him a small chance to feel that he has autonomy over his own actions and situation, some power over his epilepsy and daily torments and rages. Significantly, these patrols always take place at night. While Lambert actively works the streets to control crime, his nocturnal moves suggest that the cover of darkness makes them possible, enabled them. The night allows him to be active, but not in full view. This gives him a chance to satisfy his voyeuristic tendencies while staying hidden. Moreover, while he professes to the reader that he is making an impact, and calls himself the 'Urban Angel', a saviour of the streets, his efforts change very little in his surroundings. His night patrols map an isolated pathway, uninterrupted by mutual exchanges with others and leave little trace on the avenues of Triomf.

These walks also have a potent symbolic value if one considers that Lambert, within the family matrix and within the novel's symbolic framework of Afrikaner national identity, represents the future generation (Brophy, 2006; Viljoen, 1996; Shear, 2006, Du Plessis, 2009). His elliptical, darkened routes and his hidden identity as he makes his pathways indicate the stealth but also, the tapering off of the Benades and their physical claim to the land as well as the fragility of the Afrikaner nation. These patrols make Lambert into a figure of pathos – lost as he tries to navigate his sense of self within this space and time. He seems to become more vulnerable through his unawareness of the fact that his patrols push him, metaphorically, further 'into the dark'.

This dynamic is set up in seeming contradistinction to other habitual trips into Bosmont Hill and Triomf's surrounding areas, sometimes to run errands or visits the salvage yards where he can scavenge for materials for his mechanics hobby.⁶² Of these trips to the dumps, one particular journey to Martindale comes into focus. The reader learns that he has recently been embarrassed at Bosmont Hill. In the recounted story, Lambert sees 'these bouncy bunches of hotnot-majorettes' (215) who ridicule him and call him a 'hillbillie'. Unnerved, he chooses not to return to Bosmont, for fear he might be ridiculed again. The Martindale dump is closer to Triomf so he decides to go there. This trip brings contrasting images and exchanges into the setting that seem to indicate the presence of alterity or otherness. Lambert passes a roadside caravan of AWB party members and resists their attempts to recruit him. Once at the dumps, he spends time talking to Sonnyboy, a 'yellow kaffir' (216) with whom he shares a joint. Their conversation is an unusual example of unforced or sincere dialogue between a member of the family and an outsider. In that this conversation happens outside of Triomf and during the day suggests that the social and material space of Triomf does not provide an arena for interchange and dialogue. Outside of Triomf's zone, Lambert finds the freedom, albeit uneasy, to engage with the fragments of the city without being totally exhausted by the weight of his and his place's history. However, this potential is not depicted as being harnessed and Lambert's habitual returns to the home and his passages between these sites do not affect or change the relationships between himself and those he encounters, or between Triomf and its surroundings areas.

This excursion to the dumps resembles Pop's remarkable trip downtown at a different point in the novel. In the city alone, Pop is caught up in rivers of people, movements and encounters things that are alien to the bleak and repressive space that he and his family identify with most strongly. If read against *Room 207's* portrayal of the inner city, this seems to contradict the tragic narrative that Moele constructs about the black, urban migrant within the inner city. However, perhaps one should consider the dates of these

⁶² I am reminded here of Walter Benjamin's ragpicker, who pieces together impressions of the urban world around him using scraps.

stories. *Room 207*, set ten years after *Triomf*, reveals the inadequacy of the ‘rainbow’ nation’s rhetoric of transformation. *Triomf* was published on the cusp of the changing times. The geopathic disorders that Moele’s characters depict and construct seems to be generated through their disappointments with the post-apartheid urban scene and are particular to their social histories, just as the Benades’ are to theirs. The 207s’ disillusionments are derived through their relationships to history and so they shape the random flows of the inner city with their perspectives and expectations. For Pop, the inner city is open and free compared to what he feels in his fractious house within his bleak neighbourhood. This point of difference generates the understanding also that one urban space can signify different things to different urbanites or even that the experience of an urban space can change for an individual depending on recent events in his or her life. The relationship between these two novels creates a heterotopic sense of the city, confounding one reading of the city. Thus, for Pop now, his encounter with the inner city represents a freedom from an oppressive situation in *Triomf* but there is always the possibility that were he to return at a different time (ten years later, say, at the time of *Room 207*), he would not have the same impression of downtown Johannesburg.

What is perhaps more significantly associated with this encounter – something that is pivotal aspect to the Benades’ narrative – is the possibility of racial integration within the city, or because of it. The part of the city put forward as the site of future integration is not the suburb or the periphery of Johannesburg but its heart. This same sentiment is evoked later when the Benades’ number plate is mistaken for an acronym of the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM). In this scene in the novel the family is swept up in a jubilant, frenetic political procession in downtown Braamfontein. The Benades are closer to the spirit of change in these city streets than in their own suburban space. The question that the novel raises is this: can such a family embrace this potential for real social change or will their constant return to the barren streets of *Triomf* spells out a reluctance or inability to remedy their social and physical immobility, because of the ways in which *Triomf* and its history has produced their understandings of space and society?

While Van Niekerk puts this question forwards, she also offers the reader the idea that the possibility of change, of salvation even, comes in their connection not to city but to nature. Associated with an Afrikaner land-myth, the search for natural environments emerges time and again in the novel. Treppie's poem, 'This is not Wallpaper' an ode to Westdene Dam expresses a deep awareness of the failings of the established social order:

THIS IS NOT WALLPAPER

The African Coot creases the water
and the Egyptian geese shout wha! to the sky
and the hadida, that old bachelor
sits there on the fronds of a willow.
He shakes his feathers and stretches his leathers
and shouts ha! to his friends on the bridge,
ja-ha! They must look,
this is not wallpaper
not this time, no, not this time,
it's spring, yes it's spring
at the old Westdene dam –
and, not least
at last there is peace.

(303)

There is peace away from the built environment, in the ebb and flow of spring and water, in the antics of animals. Treppie's poem captures natural motion and mobility – the movement of seasons and the passage of animals. In this poem, the reader witnesses the family's sense of the possibility of release, which comes from a world with which they have lost touch. At the same time, the reader understands that there is some consolation in language, a descriptive language, which can evoke parts of the city that are not always readily available or visible. This poem therefore also alludes the text of *Triomf* and its capacity to render that which is hidden into language and metaphor, offering new ways of seeing the historical and contemporary relationship between these people and place.

The poem also sets up Westdene Dam in contrast to *Triomf* by evoking an earlier scenario. In the chapter, 'OH, IT'S A SATURDAY NIGHT', Treppie and Lambert are spying on a group of girls getting ready to go out. While Lambert 'checks them out' (91), Treppie looks at their wallpaper which is covered in 'trees and dams and bridges, bunnies

jumping on green grass and ducks and things. And blue hills in the distance' (91). The wallpaper is 'a mock paradise', which is exactly how Treppie describes Triomf. Treppie's poem has a deep impact on the family and encapsulates, if not their present reality, a dream to transcend 'the pre-fab wagon-wheels and aloes, rotten with rubble' (92) that is their existence. Only in leaving Triomf and visiting the dam is the family able to perceive the possibilities of this, a world without wallpaper. The final pages of the novel offer a similar consolation using this idea of passage and connection to the 'real' world: in gazing at a galaxy of distant, fiery stars, the family remains connected to the 'not wallpaper' universe, to the symbolic antithesis of Triomf and to their own burdensome lives.

The Exploded View: Passing by

They turned into Hani View. The main road had been graded recently and spread with gravel, which rattled against the underside of the car. The whitewashed pegs along the edge of the roadway, where a ridge of sand had been piled up by the graders, suggested they would be tarring soon. It would make a difference, it would tamp down these shifting sands, fix things in place.

(The Exploded View, 'Afritude Sauce': 57)

Introduction

In the excerpt above, taken from the second narrative strand in Vladislavić's novel, Egan is arriving at the housing development, Hani View. The language captures again the material detail of the location. The dirt road he uses has been built expressly for creating access to the site from the freeways that surround it. The image also has a deeper significance in relation to Egan's psycho-geography and his disturbances around the sign of the city. At this point in the story, Egan is still largely convinced that his project is worthwhile and beneficial to the communities that it seeks to house. The road is in the process of being tarred. To Egan, tar represents a logical, structural step towards the maintenance of urban order. The 'shifting sands' of the road represent its drifting boundaries, which, earlier, Budlender notices are, 'sliding away over pristine edges and valleys, lodging in tenuous places, slipping again' (6). Egan would rather try to hold

these sands in place with trusted methods. Without realising it, Egan is perpetuating a Eurocentric system of order that does not reflect the African urban landscape and its increasingly unpredictable forms. His desire to lock down motion mirrors his difficulty in relating to the new social and spatial order around him. The 'roads' he relies on are part of a city that is changing and his rigid response to this city, exemplified above, keeps him at odds with the 'shifting sands' of Johannesburg.

In the discussions preceding this one, I have explored how historical immobilities are reinforced in the modes and sites of passage in *Triomf's* and *Room 207's* psycho-geographies or chronotopes. In my discussion here of *The Exploded View*, I trace these ideas into the wider expanse of the city's highways and greater boundaries of Johannesburg's suburban developments. Where one might imagine that the text's depictions of roads, highways and characters' passages between the city's edge developments undermine socio-spatial boundaries and divisions, *The Exploded View* reveals, paradoxically, how patterns of exclusion and distancing are ingrained in the characters' movements between spaces. This reiterates some of the tensions evoked through the residential sites in the novel, and also brings historical features of passage and travel into focus. Indeed, in a reversal of the usual associations of driving, commuting, building, surveying and traveling across large distances, each protagonist's daily itineraries in Vladislavić's novel reveal the difficulty they have in moving beyond familiar, inherited perspectives of the city and of themselves as urbanites. Their struggles are tied not only to their inherited perspectives but also to the structural presences of the apartheid city's highways, and to city roads and patterns of movement. As I discussed earlier, many of these routes and modes of automobility still hold within them sensibilities associated with the apartheid city. While the novel's four men traverse and meet the post-apartheid city, their intentions and actions are restrained by their desire to sustain a latent and almost redundant urban order.

The distance created between these four protagonists and their environments through the act of driving is brought into stronger focus if one considers a slightly later Vladislavić novel, *Portrait with Keys* (2006). Acts of walking and meditations on how memory and

self is linked to one's relationship to the street, the pavement, neighbouring houses and people are integral parts of this text's ode to post-apartheid Yeoville and Johannesburg. As a point of comparison, *Portrait with Keys* raises further interesting questions about what it means to be a citizen of the city *now*, especially when one considers its lamentations about the loss of the old and the erasure of memory through changes in the built environment. One gains the sense from this series of portraits of the city that the act of walking and immediate, visceral experience brings one in direct contact with loss too. Perhaps one can consider driving, as seen in *The Exploded View*, to be an act of resistance as well: a manifestation of an avoidance of fully appreciating the inevitable pain of the loss of the familiar. As *The Exploded View* demonstrates, however, this type of resistance or avoidance renders one at odds with the environment.

'Villa Toscana'

The reader senses this distance to the environment from the start of the novel, in Budlender's trip to Villa Toscana. The reader meets him as he is 'passing by on the N3'. He takes the 'Marlboro Road off-ramp' (3). This places him in Sandton. For readers who know Johannesburg, they can surmise that he has been heading west possibly from one of the other respondents, or even from his own house, if he lives on the old East Rand.⁶³ The sense one gets in the story is that Budlender's work spans the far reaches of the city and his destinations are various residential complexes on the peripheries. An inventory of the day's remaining respondents reveals this. He looks at the residences he still needs to visit: 'Three of them after Constantinou: Martha Masemola of The Reeds, which he would have to look up on the map; Eleanor Williams of Vorna Valley Extension 5, ditto; Jimmy Dijkstra of Glen Marais (18).⁶⁴ Budlender admits that, 'he would have to look [them] up on a map' (18). The mention of a map seems to remind the reader of his reliance on order

⁶³ The East Rand or 'Eastern edge' traditionally marks the eastern limits of the city, although this in itself is becoming absorbed by the steady sprawl of Johannesburg's urban reaches.

⁶⁴ The names of these sites evoke a sense of the country idyll – 'Valley,' 'Reeds,' 'Glen' as well and of past empires – Constantinou/Constantinople, signifying the social ideology behind these kinds of complexes – to protect, to shield, to nurture: against the threat of the changing city. Their positioning on the outskirts of the city, far away from one another emphasises their dislocation from the city, and their disconnection from heterogeneous community.

and measurement and hints also at the cartographic division of colonial and apartheid discourses.⁶⁵

For Budlender, these destinations and the routes he must take to reach them are merely vehicles for his methodological demarcation of people and places for the census. While he does not necessarily live in these environments, Budlender operates between them and makes his business from the main routes that connect them. His sense of the city is therefore conditioned by his reliance on these arterial routes and on his experience in commanding the roads for his usage. Moreover, the Budlender the reader meets travels these roads and finds these destinations in his car – which is, compared to public transport or walking, a fast, reliable and controllable mode of passage. Given that the reader never learns exactly where Budlender lives, and given the nature of his work and his general command of the road, Budlender comes across as man whose mode of being is defined by an *auto-en routed-ness*.⁶⁶ His character seems to evolve in relation to the city's highways and the authority they give him. Budlender's mode of being, and Budlender himself by extension, emerge as reliant on the city designed for the fluid passage of automobiles, wealth, and for the maintenance of order and efficiency (Graham, 2006; Behrens, 2005). This is illustrated in his view of the N1 while seated above it, at the Star Stop Egoli. Like de Certeau's Empire State building voyeur, who sees the city below him as 'a wave of verticals' (de Certeau, 1984: 91) Budlender, in his perch – 'made for a statistician' (15) – is:

Suspended above a great demographic flow, like a boy on a bridge dangling a hook and line...his eye took in the stream of traffic, separated it into its parts, dwelling on sizes and shapes and shades. Colours washed through the motor vehicle industry [...] rivers of drivers.

(15)

⁶⁵ For more on this relationship see Harry Garuba's 'Mapping the Land/Body/Subject: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies in African Narrative' in *Alternation*, Vol.9, No. 1 (2002): 87-116 or J.B Harley's 'Deconstructing the map', 1989.

⁶⁶ This absence of a house, or an original starting point creates a sense of absence and dislocation from one's roots that resonate with *Room 207's* protagonists' disconnection from their former places. While Budlender and the 207s operate in different parts of the city and have different historical trajectories, this parallel signifies a state of displacement that is shared throughout the post-apartheid city.

Budlender's view from above is habitual – we learn that he has paused here several times to 'plan his routes' (14). He enjoys this position since it gives him the chance to apply his logic to the flow of cars and the lay of the roads but it also gives him an objective distance on the freeways below. Suspended here, he sits identifying drivers. He looks for repeated details like 'roof racks... bull bars, trailers, spoilers, roll bars, bakkies, 4x4's'. Indeed, 'Entire lifestyles [...] become perceptible to his trained eye' (15-16). From his vantage point he is apart and aloof from the melee of the city but so are the streams of cars, drivers and passengers who hurtle along the motorway. While the motorway indicates movement and variability, it also represents dependability for Budlender (and for its architects) – both in the technology of its construction and in the design and efficiency of the vehicles it is designed to carry. Gazing out at it from the Star Stop cafeteria, Budlender finds quantifiable rhythms and objects that he needs in order for his own existence in the city to make sense. Looking down at the flow of traffic, he seeks the logic that will protect the validity of his own daily circuits. This is illustrated by a momentary loss of thought as he stands above the freeway:

People were always saying: You hardly ever see an old car in the road in Joburg. Look around you at any intersection, it's nothing but Mercs and BMs. Where do they get the money? Then again, people are always saying: 'Every second car in Joburg is falling apart, and going like a bat out of hell regardless. It's no wonder the accident rate is sky-high.' Were the roads full of new cars or old cars?

(16)

As he loses track of his counting, he thinks to himself, 'there was a lesson in this, which only a statistician seemed capable of learning: as soon as you took account of what people were saying, you lost track of what was actually happening' (16). This excerpt also reveals that for Budlender, the unpredictable elements in the metropolis are people and people's responses to the system. The regular flow of the highway and its solid structure, supporting flows of cars and people, offers him protection from change. The rationality in the road system matches his rational mind and brings him back to safety. However, the safety he seeks spells also his dislocation and increasing irrelevance in his surrounding urban world.

This is evident in the first scene of the novel when Budlender arrives at the Marlboro Road offramp. At the traffic light, roadside vendors swamp him. Budlender's response is to try to order this melee of human activity into something formal and measurable:

He wound up the window and glared at the curio sellers and their wares, ranged on the verges and traffic islands: a herd of wooden giraffes as tall as men, drums and masks, beaded lapel badges promoting Aids awareness and the national flag, fruitbowls and tie-racks and candelabra made of twisted wire.'

(4)

For him, these things are just 'junk' (4) spilling into and changing the landscape of 'every street corner' (4). Budlender distorts the image of the man and his wares through a shatter mark on his windscreen. In doing so, he brings about a momentary fracturing of his own gaze and position as well as of that which he sees outside in the road. That this happens while in his car suggests that his reliance on formalised progress, modernity and the command of space distorts his integration into the post-apartheid city. An intertextual reference to the third narrative strand, 'Curiouser' is evident here. Majara's *Bullet-in* series of gunshots in walls enacts the same kind of fracturing of an image. He asks the viewer/observer to see the wall as marred by violence, to see the locations of the walls as fractured by war or trauma. However, in that he does not travel to these spaces where the walls are purported to be, and makes the scenes himself in the safety of his suburban studio, he establishes the whole enterprise as a game, and a distortion of reality.

As the traffic light changes, Budlender moves on, relatively unscathed. But, his containment within his car makes him into the stranger, separated from a social urban world that while it has 'no reliable statistics' (5) is, in fact, the Johannesburg of the future, one in which his place is becoming increasingly unsteady. When he arrives at Villa Toscana just after this interaction, it is not the structure that repels him 'at the ramparts' but a human being interpreting a system. Like the vendor at the traffic light, the security guard challenges his ability to exist in the city without engaging with its humanness. Budlender is further shown to be at odds with the changes around him – both social and structural – in the fact that he makes a mistake writing his vehicle's number

plate down on the security guard's log book and is denied entry to the faux compound. This creates a tension between him and the places he seeks to enter, aligning him ironically with the vendor who exists as an outsider to most drivers. Perhaps in sensing this irony, Budlender's discomfort is amplified.

This tension is radically re-ignited later in the story when Budlender drives along the R562 on the way back from Jimmy Dijkstra in Glen Marais. Trying to get back to the freeway, he encounters a minibus taxi, 'listing so badly it seemed to be on the point of tipping over' (19). The taxi alarms him, as does the stone ricocheting from the taxi's wheels into his screen – another reference to the idea that his reality is being 'shattered' by his interactions with these uncontrollable elements. Budlender is also shocked by the informal settlement that seems to have sprung up overnight alongside the road. He is rattled by these disturbances to what is normally a dependable mode of travel.

If these sights and encounters have unnerved him, the surreal vision of a strange man alongside the road, caught in his headlights seems to upset him the most.

The man sits comfortably in:

the inner tube from a tractor tyre [...] a huge black rubber doughnut [...] floating there, in spiky new boots on a blackened fringe of veld, with his fingers trailing in the ash of burnt grass, like someone bobbing in a swimming pool.

(21)

As he passes, the man extends his hand up in a gesture that is both inviting and repellent: 'arching his back, thrusting his seal-slick belly into the air extending his right hand in greeting or warning' (21). Budlender, having slowed down, then responds by racing off, losing his customary control as he veers off the tar and flees to the safety of the M1. Once there, he tries to remember one detail: the taxi's number plate, as if this can ground his experience within a framework he knows and understands. However, this detail is lost and in this loss of memory, the reader understands how dislodged he is by what he has seen. By racing back to the safety of the freeway, he reveals the cause of his unease: he

can't stave off the changes around him, and preserve the old system, and thereby himself, en route. Budlender's memory is affected by these encounters on the R562 because they disrupt his reliance on city roads, cars and trusted routes.

He realises that these chaotic elements do in fact inhabit the same chronotope as he does. If his understanding of the road and its uses has to incorporate the haphazard antics of the taxi and the man on the R562, then what does this say about his own ability to maintain order and calm within a known structure? If cars represent motion (Urry, 2003) and motion and modernity are inextricably linked (Beckman, 2004), then the driver and man from R562 threaten Budlender's sense of modernity. Given that the modernity Budlender associates with has been, up until now at least, a westernised one with a colonial and apartheid bent, then the R562 reveals the possibilities of an overhaul of the past into a supposed chaos that would unsettle Budlender's place in the post-apartheid city even further.

However, his drives around 'contained' environments like Villa Toscana do not bring him much comfort either. On one occasion after leaving Iris' house, he gets lost. As he motors around the complex he takes in the empty patterns of inhabitants' movement, their circular, repetitive circuits and their sterile lives. Like these people, Budlender is going nowhere, entrapped in an ersatz urbanity – he is lost in the maze of the Toscana complex, but also, if these people and their petty routes are the alternative to what he has seen in the exterior world and on the R562, then Budlender knows he is as deluded as they are.

This uncertain positioning, mirroring and contrasting with the instability of the 207s and the Benades, gives rise to a feeling of entrapment and thwarted mobility in him that manifests in his dream at the end of the story. In it, he finds himself on foot. As he runs through the streets of the oneiric metropolis, he slips on the streets. Without a car, on the bones of his feet, unable to move forwards in a way that his body and mind wants, Budlender starts falling through the city, unable to remain within it. His dream is also about his lust for Iris: her perfume bottles are the buildings that line the streets in his dream city. Falling through them could be taken to represent Budlender's loss of control

as he obsesses over this woman. However, in that her perfume bottles become the city and in that the story documents his growing sense of dislocation, and as I have argued before, if one considers that Iris is an object upon which he throws his attention because of his growing sense of unease, then she is also a metaphor for his reliance on identifiable and recognisable things in the city.

'Afritude Sauce'

Egan's relationship to mobility is in a similar condition. Egan is a man who is technically a visitor to Johannesburg. His main relationship with Johannesburg comes through his work as an engineer on city developments such as Hani View. Owing to what must have been many trips to the city over the years, Egan is familiar with the city's routes and sites as a regular commuter would be. He is also shown to have a familiar relationship to the city; his trips here, for instance, are spoken of in the possessive sense: 'on *his* Joburg trips' and, he 'usually' (50) stays in a cheap hotel. More significantly though, Egan knows the city because he has seen how it is constructed. This is noteworthy because if one thinks about lived space or 'third space' as being moulded through social habits and practices (Lefebvre, 1958; Bhabha, 1994, Soja, 1996) and 'first space' as being the space of conception and institutional space (Lefebvre, 1958, Soja, 1996) then Egan's relationship to Johannesburg seems to operate in the latter. Without the 'soft city' (Raban, 1974) that becomes familiar through everyday patterns, Egan can only relate to the 'hard' structures of this environment. And, if 'first space' tends to be a space of fixity and order, then one can begin to understand why he feels so uncomfortable with the unpredicted variations in his work and in the world he is acquainted with.

As an engineer who works on large, public projects, he feels deeply familiar with the inner workings of the built environment. He understands how elements of the city's inner structures look and fit together and has experienced the intricate methods through which a city functions. Even though he is a visitor, he operates with a set of assumptions about his role in relation to urban space. Like Budlender, his passage through Johannesburg should bring him into contact with the structures that he knows best and relies on the most. His realisation that his model of the city, his trusted 'first space', has become

somewhat redundant or ill-matched in this post-apartheid chronotope causes him to feel like an imposter. As much as one can trace this in his relationship to the physical, residential sites he works on, his increasing insecurity and doubt is also played out in his patterns of movement between the different locations he visits on this trip and in his relationship to travel and mobility.

Where Budlender is active, driving himself, Egan is passive, being picked up and driven around by two colleagues after meeting one of them, council official Milton Mazibuko, outside the Kempton Park municipal offices.⁶⁷ Egan has traveled from an unfamiliar hotel to a government building which, considering state architecture in South Africa, is no doubt unremarkable and generic. Even though (as a bureaucratic establishment) municipal offices discourage lasting familiarity, this kind of building is within his range of knowledge since it has a notable function and form. However, it is at this site that his sense of unease actually begins. It is not the building that unnerves him but rather what happens when he is met by Mazibuko in his car. Mazibuko does not get out to greet Egan but rather shakes his hand ‘through the window of the hired car’ (52) and Egan has to slide into the passenger seat. While this seems relatively innocuous, it signals the beginning of Egan’s loss of active control or direction in the story. Metaphorically bound to the municipal site, Egan’s passive passage signals a shift in his power relations to the public and institutional space of the city.

In the controlled environment of the car, Egan and Mazibuko spew out jaded rhetoric about complaints received from the people of Hani View: ‘people are never satisfied’ (54). The cadence and orientation of their conversation seems to be enabled by their containment in this insulated and plush automobile. This all changes when they arrive at the site and Egan discovers that the development seems to be in worse shape than he anticipated, as depicted in this impression of the untarred road cited earlier.

⁶⁷ Kempton Park is very near the airport, also in the east of the city. The R562 runs on the other side of Tembisa, which is where Budlender would have been driving when he saw the man in the rubber tyre. It is very probable that the informal settlement he sees is the same that Egan discovers has been built up on the other side of Hani View – Hani Extension 1.

The unease begun when he met Mazibuko is compounded from this view of the road and the realisation that the two settlements are spilling into one another. Like the ‘shifting sands’ that he feels need to be secured by tar, Egan’s point of view is that the unruly developments need to be controlled and planned properly. For Egan this thinking extends into a conception of roads as a device to assist in dividing and demarcating sites and movement. On this site, however, this basic tenet of urban planning seems to be overridden by another pattern of exchange – one that he is unprepared for. For the squatters of Hani Extension 1, the informal road running between their home and Hani View allows for access and for social and physical transition. Although Egan’s urban conceptual frame may understand this principle in relation to vehicles and transport, it does not extend to people, especially if those people are meant to be living in demarcated areas – ones that he has helped to fortify and delineate.

These Hani estates undermine the very principles of his trade and person. Once inside Hani View, being directed passively through identically designed streets by Mazibuko, Egan’s sight falls on a manhole:

set in a pad of new cement as pale as a mushroom jutting out on the middle of the dusty street was reassuring. It suggested something meaningful was going on below the surface: pipes has been laid, a lasting claim had been embedded in the earth, and would not be rooted out too easily.

(58)

For Egan, whose trade is ‘the shit business’ (55), the underworkings of a site hold particular importance and reassurance since it is here that the effluence (another form of transport) of human waste occurs: underground rivers of pipes carrying water and sewerage that maintain the cleanliness and habitability of massive human settlements. But, while this underground transport system may be marked clearly above ground moments later as he meets Mrs. Natlaka he realises that the normal traffic of his ‘shit bushiness’ is not working. In fact, the surface is at odds with the depths. This reminds me of Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall’s warning that in Johannesburg, ‘suffering, alienation, rebellion, insurrection’ (2007: 286) lie close to the surface. While the toilet

situation is a satirical one, it reminds the reader of the tensions between the underground, invisible and the visible urban space. The fact that Egan's strategies to reconcile surface and depth are flawed highlights the fact that he is implicated in this tension through his mode of practice and engagement.

This tension is further evoked when Egan recalls his experience in Cape Town. There, he realises that it is not only the houses but also the roads and public objects that are ill-fitted, just like his toilet accessories. His imagined, 'Africanised' plan, which comes as a response to his realisation, paradoxically perpetuates his inability to overcome the primacy of his first space orientation. His streets are populated by 'poor black people, a couple of waxy sheets of barefoot street children, barbers with oilcan chairs...scrap-metal merchants with supermarket trolleys full of stolen manhole covers' (74). Egan cannot imagine an alternative African modernity besides one of disarray and poverty. Despite his ability to see how things connect as an 'exploded view', he cannot conceive of a properly working alternative to the European urbanity he is accustomed to. This too can be thought of as a symptom of his European urban gaze and explains why he is so unsettled by his day at Hani View. He fears that the future city, the one he is trying to create, will not 'work' at all. His objectification of African details and idiom in his language and perceptual frames reflects this and creates further distance between him and his terrain – social, material and poetic.

Mazibuko and his car present Egan with a conflicting narrative and reinforce his unease. With his fat cat attitude, ambiguous politics and his comfortable sedan, Mazibuko represents the duplicity of the new urban order and the hypocrisy of the post-apartheid city. As the city becomes increasingly changed (and less organised according to Egan's gaze) a civil servant like Mazibuko (or the absent, Bhengu) enjoys the security of having a place within a rising black middle class and adopts some of the trappings of the very system that Egan finds to be unloosening. However, he and his colleagues also represent new forms of mobility. This can be seen when Mazibuko, Bhengu and the Resident's Association's Marakabane and Ramaramela come to pick Egan up for dinner. They do so in an ostentatious vehicle: a 'sleek sixteen-seater bus with tinted windows' (75).

Marakabane and Ramaramela are described as ‘lounging in the back’ (75). The bus is not necessary since there are only five of them going to the restaurant. The vehicle can be taken to represent their prowess and stature rather than their need for transport. The bus is also a minibus – the chosen vehicle for the main informal mode of transport for Africans in Johannesburg. While this one is a far cry from the minibus that Budlender sees on the R562, it embodies a sign of urban mobility and road ownership that is typically local, non-European and contemporary. These men are fluidly mapping multiple versions of urbanity and while Egan finds their behaviour difficult to digest (like the Afritude sauce which rises up in his gullet at the end of this story), these men’s power comes from their fluid combination of different urban modes and their active manipulation of their own patterns of movement. Egan, on the other hand, becomes left behind in this game – reflected in this scenario by his being driven to the restaurant in the minibus as a passive passenger.

At Bra Zama’s, surrounded by dimly lit automobile shops, spectres of his frustrated position, Egan’s handicap in relating to the future city is revealed further. Even if he disapproves of the men’s approach to business, he cannot match their dexterity and confidence. His failed Van de Merwe joke becomes a metaphor for his inability to engage in appropriate ways with the new urban order. And here again, the chosen metaphor is one of streets. This draws the reader’s attention to the reflexive relationship between public space, mobility and the self. Van de Merwe is at the top of a skyscraper and like de Certeau’s archetypal urban spectator, he is unable to read the details or nuances of the street level city. The distance created between his position and the streets obscures Van de Merwe’s vision of the manhole cover. In de Certeau’s allegory, the building represents the ‘first’ and ‘second’ spaces of the city and the street, lived space. Egan, like Van de Merwe, is separated from the lived space of Johannesburg’s public areas by his inability to move into a different way of thinking about urbanism. He becomes trapped, like Egan, above the symbolic highways of the city, just able to perceive the nature of his disorientation but unable to step into this new space and change himself (or it) for fear of what it is and what he will become.

'Curiouser'

Majara's story is not enunciated as explicitly through physical acts of traversing physical space in a car or a vehicle. However, the circuits that Majara does make outside of his house and studio are rich nodes through which one can trace his static position within Johannesburg. His relationship to passage initiates a sense of boundedness that compounds his already existent inertia in his suburban hideaway. Majara's integration into the post-apartheid city is impeded by his belief that he has control over the routes he takes or the routes he makes for others. This can be seen in his movements through his domestic space.

His perambulations around his house on the evening of the *braai* come to mind. Two passages are distinct here. The first is when Sandy asks him to make a fire. He stops what he is doing and walks over to the cooking area:

He prowled along the path made of railway sleepers to the street door. Ever since Artslink had called 'S. Majara' a 'Young Lion of the Art Scene' – sarcastically, it's true – Simeon had discovered a feline streak in himself that was hard to suppress. The goatee only made it worse. So did the rubber-soled trainers, which looked more like a superior form of foot than shoe, as if his body had magically projected its striated musculature onto the surface of his skin. Lately he had taken to inserting something catlike into his gait, a version of padding, a leonine grace.

(114)

Although initially ironic, Majara appropriates a walk that embodies his self-importance. His desire to insert a figurative image into his physical walk seems to suggest that he has a need to reinvent himself and his physical mode in accordance with his increasing fame. While seemingly innocuous, this description reveals something of Majara's belief that his passage through the city, and through the art world, can be mapped out according to his own inventions. Later, after an argument around the garden table criticising his choice to buy what were probably stolen masks from 'the Malawian', Majara again invokes this leonine walk as he gets up to go inside:

He put on his pad again, became aware of it, stretching his stride, felt the elastic in tendon and sinew, toned it down a bit, sleeked back his risen hackles, before he gave the game away.

(131)

As he comes under attack, he shifts his focus to envision himself as a powerful hunter, a predator in control of his environment, surveying rather being surveyed. For Majara, being the one who is doing the watching is a position of power. But, his mode of surveillance and the distance he takes in order to maintain this stance seems to trap him within this world.

This is evident also in his approach to his art, which given his subject matter should in theory draw him out of his inert state. However, even though he is working with violent and suggestive subject matter and foreign spaces like Rwanda, he cannot relinquish his control. Take for instance his genocide series. Majara uses the bandages to make shroud impressions of bodies and body parts of genocide victims. Instead of generating motion to represent the frenzy of this horrific episode of history, he creates muslin impressions that seem to freeze time and space: 'a twisted arm, a hand raised to ward off a blow. The long white sheets were hung in a dimly lit room like a photograph of a ghost' (112). With these shrouds, he transforms a story of trauma and mass murder into an immobile scene.

Even his video projection seems to operate by fixing the story. By removing from the video the segment where he finds the bandages in Nyanza, Majara erodes the act of transportation and appropriation from the video, securing the exhibition in the here and now. What is lost is his own act of appropriation or theft, a mobile act but also one that transgresses the ethics of documenting trauma. By directing his guest's pathways through the final exhibition, by deciding on their behalf the order of what they see and experience this scene, Majara effectively restrains his guests' movements. The overriding sense from this exhibition is one of stagnation and paralysis: not just because he is reproducing images of death but also because the exhibition itself is an exercise in controlling movement and the acts of interpretation. He conceals his theft, his own body in the

shrouds and also limits the potential of the genocide narrative to be linked directly to the hospital site.

Complementing this sense of paralysis in the gallery is the image of the Arts Minister at the opening, stuck in her wheel chair. Majara is described as noticing the similarity between her bandaged leg and the bandages of the shrouds, which suggests an allegorical link between the Rwandan Genocide and South Africa's current political situation. Less seriously, this detail could suggest that the Minister of Arts is 'killing' South African art and expression – a suggestion that has much pertinence now in 2012, just as the ANC has passed the highly contested Media Bill. With regards to Majara's work and what he represents to the reader, this brief moment suggests that Majara's art is also handicapped, unable to move beyond the confines of his ironic intentions and in turn, unable to truly move people beyond the impact of the spectacle. Majara himself then becomes caught within this controlled vision.

This sense emerges again when Majara procures the masks from the Malawian traders for *Curiouser* and Bra Zama's. At 'face value,' the masks give Majara an opportunity to satirise the curio trade and to rearrange the expectations of the consumer and his or her relationship to the culturally constructed artifact. In this way, his work undermines Eurocentric 'otherings' in the social and art world and can be seen to be radical. However, Majara's work with *Curiouser* can be read differently if one considers the steps he takes to produce it and the difference between the space of trade – that is, the street – and the space of the gallery or house; the private collection where the art ends up. Majara translates what exists on the streets and in public space, available to passersby, catering to the mobile audience, into static art, within a controllable and controlled environment.⁶⁸ In doing so, he removes the traces of the outside world and submits it to his will.

This approach to his work is also evident in his active procurement of the masks from Roger and Victor. He initially trawls well-known public markets along Ontdekkers Road

⁶⁸ A quick survey of where these masks end up: the space of the gallery, Majara's house and the restaurant, Bra Zama's, demonstrates this. This is essentially the main critique of his work in the story, as seen in his conversation with Amy in his study.

and William Nicol Drive' in search of curios for Bra Zama'. This reference to Ontdekkers makes one think immediately of Triomf and how the landscape may have changed from *Triomf's* chronotope to this one: around ten years later, in this book, the road that once marked Triomf's separation from the world is now a vibrant informal conduit for the curio trade – because of the amount of traffic that passes by and because of the expansion of Johannesburg into Western suburban areas, as well as the increasing amount of commuters coming into the city. One cannot help wondering what the Benade family members would think about this: would they feel compelled to join in? Would they be some of the white beggars standing at the great intersections around which these curio markets have sprung up? The two texts enter into correspondence here and this compels me again to consider how one 'real' space can overlap with its counter-image within the mind of the urbanite so that the city becomes a text itself, a palimpsest of visible and invisible meanings.

In 'Curiouser', Ontdekkers is a black, informal space, a veritable roadside warehouse. Despite this, the 'diffuse marketplaces straggling along the verges of suburban roads' (107) reveal nothing and so Majara follows his lead to Bruma Lake, hoping to 'buy in bulk'. There, at a 'stall on the pavement outside Flea Market World in Bruma' (107), he meets Roger who offers him six crates of masks. Majara is out of his comfortable zone (his house, his studio, his gallery) and within the unpredictable world of the market. Yet, he becomes the wealthy patron purchasing wares and so even though he is far from the safety of his usual environment, the way he conducts his search gives him a semblance of power and control.

Perhaps it is his initial self-importance that disables him from feeling easy in these far-flung areas. Later when he goes to pick up the mask and drives Roger the Malawian to Doornfontein,⁶⁹ he is described as 'looking over his shoulder all the time' (128). Majara is deeply afraid of this area and in this action, he becomes to the reader a bourgeois ideopath who sees the inner city only as a dangerous nexus of urbanity, teeming with unknown and unsafe people and practices. His unease is deepened at the abandoned

⁶⁹ Doornfontein is just next to Hillbrow. Now we have entered into the 207s' terrain.

warehouse space where he evaluates the crates of masks. As soon as the deal is struck, Majara hires vans to quickly remove and transport the masks to his home studio in Greenside. Back in the plush safety of the suburb, Majara's memory of the expedition becomes safely contained within the four walls of the studio. From this point, Victor and Roger become nothing more than conversation pieces inserted into a suburban garden supper.

The evidence of his uncomfortable circuit through the unknown urban expanse becomes transformed through his skillful manipulations of these curios into *objets d'art*. Distinguishing marks of foreign crafts people and their location(s) become subsumed within Majara's remakings of the masks too, so that *Curiouser*, like the *Genocide III* series and *Bullet-in* reflect the static environments in which Majara feels safe. By erasing the fluidity of the exchange (physical, social, cultural, spatial) that provided his materials, Majara entrenches his own immobility so that ultimately, both he and his art become confined to unmoving space of the studio and exhibition hall – both literally and figuratively. While Majara may be aware of this artificial way of engaging with space and mobility, evoked in the almost violent image of the stamped roman numeral on the mask's foreheads in the final scene, he is defensive and retreats behind the enclosed space of his trusted studio. The story ends with a sense of claustrophobia and containment. Majara and his studio co-exist in a certain inert state, calling attention to the presence of the socio-historical spatial burden within this lived space.

'Crocodile Lodge'

In this story, the novel returns to the city's highways and peripheral suburban developments. As with all three preceding characters, the state of Duffy's physical movements, along the roads and back at the site, can be read as an allegory of his displacement within contemporary Johannesburg. Duffy spends most of his time driving along the N1 and the N3. There are threads of Budlender's circuits in Duffy's car journey. Like the census drafter, Duffy spends his time obsessively tracking road details as well as driving patterns and automobile culture. The repetitiveness in his patterns seems to mirror his sense of growing redundancy within the post-apartheid urban order

since although he is on the road, he is moving slowly, wedged in rush hour traffic, both as he tried to get home and on his trip back to Crocodile Lodge to search for his lost phone. One can read his reactions to the traffic situation and his response to the hijackers on the site as an allegory for his more general state of cultural and social inertia.

Normally, driving the highways gives Duffy a feeling of command, especially when his own navigation is normally unhampered. He enjoys the liturgical ‘cadences of the traffic report’ (159) and even takes pleasure in hearing about the obstructions along the city’s arterial routes, since he is usually unaffected by them:

It would soothe him to hear that each of the named intersections had become a hub of a failed mechanism. The end point of an incomplete trajectory, and that he was implicated in none of it, he was still on course.

(159)

This freedom is short-lived in the story. As soon as he hears about an accident on his route, Duffy’s enjoyment and mobility are rapidly obstructed. The words of the traffic report are simple: ‘*There has been an accident involving three vehicles on the N1 South before the Buccleuch interchange*’ (160) and yet, ‘they fall on him like a judgment’ (160). In the use of this word ‘judgment’ Duffy’s ordinary motions become invested with a heaviness that seems unrelated to something as innocuous as traffic. However, the weight of this word is fitting if one considers how Duffy’s relationship to these roads embodies his relationship to the city, and even more so, if one tracks how this small incident acts as a catalyst for his increasing loss of direction and insecurity.

Take, for instance, when at an intersection on his diverted route he finds himself swamped by vendors offering up their wares. From the safety of his car, Duffy, like Budlender, finds the various knick-knacks unappealing. One object in particular, ‘a balsawood schooner’ (162) catches his eye. He dismisses it as ‘shoddily made’. This dismissal seems relatively unimportant, as does the object. However, the figure of the ship and this scene becomes more significant when read as part of his general state of discord with the

energies of the outside world. This ship reminds me of Foucault's proclamation in his influential essay, 'Of Other Spaces', that the ship represents the ultimate heterotopia:

Think of the ship: it is a floating part of space, a placeless place, that lives by itself, closed in on itself and at the same time poised in the infinite ocean and yet, from port to port, tack by tack, from brothel to brothel, it goes as far as the colonies, looking for the most precious things hidden in their gardens. The ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilizations where it is lacking, dreams dry up; adventure is replaced by espionage, and privateers by the police.

(1967: 236)

If the ship represents alterity, change and motion, then in dismissing the ship along the side of the road, Duffy resists assimilating the energies of Johannesburg's changing, ocean – like currents into his movements and his place here in the city. On his 'route', he is not willing to stop at the 'ports,' or look for precious things and engage in adventure. He ignores the mobile potential of the 'ship' and the traversings of boundaries that it can signal, as elucidated upon by Paul Gilroy in his equally influential study, *The Black Atlantic*:

The image of the ship – a living, microcultural, micro-political system in motion – is especially important for historical and theoretical reasons [...] Ships immediately focus attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political artifacts [...]

(1993: 4)

I have chosen this quote to draw attention to the connection between the figure of the ship and African history. Here too is an opportunity for him to engage in the histories and stories of suffering that inform the world of the vendors and the postcolonial space. In rejecting the ship, he rejects also the chance to shift his focus and embrace what is bubbling up from beneath the surface: the African heterotopia. In sinking further into his car to avoid the child's eyes, his automobile, a potentially open vessel, becomes his shield from the outside. This is reflected in the narrative description of the scene: what Duffy sees outside like a backdrop is a separate cityscape of nouns and adjectives, one which he hopes cannot penetrate his own protected psycho-geography. The outside

becomes aggressive, unpredictable and threatening, part of a perceived disorder or space when in fact he generates his own geopathology through his fears.

As he drives, stubbornly trying to avoid more obstructions along key points in his usual route, Duffy slips in and out of a nostalgic reverie, recalling languid afternoons reading his father's *Popular Mechanics* magazines in the family's suburban home. He remembers also his harrowing recurring dream of a lost childhood boxing match with champion boxer, Wilkie Peterson. In these driving reveries, Duffy's mind journeys to a time in the past. And as he coasts along, surrendering to these dreams, he finds himself away from the hustle of Johannesburg's congested highways and on 'the old road through the plots' (186) which is leading him back to Crocodile Lodge. These two threads, his dreams and his route are both, in a sense, recalled: the first is a recollection of images and memories brought into his conscious mind as he drives; the second is a road that he would ordinarily not take since it is slower and longer, used only because of the assault of traffic on the usual highways. The drawing together of these two acts as acts of recall evokes his predicament since they suggest that Duffy's response to the changes around him is to turn to what has come before. And herein he entrenches himself further into his predicament.

Duffy's relationship to his car also suggests this. Throughout the narrative, he is firmly emplaced within his *bakkie* (pick-up truck). This work vehicle is both a commodity and a representation of his autonomy and power. When he faces the hijackers – men who want to steal the car at the site – he finds himself stepping out to defend it.⁷⁰ He is bound to protect his car for what it represents to him yet this is also his downfall. While roads and cars help him keep his bearings, here at the site of Crocodile Lodge, they signal his demise.

As the last story in the novel, Duffy's tale emphasises the text's idea that one can generate one's own inertia by depending on established modes even when these modes are also meant to generate motion. Historically dominant forms and visions of cars, roads,

⁷⁰ Further attention can be paid to the fact that the men have arrived in a minibus. Duffy is a man who takes pride in private car ownership. The cars show their different relationships to the lived space. Think also of the fact that Duffy makes giant signboards for the thousands of vehicles to read while on the roads.

driving and by extension, westernised modernity come under scrutiny. The text's depiction of small, seemingly minor interactions between characters and their worlds have profound allegorical significance for understanding how these men recreate their disorders and dislocations within this city space. Duffy's bravado is also his downfall since it blinds him to his lack of fluidity and openness to a different way of being in the city. As a defensive measure, his machismo further locks him into old patterns of socio-spatial engagement. While a protective measure and while it temporarily frees Duffy from a crippling sense of inertia and inaction, his final moments are unable to propel him towards a sustained or considered reappraisal of his city space. Like all the novel's characters, Duffy becomes stuck, rooted to the ground, protective and thereby, immobile. His bravado also clashes with the controlled and measured delivery of the text so that one's impression is that Duffy cannot act beyond the constraints of his space, even when being reactive or brash. One cannot rule out the possibilities of change completely and most certainly, Duffy's act signals the potential for a different, more active mode of engagement. However he is still deeply entwined in the overarching sign of an older Johannesburg and with an inherited spatial relationship, one which he feels he should risk his life to protect, offering to subsume himself to keep the city he feels he knows intact.

Conclusion

Each set of characters' patterns of movements show how engaging with the post-apartheid space is made difficult through the inheritance of modes of being that keep certain unhelpful relationships intact. Furthermore, in each text, layered into the roads and street grids are spectres of apartheid immobilities that influence and pervade the city's routes. The characters map out their own immobilities by carrying with them unresolved relationships to passage and movement that they have inherited from previous generations. These relationships are highly complex and interwoven and reveal how seemingly innocuous acts are heavy with meaning and symbolic significance. Through this lens, these poetic sites of this heterotopic, lived post-apartheid city reveal a city whose residents are still negotiating the boundaries of change. To present a counter-narrative to the reader's expectations about the meaning of movement is to undermine the

claims of the post-apartheid moment to be able to regenerate the city and extinguish the psycho-geographical effects of the former regime's limitations on spatiality. The texts become imbued with patterns of restriction and ellipsis, mapped out by characters who unconsciously repeat and reinscribe their city, and themselves, with disordered relationships to passage and movement. While each text deals with a particular psycho-geographical zone, reading these stories together give a sense of the multiplicity not only of the city but also of interpretations of the city. The complexity of movement can be viewed across a range of subject-positions and places so that contemporary Johannesburg's reiteration of the historical archive becomes more visible in myriad different ways and modes. The overriding chronotope is one of transience, unpredictability and even revision, but overarchingly of repetition and immobility.

In the next section, I shall explore what I see to be the third layer of this complex performance: the characters' deployment of defensive tactics and personae that worsen their displacement and dislocated sense of place in post-apartheid Johannesburg.

SECTION THREE

TACTICS AND PERSONAE: ACCENTUATING THE DISORDERS

He couldn't get across the street. So he then had to stand there and watch the parade with all those hotnots. They were jostling him from all sides, and then one of them said: 'Oe, jirre, hié' kô' sports, kyk hoe staan hierie hillbilly se tril nou vi ôonse girls!'

At the time, he pretended he didn't hear, but afterwards he asked Treppie what a hillbilly was. Treppie said it was English for Ampie, and then he asked Treppie who Ampie was. Treppie said Ampie was a dirty oke with rag-hat, stretched braces, velskoene and khaki pants that were too short for him. He was a bit slow in his top storey and he spent his time sitting in a ditch, eating a tin of sardines and a tin of condensed milk while conversing with a donkey [...] He told Treppie, rubbish man. He, Lambert, didn't eat bread with sardines or condensed milk, so how could *he* be like Ampie or a hillbilly? [...] But Treppie said bread with polony and golden syrup would qualify just fine. In the nineties, he said, an outsize dick hanging from fucked-up boxer shorts were the same as stretched braces and khaki pants that were too short.

(*Triomf*: 215-216)

Introduction

I have chosen this scene, when Lambert goes scavenging for *papsakke*⁷¹ in Bosmont Hill and is called a hillbilly, to introduce the idea of how Van Niekerk's characters embody certain historical personae in the novel. I use this as a point of departure for my discussion of each novel's depiction of urban personalities appropriated by its characters

⁷¹ *Papsak* is an Afrikaans word which has been appropriated by most South Africans to refer to the aluminium and plastic bags that used to lie on the inside of boxed wine. Its colloquial presence in English indicates its idiomatic relationship with Afrikaans, pointing perhaps to the heinous culture of the *dop system* (drink system) whereby workers on wine farms in areas like the Western Cape were paid mostly with alcohol. There is a general stereotype portraying the Afrikaans coloured people who form the bulk of the Cape's farm workers as alcoholics. High levels of alcoholism and Infant Alcohol Syndrome in much of the wineland areas support this stereotype. Referring to these inner packagings in the language of these workers invokes this association, although it is often used affectionately too. In the text it links the family to this history of alcoholism but also could suggest their 'impure' roots. Remember also that Lambert is likened to a 'Hotnot' (a coloured person) on account of his appearance, each Benade abuses alcohol and as the story reveals, their racial and social purity is questionable. What this parallel also helps generate is an association between the Afrikaans Ampie figure and the ubiquitous 'Bergie' figure or Afrikaans tramp, named after the 'mountain' of the Cape where many were supposed to have lived when not on the streets. Bergies are notoriously loud and are usually drunk. They are also dislocated, homeless and neglected citizens.

as a response to the urban. This scene prompts a consideration of what Lambert's 'hillbillyness' indicates. The popular deployment of the term, 'hillbilly' invokes an idea of rural people who are inbred and insular white racists, which the Benades certainly seem to be. In Lambert's case, he certainly does look like a hillbilly: he wears filthy clothes; his body is misshapen and unreliable. He has also problems concentrating and comes across as mentally challenged. To the onlooker, like the Bosmont women in the excerpt above, he is the stereotypical poor white, a 'backward cousin' in the city. The Afrikaans version, Ampie, corresponds to this, as Treppie points out.

Superficially, this extract generates an idea of how Lambert's and his family's appearance and performances within the city garner them negative attention from those around them or from those interacting with them. Not only have the Benades been called 'hillbillies,' by those they come into contact with, but they are also 'inbred' (122); 'piece(s) of shit,' (112); 'rubbish' (112); 'bad to the bone' (112); and referred to derogatorily as 'this class of people' (184); 'a very weak kind of afrikaner' (153), 'worse than kaffirs' (153) and 'rotten' (153). Lambert in particular has been called a 'backward piece of low class shit' (405), and a monster (463). These names have been thrown at them because the Benades' daily practices and actions are defined by bouts of drunken rage, by displays of poverty, by their insularity as well as their position within Triomf, a notably poor white suburb. Being called a hillbilly also exposes the fallacy in Lambert and his family's 'purity' as Afrikaners – a key feature of Van Niekerk's novel – but also it earmarks a feature of the Benades' position within the urban environment and how they are able to respond to the changes around them and to their increasingly insecure place in Johannesburg.

More importantly, while this incident draws attention to how he and his family's daily habits and appearances bring to mind a certain caricatured persona, their 'hillbillyness' embodies a defensive tactical response to their position within the threatening urban space. I have written about the Benades' fear of the political environment and how they are motivated to run away from it if the threat of the post-apartheid moment becomes too real. I have also suggested that the Benades have nowhere else to go, since their

connection to the ‘North’ is more imagined than real. Moreover, I have shown how the family is bound to Martha Street and Triomf so that they are, in fact, unable to leave. In this chapter, I extend these ideas and argue that Benades enact their own dislocation in Triomf through another layer: their subject position as hillbillies.

In the Merriam-Webster dictionary a hillbilly is described as, ‘a person from a backwoods area’.⁷² The Benades do not match the energies of the urban, the energies of change, movement and modernity. More than this though, like backwoods bumpkins, they are caught outside the city because of their deep connection to a previous territory and time – both real and metaphorical. This connection, which manifests in a number of interesting ways in the novel, is a defensive tactic as well as a product of the family’s historical position within the apartheid city. Owing to their reliance and attachment to the past, the Benades are unable to disassemble their ties with the apartheid city. This then keeps them as hillbillies, even when the world is changing around them. I argue that through this warped ‘nostalgia’ the Benades invigorate apartheid’s conditions of urban placement and worsen their geopathologies.

In this chapter, I argue that each novel’s characters’ deployment of tactics casts them in unsuitable positions in relation to the changing city. I explore how the subjects’ internalisations of the disturbances they encounter in their daily lives in each post-apartheid textual space aggravate their disordered psycho-geographies. In so doing, they replicate past character types. I trace textual invocations of the ‘hillbilly’, in *Triomf*, the ‘hustler’ in *Room 207*, and the ‘colonial observer’ in *The Exploded View* and examine how in assuming these personae, the protagonists prolong the disordered place relations associated with apartheid. As I shall discuss more fully below, the figures of the ‘hillbilly’, the ‘hustler’ and the ‘colonial observer’⁷³ are all inscribed with the alienating and suffocating ideologies of the apartheid system, a system which, at its most pervasive and insidious level, systematically made its urbanites strangers to the city. In the sense invoked by Njabulo Ndebele in ‘The Rediscovery of the Ordinary’ (1986), I see these

⁷² Cf. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hillbilly>. Accessed: 12/05/2012.

⁷³ Linked to Triomf, the inner city, and the wealthy suburbs respectively.

character types as ‘spectacles’ produced by apartheid and colonial systems – overt archetypes that came into being (even if in the imagination) through the systemic manipulation of space and people. While one cannot say they were always fixed or steady under apartheid, the spatially determined personae evoked in these three novels embody certain ideological forms that were typical of apartheid spatiality. Thus, as with houses and patterns of movement, these textual subject personas have a distinct allegorical function. The texts become vehicle for the communication of the palimpsestic or heterotopic nature of the city and of history.

***Triomf's* hillbillies: the past as keepsake**

‘THE NEVER ENDING PAINTING’ ...

What’s this? Treppie asked when he saw the painting...by then it was too late, all the countries in Africa had already been squashed flat...

And when his mother came to see she said it didn’t look anything like Africa. Nothing he painted ever looked like anything, she said [...] Lambert looks at his painting. It’s ‘cause things kept happening and he started painting new stuff over the old stuff [...] And now his mother’s standing there with a pink day-glow tennis ball in her mouth. He couldn’t help it. She was already there when he wanted to paint a ball for the DOG [...] his mother’s housecoat hangs from the horn of Africa, on the one side. It doesn’t look like a housecoat [...] Treppie’s lying cut open across the shoulder of Africa, but he doesn’t know it’s him. His insides are hanging out. To the one side, in the little waves of the ATLANTIC OCEAN, there a huge, naked kaffir with a whopping black cock reaching right down into the water. He’s eating Treppie’s liver...Pop’s head only just sticks out above a cloud, over the same ocean. POP’S HEAD ON A THUNDER CLOUD is what he wrote there, ‘cause you cannot see very much of Pop [...] He LAMBERT, sits in the VOLKSWAGEN under the CARPORT. He’s smiling out the window. The roof-rack’s full of silver bags, and there, on top of the silver bags, is his GIRL [...] she’s a mermaid with scales on her tail. She’s got silver stars on her nipples. NIPPLE CAPS. On top of her head you can see the Volksie’s aerial.

(*Triomf*: 166)

Introduction

I have used this painting to begin my analysis of the hillbilly because it demonstrates how the Benades are defined by the Afrikaner nation's cultural and social myth of origins. Like the insular hillbilly, the Benades are attached to their heritage and the past in such a way that they are regressively defined by this attachment. This relationship, as I shall argue here, can be found in their family structure; their genealogical line, their storytelling and also within the frames they use to make sense of their experience of the urban. They use the past as a resource to steer their way through their present difficulties and through this, they stay suspended between the city and the farm, unable to merge with either the former or the latter. Before I map out these features in more detail, I would like to describe the how the hillbilly figure was produced through the urbanisation of poor, white Afrikaners under apartheid.

The Hillbilly

The Benades' hillbillyness reflects a core aspect of the Afrikaner's historical place within Johannesburg's apartheid system: his or her legitimating claims to 'heritage'. A distinct feature of the Afrikaner nationalist identity this was mainly an ideological construct that ensured power to the Afrikaner state, especially in the period of Johannesburg's growth in the early to mid twentieth century. In the 1930's and 1940's, in its era of mass urbanisation, changes within the urban environment put strain on the emergent state, especially its visions for segregation and white supremacy.⁷⁴ During this time, competition for Johannesburg's spoils was high, particularly since all 'races' were vying for the same opportunities. Even Afrikaners, writes Benningfield, were 'forced to compete with black workers' (2008: 180).

Johannesburg was important to the Afrikaner Nationalist Party and its religious counterpart, the Dutch Reformed Church (Gilomee, 2003). Positioned in the North of the

⁷⁴ I have mentioned earlier that the twentieth century saw an unprecedented influx of new urbanites in Johannesburg, on account of factors like depression-era poverty in rural areas, the city's industrial productivity, as well as its alluring modernity. These increases in population ushered in unpredictable and heterogeneous social and material energies that threatened the established urban order as well as the South African governments' sense of control over Johannesburg, its people and its wealth.

country, a source of great resources and industrial strength, it was also at the geographical centre of the country and a powerful geopolitical position for the incoming theocratic state whose political and administrative hub was nearby Pretoria. Under threat in particular in the mid century was the emergent, theocratic Afrikaner state's 'myth of the segregated landscape and the 'natural' identities that were part of it' (Beningfield, 2008: 180). As a response to the increasing threat of change and to ensure their retention of power and wealth, the emergent apartheid state 're-imagined' (Beningfield, 2008:180) the city as an extension of the Afrikaner *volkländ*. Such a re-imagining drew on Christian, biblical dogma, myths of settler rights and ties to the land that had their roots in the narrative of the Great Trek so that:

the city emerges as the concealed subject of the Voortrekker celebrations, and the future ground to which the nation aspires. Analogies were drawn between the new wilderness of the cities and the savagery of the undifferentiated interior before the coming of the Trekkers. The city, and Johannesburg in particular, was represented as a place which offered both the possibility of redemption to the volk and a threat to its existence.

(Beningfield, 2008: 180)

The fact that 'the move to the cities from rural areas was christened 'Die Tweede Trek' (The Second Trek) [...] makes a direct connection between the narrative of the Voortrekkers and that of the twentieth century' (Beningfield, 2008: 184). Incoming, rural Afrikaners were 'modernised' and 'redeemed' as Beningfield suggests according to this myth. Families like the Benades were afforded the rights to live and work in Vrededorp and Triomf on account of their claim to this heritage and its transposition onto the frame of the city.

In this light, the Ampie figure is not just a satirical label for Lambert, and nor is the hillbilly trope merely a parodic caricature of the Afrikaner. These labels point to a more serious disorder: the Benades' dependency on and replication of an historic construct of rightful inheritance and their ties to regressive religious doctrines and rural myths. The result in the novel is a subject position which is bound to the past and inherently at odds

with the pace and character of urban modernity. While heritage and land myths gave powerful ideological justification for apartheid's formation and for the rural family's claims to local urban territory, the fixed, static idea of Afrikaner origin clashed with the energies of mid twentieth century Johannesburg, producing a persona that jarred with the energies of the city. Illustrating this, for example, is the fact that a white Afrikaner's acquisition of a position within the industrial urban system of Johannesburg's National Railways depended largely on his status as a farmer and his connection to an imagined social and cultural authenticity.⁷⁵ In other words, the very feature granting their inclusion in the burgeoning urban system also spelled their dislocation from it.

The Benade family's social group was poor and uneducated and had little chance of self-upliftment. Combined with the internalisation of Nationalist ideology, families like the Benades became totally reliant on the state for their place in the city and had little opportunity for change.⁷⁶ Caught between an urban and a rural claim, and without the means or frames for advancement, poor Afrikaans families like this became backwards country cousins who were entitled to the city but, as state-dependents, were stuck between the past and the present.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Railway jobs post-Depression were especially reserved for families like the Benades in the novel, the reader is told that the family's salvation from rural poverty came from 'Hertzog's Railway plan for poor whites', which Old Pop call 'the best thing an Afrikaner had ever thought up' (121). In asking for a job, he hears that 'the Railways were only too happy to help their people'. (121) (Dr Albert Hertzog was Prime Minister of the Union Government from 1924-1939 and was responsible for the development of Afrikaner culture in the years preceding apartheid).

⁷⁶ Consider the construction of the classic 'Van de Merwe' figure in South African satire. Deborah Posel writes that he emerged in jokes in the 1970's as a response to Afrikaner bureaucracy. Cf. Posel, Deborah. 'Whiteness and Power in the South African Civil Service: Paradoxes of the Apartheid State' in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1, (March, 1999): 99-119. Van Niekerk constructs the same caricature in *Triomf* to draw attention to the same element in the poor white Afrikaner, who has become obscene and grotesque through his fealty and implication in the Afrikaner Nationalist order.

⁷⁷ Cf. Duplessis, Aletta, 2009; Vincent, Louise. 'Bread and Honour: White Working Class Women and Afrikaner Nationalism in the 1930's' in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (March, 2000): 61-78; Jack Shear, 2006; Du Toit, Marijke. 'The Domesticity of Afrikaner Nationalism: Volksmoeders and the ACVV, 1904-1929' in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (March, 2003): 155-176. Devarenne, 2006; Devarenne, Nicole. 'Nationalism and the Farm Novel in South Africa, 1883-2004' in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 35, No.3 (2009): 627-42; Coetzee, J. M. *White Writing*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.

Unfit for the city

In the extract at the beginning of this section, the figures of Mol, Pop, Treppie and Lambert are positioned haphazardly within Lambert's 'Never-ending painting' of Johannesburg, South Africa and Africa. Lambert's painting is a form of family chronicle. He spends his time slowly adding his impressions of things, people and space, constructing images and representations that show the Benades' lives in Triomf. These images are created through Lambert's perception of his daily life and the people in it but while his perspective is unique to him, the chronicler, there is a structural and narrative element to the painting that speaks of the family's shared experience of Triomf and Johannesburg, and of their anchoring within a historical socio-spatial archive. In the painting, each family figure is marked by a layer of a previous image. Lambert does not completely erase or efface what he drew first 'cause things kept happening and he start[s] painting new stuff over the old stuff. Once he gets going he hasn't got the time for blanking things out' (165). If he repaints something or someone, he uses the same spot. Owing to this, the previous figure distorts the next layer. Thus, in a sense, these distortions come about because of the layer beneath it. In their layering, they take on a quasi-fantastic quality, becoming almost mythical, arcane.

Lambert's painting becomes more distorted and transfigured because he is running out of space. The idea that the future wall may not hold his painting and that he has to work with what has already been created, and rework it if necessary, adds more allegorical depth to this painting and suggests that the Benades do not have the space – mental, physical or geographical – to expand, or change. Rather, as time passes, they can only rehash and rework their layers to invest meaning into what has come before that, like these images, reproduce their disfigurement and displacement. Certainly, turning away from the future is a coping mechanism since the family's sense of stability is threatened by political change, just as the family's way of life was threatened first by poverty and then by urbanisation in the time of Old Mol and Old Pop. However, this coping mechanism of turning towards the past is also symptom of how they were situated within the apartheid urban machine and its tempero-spatial order.

The Benades' reliance on the myths and politics of heritage and origins manifests in a number of different ways, both actively and passively, and becomes both a source of security and a form of repression for them in the novel. These tensions prevent them from determining the depths to which their 'hillbillyness' or backwardness inhibits their sense of belonging to Johannesburg. As I have mentioned previously, Van Niekerk's novel is lauded as an indictment of the Afrikaner history. It is clear that the Benades represent 'the untenability of white racial superiority' (Devarenne, 2006: 11). Indeed, as Michiel Heyns suggests, *Triomf* 'draws on some very powerful Afrikaans myths: the reenactment of the Great Trek, here paralleled by the trek to the city, the urbanization and disinheritance of the Afrikaner working class' (Hens, 2000: 61) with the intention, as Devarenne observes again, 'to subvert them' (Devarenne, 2006: 112). As Jack Shear writes, 'the incestuous folly of the Benade family becomes an undoing of both the biblical creation myth and the creation myth that maintains the Afrikaner cultural identity' (Shear, 2006: 88). However, the image of the painting draws the reader's attention to the fact that even though the Benades corrupt this history, they are still deeply intertwined with it, to the point where their 'future' is constrained by it. This condition lies at the heart of their displacement and unease.

Sticking together

The Benades' hillbillyness in the novel is a metaphor for their temporal regression. In Lambert's painting, I draw your attention to the figure of Lambert himself, the product of the Benades' ultimate regressive act: incest. He sits in the 'Volksie' (the word is written beneath the image). This shorted diminutive form of their car's make, the 'Volkswagen' is affectionate and colloquial, but it is also a version of the Afrikaans word for the traditional Afrikaans community or nation – the *volk*. Lambert sitting in the car in his painting has strong symbolic power with respect to this notion. Born from incest, he is the embodiment of a familial act. Here he is framed within an image that represents the insularity and backwardness of the Afrikaner's political narrative. This positioning towards the past has enveloped the Benade family to the point where their progeny, who represents 'the future' and who auspiciously shares his birthday with the day that marks

the end of apartheid, is enveloped within the ‘sign’ of the Volk.⁷⁸ While this mocks the Afrikaner nation – Lambert is, after all, a symbolic and literal perversion of Afrikaner supremacy and racial purity – he is also the symbol of the Benades’ continuation. Therefore this image suggests that the Benade family is *retarded*, rendered ‘late’ or backwards by its connection to Afrikaner history and by its own attachment to this nostalgic narrative. Even while the family question this narrative in different ways throughout the novel, it is interesting how much it informs each member’s waking lives and occupation of space and time.

Their incest or construction of an ‘interfamily generation’ (Shear, 2006: 83) is a most prominent feature of their bond to familial and Afrikaner heritage, but the tendency to protect their genealogy and familial line at their own cost is evident in other areas too. Mol, Pop, Treppie and Lambert’s relation to each other repeats a traditional patriarchal structure reminiscent of conservative Afrikaans families. Consider also the passing on of family names in the novel: Old Mol and Old Pop give rise to Mol and Pop and Treppie. Pop, like Old Pop is really named Lambertus, and Mol and Pop name their son, who shares all of their genes (and who may also be Treppie’s son), Lambert.⁷⁹ In this way the Benades ensure a recycling of what has come before⁸⁰ and thus mirror Triomf, where ‘everything gets recycled, from kitchen cupboards to exhaust pipes, for ages already’ (16).

Their recycling of traditional roles can further be seen in the area of domestic violence – not just in the physical acts of abuse but also in the singling out of the ‘mother’ figure as the inheritor of the weakest position in the family. Old Pop beat old Mol and so Mol’s

⁷⁸ I have also discussed, in the previous chapter, how the Volksie cars are an integral part of the Benades’ relationship to (auto)mobility, and how on the one hand, driving gives them access to more distant areas within the city, and brings them into engagements with foreignness, while, on the other, like the Benades themselves, the cars are defunct and damaged, and are used mainly to carry the family within a ‘safe’ and circumscribed radius. Furthermore, I discuss how ‘Mol,’ is their getaway car, destined to drive them North, to escape the ‘new’ city. Seen in this way, the car offers them protection from change, but also, acts as a buffer from the outside world and the shock of the future.

⁷⁹ This pattern is also evident in Mol’s choice of the same name for her dogs: ‘Gerty’s Old Gerty’s granddaughter. All the Gerties, Old Gerty and Old Gerty’s only child, Small Gerty, and now Gerty...’ (5).

⁸⁰ This also places the Benades very clearly in the space of Triomf which is, as early descriptions of household items indicate, a recycled place. On the whole, this theme and pattern of recycling pervades the novel.

abuse becomes an inheritance too. For Mathew Brophy, the ‘effects of the abuse are clear: it will be passed on to the next generation, and Mol (both Mols) will blind themselves to it. Such violence is inscribed in the Afrikaner national identity’ (2006: 101). The insinuation here is not that traditional Afrikaners beat their wives, but rather that these kinds of patterns have been produced through rural, patriarchal and Calvinist notions and practices which lie at the ideological heart of *verkramte*⁸¹ Afrikaner nationalism. These positions replay themselves and define the Benades within their modern urban context too.⁸² The acute rendering of subjectivity through free indirect discourse gives insights into the fractured state of this too. We sympathise with all the Benades because of this access through the text to their fraught psychologies. We are also repelled by their internal contradictions as they come into focus. Mol, for instance, is not simply a victim of domestic abuse. As a racist and white Afrikaner, she is also a perpetrator. The reader’s sense of the family is never fixed but what is clear is the close ties between their state of minds and the historical legacy in which they are implicated and to which they are resistant. This tension plays itself out in their subject-positions.

Returning to Lambert: he, their ‘seed’ (29), represents new growth as well as a return to the old. That he was born in the city represents the fact that he is a response to the Benades’ urbanisation and yet his existence assures that the group is linked firmly to their linguistic and familial roots. Lambert is a symbol of a change, yes, but he is also a guarantee that the Benade line will remain fixed and constant under the threat of change. If one traces Lambert’s birth back to the younger days of Pop, Mol and Treppie, one can see that he is the product of an initial resistance to the outside world, one where the Benades, as poor white bumpkins in an unknown city, were vulnerable. Rather than go outside and face this new and harsh urban environment, the three children chose to

⁸¹ Fundamentalist/right wing.

⁸² The mother figure was also essential to the structure of the Afrikaner home, and was a vital element within the Volk narrative. Mol is satirically likened to the classic *Volksmoeder* by being integral to the family structure and livelihood. As much as she is victimised, she embodies the ‘home’ more so than the male figures by donning her filthy housecoat. She also ensures the birth of the next generation of Afrikaners by bearing Lambert and so becomes the archetypal vessel for the ‘seed’. Marijke du Toit makes the important point that, in fact, this role became even more vital once the urban migration had begun, and the Volk became destabilised by the changing scene and the increased threat to their insularity in the cities: Cf. Du Toit, Marijke. ‘The Domesticity of Afrikaner Nationalism: *Volksmoeders* and the ACW, 1904-1929’ in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (March 2003): 155-176.

remain at home and play ‘games’ with each other. Interpreting literally Old Pop’s plea that they ‘look after’ each other’ (126) the siblings enclosed themselves in a safe, insulated world of incest. Lambert is the result of this ‘sticking together’⁸³ and he ensures that ‘that which belongs together, must remain together’ (127).

Lambert also represents the family’s stagnation in the city. He is the continuation of what has come before and he is also the end of this genealogical line. In a moment of clarity, Pop realises this: ‘Lambert going backwards before he ever started going forwards. And it broke his heart that things always seemed to go like this with the Benades. Generation after generation. Lambert wouldn’t even have a generation to come after him’ (315). As an effect of this, Lambert seems to be lost in time as seen in his strange, hazy logic about the passage of days:

It was the end of that long day. It was actually today, but it already feels like tomorrow. And now, he sits here, it’s the night of today, but it already feels like tomorrow. Except that tomorrow only begins after twelve tonight, and it feels like all the watch-hands and the church clocks are depending on him. It’s like he has to extend himself to the utmost to make tomorrow come, his birthday. He has to make his own birthday happen. Then he’ll be forty. That’s if he can keep it all together. But it’s actually a misnomer, as Treppie says, ‘cause after twelve he’s already past his fortieth year. Then he’s into his forty-first year. That’s cause when you have a birthday, you don’t count what it is now, you count what’s already been, and then you’re actually on the way to the future again [...]

(367)

The repetition of numbers here builds a satirical tension and also takes on a poetic cadence which reveals the strange beauty in Lambert’s simplicity. At the same time, a deep sense of foreboding penetrates the text through these numeric details because it seems as if Lambert is caught in the metre of time just as his family’s narrative becomes caught in their disordered spatiality. The pattern of the textual language thus emulates their geopathology. Lambert here contributes to and compounds the Benades’ inability to

⁸³ With this in mind, one cannot overlook the significance of the fact that family’s name translates as ‘draw nearer’.

inhabit fully the time of the present, serving as disconcerting reminder of the Benades' collective hillbillyness.

Bible time

The Benades' hillbillyness conjures up an arcane biblical temporality too. Treppie teases Mol and Pop that by having Lambert they were playing 'leading roles in *Genesis*' (119) when they decide to keep Lambert. Even though they mock the traditional Afrikaner familial or biblical model they evoke apartheid's central theocratic dogma wherein the Afrikaner, by belonging to the dominant cultural and political model, is included in God's timeless 'Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending' (24). However, where Alpha and Omega generates an idea of heaven or eternal bliss, the Benades also feel cursed by history and so their connection to the apartheid urban framework makes their transcendence from it impossible. This is evoked in the repetitive surfacing of the biblical idea of the Armageddon within the novel, something which draws attention to the contradictory conditions of being included within the traditional Afrikaner narrative and ideology while inhabiting the urban space.

These contradictions are at the heart of the Benades' struggle with their own tempo-spatial positioning and gives life to the family's eschatological nightmares. In the previous chapter, I discuss how the Benades' fear of post-apartheid Johannesburg is largely because the changes it heralds threaten their tenuous claims to Triomf. This fear is configured in apocalyptic proportions so that Johannesburg becomes a monstrous, threatening animal. Their fear the family has can be seen to be centred on the loss of the 'land', a sentiment rooted deep within existing Afrikaner consciousness. However, the Benades undermine the purity and sacredness of the apartheid *volk* and parody its religious foundations too. They constantly reject the advances of religious groups like the Jehovah's Witnesses⁸⁴ and Nationalists sloganeers who come to expound the insular rhetoric of the state. Their rough urbanisation, both in Vrededorp and in Triomf and the

⁸⁴ Interestingly, the Jehovah's Witnesses are deeply committed to the advent of Armageddon and configure it in the following terms: 'No more will there be divisive religions, social systems, or governments...the destructive ideas of human rule will be replaced by the upbuilding teaching that comes from God'. http://www.watchtower.org/e/dg/article_10.htm. Accessed: 9/5/2012. For more on the beliefs on the Jehovah's Witnesses, see for instance their official site: www.watchtower.org.

knowledge that they have suffered at the hands of the state has also tested their fealty to the institutions to which they are ideologically or religiously bound. It is, to a large degree, this contradiction which keeps the family in an interregnum of sorts and which amplifies their already disordered sense of place.

Paradoxically too, their apprehension of the ‘end of their world,’ and their idea that they can travel North to escape it – the same direction that the trekkers took – is founded on a judgment day *telos* that is typical of the Judeo-Christian chronology that informs apartheid and traditional Afrikaner doctrine.⁸⁵ So while the Benades subvert and challenge the primacy of the Afrikaner national story, the lens through which they read and react to political change echoes its ideological and mythical frameworks.

An apocalyptic undercurrent runs through much of the Benades’ narratives about the city. This leitmotif creates powerful imagery and adds a spectacular edge to their characters. However, their nightmares about the future also prevent them from being open to movements and changes in their urban space. Furthermore, this overarching narrative of doom colours their reactions to everyday dramas, rendering everyday challenges even more terrifying.

In the ‘Fifth of November’, Pop wakes up and his and Mol’s room seems to be on fire. He is the only one left in the house and as he stumbles out, he realises that the Volkswagen and various other bits from the house and yard are ablaze. Lambert has been on one of his rampages, getting everything ‘fixed’ (244) for his birthday. Pop’s thoughts, as he wakes up and responds to the mayhem around him, are enunciated in the language of the end of the world.

⁸⁵ Nicole Devarenne translates the defining statement of the ‘1876 Manifesto of the Association of True Afrikaners’ as follows: ‘Our beloved God placed us in Africa and gave us the Afrikaans language’ (Devarenne, 2006: 106). She also notes that ‘This statement, which made twin claims to the Afrikaners’ sole possession of a divinely given language and to divine sanction of Afrikaner territorial ambitions, reflects trends in Afrikaner nationalist thought into the next century’ (106). This gives one an understanding of the foundational religious myths to which the Afrikaners ascribed their claims to the land.

They read as follows:

‘It feels to him like time’s dying, like the end of time itself is approaching. The last judgment, the judgment of fire, when the clock-faces melt in the towers and the seconds burn into the wrists one by one.

(235)

Pop’s fears and words generate a sense of a temporal frieze and an obliteration of human time. He does not necessarily believe that this moment is the Armageddon per se, but his reaction and fear find an anchor within a temporal metaphor that is derived from a biblical notion of reckoning.⁸⁶ He also invokes the image of judgment day as a hot and furious Hell, as he struggles to make sense of the smoke-filled interior of the house and its onslaught on his senses. Pop’s imagination fuses constructed scenes with a real, lived moment in space. Memory, fear, sound and dream overlap to form a vision of otherworldly domesticity. A furious energy is invoked on the pages through Pop’s turning to a mythical space-time: everlasting hell and damnation, he believes this to be. He makes this comparison unthinkingly, showing his reflexive recourse to a narrative that has long accompanied the Afrikaner in his God-anointed appropriation of space and power. Pop also shows a method for detaching from the full implications of Lambert’s crazed actions by retreating into this arcane world. In return, the outside urban world of *Triomf* becomes constituted through this impression turning into an eternal hell, unchanging and in Pop’s mind at least, stuck in time.

At another key point in the story, Pop, Mol and Treppie are at Melville Koppies on Lambert’s birthday evening. This night coincides with the political apocalypse that the family has been apprehending. Images of hell are conjured again except this time they come through Treppie who, even though a critic of the theocratic state and its doctrines, uses a religious metaphor to qualify the suffering of the Benades in Johannesburg. He announces: ‘you never asked to be born, nor to live your life in this furnace-pit’ (379). Treppie’s outpouring of anger and despair is prompted by Pop’s questions about the

⁸⁶ Aletta Du Plessis, cites a passage from Revelations at the beginning of her study of *Triomf*: ‘Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand. *Revelation 1:3* (1). Within these few lines, one can trace the idea that the end of the world is configured as a temporal thing: the ending of one time and the beginning of another.

connections between their current hell-like existence and what occurred in their past. Treppie, the family member who is the most resistant to the notion of heritage and family history yet who is as damaged and implicated by it as the others are, shouts in response:

Everything! [...] It had everything to do with it, 'cause if their mother and father hadn't been so backward, and if they had been raised better, and Old Pop hadn't shouted at him, Treppie, so terribly before he even knew what went for what, and if Old Pop hadn't beaten him to a pulp when he found out what went for what, then everything would have been different.

(381)

In these words, Treppie sums up a primary root of the Benades' geopathic disorder: scarred by the family's move from the farm and their parents' inability to move beyond their rural roots and by the life that awaited them in Vrededorp and then Triomf, the Benades show how their severed connection to the past induces them to hold onto it and to their inherited frames of meaning in order to survive in the city. In this speech act above, likened to a sermon,⁸⁷ Treppie casts the Benade family as players in a struggle of epic proportions. The family feels affected by their family's process of urbanisation and the neglect they suffered at the hands of the state. However, the terms of their suffering are cast within a religious narrative which lies at the heart of Afrikanerdom. This binds them to their hillbillyness but also fractures them and keeps them straddled between two worlds, at odds with both and unable to grow or change. To free themselves from the injury of their past, they have to be able to access it. This is almost impossible in the everyday space of Triomf, since the family mostly suppresses these painful memories with drink, arguments and domestic destruction. Their perceptions of the city are so subjective, communicated by the free indirect discourse mode of narration and their jumbled visions of the world around them that they emplace themselves further within this geopathically disturbed mode and space.

⁸⁷ This section is called 'Sermons on the Mount'. This is a reference to the Christian sermons documented in The New Testament. One understands this excursion to Melville Koppies and the 'sermons' given by Pop and Treppie to be a parody of the moral teachings of Jesus, and thus, by proxy, an undermining of the Afrikaner Nationalist project. Both Pop and Treppie 'preach' on the hillsides. The ease in which Treppie and Pop slip into quasi-religious modes of ranting shows the Benades' familiarity with this historical archive.

Die 'Ou Plaas' (The Old Farm)

Emphasising this and evoking further tensions around their relationship to the urban is the fact that the 'Sermons on the Mount' take place outside of their neighbourhood on a rocky mound with ridges of *veld* that lies within the city. Melville Koppies are a sought-after landmark for Johannesburg's urbanites because they offer respite from the melee of the fast-paced urban world. They also serve as a reminder of what the land was like before Johannesburg exploded onto it. For the Benades there is an obvious association between this space and the space of the family farm in Klipfontein – in the rugged, rural 'Ou Transvaal'.⁸⁸ This setting links Treppie's sermon with the open space of the veld and also suggests that the family's connection to the rural past offers them some kind of emotional salvation from their urban lives. It also links the Benades, allegorically and heroically, to the *Voortrekkers*⁸⁹ who crossed thousands of kilometres of open land in search of freedom and the *boere* (farmers/Afrikaners) fighting for their own state after the Boer War. Thus, their seeking out of rural space as in their visits to Westdene Dam and their habitual trips to other open spaces like Westcliff or the hill above the SABC shows their desire for memories and images that connect them to a time when they were happier, the 'better days' (23) in the rural, pastoral past.

However, this is a tumultuous dynamic. This idealisation of the past comes through a desire for what they feel is lost, rather than what actually happened. These 'better days' are unobtainable, made distant by their imagination and hazy memories. In their nostalgia, the Benades' (in particular Mol and Pop) thoughts of the farm, while offering temporary respite from the present, also creates a chasm between this past life and their present one, making life in Triomf that much more unbearable, thus adding to the family's dislocation from Johannesburg.

Mol and Pop identify more with a notion that emerged through the loss of the farms and the subsequent destabilisation of the land-covenant of the Afrikaners in the early parts of the twentieth century than with the farm itself. Their convoluted hankering mirrors

⁸⁸ This is an affectionate, term meaning The Old Transvaal, which holds within it the idea of a proud and beautiful land belonging to the Afrikaners.

⁸⁹ Except, as noted in the previous chapter, the Benade family does not move beyond Triomf.

Coetzee's observation, noted by Lara Buxbaum that 'the *plaasroman* arose in direct response to these changes [the depression and loss of the farms] by depicting a romanticised, idealised vision of the family farm and equating its loss – that is, the loss of a birthright – with tragedy (79, 83)' (2011: 30). Even Treppie, who habitually exposes the fictive power of state ideology with his sarcastic acuity, sees the damage to the family as occurring *after* the family leaves the farm, as shown in his sermon. In his mind too, then, the farm is preserved from the interruption of reality and remains a lost pastoral haven.

Coetzee and Buxbaum speak of an aspect of the Afrikaner Covenant which states that in exchange for land, the 'Chosen People' – in this case, the volk, including the Benades – 'bear the responsibility of maintaining pure blood lines in order to pass the land on to future generations' (White, 2008: 86). The Benades secure their loyalty to this fiction by having Lambert since he ensures the continuity of their connection to the land and to the historical fiction of the *plaas*. But, his existence also exposes how the state's transference of the Afrikaner land claim onto the site of Johannesburg pushed these ex-farming families deeper within a backward myth unsuitable for the modern urban space, dislocating them in the process. While the Afrikaner's loss of the farm is a constructed tragedy that rationalised the apartheid state's seizure of the cities, the Benades are disordered figures because they are entangled in this paradoxical relationship with the past and with their setting. They are unsuited to both the rural haven and to the city. In the city, they are backward 'scum,' but, broken by their years in Johannesburg, they are also a far cry from the iconic, healthy *boer* hero of the farm.⁹⁰

Stories

Mol and Pop perpetuate the fiction that the Benades were happy in the past through acts of storytelling. Their storytelling reveals something of what linguistic psychologist Mark Freeman calls, 'mythopoeic desire' or 'the desire to raise [...] existence [...] to that level of meaningfulness of sacred integrity more readily found in time past' (Freeman,

⁹⁰ Lara Buxbaum argues that the Benades' frail, grotesque bodies exist in sharp contrast to the 'virile healthy bodies of those mythical farmers'. (Buxbaum, 2011, 34)

2001:45). For Mol and Pop, storytelling gives something solid to the amorphous fabric of their memory, an act which echoes oral historian, Alessandro Portelli's observation that:

to tell a story is to take arms against the threat of time, to resist time, or to harness time. The telling of a story preserves the teller from oblivion; the story builds the identity of the teller and the legacy that he or she wishes to leave for the future.

(1991: 59)

Acts of recollection metaphorically extend the Benades' intertwinement with the apartheid narrative of heritage even while they undermine this narrative with their defunct lives. The more jovial, nostalgic 'old stories' (42), especially those told by Mol, are temporary acts of forgetting, celebrating the family's 'survival' within the city and romanticising the Afrikaner state. One of the family's favourites is Mol's story about the roses, 'they know it...but she tells it anyway, it's her best story' (42). The story of the roses is set:

Just after they had moved into this house, and out of Old Pop's house in Fietas. Triomf was full of new people[...]Everyone was young and they all wanted to make a fresh start in this new place [...] the location was bulldozed and the kaffirs were gone [...] The National Party used to do the things they said they were doing.

(42)

We know that the Benades' *Triomf* is not exactly a wonderful site to inhabit. Compared to slum-like Vrededorp/ Fietas though, and considering that that this was the first time that the younger Benades were free of the oppressive presence of their family's demise, this was 'the best time of their lives' (42). This story centres on the family's success in making money from buying and selling roses, first to people at restaurants and then to crowds at an Afrikaner Nationalist political gathering. Mol suggests that their happiness came because of a more secure political time, but later, the reader learns that she had recently lost her job as a garment worker to the 'Hotnot' workers; so actually, this was a time of doubt. Mol's story begins to reveal its holes and the reader comes to recognise

that what she is doing is inventing history in order to create a secure sense of the past to which they can remain attached.

Later in the story when recounting how the family sold their roses at the Voortrekker Monument in 1961, 'the day South African became a republic' (47), the picture she paints suggests that they were part of the celebrations. What her story fails to note outright is that they were operating on the peripheries of both the restaurants and the event. At the former, they are marginal characters because they are simply poor vendors. At the latter, they are marginalised again as poor, backward Afrikaners even though the celebrations taking place are theoretically for the benefit of the *volk*'s people. Despite the success of their vending, the Benades are an ostracised family, operating outside (and behind) of mainstream urban society. Ironically, it is their very backwardness that guarantees their success in the story. At the monument, for instance, Lambert plays up his deformities and becomes their 'mascot' (47). In order for the story to act as a salve for the daily struggle, Mol, Pop and Lambert have to glorify this time. But, through this they plant themselves within an historic fallacy. This is done so that Mol, Pop and Lambert can keep the family together against the 'threat of time'. Through it, though, they string themselves between their present and the past.

Although Treppie scorns Mol's reconstructions and his family's gullibility, he understands the weight of history on the family's position in the city. He sees the Benades' struggle as being a result of their heritage: 'Nice and scrambled' he reminds Mol, '[i]t's hereditary' (120). This notion of inheritance reminds one again of the cyclical repetition that defines their temporal place in the city. As Treppie says again: 'it all started at the same point and it all boils down to the same beginning in the end' (424).

This could not be more clearly evoked than in the photograph that lies locked away in the family's lounge. When Lambert discovers it towards the end of the novel, he sees Mol, Pop and Treppie dressed up as *voortrekkers*. The photo was taken in 1938 when Pop, Mol and Treppie were still young and the family was living in Vrededorp, before Old Pop's

suicide and the family's slide further into disrepair.⁹¹ The Vrededorp community stages the Great Trek and parades through the streets of Fordsburg. This parade signifies the importance of history within the *volk's* social and political ideology. In taking part, the Benades inscribed themselves with personae resembling long dead pioneers. Mol was one of the girls wearing 'genuine Voortrekker kappies with big flaps in the front' and Pop jumped at the chance to wear 'a little waistcoat with a silly white scarf around his neck for when the wagons came by. And a hat with the brim turned to one side' (318). The family, along with others, collectively installs itself within the past in order to relive it. In keeping this picture, the Benades maintain their connection to this charade and also to the personae they inhabited for that day. Locked away, safe from damage, this record of their *voortrekker* selves mocks the family's ruin but also stagnates the family within the *voortrekker* chronotope. While this is not literal, the photograph speaks of their compulsion to protect this particular version of their story and how, through this, inevitably remain unfit for the city. In this act of concealment too the Benades allow their connection to the past to remain psychologically powerful. Living in a state of frenzied anxiety, this token of their nostalgia indicates how they try to anchor themselves against the threat of time but it also keep themselves in temporal interregnum – as hillbillies straddled between zones.

Their disheveled appearance and 'uncivilised' behaviour can thus be seen as an analogy for a deeper pathology and disorder, one which contributes to their difficulty in trusting the shift to the new urban and social order. By remaining deeply attached to a former fictionalised idea and place, the Benades carry the burden of their exclusion upon their bodies and in their actions. The hillbillyness keeps them safe but also maintains their position within an interstitial zone, rendering their geopathic disorders that much more overpowering and determining. The act of recounting as happens in this text both accentuates this disorder and provides a glimmer of hope for release. The Benades' tale becomes open to interpretation and re-negotiation by the reader. This act is driven, I would argue, by the horror of observing the Benades' state of minds and place within the

⁹¹ This was also before the Afrikaans National Party came into power (1945) but at a time when Afrikaner nationalist ideology was gaining in strength.

city. Similarly in *Room 207* and *The Exploded View*, the portrayals of oppressive and limiting characters and chronotopes compel the reader to imagine alternatives. With these novels as well, the act of reading and imagining on the part of the reader is possibly the beginning of the type of painful revision the nation has yet to embark on.

***Room 207s* 'hustlers': masters of marginality**

Honestly, we are a drinking nation. We don't go, during the holidays, on tours of this lovely country of ours, from the Klein Karoo to Skukuza, via Borokalala National Park. No. Why not? Because we don't care. That's for white people. I don't blame them. Don't blame us. We drink, grill meat and cook some hard porridge, then quarrel and maybe end up fighting...

(*Room 207*, 33)

In the above excerpt from *Room 207*, the narrator insinuates that there is a condition that shared amongst his fellow black South Africans: that they 'don't care.' Even if spoken relatively light-heartedly, Noko's comments reflect an underlying dismissal of exploring and enjoying the country. These comments, when framed within the overarching narrative of the novel, reveal a reaction by the 207s to their struggles in the inner city: they desire not to care about it. They neither want to explore it and find ways to fall in love with the inner city nor do they wish to map it in ways that they can become attached to it. They would rather spend their time satisfying their basic needs, and moving on, as soon as the opportunity strikes them.

The 207s see themselves as hustlers. Their appropriation of this persona reflects a desire for an urban identity that is fluid, mobile and empowered. In their patterns of behaviour within the chronotope of *Room 207*, the 207s show a compulsion to be casual with situations, people or places that threaten their independence. Similar to the black South African migrant under apartheid, the 207s' appropriation of the hustler persona is also a

response to uneasiness around place and the disappointments of the city, in this case, the post-apartheid one.

Bheki Peterson writes that the contemporary hustler is ‘stuck in between an immediate past where, for many, very little meaningful education was possible, and a ‘transitional’ present where the ‘fruits’ of [post-apartheid] South Africa seem to be a rumour’ (Peterson, 2008: 208). A defining aspect of the hustlers of *Room 207* is the fact that they disjoint themselves from the ties that bind them to their immediate environment as a tactic against the sense of dislocation they are experiencing. Peterson links modern, post-apartheid performances of hustling to those in the past: a defensive means to try to make the most out of an urban situation wherein the black population is marginalised and restricted. The post-apartheid hustler, like his predecessor, is the slick, modern, urban mover who has control over his own destiny and who is ‘[a]t the same time uneasy with and celebratory of [his] ghetto origins’ – ‘*masters of marginality*’ (Peterson, 2008: 197; my emphasis). The hustler persona can therefore be seen as having evolved through the unpredictability of the urban space.

Noko’s dismissal above of being overly invested in one’s environment reflects the archetypal hustler persona’s appropriation of a blasé attitude within the city. By way of meeting the dismissive character of the inner city, the 207s are prepared to dismiss it. They struggle with connections in their city life that could make their relationship to the inner city more permanent, more lasting and possibly more rewarding. They reveal their vulnerability through the fact that they consider their experience of the city to be a shared one – because it is so unpredictable and transient. They themselves call their lives and those they witness around them, ‘another sad black story’ (50). While the 207s dismiss things, people and perspectives that could delimit their independence, they also operate in relation to underlying conceptions of race and community and heritage. Seen in this way, their desire to be independent is a struggle between how to position themselves and not to repeat painful patterns of the past. Below, I explore how this struggle, embodied in their hustling, is evoked in their equivocal relationship to the ‘ties that bind’, namely close romantic relationships, community and their roots. In their hustling, the friends summon

the spectre of the apartheid urban migrant and his or her employment of similar methods in the battle to survive apartheid Johannesburg.

While I am not suggesting that every single black South African was unilaterally constructed through the terms of the apartheid city, the 207s' mode evokes a fundamental aspect of the previous generation's city experience. What follows is a brief discussion of how the apartheid hustler persona evolved in relation to urbanism, which when read against the 207s' patterns, illuminates how their habits replay history and a historical relationship to space.

The apartheid hustler

Preserving the city for the white Afrikaner included denying the black population's right to develop urban social agency and a rightful place in the city with a modern urban identity. As has been established, the apartheid labour system meant that black South Africans were dependent on the city for their livelihoods. This paradox alienated the black South African from the city, along with the fundamentally racist and divisive urban policies that defined the intricate terms of their urban engagement. In particular, after the state legalised forced removals and entrenched separate development, the black South African came to exist in tension between desiring the city and being repelled by it, inhabiting a position, if you will, of the harangued yet present worker. This tension is inherent in the figure of the unsettled labourer without sustained access or rights to the city, but whose survival (and family's) depended on it and the state (Ramphela, 1993). At the height of apartheid, to be a black South African in the city was to be a stranger, never quite belonging, yet still desiring access to urban modernity.

The construction of townships away from the city reinforced this strained relationship, as did the distance, both geographical and symbolic, of the Bantustans to the metropolis. In a similar gesture to the construction of a mythical Afrikaner heritage to the land and its riches, black South Africans were 'tribalised' according to their ethno-linguistic roots. But, where for the white Afrikaner, the notion of heritage and roots authenticated their claims to the city and to modernity, for black South Africans their historical or 'native'

geo-ethnic ties severed them from Johannesburg. For the nativised Bantu, in Loren Kruger's words: 'urbanity, modernity and freedom [...] was officially denied [...] through retribalization' (Kruger, 1997: 576). Thus, for millions of black South Africans, 'roots' or origins were a source of identity and community as well as repression and denial. Becoming urbanised, through the process of migration, meant being positioned towards different place identities, both isolated and pushed into the interstices of the country's socio-spatial map.

The relationship of black South Africans to the metropolis provided avenues for them to develop tactics that allowed them to operate within the interstices of urban possibility. Within these conditions emerged the male hustler figure. For Bheki Peterson, '[h]ustling[...] is the institution of a 'defensive space' where defensive strategies can be adopted by the wretched of the earth' (Peterson, 208). In South Africa today, he writes further, 'young blacks in the ghetto use the notion of hustling, 'uku panda' or 'to make life' as their armour' (Peterson, 208). Similarly, the hustler figure, especially within Sophiatown and its rich urban scene of the early 1950's, embodied the qualities of the marginal hero, the man with 'no strings attached'. Romanticised and eulogised through the gangster narratives of Sophiatown's *Drum* era (Fenwick, 1996), the hustler figure was also cast as a clever trickster type, the agile gangster/pantsula manipulating the informal and unseen regions of Johannesburg's social and spatial worlds.⁹²

In this light, one can see the hustler as an empowered figure whose survival depended, 'on mastering the intricate machinations of the informal (but highly organised) internal economy' and the 'range of informal dealing, semi-legal practices, rackets and small-time crime classically known in all ghetto life as hustling' (Hall *et al*, 1978: 351 in Peterson, 208). The urban hustler of the apartheid era, like the post-apartheid version, embodies a resistance to overarching urban power structure (Fenwick, 1996), thus signifying an urban agency that comes from making the most of a bad situation. In so doing, the hustler has the potential to render 'the old illiterate Africa of blankets and

⁹² The identifiable gangster/ hustler figure is generally considered to have emerged during the *Drum* era in Sophiatown's heyday and was modeled on the classic American gangster of the 1940's. Cf. Fenwick, Mac. 1996.

reserves [...] insignificant in the face of this new industrial proletariat' (A. Sampson, 1956: 27 in Fenwick, 625). While distancing himself from his racially constructed roots, the hustler becomes a figure for the marginalised in the oppressed urban space. And so, while hyper-individualistic, he represents the shared condition to which all black people were subjected.

Despite the romanticisation of the hustler figure, he is also an equivocal figure and equally disempowered by his marginal practices and positioning to the city because of the fact that he is unable or unwilling to be attached to the space he seeks access to. In this, he becomes further disjointed from his own heritage.⁹³ In other words, while this subject position capitalised on marginality, it also perpetuated a state of displacement from the city and affirmed the marginalisation that first initiated its existence within this urban scene. Operating in the interstices, being hybrid, as I have described before, also brings about a state of unhomely dislocation and alienation, especially if one considers that the hustler must be considered to be a defensive position to a difficult context. The hustler exists because he feels he does not belong anywhere else *but* in the interstices, and this in turn distances him further from the city. The hustler persona's obsession with bypassing this city, and all that it offers, to get out as soon as possible, reinforces the already precarious nature of his situation in the city, making it even more difficult for him to find a sense of belonging.

The 207s display these tendencies and one can trace in their habits their own romanticisation of the hustler of the former generation. Ironically, as I discuss here, as they try to distance themselves from their 'fathers', they also end up invoking them and the urbanity that they feel has passed. Thus, while they are betrayed by the city and the fact that it is not a space of freedom and opportunity as they expected, they also initiate a reprisal of historical limitation and ambiguity within it, which, when combined, makes it difficult to imagine how they might ever have had a different urban self or experience.

⁹³ This disjointment is a product of the migrant experience of Johannesburg, as I have discussed in the previous two chapters. With the appropriation of the hustler persona came a deeper investment in severing one's rootedness in the rural. This is possibly why so many families saw the city as a place of loss and emptiness – as evoked in most of the black urban literature of the Apartheid era, memorialised in iconic poems like Serote's 'City Johannesburg,' or Mtshali's 'An Abandoned Bundle'.

This tension creates a sense of constraint within the 207s' lived space and within Noko's narrative.

Helen of Troy

One of the first areas in which they show this reprisal and pattern is in the way they relate to women. A generous part of the 207s' time in Hillbrow is spent with the opposite sex – courting them, sleeping with them, praising their looks, and denigrating them. In the section, 'Helen of Troy', the reader can find chapters on each woman and the 207 that she is connected to in some way – either as a lover, a girlfriend, or just an object of his affection. This allocation of a separate section to the female characters, while giving the reader more information on these women, also shows how Noko and the 207s do not see the female narrative as being integrated in their own, or for that matter, the female urban experience as operating with the same realm as their own.

Considering the characterisation of most of these female characters as persons who challenge the validity of the 207s' way of being in the city, this separation reveals Noko's attempt to define his and his friends' masculinity and prowess in opposition to the urban female and her way of being in the city. Their treatment of women and the language they use to describe them, ranging from the audacious to the hyperbolic, creates disconcerting gender stereotypes about the 207s. They come across, at least superficially, as misogynistic and exploitative. They refer to women as 'whores' (56), 'gold-diggers' and 'bitches' (59), 'golden incubator[s]' (200), and 'well chosen beauties' (97). They spend much of their time acting without regard for the female characters' emotional welfare, with the sense of impunity that their hustler mode appears to give them.

In a similar way, both *The Exploded View* and *Triomf* elicit this dynamic. These novels do not make way for the full presence of the female characters. Mol, arguably, has a voice, but as discussed, the security of her place and viewpoint is often overshadowed or supplanted by those of Pop, Treppie and Lambert. But, in all three novels, the male characters are shown to be constrained by their masculinity and historical positions within the city. So, the fact that the women characters in *Room 207* are given a separate

division in Noko's narrative reflects their potential to be unique and autonomous characters in the city. Thus, both textually and narratively, the 207s' attempts at dominance illuminate their weaknesses and the restrictedness of their inherited subject positions.

Their dismissal of women resonates with the stereotyping of gender roles in *Drum*'s gangster narratives of the mid twentieth century. While fictitious, *Drum*'s representations were reflective of the social patterns affecting urban Africans at the time. For instance, as Dorothy Driver argues, *Drum*'s representation of women reveals the changes to traditional black South African social structure that occurred through urbanisation. Within popular *Drum* narratives centred mainly on urban hustlers, women were denigrated.

Driver writes:

Drum gives valuable insight into the ways in which rural patriarchal structures were giving way to urban forms, as well as into the ways in which women's voices were silenced and a set of 'feminine' voices constructed in their place. It also shows, more generally, how gender was being reshaped as part of the rapid and large-scale processes of urbanization in the mid-twentieth century. Not only was *Drum*'s so-called 'vibrancy' constructed at women's expense, but the magazine's shift from rural 'past' to urban 'present' was negotiated largely by means of belittling and damaging misrepresentations of women.'

(1996: 232)

One can trace the same attempt to belittle the women in *Room 207* and to become empowered through such an act. In creating this role for themselves within the contemporary city, Moele's protagonists seem to suggest that post-apartheid relationships to the inner city are fraught with many of the same contradictions that would have been experienced by African urban migrants in the mid-twentieth century.

I have discussed how being in the city seems to demand severance from one's former place and in *Room 207*, the young men seem to deliberately disconnect themselves from

their cultural and social roots while they try to become assimilated into the inner city. Their machismo can be seen as an attempt to disconnect themselves from anything that might deter them from reaching their dreams. It can also be seen as a defensive response to Hillbrow's challenges, as well as the disturbance of bonds to the past and to past places. Furthermore, the 207s dismissive and objectifying behaviour seems to come as a response to the power of the female figures in the novel and this is interesting since it reflects how they respond to an alternative type of post-apartheid spatial psychology. While they display sexually chauvinistic mannerisms and while Noko casts the friends as hyper-masculine 'players', most of the central female characters come across as more adept at dealing with city life. They seem to work the city differently and somehow have passage into it that shows them to be more fluid. As I have touched on in the previous two chapters, many of the 207s are 'saved' by strong female characters whose interventions avert the young men from losing themselves totally in their hedonistic, *uku panda* lifestyles. The 207s' communal exoduses to the urban peripheries and suburban life should be read as a continuation of their geopathic disorders produced through their experience of lived space in the inner city. Thus, for example, the fact that the character, Tebogo, 'saves' Matome from his inner city life by providing a home for him outside of the Hillbrow does not mean that Matome's fractious relationship to urbanism is healed by his move to the suburbs. Considering the aspirations of the 207s, and their dreams for fame and riches, the fact that the women in their lives help them to 'get out' of Hillbrow constructs the female characters as alternate versions of the 207s and exposes the male characters' constructions of the hustler persona as a subjective reaction to contemporary urban life, fragile rather than a fixed, flawed rather than necessary.

This translates into a bodily dynamic. The women possess a sexual and female prowess which seems to mock the 207s and challenges their conceptions of sex and physical power. For instance, the women enjoy a certain amount of exhibitionism and openness about their physicality and sexuality. Noko describes a typical morning scene in the flat:

you wake up in the early morning because Modishi is making love to Lerato, or [...] D'Nice is fiddling with Miss Lebogang. Not to mention the fact that Matome walks around this place naked every morning like max the gorilla, applying lotion

to his body and looking at himself in the mirror. And then Lerato will go and do the same thing with the comment, “There is nothing you don’t already know.”

(108)

Even though Noko follows this description with the comment that Lerato’s attitude shows how she’s ‘lost her sense of privacy and personal space’ (108), what is clear here is that the female characters, to a degree, are able to flaunt their bodies in ways that rival and undermine the 207s. One would not argue that the female characters are necessarily empowered by the sexual nature of their relationships with the 207s or their sexual flaunting. In the case of the more minor characters, like the cluster of prostitutes who frequent the room, these kinds of displays are disturbing and brutal because the women are not portrayed or perceived as anything more than sexual or sexualised objects. However, as a device in the text, the female characters’ sexual displays also expose and ridicule the 207s’ reliance on their chosen model of masculinity and machismo. Take for instance this encounter with Debra, at one of the 207s’ parties:

She was there standing just in front of her boyfriend, stroking him with her soft hands. Standing there, she called to Matome and said, out loud for everyone who could hear to hear, “ Since the day I first saw you I have always wanted to fuck you.”

Excuse the language but that’s exactly what came out of her mouth.

She continued, “And you are always fucking running away, what’s wrong with you? This guy!” She was preaching now. “I want to give it to him for free, but he doesn’t fucking want it. Others have to sweat for it, but I’m giving it to you for free. Free!”

[...] “I’m going to fucking rape you one of these days.”

(26)

As much as one could consider this kind of behaviour a feature of the kwaito generation’s hyper-sexualised typologies, these girls call this process into question⁹⁴. Within the hyper-sexuality of the kwaito generation also lies older, more pervasive patterns of colonial and apartheid gender stereotypes⁹⁵ as well as traditional African patriarchal

⁹⁴ Cf. Impey, Angela. ‘Resurrecting the Flesh? Reflections on Women in Kwaito’ in *Agenda*, No 49, Culture, ‘Transgressing Boundaries’, (2001): 44-50.

⁹⁵ The question of African sexualities is hotly contested. The concept that Africans are more sexually virile is recognised by the majority of post-colonial African scholars as a construction produced through the lens

tropes. The female characters mirror the 207s in ways that reveal the young men to be caught up in a long history of discriminatory behaviour, both projected onto others and internalised as part of the self. Rather than emerging as empowered men of a new generation, through the sexualities of the female characters the 207s are shown to be bound up in and perpetuating inherited and limiting stereotypes.

This complex relationship is drawn out further with the introduction of the vagrant, Justice to the novel's hustler plot. As his story goes, Justice used to be a 'hustler' too, a wealthy, urbanised youth with 'expensive sports cars [...] expensive fashion, a hundred thousand rands worth of drugs and alcohol, an innumerable amount of orgasms' (31). He loses everything after three years in Hillbrow. When asked how he was able to lose so much, he utters these words to Matome and Noko:

"Ntepa." He said it hard, and paused as if he disapproved. "Ntepa" He said it again, this time softer, as if there were nothing better. "Ntepa," he concluded in a lower tone, a deep soft voice that sounded like he had given in, had surrendered to it and it had taken him prisoner. "Ntepa is a worthless, useless, shitty thing." He said it again like the first time: hard, with anger. "No, I'm lying. It is a very powerful thing that needs to be respected [...]"

(31)

In Justice's reasoning, his loss of material wealth can be attributed to his lust for sex and the female body as evidenced, for instance, in the stark enunciation of the word, 'Ntepa' (vagina). While his warning is ambiguous his words show a condemnation of female sexuality in the city as well as his recognition of its power. These tensions are placed within an African heritage, as evoked through the Sotho word for 'vagina'. This implants Justice and the 207s' misogyny and machismo within a local linguistic and spatial idiom. This does not need to suggest an essentialist reading of their behaviour but rather reminds

of colonial and western discourse and the hegemonic European 'gaze' onto Africa. At the same time, many African feminist scholars are occupied with what Kopano Ratele calls 'ruling masculinity and sexuality,' and the prevalence of patriarchal modes within South African society, from the domestic to the political. (Ratele, 2012). In relation to the female body and national, gendered identity, literary scholars such Elleke Boehmer and Meg Samuelson have made important contributions the field. Cf. Boehmer, Elleke. *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005; Samuelson, Meg. *Remembering the nation, Dismembering Women?* Scottsville: University of Kwazulu Natal Press, 2007.

the reader of the internalisation of inherited norms within subjectivity, place and language.

This echoes tensions around the apartheid hustler's relationship to female sexuality in a time when urbanisation destabilised traditional male roles. About the *Drum* era, Dorothy Driver comments that,

however "exciting" it may have seemed [...] untamed female sexuality was also seen as dangerous to men, for it spelled the loss not just of patriarchal authority but of any masculinity which found its power in spatial separation and sexual control.

(1996: 238)

Similarly, Justice's comment and the 207s' behaviour throughout the novel reveal their insecurity within their changing environment. But, Driver's suggestion too is that this perception of feminine wiles was a *construct*, a perceived threat which reveals more about the limitations of African and colonial/ apartheid gender discourses than it does about the dangers of a woman's vagina. Accordingly, as suggested earlier, the 207s' fragile handling of their own sexuality is worsened by the fact that their constructs of hypermasculine and sexualised persona bring to life colonial and apartheid stereotypes about African men. Even though apartheid's hustler/ pantsula types were cast as, 'masters of marginality' they also gave credence to the essentialist idea that African men associate power with sex and gender. Therefore, where the 207s' feel they are defying the past by embracing a character type that seems to be suited to the new city, they in fact rekindle old patterns of discursive and personal subjectivity which informed the apartheid African urban male hustler.⁹⁶

The paradox of this situation is elucidated further by the fact that these women set themselves apart from their sexualised selves through being characterised as intellectual and strong. Most of the women are students or are working hard and using their brains to

⁹⁶ The space of the migrant labour hostel, as Ramphele (1993) argues also perpetuated this kind of playing out of gender roles.

achieve their goals. Read against the failures of the 207s to earn degrees or maintain their studies, the women show again how they are able to work the urban space differently and rework their own roles within it. Even though Molamo breaks off his affair with ‘super intelligent’ Basedi (140) and tells her ‘you are a doctor and I am a hustler. However much we want this, a union between a hustler and doctor will not work’ (138), at the end of the novel, like most of his friends, his escape from the inner city to the peripheral suburbs is linked to a surrender to the will of another smart woman, Tebogo. His words to Basedi thus act as a portent of what’s to come and echo what has become increasingly clear to the reader: the 207s are not successfully able to mediate and work the city to their own benefit without the aid of women and the more fluid urbanity they represent.

The slippages between what these women have the potential to signify and the way they are perceived and treated by the 207s gives the reader the chance to question the reliability of the 207s’ choice of behavioural mode. This adds to the ambiguity of their spatial experience of the inner city, especially within the flat – the site of sex and intimacy in the novel but of division and displacement. Through their attitudes to their women, the 207s come across as an uneasy group of young black urbanites – more than just shallow, callous young men, but men who perform and practice their estrangement from this urban space through their replication of gender stereotypes and their unconscious reiteration of historic, geopathic disorders.

The struggles of the fathers

The 207s’ struggle with their hustler personas also seems to be inherited from their fathers. While the reader learns very little detail about the 207s’ families and their lives in their former home spaces, every so often Noko or one of the other friends will reference a saying or a word of advice from their fathers. Thus it becomes clearer to the reader that their hustler-style machismo is not just a response to an unsettling post-apartheid urbanism but also the carrying-over of ideas about masculinity that stem from the previous generation. For instance, when Noko recounts a conversation he would have with his father, should he need to call him for money, he describes it thus:

I think you have an ID, right?

“Yes.”

“And some years ago you passed your matric, is that right too?”

“Yes.”

“And you have a driver’s license. And you also have a passport, don’t you?”

“Yes, I have but –“

“Son, you have your girlfriends. How many? Remind me?”

[...] “All these things make you a man and that is why I want you to look at me in the eye and talk to me, because you are now a man. The sole fact that you have not a girlfriend, but girlfriends makes you a complete man and that makes me very proud of you because, man, you went out and got yourself a girlfriend without soliciting anybody’s help. Isn’t that so? [...] A man stands on his own two feet and fights his own wars. And now you want to disappoint me. You are not a child anymore and I did what I could for you... I did all that I can and now it’s all on you.”

That was my old man. And that was the last time I ever asked for anything from him.

(73-74)

His father’s response indicates certain ‘norms’ within African social culture which dictate certain constructions of gender types and sexualities. The concept that to be a ‘man’ means having numerous girlfriends speaks of polygamous cultural practices that go back to pre-urban Africa. However, one can also see these gender norms as a product of the transition into colonial and apartheid urban modernity, as Driver demonstrates earlier. We don’t know if Noko’s father was directly urbanised under apartheid but he seems to hold similar ideas about daily life and women as to his son. His drinking habits, for example, mirror the 207s and their constant plunging into ‘wars with Isando’ (a nearby beer manufacturer in Johannesburg). Furthermore, Noko’s description below of a shared background reflects his own township heritage:

We were all like D’Nice in a way, or maybe like him in every way. Your mother works as a washerwoman. Your father, at fifty-one, is on the blue card, leaving his house every morning to take refuge and comfort with his mates in the way against alcohol [...]

(34)

His father’s argument thus reveals what can be seen as a traditional perspective of masculinity is entangled in urban crisis, indicating that the 207s’ vision of masculine

power is part of an inherited disorder and pre-existing dislocation about what it means to be an urbanised, black, male migrant in Johannesburg.

The 207s' struggle with intimacy and attachment seems also to come from the burden of expectation that the previous generation places on them. This feeling colours Noko's exit at the end of the novel and seems to lie at the heart of his sense of failure. Indeed, he tells us:

Your main reason for being here was, first, to go to that great institution of education and come out of it with a degree for a better tomorrow. This dream was not only for you, but for those that care for you and those that you have an obligation to and those you will have obligations to [...]

(174)

The weight of these expectations incites conflict in the 207s. Feelings of shame and guilt plague Noko but he also spends time uttering contempt for the former generation. He commands the reader and his friends to:

forget the past, and think about now today and tomorrow, which is where we are going. You can only say sorry about the past, and it doesn't matter whether you are sorry or not. It has passed.

(25)

This forced amnesia, characteristic of their hustler modes, puts them at odds with the perpetual reminders of this past in the city – reminders evident in the intimate and public, material spaces of the inner city as well as in the ways in which the 207s engage with their external worlds. Even on the 207s' 'Wall of Inspiration', which can be seen as a shrine to hustling and *uku panda*, the reader notices the imprint of a debt to history and to heritage in two of Molamo's quotes:

'We are the people of the day before yesterday.'

'[...] you should have twenty rands that you used the day before yesterday and used yesterday, use it for today and still use it for tomorrow and all the other tomorrows.'

(19)

These words signal the 207s' invocation of communal African heritage as part of their arsenal for facing the inner city. So, even while they are frustrated with the restrictions of the past they are intertwined in them – especially from a political and cultural point of view. This dialectic aligns the 207s again with the mid-century Johannesburg hustler who was compelled to distance himself from his nativised self in exchange for a modern, urban one but who was simultaneously displaced by the urban experience and his own defensive modes. Furthermore, these young men, even though they are in the post-apartheid era, are still yearning for freedom – from poverty, from oppression and from the burdens of the past. In this way they are unconsciously continuing patterns of yearning established in the long and painful history of urbanisation of black South Africans.

Communal bonds

The conflicts within the 207s' appropriation of the hustler persona create and perpetuate their struggles with community within the inner city. I return here to the two quotes from the friends', 'Wall of Inspiration'. The first comes from 'Africa's Song,' an African poem found in a book and documentary series written and presented by Kenyan scholar, Dr. Ali Al Amin Mazrui, entitled 'The Africans – a Triple Heritage'.⁹⁷ The full text of Africa's Song is as follows:

We are a people of the day before yesterday and a people of the day after tomorrow. Long before slave days we lived in one huge village called Africa. And then strangers came and took some of us away, scattering us in all directions of the globe. Before the strangers came our village was the world; we knew no other. But now we are scattered so widely that the sun never sets on the descendants of Africa. The world is our village, and we plan to make it more human between now and the day after tomorrow.

(1986)

By including this quotation on the 'Wall of Inspiration', and by pinpointing it in his narration, Noko draws attention to a philosophy of afrocentricity and its exaltation of a

⁹⁷ The written text and documentary series were produced in 1986. The triple heritage refers to what Mazrui considers to be the three main cultural influences on Africa and Africans: traditional African culture, Islamic culture, and Western culture. Cf. Mazrui, A. *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*. New York: Little Brown and Co., and London: BBC, 1986.

communal Africa that existed before the arrival of colonialism and the slave trade. According to this song, this Africa is now global. In his song and his general scholarship, Mazrui expounds how western influences have become part of Africa's identity, along with Islam and African culture, and so, as implied by the above words, the diaspora should not be seen as threatening, but rather as a chance for Africans to treat the whole world as home, as an African village, and to try to 'make it more human' and inclusive, thus presenting an African humanist perspective about global race politics. The narrative's inclusion of such a potent political statement adds another dimension to the friends' hustling – suggesting that a greater political intention underlines their actions and responses to their urban situation. This is also indicated by their *lekgotla*-style⁹⁸ conversations about race, culture and identity in the flat,⁹⁹ or their many countless aphorisms about what it means to be urbanised and to suffer in contemporary Johannesburg.

This awareness that the 207s interpret their suffering as part of a long history of racial struggle is also evident in Noko's words: 'I was born black – there's no punishment more painful than being born black' (143) and, 'I'm black and I don't belong' (144). Their awareness that they are racially and politically marked, as outsiders to the city, can be seen as the root of the 207s' fluctuations in behaviour – simultaneously propelling them towards and pulling them back from places, identities and people that remind them of their heritage. They see this a shared condition, part of the black experience. However, this idea is not evident in their hustler modes nor, for instance, in their desire to gain wealth at the expense of others, nor in their treatment of women nor their xenophobia. Stuck on the wall, Mazrui's words seem to fail the friends in the city. In the inner city, the friends forget such principles, especially as their dreams fail to reach fruition. The idealism that they may have arrived with falters after a decade grappling with the lived contradictions of Hillbrow and their failure to become educated, wealthy or powerful in ways they initially imagined. This pattern is an historical one, so these quotations, especially the lines from Mazrui's 'Africa Song,' could be taken as a warning of the

⁹⁸ Lekgotla is the SeSotho word for 'meeting'.

⁹⁹ Cf. in particular, the chapter entitled, 'Money Day' in the section, 'Hard Living,' 143-145.

cyclical and repetitive nature of the black South African's difficulties in the urban space. As Noko repeats time and again as he meets different characters in the inner city, the 207s are 'just another sad black story'.

Reading the 207s' hustler modes as embodiment of a historically conflicted state helps the reader make sense of the numerous contradictory statements in the novel. It also helps explain why Noko uses ellipsis to complete the following statement: 'Sorry to say it, but we are as black as...' The ellipsis illustrates Noko and the 207s' sense of an established 'black' story as well as their desire to navigate themselves towards an unwritten future, one that could bring revision of the historical order. As so many urban scholars suggest, these revisions are most potent when they stem from a heterogeneous and lived social space like the inner city of Johannesburg. But, as *Room 207* shows, this lived social space is a site of struggle for the 207s as they precariously navigate personal relationships and social ties and appropriate a dismissive, but unstable, hustler mode to meet the demands of the contemporary urban environment. As much as they invoke and wrestle with a historical burden and an allegiance to a shared past, and for all they reveal themselves as young men who are engaged in struggles around personal attachment (rather than being simply callous, shallow urbanites), these young men perpetually create distance between themselves and their immediate social world and deny the shared narrative of the neighbourhood. The following introduction to Hillbrow illustrates this, even if paradoxically:

I like to call Hillbrow our little mother earth in Africa because here you'll find all races and tribes of the world. Here you'll find Europeans and Asians and that by fate have become proud South Africans, taking a long shot or maybe even a short shot at a dream of dreams of their own.'

(19)

The recognition of shared experience is intimated by the phrase 'our little mother earth'. This is another direct reference to *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, and asks the reader to consider Mpe's construction of a xenophobic inner city. With this tragic novel in mind, Noko's reference to 'our little mother earth' becomes ironic as it reminds the reader of

the difficulties of creating an unprejudiced community in Hillbrow, post-apartheid. Within this excerpt, one can trace Noko's acknowledgement of the multi-ethnic and linguistic make-up of the inner city. But, there is also an implicit dismissiveness in his terminology. His generalisations about other migrants' origins and his reference to them as 'tribes', flattens the histories and nuances of their particular stories. Isolating strangers within their ethnic, national or social groups also reminds the reader of the xenophobic streak that most of the young South African men carry with them, especially Zulu-Boy. Noko's comments thus emphasise a tension between familiarity and disregard – a dynamic which keeps the 207s within the community while also preventing them from becoming too close to anyone.

This dialectic is illustrated when Noko walks through Hillbrow. He introduces the reader to the vendor who sells 'everything illegal to those of us who find pleasure in losing our mind' (165). The use of the word, 'us', invokes a sense of community (even if uttered ironically), but with regards to the vendor, Noko's familiarity is limited.

He knows that the merchant is:

Venda, and, as you will see, as black as they come...the funny thing is that I know that he's Venda and he's a vendor and I can talk to him anytime, but I'm sure I don't know him at all and, what's more, I don't want to know anything about him. To me he is only a businessman.

(165)

Certainly, the fast paced, frenetic street life of the neighbourhood and the competitive nature of the informal economy make people wary of each other. The influx of thousands of different migrants and immigrants into the city from the early 1990's onwards means that living in Hillbrow involves running up against strangers all the time (Morris, 1999). It seems a pragmatic response, then, not to become familiar with every person one meets. But, Noko's lack of personal connection to this man also stems from a decision he has made about how he conducts himself in relation to others, a decision to not get too involved, as indicated in the line, 'I don't want to know anything about him'.

In addition, if one considers how the 207s' experience of street life in the inner city is still underscored by the legacy of restriction, then his dismissal of the vendor can be seen as a function of a historical legacy of distrust and unease as well as the contemporary hustler's refusal to become too attached to others. While refusing to get to know this vendor, even his name, Noko admits that he knows that he is Venda, showing that there has been some kind of exchange over the course of their interactions that went beyond the cursory, even if this fact was established casually through language. Noko remembers this detail of this man's life and background and inscribes him according to his ethnicity. Still, the vendor remains anonymous and whatever flicker of commonality or interest that is sparked becomes contained by a gesture of casual indifference.

Other inner city residents and people are treated with a similar combination of recognition and disregard and through this the inner city population in *Room 207* does not resemble a community, but rather a nameless, faceless albeit familiar crowd. This is evoked in Noko's language and descriptions of others. The Xhosa woman and her team who come to evict them once a month are simply referred to as the 'slaves of the landlord' (76). The hordes of underground musicians who visit Matome and Wada's studio are never described or named, neither is their music – even though the 207s profess their desire to be part of the music industry. The security guard who regularly assists Matome in his grocery shoplifting remains an anonymous figure in the background of the narrative. So too do the security guards whom the friends pass every day as they go into their high-rise block. Likewise, the guards at his fiancée's block (another character who is never named) are never more than props to Noko's exploits. When Noko leads the reader on his excursion around Hillbrow, he asks the reader, 'What did you see? People living? Yes, people living out there. Is that all? People living in rotting streets and buildings [...] Your observation is that you cannot tell if they are happy or just pretending to be happy' (169). Here Noko transfers his own culpability in this process. It is difficult to gauge whether they are happy or not without more details about who they are, which Noko cannot give. They are simply 'people,' just as the street children are only figments of street life, and the dead man lying on the road in Hillbrow is just 'a darkie brother bled to his death' (163).

Even within their more private environment, one can see the same indifference, the same blasé attitude. The 207s live in same block for ten years and yet they cannot name their neighbours. The people who attend their parties are anonymous too, even though the friends have countless gatherings in their room. Later, when Noko is in another flat in Berea, one that he shares with numerous other people, he tells the reader that he has no contact with the ‘fifty people who share this flat’ (231). Likewise, even though they share the same space countless times, only one prostitute, Ntombifuthi, has a story attached to her; the rest are just ‘ladies of the night’. This lack of detail permeates the young men’s inner city experience, producing, on a psycho-geographical level, a sense of impermanence and dislocation.

Even though the 207s are surrounded by people in the densely populated inner city – all of whom seem to share a common goal to survive the experience and change their lives for the better – the friends’ social interactions are constituted by a multitude of disconnections and absences in their interpersonal relationships and lived spaces. This undermines their chance of being part of a community or creating a meaningful sense of belonging here. Their patterns are a product of the unpredictable experience of the black migrant in a space that is still produced by historical patterns of poverty and insecurity. The 207s’ dislocation from community is also an effect of the hustler’s mode of being and his struggle with social connectivity, as he seeks to master his own marginality. In this way, the 207s not only respond to the legacy of history within the patterns of everyday life *external* to themselves but they inhabit a persona that reiterates the patterns of the previous generation internally as they try to claim their place within an unrelenting urban situation. The hustler mode, although it helps them deal with the burden of this historical pattern to a degree, inhibits trust in their social world and in people who could help them negotiate the post-apartheid space and era of transition.

The Exploded View: The City as Object

Was he Nigerian? It was time to learn the signs.
(*The Exploded View*, ‘Villa Toscana’: 4)

‘The Afritude Sauce is the specialty of the house...’
‘It’s the real thing...’
In that case, I suppose I’ll try it.’
(*The Exploded View*, ‘Afritude Sauce’: 83)

The economies of repetition. Any task got faster and easier as you went along. One of the pleasures with working with your hands lay in rhythms and refining sequences, discovering how a given process could best be done.
(*The Exploded View*, ‘Curiouser’: 105-106)

One of them was carrying the pipe he’d taken from the back of the bus. It might be a spanner for the jack. He was not pointing it or flourishing it, it was simply there, an incidental object, dangling from his fingers.

(*The Exploded View*, ‘Crocodile Lodge: 199)

These four excerpts from *The Exploded View*’s four narrative strands evoke each protagonist’s focusing of his urban environment through an objectifying lens, or as an object-item. Budlender retreats behind physical, recognisable signs to understand the city; Egan attaches meaning to objects and things that can help him cross into the new urban order; Majara manipulates objects and himself to make art that keeps him in control of his environment and his public and Duffy invests himself in the pursuit of an incidental object in the hope that he can anchor himself against the changes in his surroundings.

In this way, each of these men, through his objective gaze, replicates the role of a colonial observer and adds a further layer to his disordered place in post-apartheid Johannesburg. In my previous chapters, I discuss how the four protagonists in *The Exploded View* enact a distancing between themselves and the post-apartheid city through their abstracted gazes and safe modes of travel, their quantifying measurements of urban space and their attachment to or work within controlled suburban zones. The very notion of ‘the exploded view’ evokes the outsider’s perspective, since to see something, such as the city, in its entirety and to be able to or want to visualise its components fitting together, one must be able to conceptualise the whole as divisible in some kind of uniform, interconnected way. One must also be far enough away from it to objectify it as the sum of all its parts. By seeking an ‘exploded view’ of contemporary Johannesburg, they reveal the extent to which they resist being immersed in everyday, post-apartheid

Johannesburg and all its unpredictable fluctuations. Furthermore, they show how even though the colonial period might be over certain patterns and positions appropriated in the contemporary moment can create an engagement with the city that resonates with the colonial gaze.

Owing to these fluctuations and the slippages they incite in the protagonists, Michael Titlestad and Michael Kissack see the 'narrative territories in *The Exploded View* as: 'liminal zone(s) of shifting possibilities' (Kissack, Titlestad, 2006, 11) and the struggle of each man to be the start of possible revisions in themselves. Shameem Black (2008) also argues for such a point, suggesting that these kinds of encounters invoke in these men a type of psycho-social reckoning with space which ultimately can lead to renewal and an overhaul of themselves and of their relationship to the city. Similarly, Stefan Helgesson writes that 'the peculiarities of the African metropolitan form lead to affective crises for the characters' (2006: 28). He argues that the protagonists come to accept the new city forms through these crises. While this is evident on a number of levels indeed, within the spatial frame with which I am concerned, I see striking evidence of these characters beginning to lose their sense of place because their response to the city is not to become open to new possibilities but to try to reinstate a sense of control over the unruly city and to lock down their growing sense of unease. The characters resist assimilation and acceptance of a new African metropolitanism by becoming further entrenched in an inherited position of distance, like their colonial forefathers.

In this novel as with the others discussed in this thesis, one finds an historically rooted self-perpetuating pattern of dislocation between city space and this subject position. As I have discussed, triggering the protagonists' displacement and anxiety is the sense that their cognitive and practical tools for engagement (which originate from a Eurocentric perspective and epistemology of ration and order) are outdated or out of place, and that the city in turn is becoming increasingly foreign and difficult to read and measure. In response to this anxiety, the men attempt to organise these experiences according to known principles of abstraction and quantification, even while they recognise the fallibility of this act. By trying to objectify their experience they position themselves

further outside the city, as onlookers. This replicates aspects of the archetypal colonial persona. In the following section, I trace one significant way in which each protagonist enacts this mode, either by making the city and its energies into an object, or by using an object to counter the effects of the loss of control on their sense of place, thereby installing themselves as outsiders to the city, limited by their need to take distance and observe.

Before I continue, allow me to outline the figure of the colonial observer to make my point clearer. *The Exploded View's* suburban scenery and protagonists' removed perspectives resonate with the typical Englishman's bourgeois legacy and his status on the fringes of political engagement. The reader knows little about the backgrounds of these men except their names and relationships to the city. Their characters evolve through an assimilation of character traits and reactions to the space around them. While neither Lesley Budlender nor Simeon Majara is typically bourgeois or elitist, both evince traits that are reminiscent of this type. The same can be said for Egan and Duffy: while one does not learn extensively about their histories, their practices within the chronotope of post-apartheid Johannesburg align them with the same type.

The colonial observer

As the apartheid city emerged and was materially and discursively constructed to keep the Afrikaners 'in' and black South Africans 'out,' the white, English speaking citizen, already inscribed within South African history as the colonial 'other,' came to occupy something of an interstitial position within apartheid urban discourse and space. This has roots in colonialism proper: the entire colonial system was orchestrated around the colonist not becoming fully integrated or mixed within the indigenous space or native culture. As I shall argue further in relation to the novel, this distancing manifested in physical markers, such as dress, behaviour and architecture as well as more insidious ways, such as a discursive denial of what Johannes Fabian calls, 'coevalness' (Fabian, 1983:35), or the occupation of a simultaneous time frame to the indigene or indigenous space. Much work has been done on the effects of these separations on the colonist

him/herself: strung between worlds s/he is caught in the intersections between his or her 'home culture' and the one in which he or she is immersed in the colony.

Within the rhetoric of apartheid, the white, English-speaking South African occupied a position as both a benefactor of and accomplice to the state system. S/he was not part of the *volk* but was not cast out either. Being European, s/he was, for obvious reasons, exempt from the full force of apartheid regulation. Unlike the black South African, the white English person has the freedom to the city. But, being English, s/he is also a tacit 'enemy' of the Afrikaner state in Johannesburg, bearing with him the colonial legacy of the Cape and a reminder of the Boer war. Still, the English-speaking colonial type was socially part of the city. Furthermore, apartheid Johannesburg was a familiar setting since its divisions and architectures, social groupings and machinations basically extended what had begun earlier in the late 1800's (Bremner, 2010). Underlying the apartheid city were Eurocentric modernist principles that had been extended into African urban spaces through colonial discourse and practice.

Thus, whilst the Afrikaner *volk* did not include the Englishman, its urban policies invoked an imperialist legacy of domination, control and appropriation wherein the Englishman felt comfortable. Apartheid Johannesburg's spatial strategies can thus be seen an extension of a pre-existing, but less fanatically enforced imperialist urbanity, especially with regards to the area of segregation.

In this regard, A.J. Christopher points out that:

On the basis that colonisation and imperialism involve the interaction of differing cultural groups, English colonisation has been consistent in its resistance to any degree of integration.

(1983:145)

Furthermore, as a representative of the western world's economic and political weight, the 'Englishman' was necessary to the apartheid state's aspirations to be included within the global economy. Protecting the already established business interests of the English in Johannesburg was also a strategic way of ensuring white majority in parliament and the

ongoing power of the Nationalist party (Walshe, 1994; Posel, 1991). ‘After all,’ as Peter Walshe comments, despite its autocratic rule, ‘the Afrikaner government had the most slender of majorities in parliament’ (1994, 352). Thus again, the Englishman was included as part of the ‘Chosen People’ inasmuch as s/he was strategically necessary for its survival amidst a country mainly populated by non-white South Africans.

When Ezekiel Mphahlele refers to white liberalism in South Africa as ‘garden party liberalism’ (Mphahlele, 1962: 64) he invokes the associated trope of the English suburban garden and leisurely lifestyle echoed further in Njabulo Ndebele’s description of the colonial leisure class and the game lodge industry (Ndebele, 1999). While the liberals were not actively engaged in perpetuating the most explicit forms of the apartheid system, they were often criticised for their general lack of active opposition to the status quo.¹⁰⁰ The passive white liberal evokes this outsider position.

Each of the protagonists from *The Exploded View* replicate this passivity in the way that they do not allow themselves to engage fully with their urban environments. The Englishman’s position as an ‘objective observer’ within urban state business and city life, coupled with his inherited tendency to objectify the African city, kept him distanced from the ‘native’ space. It is this heritage that seems to play itself out in the way each character deals with his increasing anxiety in the post-apartheid city.

‘Villa Toscana’

In ‘Villa Toscana’, as Budlender engages with this ersatz world and becomes destabilised by it, his relationship with objects comes sharply in to focus. At crucial points in the novel, when the spaces or the people around him become unreadable, Budlender looks to objects for meaning. In this almost compulsive habit, the act of mapping his experiences in locatable, finite and known things, Budlender distances himself more from the city, finding on the one hand, ‘safety’ but in so doing, casts himself as an outsider. Stefan Helgesson in his critique of Vladislavić’s novel points out that for colonial rulers of

¹⁰⁰ Steve Biko famously took up this position in much of his Black Consciousness Writing, insinuating that it was better to deal with Afrikaners since at least with them, you knew where you stood. Cf. ‘Black Souls in White Skins’ in Biko, Steve (1978) *I Write what I Like*. Johannesburg: David Philip Publishers, 1987.

India, ‘“countable abstractions [...] created the sense of a controllable indigenous reality”’ (Appadurai, 1996: 117 in Helgesson, 2006: 29). Indeed, as a census drafter, Budlender’s job is to record observable details and make sense of an increasingly obscured urban space. He neither seems to fully grasp how his *métier* reflects one of the principle concerns of the colonial gaze, nor how his gaze transmutes into a fetish-like obsession when he becomes disturbed by what he finds in his everyday world. Through the gaze that Budlender exerts onto the environment, he pushes himself further away from it and renders the uncontrollable ‘indigenous reality’ countable but also ‘other’.

One of the first instances where Budlender attributes meaning to an object in the face of an undecipherable interaction is at Villa Toscana. He is ‘repelled at the ramparts’ (9) because he has filled in the wrong number plate in the guard’s logbook. Budlender momentarily forgets that he has changed his number plates from the old Transvaal system (T) to the new one (GP)¹⁰¹:

Damn. The number had been changed to the new provincial system when the car was licensed a few weeks back. Gauteng province. Without thinking he had filled in the old number with its concluding T, claiming allegiance to the vanished Transvaal.

(8)

Cognisant of the Freudian implications of his mistake, Budlender makes light of this error, thinking sardonically, ‘perilous times we’re living in. A little accident, a slip of the pen, can turn into an incident before you know it’ (8-9). However, this small act, even if not an act of fealty but an innocent slip reveals him to be anachronistic and unsynchronised with the new environment. As object-markers of a car’s (and usually the car-owner’s) place of origin, changing the province’s number plates eradicates evidence of apartheid’s detailed, and rigidly enforced spatial demarcations. Under apartheid each province, city and Bantu ‘homeland’ had its own set of numbers on a plate. Budlender may not actively be trying to show loyalty to the Old Transvaal of apartheid, but for a man obsessed with capturing details, one can imagine that the new number plates would be an affront, denying him the chance to map and locate the origins of every car he sees

¹⁰¹ This phase-out occurred in 2000/ 2001.

moving through the city, including his own. When he forgets to write down the new number plate one can read this as an unconscious allegiance to an old order of systematic numbering, an order that Budlender innately relies on. Such a seemingly minor object holds a large amount of significance, acting as an anchor in a world where the surfaces of the old and familiar order are being phased out.

Moments later, when he looks closely at the building while waiting for the guard, as he notices the artificial yet fortress-like walls: '[a]bsent-mindedly, he took a calculator out of his pocket, turned it over in his fingers, put it away again' (10). This slight gesture of handling a tool that counts and abstracts reminds the reader of his need to quantify information as the urban world around him starts to become less reliable and less possible to 'add up'. These acts indicate his unconscious desire to demarcate the world around him as a way of ordering it. In this gesture, Johannesburg becomes a fetishised thing, an object invested with his subjective desire, rather than a shifting metropolis in itself.

This tendency to fetishise the object also translates into his lust for Iris. She is difficult to deconstruct for Budlender since she reveals very little detail about herself. She is almost inanimate in her reserve. But, she begins to take on meaning for Budlender through an assemblage of the objects around her – not only those within her house and in her proximity (including, to Budlender, her co-presenter) but those that she exists in relation to. This reveals an existing subjective pattern:

He had been drawn to a woman before by the way she took hold of the world, the way she lifted things and put them down again, a telephone receiver or a magazine, the way she turned a key in a lock or clicked the nib of a ball point in and out.

(11)

Constructing Iris in this way allows Budlender a measure of control over his feelings within his urban environment. He casts himself as a passive onlooker, an observer who does not act with confidence but who occupies the position as a peripheral voyeur. When he falls through the streets in his final dream, he is falling through Iris, as embodied in

her bottles. This dream represents both his need to objectify and the disabilities he engenders by trying to alter the pace of the teeming, African urban world.

His compulsive tendency to abstract his environment, especially when it becomes threatening, manifests in public spaces too. He halts at the intersection on Marlboro offramp. Traveling to the intersection brings Budlender into contact with the informal roadside economy of Johannesburg's inbetween spaces – roadsides, bridges and verges. His containment within his car keeps him separate from the vendors haggling at his window. However, Budlender's response to one tradesman shows that even though he is not sharing the same space, he is compelled to enforce more distance between them. He objectifies him, breaking him up into little pieces and begins to classify his body parts as a representation of a human rather than attempt to understand the human in front of him. He dissects the ethnic significance of his cheekbones, skin, 'the ridge of a lip, the slant of an eye, the size of an ear' (5), asking 'Was he Nigerian?' (4) This objectification of the man's features establishes Budlender as the archetypal European observer, distanced – and thus safely different – in his gaze from the unpredictable and immeasurable African public. Moments later he admits:

it seemed to him there were Nigerians everywhere. He started to see Mozambicans too, and Somalis. It was the opposite of the old stereotype: they all looked different to him. Foreigners on every side. Could the aliens have outstripped the indigenes? Was it possible? There were no reliable statistics.

(5)

Turning human beings into objects is for Budlender less an exercise in racism than it is in detachment. His place in the city, as a white, educated statistician, is constructed out of his difference to these other people and this differentiating mass of unknowables. His difference to this perceived disorder is valid only so much as he can track it visually, though. By turning the man into a 'thing', constructed from pieces of visible 'things', he not only constructs the difference between himself, a living organism, and this object-person outside but he also deconstructs him as a threat. His obsession with this deconstructive game disassembles the uniqueness of each of the African nationalities he professes to 'know'. Although Budlender seems aware of the differences between various

ethnic faces, the African vendors are reduced from subjects to objects of his western logic. At this point, these men become like Majara's masks: dissembled and dissected. This kind of action, even subconscious, erects a boundary between the flowing city of people outside and Budlender, so that he and the city do not exist in the same chronotope. His objectification undermines the possibility of his coexistence or his 'synchronous/simultaneous' (Fabian, 1983: 31) engagement with his surrounding world.

He does a similar thing with Iris' co-continuity presenter later on in the story:

Her companion, a young man with muscular arms and a bearded hairdo that made him look like a ritual object, was speaking – what exactly? Zulu? Sotho? He should learn to tell the difference [...] for all he knew the fellow might be speaking Igbo. Come to think of it, he did seem to have the characteristic shell-like ears, the 'Igbo ormer,' as Warren has put it.

(25)

Budlender subjects the continuity presenter to the same scrutinising gaze. This description is clearly intended to be comical but it also shows the extent of Budlender's tendency to objectify the 'native other'. He finds this male presenter threatening because he is sharing the screen with his primary object of affection, Iris, and so Budlender's analysis is also intended to belittle the co-presenter. But, considering that this interaction takes place after his disturbing experience on the R561, it signifies that while he is becoming increasingly aware of the changes in his urban social world he finds solace in deconstructing this world and its relationships, favouring if you will, an exploded view. This is reinforced by the act of watching television: Budlender is occluded from the return gaze of his object. Being in this position helps him feel that he is control of his relationship to the lived contemporary city, but, through this distancing, Budlender renders himself out of synchronisation with it too.

'Afritude Sauce'

In 'Afritude Sauce,' Egan's profession embodies the principles of western planning and order, as I have discussed previously. As an engineer, he becomes perturbed by the inadequacies of his public construction projects, which are intended to address

Johannesburg's housing crisis by creating residential units for poor, black families on previously unused land in the city. I have commented on how this kind of state-orchestrated building project reinvigorates apartheid and colonial planning strategies in the post-apartheid urban space by mapping new, conditioned residences into peripheral spaces, much like apartheid planning did. Indeed, building such a site as Hani View, on a previously uncharted area, reminds one of the 'seizing of territories [...] mapping of sites [...] framing of landscapes [and the] construction of buildings [and] displacement of peoples' (Richard Cavell, 1995: 1).

While Egan's project evokes colonial and apartheid spatial enterprises, Egan himself is a contractor who likes to consider himself as part of the 'new order' (84). Yet, as he encounters destabilising elements which potentially threaten the principles at the heart of his work and outlook, his response mimics that of the old guard. Despite growing misgivings about his trade, Egan reproduces his position as an outsider in his reactions. He does so not simply in the objective world of his work but, similarly to Budlender, through the value he places in solid, material objects and his belief in their ability to represent or deflect the instability of his external world. This relationship to things distances him from the fluid social world surrounding him. Even while he senses that his practice is flawed, he invests meaning in objects as a way of diverting his uneasiness, which only disturbs his place more within the contemporary urban scene, as his experiences in the story attest. In this way, he recreates a position of the ambiguously placed colonial observer, or the English-speaking citizen on the outskirts of local urban action.

The reader is given a clue to Egan's ambiguous position in the question he asks as he comes into his hotel room after dinner at Bra Zama's. He sees that the 'chamber maid' has been in to make the room cosier for him – turning down the bed and turning on the light, closing the curtains and leaving a little gold-wrapped chocolate on the pillow. In response, he wonders, 'how much importance should he attach to these details?' (49). Egan is aware of how in the hotel room he is another generic punter – the intricacies of these personal touches are the same for everyone who visits. And while he wishes to

dismiss these touches, he also feels ‘warm inside, he felt welcomed, despite himself’ (49). At the end point to a day where Egan has felt increasingly insignificant and challenged, the details of the room act as an antidote to his discomfort in an urban world where other details do not seem to make sense anymore. This suggests that Egan, much like Budlender, prefers to remain within the boundaries of details he trusts, even if they are an illusion. The room of his hotel and its little European touches offers him solace in juxtaposition to the ‘details’ of Hani View and Hani Extension 1.

This same idea is raised implicitly when he recollects that his earlier construction model was unfit for the African landscape that it professed to represent. Still, in these details Egan trusts and finds comfort, more so than the social world in which he participates. He reflects on a similar experience on a recent trip to Mpumalanga. A junior planner tries to convince him that he should try ‘to listen to people,’ suggesting he would ‘learn something from the people who actually use your products’ (61). Egan balks at the idea that this act would be doing his ‘bit for reconciliation’ (62), just as he is uncomfortable with engaging with the residents of Hani View.

I have argued in earlier chapters how this is a form of socio-spatial pathology. Egan cannot cross the divide between the represented world and the fluid, unbounded and thus wholly unpredictable one of this new lived urban space. He cursorily engages with the social world he has helped build but his social methods tend to be off the mark because he is unable to separate himself from the constructivist framework from which he operates. As a result he becomes insecure about his capacity to actually meet the social needs of Johannesburg’s increasingly mixed and intermingling population – a sentiment echoed in the ironic fact that his toilet at Mrs. Natlaka’s house doesn’t work.

Besides surfacing in his interactions with the sites he is involved with, there are two moments in the story that illustrate well how Egan binds himself in his position as an outsider even when he tries to be included in the new order. The first occurs in his dream wherein he and his child are playing with a plastic cone. For Egan, the pieces of the cone come to resemble the graphic proportions of the population who are suffering from

various social ailments, such as poverty and illness:

He'd been asleep when they called for him, and dreaming about Nicholas, his son. The dream came back to him now [...] Nicky was playing on the floor of the nursery, Egan was kneeling beside him, scattered between them was a set of coloured plastic rings that had to be fitted over a peg to form a cone. An educational toy [...] As he teetered on his padded backside, Egan picked up the ring that lay at his knee and handed it to him. It was just a plastic ring. And yet it was also the 58 per cent of South Africans who lived below the poverty line. Not an image of them, not a symbol, not even an idea. The thing itself, somehow, was the poverty [...] Nicky pushed the ring away and put the small yellow one over the peg. It dropped to the bottom where it did not belong. The 19 per cent who were HIV positive. Or was it the 35 per cent who had access to telephones? Egan slid it off again.

(77-78)

It seems that Egan can visualise the social urban world in a clearer way through these objects than he can when interrelating with it on site. In his child's hands, the objects are disconcertingly jumbled. The toy elements represent not just statistical slices of the external lived city but some of the biggest issues of the post-apartheid era. These issues have come to alter and rupture the safety of the country's surfaces, emerging as sources of instability. In manipulating these objects, the child symbolically shows his disregard for those who may be experiencing their effects most directly – characters like those living in Hani View and Hani Extension 1. Egan and his child are on the outside of this fraught situation and have the power and position to turn it into a game of objects. The child is adding to this instability. Egan tries to remember which piece represents which of South Africa's contemporary afflictions, while his son, his next generation, unthinkingly discombobulates the pieces and shifts the order. This dream speaks deeply about Egan's anxiety over a country becoming increasingly unknowable to him. It is an expression of his sense of distance from it and his positioning outside of it. In watching his child manipulate the pieces, he becomes passive too. And, the figure of the child, his own child, suggests that Egan is passing this tendency to objectify the African terrain on to the next generation.¹⁰² By inserting this dream narrative into the text, Vladislavić suggests

¹⁰² There is a strong parallel here with the Benades and Lambert. Even though operating from vastly different positions, these characters show a similar tendency to be caught in a cycle of inheritance.

how the subconscious reflects the anxieties of the conscious and by the same gesture, hints at the capacity of hidden narratives to emphasise or illuminate that which is difficult to decipher or face. Here we see a reflection of this collection of novels' capacity to engage the reader in a conversation with imagined and real or conscious and subconscious features of a situation or space and the lesser known layers and factors within a represented reality. The dream and the real become intertwined; the past and the present are shown to be interlinked so deeply that contemporary Johannesburg's reality is can be seen a surfacing of depths and of the past.

Later, in 'Afritude Sauce', Egan's attempts to 'fit in' with the four powerful black businessmen and public servants he is working with at Hani View, the reader notices how Egan emulates them, albeit awkwardly, through a simple gesture of donning a piece of clothing: a Madiba shirt. Mazibuko, Bhengu, Ramaramela and Marakabane operate in a way that makes Egan seem completely outmoded, as observed in my previous chapter. In addition, they are socially aligned with the residents. Even if their intentions are dubious, as is intimated in the story, they can speak the language of the African city (Egan cannot even tell which language they are speaking – 'Xhosa? Sotho?' He asks). They are in touch with an African urban sensibility that marries both western urban norms with local ones. This is seen, even if parodically, in their taste for Bra Zama's, an Africa-themed tourist haunt, as well as their ostentatious business acumen and patronizing attitude towards Egan. Egan's shirt marks his inability to fluidly marry influences or assimilate his mode of being into a confident expression of Afropolitanism.¹⁰³ He admits:

The Madiba shirt was a mistake. He'd decided to go casual, although the loose fitting shirt with its African design – argumentative little people jumping up and down waving their arms in the air, jagged lines sparking from their fists – always made him feel ridiculous. It was a bit like Estelle's wrapping paper, he thought sourly. He should have gone with his instincts and worn a suit.

(75)

However, where for the Benades this is a tactical and ideological response, for Egan, this is a position he cannot seem to get himself out of – hence his anxiety.

¹⁰³ Cf. Nuttall, Sarah and Achille Mbembe, 'Afropolis: From Johannesburg.' *PMLA*: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America. Vol. 22, No. 1 (2007): 281-288.

His relationship to the shirt in the text is abstract – it represents not an expression of himself, but an attempt to ‘Africanise’. Although he feels foolish, Egan chooses to reproduce a classic colonial dynamic, as outlined by Gail Ching-Liang who reminds us that ‘clothes trap the essence [...] they objectify it. Like souvenir curios which represent fetishized totems, they present the [African] world for consumption’ (Gail Ching-Liang Low, 1993: 249). She continues:

The primary attraction of the cross-cultural dress is the promise of ‘transgressive’ pleasure without the penalty of actual change. Such metamorphosis does little to subvert the existing power hierarchies, since the cross-dresser may always reveal or revert to the white identity underneath the native clothes.

(1993: 254)

Whilst a gesture of good will, this donning of the Madiba shirt, a representation of the new national order and of Africa, casts him in a precarious position. Superficially he inhabits the garb of the land but intrinsically he is unaltered. The shirt is an object to him, a curio. Wearing it prevents him from assimilating into the new order. This is illustrated, for instance, in his unsure description of the ‘argumentative little people’ and ‘jagged lines’ on the shirt itself. Even as he wears the shirt, he does not understand its form.

Egan’s response to his discomfort is to try to objectify his experience in the restaurant. In order to regain a sense of control, he separates himself from the scene and imagines a future, distant time when he can look back on it:

He could already see himself looking back on it, from a tremendous distance, and understanding at last what it was all about. He wished he was there now, at that reassuring remove, on a height filled with the wisdom of hindsight.

(80)

In this imagined act, Egan reveals an underlying pattern in his behaviour: to be separate, to be outside, but also to blend in and to be present. In this pattern of behaviour, Egan positions himself on the outside, looking in: he becomes like the masks on the walls of Bra Zama’s or like the visitors who seek out the touristic experience. He becomes a

stranger to the city through this process, frustrated like Van der Haas and also like Mrs. Natlaka unable to fit into the contemporary city.

'Curiouser'

In 'Curiouser', this objectifying tendency is pronounced most strongly and clearly in Majara's objects and his art-making process. His art is a key site through which he fends off feelings of redundancy and through which he objectifies the city. This dynamic comes through his position as a creator or a manipulator of artifacts and spectators. His *Genocide* series is designed to manipulate people's reactions while keeping Majara outside of, and disaffected by, the experience. In *Curiouser* and Bra Zama's décor, he also shows his desire to create and control. With *Curiouser*, he states that he seeks to disarm 'the obvious trappings of the tourist experience [...] trusting that in the end he would be able to turn them inside out, double them back on themselves, so that they meant something else' (107). Even though he parodies the tourist experience, he takes no issue with exploiting it in Bra Zama's. Here in the restaurant, Majara uses the masks as a curio show to create an 'authentic' experience for visitors seeking a prefabricated taste of Africa. The fact that he can produce two works with such different intentions from the same cache of 'raw materials' points to his deft manipulation of the objects he uses.

The way he cuts up the masks for *Curiouser* is testament to this too. In his process of making objects, he does not allow himself to become altered by his creations. Nor does he inhabit the same zone or time as the things he manipulates. He chooses to generate objects for a range of spectators without changing himself. This is also evident in *Bullet-in* and his artful manipulation of a single wall in his studio to represent many from all over the world. In his series of photographs, different sites of violence emerge within his home or studio. By repeatedly creating the bullet holes himself, Majara is able to orchestrate a multitude of harrowing scenarios without risking his life or without risking his position as the omnipotent outsider and creator.

I have suggested that this story stands out from the others because Majara is not white or 'European'. However, his ethnic profile does not deter him from assuming a position of distance that is typical of the colonial observer in the 'native space'. Majara's so-called

racial difference is useful, therefore, in tracing how the manifestations of apartheid-era personae in post-apartheid era characters and spatialities are linked to everyday practices and habits rather than ‘racial types’. Majara thus represents the discursive aspect of this subject position, instilling a sense of its pervasive relationship to the South African city space, taking on new forms and incarnations even after the end of apartheid.

His objectifying tendency takes on an unnerving intensity as Majara becomes increasingly aware of the artifice in his situation. As his position is threatened by the growing sense of fakeness in his surroundings and the parallels between his art and his suburban world, Majara objectifies himself and wields himself as an art form. Rob Gaylard suggests that ‘there a kind of artistic arrogance in presuming to shock people, but there is a kind of narcissistic voyeurism involved in such shocking, particularly when the body of the artist is at its centre’ (Gaylard, 2006: 70). Gaylard refers to the *Genocide* series where Majara uses his own body as the model for the bandaged death shrouds. Gaylard also suggests that *Curiouser* or *Bullet-in* is a diversion from this kind of bodily act. In fact, the shrouding process gives his voyeurism more of a physical visible presence, his narcissistic deployment of his body and his self at the centre of his art (and his investment in himself as a cultural artifact) can be seen as a fundamental tactic in his daily practices and interactions with his environment, to fend off his growing unease within his artificial, created environment. After all, as the reader is told in the novel, ‘Simeon was an artist. Everything else followed’ (103-104).

His investment in himself as object is signaled at the start of the story by his configuration of his self in the third person, using his public title, ‘S. Majara,’ in inverted commas:

In the studio attached to his house, where he usually engaged in the serious business of making art, ‘S Majara’ indulging a whim, began to construct a lantern out of wooden masks.

(101)

Majara’s narcissism does not stop him from being playful or from satirising his own art. This is reflected in the subtle undermining of his actions in the reference to his studio as: ‘where he usually engaged in the serious business of making art’. He also parodies his

recent exhibition by turning leftover masks into lanterns for his garden party. Majara may expose his pretensions but he is also portrayed as wholly invested in his role as a public commodity as seen in these lines:

S. Majara was having a closing. It was the new thing, more fun than an opening, they said. His show at Pollack had just come down, he had spent the whole day taking works apart and packing them up, and the last thing he felt like was a party. *But it had to be done.*

(101-102; my italics)

The juxtaposition of the phrase, ‘they said’ with the sentiments in the last line shows that Majara is willing to perform a certain role to guarantee the promotion of his public persona. He also exploits his ethnicity in his self-commodification. Adopting the role of the ‘Young Lion’ (114) of the contemporary art scene not only casts him as powerful and predatory artist, but also conjures up his roots as an African. Again, while he may invoke this name with slight irony, he does not resist this title or what it may bestow upon his person, as seen in his stealthy adoption of a leonine walk before and during the *braaivleis* described in the previous chapter. His blackness is a vital part of his public persona – evident by his being asked to help decorate Bra Zama’s by ‘an acquaintance’ who decided ‘that he knew more about authentic African than she did – he was black after all, never mind the private school accent’ (106). He acknowledges that he has been educated in a Eurocentric environment and so his African-ness becomes a construction for the public world, rather than a reflection of his cultural or social habits and heritage. He wields his ethnicity as an object in itself, and surrenders it to public consumption.

Through this, he becomes both an object of the colonial gaze and the colonial gazer. By rendering this boundary ambiguous, Majara implicates himself in his most recent series of objects, *Curiouser*, his collection of reconstituted African masks. This process starts from when he discovers the potential of the masks as anthropomorphic objects. Early descriptions of the masks on the sides of Johannesburg’s roads are uncannily human:

The face of Africa, he thought, the one made familiar by ethnographic museums and galleries of modern art, B grade movies and souvenir shops. Everywhere you

went in Johannesburg, wooden faces looked up at you from the pavements at the hawkers's stalls, running catalogue of expressions ranges from hollowed-out hunger and plump self-satisfaction, each flipping over into its opposite as soon as the weather changed.

(103)

His reference to these objects as 'the face of Africa,' is markedly ambiguous. This sentence could be describing the faces of the vendors too. This description resonates with the previous two stories where Egan and Budlender take stock of black African roadside vendors in a similar objectifying language. Majara is doing a similar thing here although for him there is a further process: in being an African, he sees himself in the masks too. He is also another 'face of Africa' – both ethnically and in the art world – and thus he implicates himself in his objectification of his black African counterparts and their wares. Owing to this process, the statement that 'Curiouser has been a great success, a new beginning for him, everyone said so,' (103) takes on deeper significance. One begins to realise that through this exhibition, Majara has crafted himself into a new form of urban artwork.

His positioning of himself as an 'authentic' object – an artist, an African, a mask – translates into an objectification of his immediate, social world too. At the *braaivleis*, he recounts part of his story about how he procured the masks. Resounding through the garden comes '[l]aughter, loud enough to turn heads. Simeon had told this story before and was getting better at it. It helped that everyone was tipsy. You could always count on the Sociable White' (128). He satirises his own self and turns himself into the central protagonist, simultaneously. His lens also categorises his friends according to his abstracted taxonomy, so that other artists and friends become nothing more than 'Sociable Whites'. Whilst a seemingly harmless pun on a brand of cheap white wine and sign of familiarity amongst his white friends, this phrase transforms them all into stereotypical South African figurines. This also conjures up images of the white, garden party liberalism typical of the city under apartheid. These objects become contextualized within this scene, as part of it, determined and determining the colonial space. As a result, Majara comes to emulate the colonial player surrounded by his cohorts within the

colonial garden.

By objectifying his friends, Majara reduces them to bit parts in his little theatre. At the same time, by affiliating with them and having them as friends, he shows how he has appropriated a typical, historically produced Eurocentric position in the contemporary urban scene. Grouping his friends together in this way, as a collective of similar elements, also invokes how he sees his mask series. He admits to Amy in conversation that he had ‘become used to thinking of [the masks] as a single element, as raw material, and it suited him’ (146). This resonates with how he has come to see his social world, his friends, and himself: raw materials regulated and constructed according to an abstracted order.

In treating his world and himself like this, Majara tries to assure his longevity and his control. As long as he is able to manipulate his own image, his art and his world in these ways, he has power within the city. However, as the ending of the story indicates, Majara also imposes a deep isolation on himself through this. Unsettled by Amy’s chiding about his work, he returns to the comforting smells and space of creation in his studio. Majara’s response to feeling destabilised is to immerse himself back into the inanimate object:

He sat in the neon glare while the work folded from his brain, one piece after another, sequences and series, objects and their names, stamped with Roman numerals like the descendants of a single forbear.

(155)

In this final act he shows how in trying to ward off the threat of the uncertainty he further dislocates himself from being an active and engaged subject in his world, becoming like the masks a man marked by the stamp of a system of order from which he cannot or will not extricate himself.

‘Crocodile Lodge’

Gordon Duffy’s tactical response to his urban situation reiterates those of the other protagonists. As his relationship with the (sub) urban space is revealed as unstable –

embodied in the disparity of Crocodile Lodge and its incarnation of a spatial politics of exclusivity and exclusion – Duffy begins to feel displaced in Johannesburg. His work centres on objective representations – specifically the construction of large, highly visible roadside advertisements. In this story, his work on Crocodile Lodge’s billboard brings him into a situation where he realises that the world he is helping create is artificial and ill-fitting for the post-apartheid city. Duffy’s worries are compounded by his travel back through the city, and he starts to feel a growing mistrust of the structures and patterns to which he is accustomed. As with the other three characters in this novel, his response to this feeling perpetuates his loss of bearings and his mistrust of his own place in the city.

Duffy’s abstracted gaze is less fixed than the others, perhaps because he has an unrequited relationship with engineering and has had to respond creatively to this by seeking out alternative jobs in Johannesburg. He seems less in control of himself and less *emplaced* to begin with than the other protagonists because of this lack of qualification. But, like all three previous central characters, he becomes increasingly uncomfortable by his feelings of redundancy in the city. In his reaction to the loss of his phone one can trace how Duffy tries to fend off these feelings of discomfort in the urban. In his increasing concern over this object, Duffy shows a tendency to invest meaning into something inanimate and controllable as a way to fend off his worries. This only dislodges him further.

His phone is not just a personal item. It is his mode of communication and, given the nature of his work, it is also his mobile office. It grants him the ability to move freely from one site to the next and embodies his efficiency by keeping him active within the teeming metropolis around him. The loss of his phone signals the potential loss of his ability to operate the urban and to be autonomous. Losing it incurs fear of his increasing passivity. It is also worth noting that the loss of his phone coincides with a loss of confidence that accompanies his interaction with the group of student architects on the site. Duffy’s decision to go back to the site to look for it gives him a sense of control. If he can find his phone, he can possibly retrieve some of his self-assurance. As the story progresses and one learns of areas where Duffy feels weak or redundant, the phone grows

in importance. As he becomes more frustrated, he invests his phone with more attention. Despite his strong desire to return to a space of safety and comfort – Duffy’s eagerness to go home is stressed at several points in the story – and even though he knows that going back is dangerous owing to car hijackers who operate in the city’s peripheries at night, he decides to return to Crocodile Lodge’s building site to retrieve it.

One of his first concerns is for his wife: should she be trying to reach him, she would be worried if he didn’t answer. If he goes back to the site, he will be late for supper. Duffy’s anxiety about his domestic situation accentuates his anxiety about becoming outmoded in the contemporary scene when we are told that his wife has become a boxer. While driving, Duffy recalls a visit to the gym when he is taken aback at his wife’s strength and coordination as she performs:

She had the head-bob, the hooks and jabs, the nifty footwork, all put together with a ferocity that surprised him. My wife, the middleweight. He watched with grudging and guilty amazement as she threw everything she had at the bag, while the trainer kept it steady or let it sway, and then he sneaked out to wait in the bakkie. Didn’t say a word when she came out flushed and sweaty, just looked out of the corner of his eye at her fist, clasp the handbag strap, and drove.

(167)

His wife’s ability is threatening for him because he was a far less agile boxer in his youth, as his Wilkie Peterse dreams attest. Also, as a character, she is strong and in their relationship Duffy seems to defer to her. It is because of her warnings that he is initially reluctant to go back to the construction site: ‘she did not like him messing around...especially after Manny Pinheiro got himself shot in a hijacking at Kya Sands’ (181). Going back to retrieve his phone can be seen as an attempt to regain some of his autonomy from a spousal relationship that triggers the same feelings of inadequacy that are present both in his work and in his relationship to contemporary Johannesburg. His willingness to act impulsively seems because, as an ordinary and usually reliable object, his phone becomes a symbolic device through which he resists succumbing to the uncertain energies around him. The task of finding it becomes an idea that grounds him, and this has become more important than complying with his wife’s wishes.

His fears, after all are escalating, illustrated when he toys with the idea of driving blindly on the highway:

He had read somewhere that if you sneeze at 120 km's an hour, and the average sneeze lasts seven seconds, counting the bleary-eyed build up and the snotty aftermath, effectively you're driving blind for more than two hundred metres. Could it be true? He readjusted the side mirror with the toggle on the door panel, starting converting kilometers per hour into metres per second in his head, let it go, tried to remember precisely what had become of his phone.

(169)

As a metaphor, the act of driving blindly reflects Budlender's fear of becoming unhinged from his place in the increasingly unfamiliar city. The horror of losing his phone reflects his horror of losing control and 'crashing'. The phone represents Duffy's connection to a personal life that he recognises: it holds a record of his place within Johannesburg. Without it, he is without the habitual litany of connections with help familiarise him to his world, and vice versa. Without it, he would be lost, and not just lost, robbed of a way to make contact.

In entertaining where he thinks it might have landed up, he reveals his Eurocentric point of view:

A superstitious tremor shook him. He imagined the cellphone lying somewhere in the grass at Crocodile Lodge, in a place full of red ants and dry roots, and his own voice calling from it like a small creature. Or even worse, his telephone voice, disembodied and businesslike, speaking out of some thief's pocket. This thought was suffocatingly worse, choked with lint and dottle. The smell of his own aftershave and sweat rising from the plastic handset in the hot pocket of an overall. It's an intimate object, this channel for voices – he'd never seen it that way before – pressed close to your body and your thoughts, breathed into, spoken to. A catalogue of your own connections too, the pre-programmed numbers to your wife, mother, son, daughter, doctor, armed response company.

(180)

While the loss of his phone in the grass leaves him with the feeling that his reality is fragmenting, the theft of the phone by a black South African – signified in the use of the

word, 'shack' – seems to terrify him more. Duffy's imagining of a black thief reveals an insidious ideopathology that plagues the white South African in the city, a historical fear of the black 'other' that Lindsay Bremner suggests has been reinvigorated by the post-apartheid's reconstitution of the urban system, and its unsettling of urban boundaries. She writes:

Urban spaces have been rendered permeable, open to infiltration, intervention and contamination. All that apartheid so vigilantly preserved and kept at bay – wildness, brutality, laziness, madness – has entered the city. It has become, in the Bakhtinian (1984) sense, grotesque, an unbounded, uncontained, openended body. A site of violent intimacies. Where do 'we' begin and 'they' end? A deep seated anxiety prevails.

(2004: 460)

Like his narrative counterparts (and Villa Toscana's architects) Duffy is unsettled by the increasingly open-ended, 'nativised' city. As he loses his sense of boundaries, he clasps onto an apprehension of the black man that is typically 'colonial'. In constructing the thief as a racialised 'Other', he exposes his reliance on the city of the past and on an urban spatiality that he feels would have preserved him from these fears and from the incursion of the unknown *indigene*. Retrieving his phone therefore becomes an exercise in fending off this incursion and the changes associated by the contemporary Johannesburg.

This transference of a greater fear onto the lost phone explains why Duffy is prepared to fight the hijackers at the end of the story. When he gets back to the site, his approach to his search reveals how he sees the retrieval of his phone as an opportunity to keep the 'unknown' at bay. He recites as he looks: 'Search beneath the billboard' he says to himself, 'A grid-search of sorts. Use the pillars of the hoarding and these thick shadows to mark out territory' (195). Conceiving of his search area using a mappable plan on a visible surface allows him to reassert a sense of control over this territory and his situation. When the thieves appear, they become the 'unknown'. To the thieves, he is just a man refusing to run away and they beat him. To Duffy, this is his chance to take back what he feels he has lost: certainty, power and relevance. The last line of the novel

communicates this. Duffy is described as feeling ‘with every blow [...] more like himself’ (201).

While he is being beaten and possibly killed, he feels he is acting. By taking a stand against these men, and protecting his car, his phone, and his territory, Duffy believes he is in control. However, the men become configured through this desire to assert and affirm himself and thus even in these final moments, he cannot stop objectifying them and the ‘native’ space in an attempt to take back what he feels has become lost territory. The irony in his final stand is that this never was his territory and so, even as he tries to fight, he becomes, like the spanner in his assailant’s hands, ‘an incidental object [...] simply there [...] dangling’ (199) in the city.

Conclusion

In these three novels the protagonists show how they develop tactics to ward off threats to their insecure place within the city. These tactics vary in form but each of them has a temporal logic which keeps the protagonists situated in the past and in historically restrictive positions. By occupying these positions, each set of central characters defers and disables his ability to make whatever changes are necessary to bring about a revision of his experience of lived space and of the past which haunts him. This pattern interlocks and accentuates the geopathic patterns of unhomeliness and immobility that come about in each man’s relationship to his domestic space and his public itineraries. The resultant self-perpetuating pattern of affect means that the city and subject reproduce each other’s disorders. In contextualising these geopathically disordered personae within the city and showing their links to the apartheid urban order, each novelist insinuates that space and spatiality defines the terms of self. At the root of each of these types lies a temporal and spatial disjuncture with change, something generated within apartheid spatial discourse but perpetuated by the anxieties of each character as they engage with the new urban order and their idea of who they are within and on account of the city. At the core of their actions, these characters are attempting to retain a sense of the familiar, trying to recognise themselves despite the shifts around them. In these attempts, they cast

themselves as ultimately strange and out of place, disordering the possibilities of assimilation within the post-apartheid scene.

CONCLUSION: WRITING THE ZONES

In this thesis I have argued that these three novels collectively present a vision of Johannesburg as a disturbed and palimpsestic human site – a confluence of historical and contemporary practices and energies which give rise to and distort the present spatiality. In their depictions of this lived post-apartheid urban zone, *The Exploded View*, *Triomf* and *Room 207* show a post-apartheid city struggling with the weight of its traumatic socio-spatial and structural past. As I have charted, Johannesburg has evolved through the explicit violences and the more insidious conditions of possibility that were effected upon it and its people between the years of 1948 and 1994 by the apartheid state. I reveal in my analyses and discussions that these conditions of possibility have their roots in the years before apartheid, from when Johannesburg began to emerge as an industrial giant and wealthy mining area, in the early 1900's.

As analogies for the 'real' city, these poetic versions collate the conflicted narratives and situations and show this post-apartheid urban hub to still be heavily loaded with apartheid spatiality and signification. Each novel, by using a distinct and detailed socio-spatial language, shows how social and spatial conditions of displacement and dislocation, loss and alienation are inherited and are played out from generation to generation within the city. The authors achieve this by creating narratives which draw out the analogous and causal relationships between character and setting, thereby mirroring natural, external dialectics between the subject and his or her environment. In each novel, the characters' ideas of how they can operate within intimate and public space show inherited psycho-social disturbances around habitation, access and passage reflecting key aspects of Johannesburg's society's fraught development in the twentieth century, extensively creating the disordered city in the pages of each novel. This relationship to the past is also portrayed to be within the harder shell of the contemporary city. The structures and economic systems, paved pathways and built environments of the post-apartheid metropolis are replete with unresolved stories which continue to burden those who are trying to establish a sense of place here, affecting in turn the character of the city.

The presence of history within these Johannesburg chronotopes is not always evoked directly or explicitly but is often sometimes ambiguously rendered, replicating how in reality, history is buried in memory or the imagination, or as Mbembe and Nuttall have reminded us, beneath the surface. Writing about the state of the country in 2005, Ivan Vladislavić evokes a brilliant analogy for this. He describes South Africa as a country, which ‘drags its history around behind it in brackets’ (2005:88). Indeed, each novel depicts how the imprint of history on the contemporary space is like a parenthesis – extra information which continues to inform and burden the present day city and its people but which also holds within it the key to understanding. By presenting these imprints as embodied within the city and distinct types who live in it, the novels confront the reader’s sense of resolution in the post-apartheid urban moment.

I have argued in my introduction that these novels are necessary to how we understand the city especially since South Africa’s public, inundated with overbearing nationalist liberation narratives and perhaps a general weariness of apartheid’s legacy, has shown a tendency to repress or ignore the past in favour of a focus on the future. In recent years especially, this blurring of the impact of apartheid on present-day society has shown itself to be a flawed and dangerous strategy as the effects of the old system have come closer to the surface – manifesting in violence, poverty and new forms of exile. As Bheki Peterson has suggested, nothing is more regressive and inhibiting than repressing a potent part of our national consciousness and psyche (2010).

A call to recognise this has been made, as I have shown, by scholars and writers who understand that repressed trauma and violence manifest in pervasive ways within society and only becomes more insidious owing to its disguise. Events after the formal dismantling of the apartheid state, like the staging of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), raised critical issues around truth and healing and the possibilities of social rehabilitation through testimony. While the TRC has been the subject of much critique, in its wake came writings about how literature can aid this process. In a fashion typically postcolonial, local critics like Meg Samuelson (2007), Carli Coetzee and Sarah Nuttall (1998), Bheki Peterson (2010), Leon de Kock (2005) and Jeremy Cronin (1997)

argue that creative fiction can bring about a ‘working through’ of the past by evoking history within narrative. As postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha argues, texts have a key role in reformulating the wounded nation and can ‘repeat and revise the unspoken in order to make the act of narration an ethical act’ (Bhabha, 1992: 147).

In a sense what I have argued for with regards to these three fictions is a similar thing. But, I am not so much concerned with how these novels portray the ‘truth’ or engage the reader or text itself in an ethical act of witnessing as part of national therapy. Rather, where I see these novels as making an impact on this territory is in their ability to portray and focalise contradiction and tensions within the lived space of the city. A statement made by Meg Samuelson speaks directly to my argument. Along with its reflexivity, she sees the power of creative fiction to be its ‘potential to dramatise, rather than conceal, contradictions’ (Samuelson, 2007: 241). Indeed, I see the dramatisation of contradiction to be central to these three novels, emerging not only in the way that Johannesburg is portrayed as simultaneously encouraging and discouraging for its urbanites, nor simply in the way that the characters are compelled to remain within it even while they are repelled by it, but also in the fractious and often ironic way that space and subject are portrayed as creating each other. Where moments of transcendence or a character’s ruin seem to be inevitable, for instance, an opposing force generated by either subject or city (or both) complicates this and changes the cadence of the narrative, plot or description. This draws the reader’s understanding of the city further into uncharted territory. Furthermore, as I have tried to show, where the city and the subject seem to be at odds with one another, moments later, they can be seen to be mirroring each other’s character. This is in a sense what Michael Toolan speaks of when he describes the potential of setting to ‘take on the role of companion and herald, then catalyst, and [...] essence’ (Toolan, 1988:111).

My argument has also centred on the intricate boundedness between subject and setting and how this dynamic shows the characters to be entrenched in dangerous and debilitating cycles. I argue that these novels’ portrayals of post-apartheid Johannesburg contradict a pervading tendency within contemporary African urban studies to paint postcolonial (or in our case, post-apartheid) cities as enabling sites of potential, owing to

their multiplicity and heterogeneity. This idea is intricately and productively linked to contemporary theories around the subject and space in Africa, founded on notions of hybridity and the power of the social to remake environments. However, when read together an ensemble, these novels reveal that the very components of lived space, the built environment and people, when entangled in a history such as Johannesburg's, perform a denial of the mobile potential and heterogeneous energies of the urban too.

These novels portray a dystopian vision, perhaps, since they do not attempt to conceal the deep wounds that exist within the city. However, they provide a startlingly important vision too, 'a critical dystopia' (Robinson, 2009) if you will. Moele, Van Niekerk and Vladislavić do not simply reduce the city to a distraught and hollow shell. Rather, they position it on a seam somewhere between the imagined future and the spectre of the past, encouraging the reader to become more familiar with its disrupted character and in turn allocating a position for the reader to consider the city without ignoring the city's uncomfortable patterns. What these novels insist on from the reader is for her to inhabit the unhomey position in relation to Johannesburg, to step into a uncomfortable and possibly traumatic reading zone and to come to terms with the full impact of Johannesburg's history, and possibly even her own place and role within it.

One must of course be careful not to romanticise this process, and as Andrew Van Der Vlies argues (2008) one cannot simply imagine that by reading narratives which bring to light aspects of our history we can simply heal the nation. I am not suggesting that these texts eulogise the past and therefore free us from it. Rather, I am suggesting that they create new positions for readers and conflicting, painful and even confusing views of this city. In doing so, they encourage a shifting of perspective, an attentiveness to complicated detail and therefore the beginnings of a new process of (urban) imagination.

Lastly, the way in which these three novels work together and create an overlapping but jarring *mélange* of different spaces, narratives and textual experiences is part of what makes this reimagining of the reader's position possible. The common threads that one can trace in these portrayals of suffering, loss and confusion assist this as well as the

manner in which they expose the reader's assumptions about how space and textuality work. When read together, the sites of Triomf, the inner city and the suburban peripheries of Johannesburg become unbound and flow into one another. So too is the separateness of each novel bridged by its conversations with the others and in its reiterations of each other's stories and spatialities. The result is a new and complex interrelated zone which blows open the limitations of post-apartheid city literary expression and our understandings of the urban scheme in contemporary Africa, creating a resounding shout, as Treppie says, that:

'THIS IS NOT WALLPAPER'

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