

***Bildung* Beyond the Borders:**

Racial ambiguity and subjectivity in three post-apartheid *Bildungsromane*

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A minor dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
award of the degree of Master of Arts in English Language & Literature
Faculty of the Humanities
University of Cape Town
2018

COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the subject formation of racially ambiguous protagonists in K Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents*, (2001), Yewande Omotoso's *Bom Boy* (2011) and Zoe Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* (2006), three *Bildungsromane* set in post-apartheid Cape Town—the mother city—whose violent, racist histories of colonial encounters, slavery and apartheid have led to a strong social sense of racial group belonging and racial exclusion. It is between and among these strictly policed racial groups that these novels' protagonists seek belonging and a place in society from which to act and speak.

Although different aspects of racial ambiguity are foregrounded in these novels—namely phenotypical, cultural and political—these protagonists are all socially marginalised and they must form their identities and subjectivities at the intersections of social trauma and personal trauma brought about and catalyzed by the racist history and current socio-cultural formations in South Africa. Across the two socioscaples of society and family, this trauma is manifest as a gap in language—there is no affirming or cogent racial subject position for these figures from which to speak—and at the level of the body, where circulations of feeling produce the racially ambiguous body as abject or non-existent. As a sub-genre, the post-colonial *Bildungsroman* has been widely appraised as reconfiguring the thematic, structural and narrative traditions of its classical European counterpart, and my dissertation argues that these novels support this understanding. I also claim that they trace their racially ambiguous protagonists' subject formation not from an initial subject position of self-centered, willful childhood innocence and ignorance but from a state of non-subjectivity into existence itself—proposing that the trajectories of the novels trace an ontological rather than ideological shift.

Keywords: affect, trauma, postcolonial, Bildungsroman, subjectivity, language, race, mixed-race, Cape Town, borderline, post-apartheid, literature, identity

What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences.

These 'inbetween' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.

(Bhabha 1)

After all, when one gives an account of oneself one is not merely relaying information through an indifferent medium. The account is an act—situated within a larger practice of acts—that one performs for, to, even on an other, an allocutory deed, an acting for, and in the face of, the other, and sometimes by virtue of the language provided by the other. This account does not have as its goal the establishment of a definitive narrative but constitutes a linguistic and social occasion for self-transformation.

(Butler 130)

Acknowledgements

This study is a work of multiple origins, voices and methodologies—perhaps appropriate to its subject matter of subjectivity, racial ambiguity and multiplicity in post-apartheid *Bildungsromane*. Genre studies, critical race studies, psychoanalysis, affect studies and critical theory entangle into this uneven and hybrid third space, a work raised by a small village.

I would like to thank my adviser, Christopher Ouma, for his keen eye, good humour, encouragement, and infinite patience. Thanks also to my co-adviser Khwezi Mkhize, whose thoughtful insights and suggestions added great richness to this project, and to Meg Samuelson, who helped me get started. I am also hugely grateful to Sandy Young, who was extremely gracious in her time and logistical support. For all the flaws in this work I am responsible, and any merit within derives much from all those who saw me through.

Thanks to my parents for never doubting that I'd finish, even though it took many nights and many more days. To my siblings—I am so proud to be part of your family. Thank you for giving me my life's greatest education. To Rowan, thanks for the deadpan jokes, the best company, the unwavering intellectual support and all those Thai noodles throughout this process. And to Sam, who met me early in this journey and has been gently nudging me on, with love.

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INTRODUCTION: Setting the Scene—
Cape Town and a History of Racial Borderlines

Mixed-race South Africa: an early history

In the eyes of the law, mixed-race South Africans have only existed since 1985¹, when South Africa's apartheid laws against miscegenation and interracial marriage were annulled. With 'coloured'² being the 'in-between' racial category centrally comprising the creolized populations of the country concentrated in the Western Cape, the study of mixed-race identity in South Africa has focused almost exclusively on coloured identity and culture. Parallel to this, attention to identity of first-generation mixed-race South Africans has shifted throughout history, from a focus on the iniquity of miscegenation, to considering interracial relationships as a sign of national racial healing, to a more complex approach today. Regardless of the approach, South African mixed-race studies tends to trace the origins of interracial mixing to Krotoa-Eva, like in Zoë Wicomb's acclaimed 2000 novel, *David's Story*:

David's story started at the Cape with Eva/Krotoa, the first Khoi woman in the Dutch castle, the only section I have left out. He eventually agreed to that but was adamant about including a piece on Saartje Baartman, the Hottentot Venus placed on display in Europe. One cannot write nowadays, he said, without a little monograph on Baartman; it

¹The Immorality Act banning sex between whites and blacks was first enacted in 1927 and updated numerous times to include stricter provisions, including the banning of sex between whites and any non-whites. The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 banned interracial marriage.

² Ideological opinion about the term 'coloured' is fractured: on one hand, some claim it is a perpetuation and affirmation of apartheid racial terminology and thus segregation, and should be scrapped, and on the other, that it should be retained but reimagined alongside a sober accounting of its uncomfortable history that includes being the subject of slavery, rape and subjugation. Its orthography has gone through trends too—coloured, Coloured, 'coloured' and so-called coloured all have their proponents.

would be like excluding history itself.³

The narrator-amanuensis of this work shows a simultaneous erasure and inclusion of Krotoa-Eva, who has become an ambivalent ‘mother of the [rainbow] nation’ figure. A Khoi woman employed by Jan Van Riebeeck who became a translator between Dutch settler and local Khoi communities, Krotoa-Eva was the first native South African woman to officially marry a European, and whose (Dutch) name, Eva, “fills the journals of the Dutch East India Company almost from the very start of their little feeding-station at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652.”⁴ Her children were thus the first mixed-race South Africans produced in a ‘legitimized’ marriage. Krotoa led a troubled life largely estranged from her Khoi people and was imprisoned by the Dutch on Robben island for her struggles with alcoholism⁵. And her children? They all but disappeared from history, quietly absorbed into the white community, enjoying nothing of the lasting though fickle fame of their mother⁶. The historical erasure of these mixed-race individuals, and obliquely reflected in Wicomb’s text, offers an apt beginning for considering a history of the erasure of mixed-race South Africans and their multiplicitous heritages—cultural, racial/phenotypical, and political. This erasure has happened in two main ways: from dominant race groups in a highly racialized society that imposed upon them myths of shame, impurity and tragedy, alienating them to the

³ (Wicomb, David's story 1)

⁴ (Wells 417)

⁵ (Distiller and Samuelson)

⁶ An interesting exception to this is Dalene Mathee’s work *Pieterella, daughter of Eva*, a work of historical fiction originally written in Afrikaans, that follows Petronella van Meerhof and her brother Salomon, children of Krotoa, to the penal colony of Mauritius, where they were sent to live with foster parents who treated them as ‘slaves.’ The work also examines Petronella’s conflicted racial identity.

fringes of society; or from their absorption into a single racial grouping.⁷ In this work I consider the subject formation of racially ambiguous literary characters in post-apartheid fiction, and I would like to begin by acknowledging the overlap and slippages between racial ambiguity and mixed-race identity. The rigid racial classifications of the apartheid regime attempted to fix a single, specific race to an individual, and forbade interracial sex and relationships. Racial ambiguity or racial multiplicity was not tolerated, and through the subjective decisions of government officials or individual reporting and appeals, one's race—singular—was assigned on record, importantly, through the 1950 Population Registration Act. The ban on interracial relationships also had the effect of genetically reinforcing phenotypical traits within a racial category, and thus racial ambiguity came to overlap with a mixed-race identity. Mixed-race identity also bespeaks human movement as experienced throughout modernity from European voyages of discovery in the 17th century through transatlantic slavery until our present moment of diasporas formed as a result of economic and educational migration as well as asylum-seeking.

Race is, as we know by now, a biological fiction but social reality⁸, a taxonomy whose categories are ascribed to individuals, or that individuals freely identify with, on the basis of phenotype, culture, ancestry, politics, accent, and other factors. This study will analyse all of these features for racial identification

⁷ The social situation and political-cultural history of coloured people—a racial grouping with mixed-race ancestry—will be addressed more thoroughly later in this introduction.

⁸ The shrewd philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah, who is 'against races' but acknowledges the importance of 'racial identity' writes that, "while there is a place for racial identities in a world shaped by racism, I shall argue, if we are to move beyond racism we shall have, in the end, to move beyond current racial identities." (Appiah in Appiah and Guttman 32)

and ascription, and will not use scare quotes around race and racial terminology in acknowledgment that these terms have real social meaning and us, despite their lack of biological grounds.

Since the end of apartheid there has been a small number of sociological studies on the mixed-race individual and interracial relationships, investigating the self-categorization and sense of social integration and acceptance of these individuals⁹. While there is ample work on the anxiety and promise of interracial relationships in the South African cultural imagination, there has been, however, little theoretical work exploring first-generation mixed-race South African identities in cultural studies, critical race studies, or literature. Perhaps the closest thing is Diana Mafe's 2013 *Mixed Race Stereotypes in South African and American Literature*. For her project, however, Mafe largely collapses the distance between coloured identity and mixed-race identity in South Africa¹⁰. In this current study I hope to pry open that distance, training my eye on the subject formation of figures in recent South African literature who are first generation mixed-race¹¹ subjects or whose racial identity is multiple or ambiguous, with my primary analysis focusing on three post-apartheid *Bildungsromane* set in Cape Town. This study puts into conversation recent voices in coloured and diaspora identity studies with psychoanalysis against the contemporary and historical

⁹ (Carvalho-Malekane) (Cole) (Jaynes)

¹⁰ Save Mafe's discussion of Botswanan mixed-race author Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*. In Zambia and Botswana, however, the term coloured is used for first-generation mixed-race individuals. See, for example, Juliette Bridgette Milner-Thornton's "Rider of Two Horses": Euraficans in Zambia' in *Global Mixed Race*.

¹¹ For the rest of this work, I will use 'mixed race' to denote 'first generation mixed race' and 'coloured' to denote the South African creolized population.

settings of Cape Town to consider and re-consider approaches of subject formation and their intersection with race in a highly racialized—that is, racist—society. What allows me to do this work is a shift in studies on coloured identity that conceives of colouredness as a creolized racial and cultural formation rather than a mixed-race identity, which I define here as the identity of a person whose parents can be understood as having different, distinct racial identities, a state I also call *first generation mixed-race*. I focus on novels set in Cape Town as it is a space with an ongoing history of racialized and nationalised contestation over its control and the legitimacy of those in power¹². The site of South Africa's first colonial contact in the country, Cape Town also hosts the country's largest community of creolized South Africans—coloured people, whose history is one of mixed racial origins and provides the historical backdrop for a contemporary consideration of mixed-race South Africans.

In Chapter One I consider Azure, the homeless twelve-year old protagonist of Kableo Sello Duiker's 2001 novel *Thirteen Cents*. Azure is black and had blue eyes, and his unusual phenotype complicates how others relate to him. In Chapter Two, I consider the subject formation of Leke, protagonist of Yewande Omotoso's 2011 *Bom Boy*. Son of a coloured mother and black-white mixed-race father, Leke too is phenotypically ambiguous. Adopted by a wealthy white couple, Leke's coming of age is a reckoning with his lost Yoruba origins. Finally, Chapter Three considers Zoe Wicomb's 2006 *Playing in the Light* whose protagonist Marion

¹² Control—ideological, political and material—has been contested and has changed hands between autochthonous peoples and colonizers; between the Dutch and the English from 1652-1814; between coloured and black people under apartheid and in current times, between those who claim indigeneity and those who don't, and more.

Campbell, a white Afrikaans woman, discovers that both her parents were not white but coloured. Marion's is a political-cultural journey of learning how to inhabit dual racial subject positions.

History, narrative and trauma: 'the Mother City'

From white settler discourse, Cape Town gained the moniker, 'the mother city,' a translation of the Latin 'metropolis.' Thousands of white European men made the four-month long journey by ship to the Cape of Good Hope, where they found sexual release and relationships with slaves and native women, in a socio-economic climate where women were not empowered to give or refuse consent¹³. As such, many native mothers—Khoi and slave women of colour—in this 'mother city' bore children either as property for their white masters, or from white men who would not acknowledge paternity. The economic and psychological implications both for mother and child were grave. Since the condition of enslavement is passed down through the mother, we might ask what kind of mother is the mother city to those bearing political, cultural or phenotypical heritage from both oppressor and oppressed? What kind of language, what discursive worlds does this socio-geographic 'native mother' bequeath to her children who 'belong' in different ways to different peoples? Lacan scholar Bruce Fink discusses how our literal 'mother tongue'—that is, the language of our mothers—sets the primary conditions for our subjectivity:

we are born into a world of discourse, a discourse or language that precedes our birth and that will live on after our death. Long before a child is born, a place is prepared for it in its parents' linguistic universe: the parents speak of the child yet to be born, try to select the perfect name

¹³ (Distiller and Samuelson 9)

for it, prepare a room for it ... *The words they use to talk about the child have often been in use for decades, if not centuries, and the parents have generally neither defined nor redefined them despite many years of use.*

Those words are handed down to them by centuries of tradition: they constitute the Other of language, as Lacan can call it in French (l'Autre du langage), but which we may try to render as the linguistic Other, or the Other as language.¹⁴

The mother thus metonymizes Cape Town as the linguistic Other, and both mothers are involved in setting out the discursive grounds and limitations for a child's subjectivity. Sindiwe Magona's 1990 memoir *To My Children's Children*, exemplifies this Lacanian sense of identity and belonging in language and culture and provides a particularly powerful foil for the other novels I consider in this project. Magona, a young Xhosa girl, moves to Cape Town's townships after an early childhood in rural Eastern Cape. Immediately evident is Magona's uncomplicated sense of belonging with her village community, which she describes in discursive terms, "total immersion into a group where my own place in it was clearly *defined*."¹⁵ Magona insists that her childhood was warm, loving and supportive despite the raging race wars of the wider society that intended to tear apart the cultural fabric of the black family—things she learned later in life. What the representation of her childhood offers is that a coherent intergenerational narrative of 'Who We Are'—relayed in her case by female elders from the level of the nuclear family and extending beyond—is the backbone of her powerful sense of self that exists within but ultimately exceeds the limitations of the violent conditions of Cape Town's society. The text's preface frames the memoirs as such:

When I am old, wrinkled and grey, what shall I tell you, my great-

¹⁴ (Fink 5) (my emphasis)

¹⁵ (Magona, *To my children's children* 7) (my emphasis)

granddaughter? ... How will you know who you are if I do not or cannot tell you the story of your past? (Magona, *To my children's children* ix)

Scholar Meg Samuelson discusses Magona's maternal narrativity in the context of colonial and apartheid South Africa, where fathers were too often forced to be absent from the day-to-day lives of their families. Samuelson argues that in *Mother to Mother*, the

maternal voice maintains the family, the community, and, by extension, *the people's sense of self*. Attempting to fulfil this function by reclaiming and speaking in this voice, Magona frames her story within the oral tradition, the folktales and rhymes “handed down, by word of mouth, from generation to generation.”¹⁶

Much of what enables Magona's narrative is the strong sense of cultural continuity, premised on a shared identity, which in South Africa has been and continues to be inextricable from a racial identity. The primary texts I consider in this project explore what happens when family narratives—and especially the maternal voice—are ruptured between one generation and the next. In ‘Postcolonialism and the Diasporic Imaginary’ Ato Quayson remarks that texts representing a diasporic experience tend to include as a salient feature what he calls genealogical *accounting*¹⁷, or what I have glossed above as family narrative, and later as ‘intergenerational narrative’. In an essay on trauma in South African literature, Magona simply calls this ‘memory’, that is, “not just individual memory but collective memory—the memory of the race.”¹⁸

¹⁶ (Magona, *To my children's children* 6, 8) (Samuelson 229) (my emphasis)

¹⁷ (Quayson 148)

¹⁸ (Magona, *In the blood* 104)

Mixed-race South Africa: intersectionality

In 2016, South African comedian Trevor Noah, a mixed-race man born under apartheid, published his memoirs *Born a Crime*. Noah tells of growing up in Johannesburg townships with his black mother, his limited and difficult access to his white father, but prominently celebrates his racial and cultural multiplicity, specifically through a multilingualism that afforded him entry into black social groups despite their initial mistrust of his light skin colour. Between the passing of the 1927 Immorality Act banning interracial sex and the end of apartheid, few first-generation mixed-race individuals like Trevor Noah were born in South Africa, and those who became absorbed into another racial grouping—Noah ‘became’ black¹⁹—or led lives on society’s margins²⁰. From these marginal and borderline spaces, this latter group did not possess the social or cultural capital to tell their stories or use their agency to create a visible identity. Noah’s massive cultural, economic and social capital,²¹ generated only after the end of apartheid, however, underwrote the writing, reception and vastness of the audience of his memoirs. The story of the late Happy Sindane, an impoverished mixed-race South African man, is less felicitous. In 2003, the ‘racially ambiguous’ sixteen-year-old Sindane, teased and bullied in black communities throughout his childhood for his light skin colour, claimed that he had been abducted from a white family and forced to live as a slave for a black family in the Tweefontein township. His ‘try-

¹⁹ Noah lived in areas designated for black people, socialised with black people, went to schools designated for black people, and attempted to pass for black in order to remain within these black communities. (Noah)

²⁰ See Zakes Mda’s *Madonna of Excelsior* (2002), Bessie Head’s *A Question of Power* (1973), Sarah Gertrude Millin’s *God’s Step-children* (1924), all novels dealing with the marginalization of mixed-race individuals in South Africa under colonial or apartheid rule.

²¹In August 2017, ‘The Daily Show’, a satirical news television show presented by Noah, counted 1.6 million viewers, not including those watching through non-traditional media like the internet. (Pedersen)

for-white' story captivated the nation, but he was largely forgotten once it emerged that he was not 'fully white' but the mixed-race child of a German father and his housekeeper, a woman who had later abandoned Sindane for another family to raise.²² Unlike Noah, Sindane did not receive a satisfactory account of his origins from the woman who raised him, and he grew up bitter and unsure. In addition, he was poor and poorly educated, barring him from achieving the commercial success of Noah by capitalizing on his racial mobility. When reading Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* about a homeless child alongside Omotoso's and Wicomb's works about middle-class characters, we are confronted with intersectional concerns of subject-formation in stark terms—something impossible to ignore when considering the experiences of mixed-race individuals, whose isolation from the collective benefits and solidarity that may accompany belonging to an ethnic group—cultural, psychological and material—may render them more abject and vulnerable than an individual able to participate in such groupings with ease.

Mixed-race South Africa: coloured roots/routes

In the eyes of many South Africans, Trevor Noah might be classified as coloured—though as a child he was bullied and excluded by coloureds, who found his cultural and linguistic differences from them unnerving, while his phenotype suggested he was one of them. This point brings us to a crux: how histories of coloured identity in South Africa are indelibly linked to the (in)visibility of mixed-race and racially ambiguous South Africans. The Population Registration Act of 1950, instituted two years after apartheid's official onset, lumped together as

²² (Hope)

‘coloured’ (“a person who is not a white person or a native”) all South Africans whose heritage traced back to native peoples of the Western Cape—Khoikhoi, Griqua, San; as well as South East Asian slaves; the progeny of white and black relations; and any other non-white, non-black, non-Indian people.²³ The apartheid government and the colonial regimes before it positioned coloured identity as a political buffer or border identity between white and black races, with coloureds being offered more privileges and freedoms than blacks but fewer than whites. Elements of culture—Christianity, especially—held out the promise of becoming politically equal with whites through performances of Christian respectability, ‘white’ culture, and taste.^{24, 25} To compensate for a feeling of shame and inferiority inculcated by apartheid and colonial law and practice, coloureds frequently expressed a sense of superiority over blacks, perpetuating racial prejudice and racist system that succeeded in its attempt to ‘divide and conquer’ the oppressed. This lack of solidarity with blacks entailed a troubling and troubled complicity

²³ The exceptions to this framework, for example, the classification ‘honorary white’ offered to East Asians and occasionally African-Americans, only underscored the arbitrariness of ‘race’ per se and exposed the socio-economic motives of official racial classification.

²⁴ An excerpt from Robert Ross’ *Status and Respectability in the Cape Colony, 1750–1870 : A Tragedy of Manners*, concerning Ordinance 50 of 1828, which emancipated Khoikoi slaves and indentured servants, which was linked to a social approach of the civilizing power of Protestant Christianity: “Throughout the Colony, and indeed beyond its borders, this combination of Christianity and respectability was attractive to a considerable number of the free people of colour and, after 1838, of the ex-slaves. It enabled them to make statements and claims within the same arena as those of their white fellow-colonists who were arguing about ethnic affiliation, individual status and the sacredness of the landscape through and within their churches, or by emphasising the respectability of their lifestyles. The struggle to maintain what was now seen as a Christian lifestyle would be rewarded in this world with material and political advance...” (Ross 119)

²⁵ Post-apartheid coloured incorporation of European-influenced ‘white’ culture as refined and desirable is particularly evident in the fictional and critical works of author Zoë Wicomb, as well as throughout the corpus of coloured studies from the likes of Zimitri Erasmus and Mohamed Adihkari.

with the oppressive apartheid order.²⁶ Compounding this antagonism, South Africa's transition to a black administration has not seemed to ease the erasure and marginalisation of coloureds from dominant discourses—importantly, current national policies aim to economically empower blacks while they overlook coloureds.²⁷ In April 2018, the *Gatvol Capetonian* (GC) movement roused disaffected coloureds living in the Cape flats. Grounded in the belief that there is an “economic war” on coloureds, the movement cites unemployment statistics and a plethora of personal anecdotes to support this. GC's most infamous proposal is that anyone not born in the Western Cape pre-1994 should leave. This rhetoric focuses on marginalizing black people who have relocated from the Eastern Cape to the Western Cape in search of better education and work. It's worth keeping in mind that *Gatvol Capetonian* is a new movement and, while it has garnered much interest, it does not receive unilateral support. Despite this, the movement's anti-black racism is worryingly familiar, both from South African history and in current global waves of ethno-national populism.²⁸ *Gatvol Capetonian* is still only one movement in a wider context in which political stands are taken on behalf of coloureds as a group *per se*; the 1990s saw others which were also grounded in claims of indigeneity and similarly tended to elide the multiplicity of ethnic

²⁶ (Erasmus 24)

²⁷ (Adhikari, Narratives of Miscegenation)

²⁸ (Jacobs and Levenson)

origins²⁹ within coloured people.³⁰ The legacy of miscegenation has been a central though largely silenced feature of South African coloured identity, and has resulted in a number of cultural effects including aggressive social policing of women's (sexual) behaviour and dress.³¹ The work of Zoe Wicomb and others suggests that coloured families constructed their white ancestors as conferring respectability, not shame, though these early sexual encounters were by and large, rape of native and slave women.³² Both Adhikari and Erasmus document that the term '*boesman*'³³ is and was a slur³⁴ used both towards and within coloured communities, connoting primitivism and a lack of respectability—even while contemporary movements like *Gatvol Capetonian* and others deploy Khoi ancestry as a legitimising force to stake claims for South Africanness, land and power.

On the national level, it's not just political action that overlooks coloureds—even otherwise enlightened South African scholarship can unwittingly erase the legitimacy of coloured and mixed-race cultures in all their entangled and chaotic histories. For example, Mbulelo Mzamame writes in 2005, “a culture's resilience

²⁹ A 2010 study of the genetic makeup of coloured people found “massive maternal contribution of Khoisan peoples (more than 60%) and the almost negligible maternal contribution of Europeans with respect to their paternal counterparts. The overall picture of gender-biased admixture depicted in this study indicates that the modern South African Coloured population results mainly from the early encounter of European and African males with autochthonous Khoisan females of the Cape of Good Hope around 350 years ago.” (Quintana-Murci, Harmant and Quach 611)

³⁰ (Jacobs and Levenson) I discuss this further in Chapter One of this dissertation.

³¹ (Erasmus 13)

³² The ironic reasoning undergirding this view buys wholesale into white superiority. From Wicomb's *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, the mother of the coloured Shenton family ironically justifies her family's own racism by gesturing towards “the Englishman whose memory must be kept sacred, must not be defiled by associating with those beneath us [blacks and uneducated, lower class coloureds]. We were respectable coloureds.” (Wicomb, *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* 153)

³³ The term was originally imposed by white settlers on the KhoiSan peoples of the Western Cape.

³⁴ (Erasmus 13) (Adhikari, *Popular Racial Stereotyping* 158-160)

comes from the sturdiness of its roots. ...once rooted, always rooted.”³⁵ Mzamame appears to disregard the resilience and legitimacy of creolized identities as well as a large body of scholarship discussing the links and disconnects between roots and routes³⁶—attempts to trace multidirectional and diasporic genealogies, historiographies and transnationalisms—as well as the Deleuze and Guattarian notion of the root-as-rhizome that spreads horizontally and can easily be transplanted.

Race and South African literature: the colonial state and apartheid

Despite the non-acknowledgement of a mixed-race identity in South African political classification systems, much South African literature, both past and present, has used the mixed-race child or its potential as a symbol of tragedy, hope, or both. These representations include the trope of the tragic mulatto³⁷, who is portrayed as bearing the iniquity of miscegenation as a burden, who is shunned by both black and white communities and doomed to mental illness due to inner torment about the impossibility of reconciling the two sides of their (racial) identity. More popular in the USA around the time of its publication than in South Africa, Sarah Gertrude Millin’s 1924 eugenicist intergenerational novel *God’s*

³⁵ (Mzamane 214)

³⁶ Saliently, the work of Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic*, and obliquely, Edouard Glissant’s use of the figure of the rhizome in *Poetics of Relation*.

³⁷ The ‘tragic mulatto’ has its origins in a Caribbean and North American imaginary, where the skin colour and phenotypical presentation of the offspring of black/white relations marked the ‘mulatto’ as the result of the shameful and likely violent sexual encounter of a master and his slave, a taboo act resonating keenly with the creolized history of the coloured people of the Western Cape. See Diana Mafe’s *Mixed Race Stereotypes in South African and American Literature* and Teresa C. Zackodnik’s *The Mulatta and the Politics of Race*

Step-Children, traces the tragic curse that the mixed-race subject inherits as the constitutive feature of his identity. On the other hand, the hopeful relationship between coloured Lanny and white Sarie at the core of Peter Abrahams' 1948 *Path of Thunder* offers the faintest glimmer of a post-racial, harmonious future—but the couple is killed by their own community, and the possibility of a mixed-race child to herald this future is snuffed out. Nadine Gordimer in *Occasion for Loving* (1963) and numerous other writers deploy the interracial relationship to highlight the public injustices of the state create ineluctable psychological effects in a private sphere. The brutal structures of apartheid and coloniality spurred black writers in South Africa to explicitly resist the white supremacist state in their writing. Epitomized by the Soweto poets of the seventies, the heyday of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM)³⁸ and inflamed by the unfathomable mass violence against blacks, a trend of representing the spectacular clashes between stock characters of innocent black good-guy heroes and the brutally evil white apartheid policemen representing the state was prevalent in explicitly anti-apartheid writing by black authors and poets, with the complexities and complicities of interracial relationships were largely absent from this literary moment.³⁹ Towards the end of apartheid, this style of writing was generally

³⁸ Despite its radical blacks-only ethos, ensuring that blacks were leading the movement for their own freedom, the BCM was already envisioning a non-racial utopia at the end of their efforts. Steve Biko characterizes his desired state of racial and social integration as “free participation by all members of a society, catering for the full expression of the self in a freely changing society as determined by the will of the people.” (Biko 25)

³⁹ Bloke Modisane, an acclaimed black South African author and journalist from the *Drum* years is a salient exception, who, in his memoir *Blame Me on History*, discusses the “sexual hypochondria ... articulated by pornographic statutes like 'The Immorality Act' and 'The Mixed Marriages Act'” (Modisane 213) and the psychological aspects of his misogynistic affairs with women, including with white women. He writes that, “only the state of being white could satisfy me, and in a tedious succession I thought myself to be,

denounced for its propagandic tone, bald and static characterizations, with the texts accused of neglecting imagination and the complexity of psychological, material and political realities. Most famously, Njabulo Ndebele's 1991 essay *Rediscovery of the Ordinary* and Justice Albie Sachs' 1990 speech *Preparing Ourselves for Freedom* advocated for greater attention to craft in order to create work that was both aesthetically powerful, with greater nuance, *and* politically powerful. Ndebele and Sachs, among others, also offered what they saw as fresh imaginative possibilities and horizons for creative work.

World-famous white literary writers under apartheid—take JM Coetzee and Nadine Gordimer—were afforded the position of not living in fear of brutalization by the white state, and produced works offering perspectives and interiority markedly different from trends in black writing, though their works largely feature white protagonists. Their work doggedly addressed issues of power, desire and language in interracial connections, friendships and relationships under and after apartheid, yet the relative linguistic inaccessibility, formal and narrative experimentation of both Gordimer and Coetzee's texts demarcate an audience that is highly educated, excluding many black South Africans due to the systemic undereducation of blacks in the colonial and apartheid states. Both authors' work frequently interrogate the ethical implications of what it means to be a South African text, a South African writer, and a white South African. In Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999), a group of black youths rape Lucy, the white protagonist's daughter. The unborn child is simultaneously a tragic retaliation to

of course, always for the first time, lyrically in love with every white woman I met." (Modisane 220) For Modisane, sex with white women was—as Fanon theorized—a mode of being recognized by the white establishment.

South Africa's history of anti-black violence, and a symbol of a desired subversion of racial power relations—some kind of hope-in-retribution; and, because Lucy keeps the child as a kind of reparations, an offering of atonement for that historical violence. On the other hand, Gordimer's post-apartheid novel *No Time Like the Present* (2012), features a middle-class interracial couple whose children Sindiswa and Gary Elias were *intended*, born not for a political principle nor from a violent encounter, and destined for upward mobility and possibly emigration to Australia. As I write this, Lucy's child would be nineteen years old and Sindiswa and Gary Elias in their mid-teens. How might these mixed-race teenagers construct an identity as South Africans today? What kind of intergenerational narratives would they receive to make sense of themselves in the world? From a cursory consideration of these characters, Trevor Noah and Happy Sindane, it is clear that the mixed-race experience is not homogenous. I hope that interrogating a range of these experiences, however, might help us reconceive notions and expressions of race, family, history and power and shed light on intersectional concerns about the mixed-race post-apartheid South African.

Race and South African literature: post-apartheid

In the aftermath of apartheid, critics began to agree that emergent writing displayed more expansive and exploratory approaches and stylistics than what had come before it⁴⁰. Writers like Duiker and his contemporary Phaswane Mpe⁴¹

⁴⁰ (Mzamane)

⁴¹ Author of short stories, poems, and *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2001), a novel that scholar Carrol Clarkson describes as “pos[ing] a radical challenge to notions of 'community', of what constitutes 'home' in the same instant that the narrative is generated by these notions. The novel is written in the second person,

wrote into and out of this widening imaginative space created by the loosening of the moral and social obligation for (and, dare I say, trend of) creative workers to demonstrate explicit political commitment in their art. Mpe, at a reading in 2002:

The world is more complicated now than just black and white. We are freer now. We dare to explore themes that would have been deemed irrelevant during the apartheid years.⁴²

In post-apartheid literature, the complex began to accompany and replace the flat and stark; the personal began to replace the explicitly political, and unique contingency began to replace the general symbolic. Pre-colonial practices and cultures began to influence black writers' work in new ways—modalities of orality, as well as supernatural and animistic ontologies were woven into explorations of the contemporary South African subject, blending the past and future with the present in new ways.⁴³ In this fresh space, coloured writers and thinkers were freer to grapple with their racial identity and subjectivity in new ways.⁴⁴ Coloured writer Zoe Wicomb, however, had already begun in her 1987 debut collection of short stories, to air out the shame in coloured identity resulting from colonial oppression that engendered the shame of native and slave ancestors, and the shame over those ancestors' sexual coercion.⁴⁵ In newspaper articles and other texts aimed at foreign audiences to whom the epithet 'coloured' is an offensive

which has the disorientating effect of simultaneously distancing, but engaging the reader in the implied community signalled by the 'our' of the novel's title." (Clarkson 451)

⁴² (Mpe in Swarns)

⁴³ (Mzamane)

⁴⁴ (Erasmus 15)

⁴⁵ (Wicomb, *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*)(Wicomb, *Shame and identity*)

term, coloured people are frequently described as ‘mixed-race’⁴⁶ in an effort to contextualise the racial descriptor. However, scholar Zimitri Erasmus wishes to move the discussion of coloured identity away from ‘race mixture,’ and based rather on “cultural creativity, creolized formations shaped by South Africa’s history of colonialism, slavery, segregation and apartheid.”⁴⁷ A number of South African novels since 1990 offer interracial family-related plots that comprise a search for obscured origins, both genetic and cultural. Saliently, Achmat Dangor’s *Bitter Fruit* (2001) depicts the journey of Mikey, a young first-generation mixed-race white-coloured⁴⁸ man’s anger against his biological father, the white Afrikaans apartheid policeman who raped his mother, whom he kills by the end of the novel. CA Davids’ *The Blacks of Cape Town* (2013) involves the recuperation and re-memory of the protagonist’s intergenerational heritage, within which her coloured great-grandfather ‘passed’ as white, changing the family name to ‘Black’ in his shift in racial identity, and the discovery of her coloured father’s affair with a white woman, a comrade in the anti-apartheid movement. More recently, a first-generation mixed-race woman living in the US, the protagonist of Zinzi Clemmons’ *What We Lose* (2017), gives a first-person account of dealing with the death of her coloured South African mother and deals with her sense of a loss of South African identity through a reclamation of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela’s legacy as the ‘mother of the nation.’ All these novels, like those I discuss in this study, include

⁴⁶ (Polgreen)

⁴⁷ (Erasmus 14)

⁴⁸ Mikey is raised in a coloured community and accepted as part of it, however, oblivious to the fact that his coloured father is not his biological parent until he discovers and reads his mother’s private journals.

a strong strain of trying to recuperate the wrongs done to the native mother as a central pillar in their self-formation.

Mixed-race: global perspectives

From the scientific racism accompanying the early age of colonial exploration, the transatlantic slave trade and its influence on the sociological development of colonial expansion, mixed-race individuals have figured as aporias in the West's racial anxiety used to justify its quest for domination and consolidation of power and resources. Pregnant always with the possibility of undermining the carefully policed differences and separation between the 'west and the rest', miscegenation has been constructed as a danger to white power, despite the hypocritical conundrum of white men having unpoliced sexual access to women of colour.⁴⁹ It has also constructed more recently as a danger to black solidarity.⁵⁰ The field of mixed-race studies is based largely in the UK and USA, where its roots lie in the cross-cultural contact of the transatlantic slave trade from Africa's west coast to the Caribbean and American south.⁵¹ The late eighties birthed the contemporary field of critical and historical work about interracial marriage and mixed-race identity, a field that continues to grow. *Racially Mixed People in America*⁵² (1992) was one of the first anthologies responding to a wide range of psychological and social questions in this field. Of note a decade later are

⁴⁹ (Ifekwunigwe 11-12)

⁵⁰ (Daniel 285)

⁵¹ (Ifekwunigwe 9)

⁵² Edited by Maria Root, who also edited and introduced *Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders as the New Frontier* in 1996. Both volumes were widely used in educational contexts in the United States at the onset of mixed-race studies.

Rethinking Mixed Race (2001), a transatlantic anthology from American and British scholars, and centrally, the British-Ghanaian Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe's *Mixed Race Studies: A Reader* (2004), which traces the deep, global history of mixed-race studies, starting with essays and scientific papers published in the age of scientific racism and social Darwinism, continuing with essays through the late 80s and 90s which she dubs the 'age of celebration,' a moment of pride in mixed race identity as promising a post-racial future, and ending with work from what she calls the current 'age of critique' in mixed race studies, that addresses the complexities and contextual contingencies of mixed-race subjects the world over, as well as the problem of formulating a response to the exclusion of mixed-race people from majority and minority racial and ethnic groups.⁵³ A decade further brings us to works like the 2013 *Mixed Race Identities* by Peter Aspinall and Miri Song, which analyses and theorises the results of intensive focus groups conducted with young mixed-race Brits, and 2014's *Global Mixed Race*⁵⁴, a comparative anthology that collects essays exploring mixed-race identities around the world, divided in two parts: 'Societies with established populations of mixed descent,' and 'places with newer populations of mixed descent,' but largely disregarding individual mixed-race experiences in which there is no collective 'population' of mixed-race people to speak of. In this collection and many others, South Africa is represented by analysis of coloured identity as a mixed-race collective rather than by the perspectives of first-generation mixed-race subjects who tend not to belong to a mixed-race cultural community outside their siblings. Creolized societies—

⁵³ (Ifekwunigwe 8)

⁵⁴ Edited by Rebecca Chiyoko King-O'Riain

like coloureds in South Africa—each have unique cultural narratives about creolization and race (mixture), each rendering differently the social significance of colour, ‘degree’ of blackness or whiteness, and racial identification. South Africa, as we have seen, is no different, with opinions like Erasmus’:

To talk about ‘race mixture’, ‘miscegenation’, ‘inter-racial sex’, and ‘mixed descent’, is to use terms and habits of thought inherited from the very ‘race science’ that was used to justify oppression, brutality and marginalization of ‘bastard peoples’.⁵⁵

Erasmus’ strong feeling about discussion of coloured identity does not suggest how to approach the very different question of first-generation mixed-race people who, in our globalised world, meet challenges different from those encountered by entire populations of creolized peoples. *Philosophy and the Mixed Race Experience*⁵⁶ (2016), a collection of philosophical reflections about mixed-race identity and experiences written by mixed-race academics, is aligned somewhat with my own work at large, in its theoretical approach to the topic, but does not address experiences particular to South Africa and its particular racialized formations.

Borders: the post-colonial subject, trauma, and diaspora

Homi Bhabha writes that “the borderline work of culture demands an encounter with ‘newness’ that is not part of the continuum of past and present,” characterising the ideological and material spaces in which postcolonial cultures emerge as a *third space* where cultures broadly conceived as pre-colonial and colonial come into contact and produce new, unpredictable forms. Hybridity, to

⁵⁵ (Erasmus 12)

⁵⁶ Edited by Tina Fernandes Botts

Bhabha, refers to cultural production, mores and ontologies that include modalities and materials from more than one culture. He has been criticized for this view because it seems to ground itself in a notion of pure, 'untainted' cultures which can then be 'mixed'. We see such a critical approach from Erasmus ("terms and habits of thought inherited from the very 'race science'...used to justify oppression,"⁵⁷) and such critique is also levelled at the notion of 'mixed-race' identity from other thinkers who wish to abolish racist discourse on the grounds that race is a scientifically false notion.⁵⁸ But in our social reality, notions of original, purer cultures are wielded as power, and despite the hybrid cultural space they foster, postcolonial societies reflect these hierarchies of race and culture. Post-colonial approaches are thus important to this work because the effects of dealing with a shift in national powers, from apartheid to post-apartheid, are legible at the level of socio-economics, affective relationships (like the (re)positioning of coloured identity) and borders, which are a legacy of coloniality but remain in these post-colonial times. In this more geographic meaning, borders signify the political divide between countries and suggest a cultural divide, which is disturbed by global flows of culture and diasporic movement. Socially-policed borders also divide the city space, a policing that relies on judgments of race, language, class, gender, and other identifiers. In this sense, the border writ large

⁵⁷ (Erasmus 12)

⁵⁸ There is a range here: from most contemporary thinkers who are urgently calling for a widespread movement away from understanding race as biological, to 'racial eliminativists' advocating new humanisms, like "J. L. A. Garcia [who] calls for a 'new interpersonalist personalism' that completely rejects racial identity, and even rejects the proposition that race or ethnicity can give meaning to our lives." (Fernandes Botts 10)

represents the current limits of freedom and subjectivity and beyond which we may find new ways of being.

Trauma also acts a border between the traumatized individual and the rest of the world, the mourning or melancholic individual unable to make successful new ego-attachments until mourning has been completed. Frantz Fanon, Dominick LaCapra and Ato Quayson and Anne Anlin Cheng are four thinkers of many who have extended the western-centric conversation about trauma as a deeply individual psychic wound—which LaCapra calls ‘historical trauma’⁵⁹—to a much broader picture of entire societies traumatised by systemic oppression of coloniality or other unequal social system—which he calls ‘structural trauma’⁶⁰—thus “reconceptualizing postcolonialism as a post-traumatic cultural formation.”⁶⁰ Such approaches question the possibility for healing simply via individual psychoanalysis or ‘talk therapy’ as advocated by western psychoanalysis, acknowledging that “reclaiming the past and transcending mechanisms of victimization and resentment,”⁶¹ as well as systemic change is necessary, both for healing and to end the ongoing infliction of trauma on postcolonial subjects. Despite this, psychic healing can and does take place to an extent at the level of the individual, including through processes of ‘decolonizing the mind,’ as advocated for in various ways by decolonial thinkers including Fanon, Ngugi waThiong’o, and Nelson Maldonado-Torres.⁶² Structural trauma, however,

⁵⁹ (LaCapra, *Trauma, Absence, Loss*)

⁶⁰ (Craps and Buelens 2)

⁶¹ (Mengel and Borzaga, Introduction)

⁶² For example, in Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*, waThiong’o’s *Decolonizing the Mind*, and Maldonado-Torres’ “Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality”

catalyses historical trauma or is born from events that cause specific traumatic loss⁶³—e.g. the Holocaust, prison deaths under apartheid—and postcolonial subjects may suffer great individual losses, and require healing from both.⁶⁴ In addition to the postcolonial refocusing on structural trauma, trauma studies has turned from understanding trauma in predominantly linguistic terms—as that which is unclaimed and cannot be spoken—towards considering trauma and the body, which has included much work on trauma and affect. In *The Melancholy of Race*, Cheng considers the American racialized body as existing in a melancholic state that is embodied in various ways, including affective obsessions with beauty and hypochondria. Quayson suggests that certain African literary texts perform ‘symbolization compulsions’, analogous to Freudian repetition compulsions but in which characters’ latent trauma becomes visible through literary patterns of metaphorical and symbolic displacement⁶⁵. In *The Fact Of Blackness* Fanon discusses affect associated with racist regimes including nausea, fear, anger⁶⁶. The intersectionality of identity strata—class, race, gender, etc—similarly play out on affective planes, with shame, disgust, fear and humiliation being particularly important social emotions that circulate to maintain social hierarchies. Cheng offers a particularly pithy insight about subjectivity that supports the usefulness

⁶³ (LaCapra, *Trauma, Absence, Loss* 725)

⁶⁴ In this present work I also draw heavily from the writings of Gabriele Schwab, a thinker of German descent who considers the intergenerational legacies of trauma, chiefly in her work *Haunting Legacies*. Particularly useful is that her work bridges a gap between structural and individual, or historical, trauma. However, I must note that while her work is useful, it emerges from the context of the Holocaust and the ensuing generations of Germans and Jews, and thus at certain points requires rearticulation to suit the current context.

⁶⁵ (Quayson, *Calibrations* 90)

⁶⁶ (Fanon 82-108)

of psychoanalytic theorization without having to indulge in western, solipsistic, individual-based approaches to trauma, and her view is supported by the Lacanian approach to the emergence of the subject. She writes,

The politics of race has always spoken in the language of psychology. The lesson of psychoanalysis speaks above all to the possibility that *intrasubjectivity exists as a form of intersubjectivity* and that *intersubjectivity often speaks in the voice of intrasubjectivity*: a mutually supportive system.⁶⁷

These approaches to race, trauma and affect lead me to integrate both sides of the trauma debate: showing that even structural trauma and its healing happen both at the level of body, where the individual is or is not permitted agency and subjecthood in their bodily presence within social networks of affect—and at the level of the language, where an individual is or is not permitted a subject position within a discursive regime. The dual sites of discourse and the body are central to this project.

The Bildungsroman: form, intersubjectivity and the public sphere

In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Judith Butler considers the intersubjectivity of subjectivity with respect to the linguistic giving an account of oneself, a form I find analogous to the *Bildungsroman*:

Giving an account is ... a kind of showing of oneself... for the purpose of testing whether the account seems right, whether it is understandable by the other, who “receives” the account through one set of norms or another. I have a relation to myself, but I have it in the context of an address to an other. So the relation is disclosed, but it is also, to borrow from Foucault’s work on confession, published, brought into the realm of appearance, constituted as a social manifestation.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ (Cheng 28) (original emphasis)

⁶⁸ (Butler 131) (my emphasis)

When we do act and speak, we not only disclose ourselves but act on the schemes of intelligibility that govern who will be a speaking being, subjecting them to rupture or revision, consolidating their norms, or contesting their hegemony.⁶⁹

Since the *Bildungsroman* is addressed to a community of national others in its appearance in a national public sphere and a national literature, and is often read as a metaphorical parallel to the formation of national identity, its manipulation or acceptance of those national norms are a challenge to the national social sphere, and its ending is often read as offering predictions or hopes for the nation's future.⁷⁰ These three novels with three racially-multiple protagonists challenge racial norms and offer various predicaments for the future of the 'rainbow nation'.

Vilashini Cooppan insists that

all stories of post-apartheid South Africa ... become realisable within a model that has trauma at its core, history as its content, narrative as its melancholic modality, and mourning as its cure. ...

Extrapolated to the national scene, the trauma of apartheid, linked to the microscopic story of the individual subject of the state, operate as the generative event or historical origin point for the still-coalescing category of the post-apartheid narrative.⁷¹

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has long been read alongside post-apartheid literature as they both largely do the work of telling and mourning that Butler and Cooppan respectively speak of. As a discursive regime, however, the TRC operated on its own norms of the limits of speakability, where literature may bend and invent its own internal norms, allowing not only for mourning but also for vision and a creative restructuring of the past and future, which also can offer

⁶⁹ (Butler 132)

⁷⁰ (Mengel, Trauma and Genre 164)

⁷¹ (Cooppan 47-48)

psychic healing. The *Bildungsroman*, as a (linguistic) narrative account of an individual moving from innocence to experience and their journey of social integration is a particularly apt form for representing a process of psychic healing, and is thus a favoured form within South African post-apartheid literature as a methodology of working through the traumas of apartheid and coloniality, and is one that offers perspectives into the possibilities and limitations for subjectivity and self-formation in a community⁷² where one's racial identity and body has particular implications. Franco Moretti writes that "the legitimacy of a ruling class and through it of an entire social order ... is always the distinctive framework of the *Bildungsroman*,"⁷³ and we see our protagonists working to create themselves within the thicket of a social order governed by whiteness (with its anti-blackness) as the still-ruling class in contemporary Cape Town. Butler writes also that an account of ourselves "does not have as its goal the establishment of a definitive narrative but constitutes a linguistic and social occasion for self-transformation."⁷⁴ Retelling race thus helps us to make sense of melancholic identities born from South Africa's violent past and to usher in a present with more social, physical, spatial and psychological freedom for self-transformation and self-formation. In this work what I am naming 'subjectivity' is this: the social and discursive position which an individual (the subject) has actively self-generated, at least in part.⁷⁵ This process of self-formation is the central principle

⁷² (Austen 214)

⁷³ (Moretti 208)

⁷⁴ (Butler 130)

⁷⁵ If the individual's position is not the result of their self-formation, and is merely acted upon, I consider the subject to be in a state of objecthood, in the Fanonian sense: "Dirty nigger!" Or simply, "Look, a Negro!"
I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire

of the *Bildungsroman*⁷⁶. Stuart Hall's *articulation*—I expand on this later—thus becomes an important concept for my explorations of subjectivity in this study.

This study also engages with questions of diaspora as imbricated with post-coloniality. Diasporic identity and cultural forms have been described as fluid, hybrid, trans-temporal, transnational, subnational, supranational—all terms invoking borders. South African scholar JU Jacobs argues that “all South African identities are fractured... and arisen directly or indirectly, from the experience of diasporic migration,” and that, “the diasporic subject is [contemporary South African literature's] most recognizable figure.”⁷⁷ Sarah Nuttall deals with this through her concept of *entanglement*, which correctly insists that all cultural and racial histories in South Africa are necessarily entangled. This, however, is not to elide the difference between the experiences of being black, white, coloured, mixed-race, and so on, but to acknowledge that all racial and cultural categories are already hybridized.

Decolonial theorist Walter D. Mignolo describes border thinking as “a transformative project,” which comprises, “silenced and marginalized voices... bringing themselves into the conversation of cosmopolitan projects, rather than waiting to be included,”⁷⁸ effecting their own self-transformation in a world where discursive and embodied norms exclude the possibility of their subjectivity. It is in this spirit of border thinking, in the spirit of “compassionately listen[ing] to and

to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects. Sealed into that crushing objecthood, I turned beseechingly to others. (Fanon 82)(my emphasis)

⁷⁶ (Austen 218)

⁷⁷ (J. Jacobs, *Diaspora and Identity* 1)

⁷⁸ (Mignolo 736)

affirm[ing],”⁷⁹ that I undertake this project to consider both the conditions of becoming (oneself), and the subject positions available to subjects on the borderlines of race in post-apartheid Cape Town.

⁷⁹ (Mignolo 736)

CHAPTER ONE: Phenotypical Multiplicity
in K. Sello Duiker's Thirteen Cents

K. Sello Duiker's short literary career¹ left a massive impact on South African letters, with the raw and striking *Thirteen Cents* (2001); *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2001)², Duiker's 457-page masterpiece; and the posthumously published *Hidden Star* (2011), a children's novel. In all these works, Duiker's literary worlds exceed the real, spilling over into the magical. In these spaces, he imagines a South Africa in which new, fluid identities exceed the more rigid social strictures of the past. In theoretical conversations, Duiker scholarship has tended more towards consideration of *Quiet Violence*, whose protagonist Tshepo—a traumatized young black man—spends the bulk of the novel seeking the healing effects of loving relationships and community, and for a time finds a brotherhood within a close group of male sex workers. Scholars engage with two main thematic clusters in Duiker's work: space, place and intra-African migrancy; and new masculinities. In the first, scholars like Meg Samuelson, Dobrota Pucherova and Thomas Penfold consider Duiker's generous and complex representations of African migrants in a post-apartheid moment fraught with xenophobic sentiment and violence—including in the literary landscape³—and reflect on Duiker's literary urban space of exclusion and inclusion via thematics of border-crossing and the public/private distinction, with Samuelson writing that

[Duiker's] fiction details the ways in which class and xenophobia,

¹ Duiker tragically took his own life at age 30, after writing three novels.

² Hereafter *Quiet Violence*.

³ (Pucherova)

along with gender and generation, are emerging as newly divisive regimes in post-apartheid city-space. While the images of Duiker's characters strolling across physical and social boundaries may suggest the liberatory potential of and within cities, their appalling experiences of abuse remind us of the realities of city-space today.⁴

Barring some disapproval at a perceived misogyny in *Quiet Violence*⁵, Duiker is more frequently discussed and lauded, however, as queering black masculine identities and addressing both the emancipatory possibilities and troubling violence linked to the commodification of sex, and its intersection with race.⁶ In concert with others⁷, Andrea Spain suggests that *Quiet Violence* ends with a “tremendous optimism... a future waiting to emerge in and through Tshepo.”⁸ Perhaps scholarly consideration of *Thirteen Cents*, which features Azure, a black 12-year old homeless protagonist with blue eyes, is less prolific because the novel's apocalyptic ending contains significantly less optimism⁹, and there is a general paucity of optimism in post-apartheid literature.¹⁰ Spain, for her part, focuses on the affective and ethical potential of ‘moments of contact’ for Azure that arise by chance and exist largely outside of institutional and informal networks of power, offering that

Duiker's work answers an ethical injunction to move away from
“our continuities of belonging” – our now unmoored fantasmatic

⁴ (Samuelson 255)

⁵ (Stobie, *Double Rainbow*) (Gagiano 820) (Pucherova)

⁶ (Carolin and Frenkel) (Tsehloane) (Gagiano) (Lenta) (Stobie, *Postcolonial pomosexuality*)

⁷ (Pucherova)

⁸ (Spain 420)

⁹ Scholar Shaun Viljoen disagrees—a point I address later.

¹⁰ Elleke Boehmer writes of South African literature as invested (unwittingly, perhaps) in symbolization compulsions, in trauma repetitions, and almost unable to escape a melancholic modality. However, she considers some literary works that move beyond this, suggesting that they offer only a provisional ‘time being’ temporality as one that can contain hope—a cautious optimism inextricably bound to the present moment. (Boehmer 42-44)

attachments to versions of the national, racial, communal, or familial belonging – toward a focus on propinquity, on “the being with” one another, together.¹¹

In sympathy with Spain’s argument but pursuing a different direction, I read *Thirteen Cents* with a focus on how the racial identity of Azure is read and produced in the more *institutionalized* economies of violence and negative affect inherited from colonial and apartheid systems of racialized violence that are reproduced amongst vulnerable populations. Drawing from affect theory and a dialectics of death as offered by Abdul JanMohamed, I consider Azure’s relationships as residing in intimate but negative affect, with the allegiance and community of friendship and ethnic belonging finally denied him. I then consider Azure’s responsive articulations—in Stuart Hall’s sense—to the world, and of his own cultural and racial identity and subjectivity, and finally I discuss the implications of the apocalyptic ending of this *Bildungsroman* as a rejection of the plot trajectory of the traditional *Bildungsroman*, drawing also from Joseph Slaughter’s theorization of the dissensual *Bildungsroman*.

Life on the borderlines: fear and social-death

Twelve-year-old Azure narrates his story in the first-person present, offering a level of self-reflection that is at times precocious and complex, and at others, immediate and simplistic. Azure is a principled, headstrong and thoughtful orphan who bears pheotypical racial optics of both blackness and whiteness: he has dark skin and blue eyes, and his experience invites new meaning to Sindiwe Magona’s reflection that “our bodies are perforated by painful memory—trauma,”

¹¹ (Spain 417)

(in this case, the structural trauma of an apartheid legacy) “is in the blood, in the very cells of our apartheid-deformed bodies.”¹² We could consider Azure’s body—and its ‘deformation’ into threatening, confusing, by apartheid—as a transplanted dramatization of Pecola’s doomed fantasy in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* written thirty years prior: “A little black girl [who] yearns for the eyes of a little white girl, ... the horror at the heart of her yearning ...exceeded only by the evil of fulfilment.”¹³ The evil fulfilment of Pecola’s fantasy occurs in her mind: believing her eyes have turned blue, Pecola is slowly ostracised from society and generates an imaginary friend who praises her prettiness while becoming increasingly delusional and reliant on her imaginary friend as a coping mechanism for dealing with an unkind society. Already an abject figure on society’s margins like Pecola, Azure too becomes increasingly isolated as his unusual phenotypical presentation invites power-laden gazes that interpellate him into a range of different subordinate and victim subject positions that he resents. Spain points out the handful of times in which Azure is not subjected in these ways, stressing, however, that these moments are ephemeral and do not generate a subject position which can be sustained when within the reach of institutional networks of power.

Fleeing Johannesburg after his parents were murdered, Azure lives on the streets of Sea Point, Cape Town, sometimes acting as a protective and authoritarian older brother to eight-year-old Bafana, a runaway who is fast approaching drug addiction. Bafana is the only person in the novel whom Azure is ‘above’ in a hierarchy, and Azure attempts to groom him into adulthood—training

¹² (Magona 97)

¹³ (Morrison 162)

him how to survive on the streets while maintaining dignity—with threats and violence, mirroring the relationship Azure has with Vincent, who is Azure’s only friend from Johannesburg, and who accompanied Azure to Cape Town also to live a life on the streets. Vincent gives Azure advice dosed with smacks and verbal violence. These hierarchical relationships among these street children also reflect Azure’s primary perspective which divides the world into the separate domains of children, who are innocent, and grownups, who are evil, abusive, sadistic. At twelve, nearly thirteen, however, Azure is between these realms, considering himself “almost a man,”¹⁴ as opposed to a child, due to the horrific things he has seen and the degree to which he is fully responsible for himself. Compared to the adult reader, however, Azure appears in the novel as a child—he is, in legal terms, a minor. For Susan Mann, the use of the child narrator in South African fiction allows for a clear, stark representation of society, especially of its violent tendencies: “the child itself represents the socially, if not culturally, blank slate, the uncontaminated potential in a context that is often loaded, guiding the reader to gauge the justness of a situation.”¹⁵ Azure fears and is constantly alert to the possibility of violence in an unstable post-apartheid Cape Town. He fears the gangsters and pimps who run the streets, and the white men to whom he sells sex, describing the violent, brutal sexual encounters to which he is submitted. Due to his vulnerability as a poor, black orphan, Azure’s white clients act on their paedophilic desire for his child’s body while fetishizing his blue eyes that signify an illusory proximity to whiteness, respectability, and standards of beauty that

¹⁴ (Duiker 6)

¹⁵ (Mann 337)

elevate whiteness and Caucasian traits. Black and coloured men envy and resent Azure for his blue eyes—in particular, the powerful gangster Gerald who is frequently likened to a T-Rex. Without access to education received from a stable community or schooling—a staple of the traditional *Bildungsroman*—Azure thus fashions his own peculiar worldview that can accommodate the bewildering, chaotic world laden with sensation and affect in which he exists, using what Harry Garuba terms the “continual re-enchantment of the world,”¹⁶ a strategy of transposing material reality onto a magical, or animist plane, in order to understand everything as connected in the same system and to allow for the attribution of meaning and value to materiality that the scientific method and western epistemology might not permit. Garuba proffers this terminology to describe epistemological—or rather, cosmological—approaches deployed by cultural practices in Nigeria and across Africa that are flexible, offering “philosophical accommodation,”¹⁷ which, in the contemporary moment, allows for a single though porous and polyvocal world order that incorporates both ‘tradition’ and modernity. Azure’s acutely vulnerable social position, and his intellectual innocence about the world allow for, in Mann’s words, an “ability to penetrate the haze of social constructions with laser insight into a reality that is often more relevant in its mythic, often archetypal, simplicity.”¹⁸ Azure indeed sees the world in a mythic, animist framework, which incorporates people, animals and objects into an order of good or evil: children, sea water, clean water, seagulls—good. Adults, pigeons, rats, dirty water—evil. Samuelson suggests that these “leaps into

¹⁶ (Garuba 265)

¹⁷ (Garuba 253)

¹⁸ (Mann 346)

myth and magic are emblematic of attempts to make sense of a lived reality in city-space.”¹⁹ Azure, not fully cognizant of a history of social power in Cape Town, attributes the power of adults—comprising bankers, gangsters, police, rapists, and all those who turn a blind eye to suffering in Cape Town—to magic, “evil spell[s],”²⁰ that turn children into rats and pigeons, and force them to “do ugly things in the dark,”²¹ giving him a world-system with which he can understand his life. The physical violence Azure that fears at every corner is complicated by co-existent expressions of desire for his body—sexual and acquisitive or jealous and possessive. Within Azure’s own animist worldview rooted in the Cape Town streets, race takes a back seat to the adult-child distinction, with racial issues emerging as particularly confusing and challenging. Due to the racialized violence he receives from blacks, whites and coloureds, Azure places little stock in the positive power of racial identities. Only twice he identifies in racial terms. One night he gets drunk with two men and strategically self-identifies as Sotho to avoid speaking Afrikaans. Late in the novel, he identifies as black, using the first person plural:

*We dress funny at sea, black people. You can always tell by how we dress that we are scared of water. ...And black people always take home with them a bottle of sea water with sand. They do all sorts of rituals with it.*²²

But Azure is not scared of water—he loves swimming, in the ocean, in swimming pools, in reservoirs. By the end of this reflection, the ‘we’ has become ‘they’,

¹⁹ (Samuelson 256)

²⁰ (Duiker 5)

²¹ (Duiker 6)

²² (Duiker 180-181)(my emphasis)

identifying with black people only to show that he is not like black people. *Thirteen Cents*, a *Bildungsroman* or anti-*Bildungsroman*, charts Azure's doomed negotiation of adulthood in a world organized by power structures that harness the social and affective hierarchies of race generated by a history of coloniality and apartheid, a social order whose ruling class is legitimated by whiteness.

Subjection and social-death: race, violence, affect

Setting off the novel's central conflict, Azure mistakenly calls Gerald, 'Sealy,'—the name of one of Gerald's black friends. Responding with rage, Gerald yells, "*Jy, tsek jou naai, ek is nie n kaffir nie,*"²³ [You, get out of here, you fuck, I am not a *kaffir*] punching Azure in the face. Azure flees and hides out for a few days, afraid. Vincent, Azure's friend, explains, simultaneously scaring Azure by telling him that the pigeons are Gerald's spies, listening to everything they're saying, thereby endowing Gerald with the godlike qualities of omnipresence and omnipotence:

'You know Gerald, he's fucked up. He thinks he's white because he's got straight hair and a light skin. If you show up with those shoes [veldskoens] and your blue eyes, he'll kill you. He'll say, Who the fuck do you think you are? Trying to be white?'

'But I'm not.'

'I know that, bra. We come from Mshenguville together. I know that. But that asshole doesn't. He'd love to have your blue eyes. Everyone knows that except you. You must try and work around you, blue eyes.'²⁴

²³ (Duiker 25)

²⁴ (Duiker 44)

Gerald, already grasping at markers of whiteness—straight hair and a light skin—wants to be, or appear, white, which is intimately connected to a disgust he feels for blackness: *'ek is nie n kaffir nie.*²⁵ and the shame he feels over being coloured, or rather, not white. Theorist Sara Ahmed suggests that shame has a critical social function of restoring harmony when an individual violates social rules, but “may be restorative only when the shamed other can ‘show’ that its failure to measure up to a social ideal is temporary.”²⁶ But Gerald’s shame over his failure to be white is chronic, not temporary. That is, shame cannot be a condition for entry into whiteness. Mohamed Adhikari discusses the affective dimensions of socialization for coloured people amid the changing racialization of power dynamics in South Africa, with shame and frustration featuring centrally, writing, “a common refrain amongst disaffected coloured people has been 'First we were not white enough and now we are not black enough'.”²⁷ Gerald, however, has not shifted from the apartheid-era valorization of whiteness to now envy blackness, nor has he embraced his colouredness. It is Azure’s ‘white gaze’ that reminds Gerald of his colouredness—“not white enough,”²⁸ and of his self-perceived inadequacy. As an economically disenfranchised adult male, a coloured try-for-white, Gerald cannot bear the incongruity of disempowerment and emasculation in and by the eyes of a black child, one of the few social figures over whom he feels entitled to power. To restore the racial order from which he claims power, Gerald must either eliminate Azure or incorporate him and his eyes into

²⁵ (Duiker 25)

²⁶ (Ahmed 107)

²⁷ (Adhikari 462)

²⁸ (Adhikari 462)

his hierarchy—exemplifying the *Bildungsroman* villain as theorized by Joseph Slaughter who is characterised by the desire for social climbing.²⁹ In a post-apartheid South Africa, however, this social climbing is transposed into a kind of ‘racial climbing’, which we will also see in Wicomb’s *Playing in the Light*, where our protagonist is the anti-hero if not quite villain. In response to Gerald’s villainous desire, Vincent tells Azure that “people have beat you up all your life [because T]hey think you’re not black enough,”³⁰ counselling Azure to ‘socially descend’ (in Gerald’s terms), to be “the blackest person... more black than all of us.”³¹

When Azure surfaces, presenting himself for his punishment, Gerald has his henchmen beat him brutally. Shortly after the beating, police pull into Gerald’s squatter compound, and Azure with his broken foot and bloodied body knows to “stand with [his] back to them,”³² lest he is victimised further by the gangsters for appealing to the police. He thinks, “If I’m smart I’ll stay like this till they leave.”³³ He knows that the police—in cahoots with the gangsters—cannot save him, now or in the future. This is the novel’s most telling scene about the utter externality of Azure’s existence to socialities other than the street communities that abuse him—he is literally unable to appeal for protection as a citizen of the state. Gerald’s lackey Richard locks up Azure while he recovers; depriving him of pain medication, food and water, and subsequently poisoning him with contaminated

²⁹ (Slaughter 200-201)

³⁰ (Duiker 44)

³¹ (Duiker 44)

³² (Duiker 51)

³³ (Duiker 51)

food, causing him severe diarrhoea—it is suggested that Richard urinates into the milk he gives Azure. He and a group rape Azure, and subject him to further physical abuse and humiliation.

In his exploration of Richard Wright’s ‘dialectics of death,’ Abdul JanMohamed deploys and expands on Orlando Patterson’s work, which posits that the ever-present threat of actual-death—being killed by a white master in the context of slavery, and by whites lynching blacks in Jim Crow America with impunity—constructs black life and subjectivity as social-death, circumscribed by a “commuted death sentence.”³⁴ This condition of social-death is marked by the black’s self-policing of expressions and instincts, for fear that such expressions of freedom may invite actual-death. Emmett Till, as we know, was lynched for whistling at a white woman. Literally and figuratively keeping one’s head down as a black survival strategy helped maintain a racist order, because, in exchange for their life, blacks submitted to social-death. This dialectic governs Azure’s life too. Azure’s coming of age, like Bigger Thomas’ in *Native Son*,

opens up for him not a world full of life, of possibilities, wherein he can fulfil himself, but rather a world of increasingly narrow confinement... to become mature in the world of social-death, indeed, to become a subject... is to come to terms with the commuted death-sentence that defines the horizons—“external” as well as “internal” horizons”, so to speak—of black subjectivity...³⁵

Throughout his ‘initiation’ and beyond, Azure has been generating a stance that is ultimately oppositional and destructive towards his world “of increasingly narrow confinement.”³⁶ In increasing anger he vows to destroy Gerald along with

³⁴ (JanMohamed 16)

³⁵ (JanMohamed 49)

³⁶ (JanMohamed 49)

the world of grownups, with destruction being a modality he associates closely with Gerald, the T-Rex, and that he inherits from adults: he says, as he is healing, “Grownups, this is how they teach me to be strong. I take in their light and destroy them with fire.”³⁷ Once released from his harrowing multi-day torture, Gerald takes possession of Azure, forcing him to share his shack and work for him, and re-names him ‘Blue’, marking him as his property and robbing Azure of “the only thing [he has] left from [his mother],”³⁸ and offering him a world in which there is a subject position prepared for him—as Gerald’s slave. He exerts the force of his power with the binding words, “I own you now.”³⁹ By owning him as a slave and restricting Azure’s agency Gerald finally possesses Azure’s blue eyes and their connection to whiteness. Gerald gives Azure a pair of blue tracksuit pants, warning him to never wear orange, which is his own colour. Emblematic of the affective tension that binds them, a tension overdetermined by (skin, eye, hair) colour, blue and orange are complementary colours, opposite on the colour wheel, as well as the essential colours of the ‘*oranje, blanje blou,*’ the flag of apartheid South Africa. The tragedy of this master-slave relationship is a tragedy of (post-)apartheid South Africa, in particular of the Western Cape: two disenfranchised, socially abject men of colour locked in a relationship shaped by coloniality and apartheid, a relationship in which one intentionally plays the role of white oppressor and the other of black oppressed. Apartheid is certainly not over but it has morphed into different forms that play out on different planes, seeped so deep

³⁷ (Duiker 59)

³⁸ (Duiker 5)

³⁹ (Duiker 69)

into the psyches of South Africans that even the most oppressed employ its logic to dominate others.

Azure's articulations: mythological sociality and symbolic-death

Throughout the novel *Azure*, as the first-person narrator of the text, has articulated himself almost exclusively through negative affect: through fear of Gerald, through disgust and distaste for his clients, in moments of sadness and distress about his circumstances, with deep ambivalence about whether he is a child or grownup, with a rejection of a homosexual identity, and in the few instances of positive affect, his enjoyment from the dissociative states of swimming alone and smoking cannabis. In his burgeoning anger at being enslaved, *Azure* reaches a breaking point and escapes, taking two trips up Table Mountain where he enjoys mostly solitary sojourns and swims daily in the reservoir, feeling free. He sleeps in a cave, builds fires, dances, chants, fasts, and enters trances where he has supernatural visions and dreams of ancestors and spirits in animal and magical forms, including the company of a constantly weeping 'Saartjie'—suggested to be Sara Baartman. In these ways, he embarks on a self-created initiation rite into manhood that shares elements of those undertaken by many (mostly black) South African boys becoming men,⁴⁰ thereby rejecting the violent initiation into Gerald's universe. However, the elements woven together in *Azure's* supernatural world arise not from a single essentialized, specific ethnic history or culture, but from a number of different cosmologies that overlap—urban legend,

⁴⁰ AmaXhosa, amaZulu, baSotho and other Southern African ethnicities undergo somewhat similar initiation rites where initiates leave their communities, build a shelter and are instructed in the culturally inflected ways of manhood, for them to return to their communities no longer as boys but now men.

histories of the Cape, and Khoi mythology—a coevality that metaphorically reflects the undeveloped, pre-modern landscape of Table Mountain rising out amongst the modern cityscape as well as the often-overwritten multiplicity of phenomenological, cosmological and ontological realms of Cape Town’s people, now and throughout history. However, this palimpsest of ethnocultural realms does not establish his initiation into an actual group of people—he is radically alone.

In *What is Slavery to Me*, Pumla Gqola discusses the creolizing history of coloured cultures and identities which, in their “imaginative process,” and “dynamic articulations,”⁴¹ require intention, creativity and agency informing their sense of identity. Helene Strauss reads creolization differently in *Thirteen Cents*, rather as Azure’s intentional and constant shifting of his subject position in strategic response to “inconsistent cultural messages from a variety of sources.”⁴² Strauss’ creolization centres on survival, Gqola’s on self-determination. Gqola discusses the !Hurikamma Cultural Movement (!HCM) as one of a range of contemporary renegotiations of coloured ethnicity. The movement foregrounds a Khoi identity which encourages coloured people to simultaneously distance themselves from apartheid racial classifications, stake a claim of African indigeneity and geographical entitlement, allow them to identify as culturally and racially coloured but politically black and with a wider struggle against racialized oppression without giving up the cultural practices of their daily lives, and to permit an engagement with multiple cultural histories as well as a history of

⁴¹ (Gqola 32)

⁴² (Strauss 32)

slavery that does not become the centrepiece of their ethnicity.⁴³ Azure's rearticulation of his identity—partly through a spiritual, site-mediated connection on Table Mountain with history and culture of the Khoi and partly through the mythology of Cape Town's underworld—offers a culturally creolizing parallel to !HCM's formulation of Khoi identity, though it offers no entry into a political struggle because Azure lacks a community. Particularly poignant is Azure's claim of Sarah Baartman as a spiritual ancestor. Like Azure, her bodily 'difference' was simultaneously what incited fetishized desire, and the justification for her violation and social exclusion from the communities desiring her as a scientific object of curiosity. Removed from her own community and denied self-representation, Baartman remains in the historical record as voiceless, a human rendered object/abject, brought to consciousness in history only through acts of imagination. Saartjie of *Thirteen Cents*' continual weeping and reluctance to talk remind us that, when it is impossible to rearticulate pain in community as a political struggle, loneliness, despair and silence become the affective face of abjection, which are insufficient practices for self-transformation. Though Azure's relation to Saartjie is tender, it is neither nourishing or positive. Saartjie—the symbol of the Cape's violent history of conquest of the motherland—is positioned as a passive and powerless native mother locked into tragedy and silence who cannot protect Azure, and likewise resists his protection and help, an echo of his actually dead mother who can neither comfort Azure nor save him. As above, so below: violence begets violence. In this supernatural mountain realm, Azure's ontology is still circumscribed by negative affect—rage, fear, distress—and

⁴³ (Gqola)

violence. Anne Anlin Cheng's insightful comment that intersubjectivity is reflected in one's intrasubjectivity is powerfully relevant here⁴⁴. Azure's subjectivity, which we must remember in this case is a product of his imagination or dream world, remains as below, enmeshed in antagonistic and unequal power relationships, though for the first time, he has power enough to confront and conquer those whom he fears, like the punitive and angry Mantis, the Khoi god whose eyes "are like dirty water... murky and hold scary secrets."⁴⁵ Twice Azure destroys Gerald in violent, vengeful scenes of imaginative, or magical wish-fulfilment. Azure reclaims the symbol of the T-Rex for himself, however, seemingly to affirm the internalisation of the philosophy of Gerald's order and situating himself as a potential successor to Gerald's 'kingdom', despite his rejection of participating in it as Gerald's slave. With the knowledge that "boys [have an] increased risk of becoming perpetrators of violence if they have witnessed violence in the community or at home,"⁴⁶ it is only too easy to imagine a grownup, hardened Azure claiming status and street cred through his blue eyes to create and maintain violent power in a system like Gerald's, with racialized intimacies founded on fear, shame and anger. Saartjie, Mantis and Gerald of Azure's dream-trance-mountain world belong to the realm of the supernatural; they are not 'real' people. So the sympathetic connection that Saartjie offers Azure, and Azure's victories over Gerald and Mantis are metaphysical, mental manifestations of a cosmology that may offer a place, i.e. subject position, for Azure in its order, as long as it remains away from the workings of institutionalized networks of power. But Azure's

⁴⁴ (Cheng 28)

⁴⁵ (Duiker 153)

⁴⁶ (Sadan and Mathews 80)

refrain with which he closes his story acknowledges the loss of his last and also most primary, vital ties to a stable pre-existing identity offering a positive self-image—his place within a family: “My mother is dead. My father is dead,”⁴⁷ he repeats. Azure’s complete alienation from positively affected sociality in both the real and the supernatural is signalled by this lack. His discursive agency over his self-representation is lost along with his mother, and his agency in the physical world mirrors this: without a parent to mentor, protect and love him, he is subject to forces of violence that strip his agency.

The novel ends with Cape Town and Table Mountain flooding and then burning in chaos and desecration, the sun spitting balls of fire onto the earth—in Spain’s words, the novel “dramatizing a kind of death-drive.”⁴⁸ In JanMohamed’s account of Wright’s fiction, “embrac[ing] the possibility of actual-death”⁴⁹, which JanMohamed calls ‘symbolic-death’, is the move necessary for the slave or black person to attain agency. That is, taking charge over the means of their own death is the only leverage against a master whose commits the slave to a state of social-death, or non-personhood. For Azure, Gerald is only metonymic for Cape Town, whose streets and networks of power are the real slave master, as shown in his conversation with Vincent early on:

[Azure:] “Grown ups are fucked up.”

[Vincent:] “No, Cape Town is fucked up, really.”

[Azure:] “You’re right, it’s Cape Town, not the people.”

[Vincent:] “And the people. Don’t forget about the people. They’re also fucked up.”⁵⁰

⁴⁷ (Duiker 194)

⁴⁸ (Spain 419)

⁴⁹ (JanMohamed 62)

⁵⁰ (Duiker 46)

In Cape Town's final moments, which appear as the manifestation of Azure's deep desire for destruction, Azure cowers in a cave in anticipation and indeed embrace of certain death, and this is his symbolic-death that liberates him from the stronghold of the city. He admits, among other harrowing revelations, "I have seen the centre of darkness. I have seen the slave-driver of darkness and he is a mad bastard."⁵¹ Even before this dramatic ending, Azure has begun to realize that there are no identities and points of reference 'out there' with which he can align himself in mutual affect in the way that he wishes to vis-à-vis his mother:

I just want to be left alone...I don't want to think about bastards who pick me up at night when their wives are not watching and fuck me for peanuts till I bleed. ... I don't want to hear Gerald saying you have learned to live with fear. ⁵²

However, his removal of himself from subjection to others in the world, being 'left alone,' will also deprive Azure of any possibility of agency. Both being in the world—that is, being affective, vulnerable to the gaze and to violence, and abjected from language and society as a non-person—and being left alone, commit Azure to non-subjectivity; a lose-lose situation. His alienation both within a human order and the alienation of being 'left alone,' can only be solved with his utter destruction of Cape Town, the destruction of every narrative and community towards which he could articulate an identity, every force that initiates his subjectivity and agency. South African writer Shaun Viljoen, in the introduction to the novel's 2013 edition, appears to read this apocalyptic scene as either hyperbolic or metaphorical because he offers the possibility that "the novel ends

⁵¹ (Duiker 194)

⁵² (Duiker 171)

on a muted note of hope and the possibility of an alternative way of being in this world,”⁵³ suggesting a re-grounding of Azure’s subjectivity for a future life in the real world and public sphere to which Azure will return. However, it is not clear from the novel that Azure’s powerful self-articulation as a young, vengeful and violent T-Rex of Cape Town’s underworld has the power to offer a hopeful existence. In *Human Rights, Inc.*, Slaughter considers two post-colonial texts that similarly refuse a hopeful ending of the protagonist’s assimilation into the state and public sphere—Michael Ondaadje’s novel *Anil’s Ghost* (2000) and Tununa Mercado’s memoir *A State of Memory* (1990)—that he terms ‘dissensual *Bildungsromane*’ or ‘anti-*Bildungsromané*’ in their difference from consensual or affirmative *Bildungsromane* which stress their protagonists’ ultimate consent to living by social rules and norms. Dissensual *Bildungsromane* rupture the teleology of the *Bildungsroman*, “protest[ing] the protagonist’s exclusion from the realm of public rights yet articulat[ing] this protest within the normative genre of the rights claim.”⁵⁴ Slaughter describes the public sphere as having a range of functions, each of which bolster certain aspects of citizenry: a “zone of defense between people and the state,”⁵⁵ simultaneously affirming the state’s legitimacy, and “protect[ing] the people from The People”⁵⁶—that is, as a space to appeal to the state against mistreatment by civilians. Additionally, he discusses the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as a public-sphere mechanism that allowed victims to become citizens:

⁵³ (Viljoen ix)

⁵⁴ (Slaughter 181)

⁵⁵ (Slaughter 151)

⁵⁶ (Slaughter 148)

By the TRC's own logic, participation in the discursive public sphere becomes the hallmark of citizenship—the highest form of the human personality's self-expression in traditional human rights discourse—that is exercised through storytelling and story-listening.⁵⁷

Within the novel, Azure is denied access both to a public sphere and to a private life; he is one of those citizens who is not “positively enabled” to “join the democratic community of speech as [a] possible interlocutor.”⁵⁸ At a greater remove, *Thirteen Cents*, however, is a text in the public sphere, representing Azure's experience from a first-person perspective. The irony, of course, is that Azure's abjection and subalternity would not exist as such if he were able to write a memoir—or novel—and have it published. The protagonists of Ondaatjie and Mercado's texts are educated people who are more than capable of crafting their own experience through extended prose. *Thirteen Cents* is thus necessarily fictional while representing real-life scenarios—Duiker lived with a group of street children in order to write the novel.

An asocial subjectivity?

Though Azure tried to create a new set of forces in relation to which he could articulate an authentic identity—a mythology interweaving elements of Khoi culture, lore from the urban underworld, and Cape Town's history of violent intercultural encounters—his project ultimately fails in granting him true subjectivity or agency because those forces are not shared beliefs, thus constraining intersubjectivity and agency to the realm of the imagination. They fail also because his inner horizons have already been so limited by his experiences

⁵⁷ (Slaughter 144)

⁵⁸ (Slaughter 154)

of a world that rejects him, that he cannot even seem to *imagine* a world for himself where he is not trapped in cycles of violence, sadness and isolation. Where Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* imagines a world in which she has blue eyes and an adoring friend who dotes on them, Azure fails to create an imaginary realm whose relations are not primarily structured around an economy of violence. Dissociation rather than escapism is Azure's mode of imagination, and the fiery destruction of Cape Town is the work's final act of dissociation, a post-dystopic crescendo. For all his creative multidirectional self-articulation (both in the world below and in his extended trance on the mountain), which requires, in the words of Stuart Hall, "no necessary or essential correspondence' of anything with anything,"⁵⁹ Azure desperately needs some correspondence with something. Gavin Lewis discusses the importance of ethnicity as collective identity, though his thoughts could be applied to many types of collective formation:

Ethnicity ... is a changing social process, serving important psychological and emotional needs by instilling a sense of self-worth and belonging, as well as being a political process whereby groups of people seek to mobilise collectively to advance or defend their material interests within the wider society.⁶⁰

Azure exists, motherless and fatherless, between childhood and adulthood and at the borders of ethnic, cultural, sexual and other communities, unable to access the material, psychological and political nourishment and solidarity of these social formations as sketched by Lewis. Azure's existence is the limit case of many of these group identities. Gerald can abuse Azure because he is black, though he keeps him close because of his blue eyes. Azure's clients rape him with

⁵⁹ (Hall 45)

⁶⁰ (Lewis 4)

impunity because he is vulnerable and black—totally other—though they desire him in part because of his blue eyes—an affiliation. Black schoolchildren beat him up, and his eyes send “confusing messages.”⁶¹ We see that his phenotypical (black skin/blue eyes), cultural (a cosmology embracing animist Khoi and urban myth) and ethnic (Xhosa) identities have barely any overlap, and are each articulated in relation to different sets of forces. In this novel, we see not only how South Africans’ confusion of imaginary ‘pure’ racial identities prompts violence, but also the type of pain that inbetween spaces can generate: loneliness and emotional abjection that turn into anger and an embrace of a violent order when there is nowhere else left to generate a subject position. Azure’s access to relationships that consist only of violence and negative affect resist Bhabha’s hopeful possibilities of subversive engagement in “innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation”⁶² that arise from intersubjective and communal encounters comprising mutual goals. Azure’s “strategies of selfhood,”⁶³ limited by his experience as utterly abject, can only “initiate new signs of identity [that]... define the idea of society itself”⁶⁴ as flawed to the core. In my reading, then, like *The Bluest Eye*, *Thirteen Cents* ends on a note of despair. Both novels destroy the hopeful conclusion of the traditional trajectory of the *Bildungsroman*, and as dissensual *Bildungsromane*, they

demonstrate... the gender, racial, ethnic, religious, class, and other ‘minority’ biases and exclusions that are institutionalized in the historical world of convention and that are, as Nancy Fraser and others have argued, constitutive of, rather than incidental to, the liberal public

⁶¹ (Duiker 25)

⁶² (Bhabha 1)

⁶³ (Bhabha 1)

⁶⁴ (Bhabha 1)

sphere's hegemonic functioning.⁶⁵

In these cases, the abject black child is wholly denied a society in which healthy relationships and integration is possible, their exclusion the grounds for the consolidation of power amongst whites, adults, and the ruling class more generally. There is no possibility for Pecola and Azure to hope for a 'rags to riches' story arc, or even the possibility of normative social integration. Slaughter and others⁶⁶ point out that many postcolonial *Bildungsromane*, as well as many South African post-apartheid novels, end with the "perpetual postpone[ment]"⁶⁷ of their protagonists' social assimilation or uncertain future, "so that the sovereign, undivided human personality remains a vanishing (plot) point beyond the frame of the text,"⁶⁸ resulting from the inequalities in rights and access that postcolonial societies inherit from their colonial forbears, despite their often progressive promise of rights for all. The ambiguous apocalyptic ending of *Thirteen Cents* suggests on one (realist) hand, actual-death and destruction rather than the uncertainty of postponement, and on the other (surrealist, magical) hand, suggests the inner destruction of Azure's mind—the death of his sense of the real world. In both situations, any promise of Azure's future social integration is shattered. Again, Slaughter writes of the dissensual *Bildungsroman*,

the corruption of the literary form represents a corruption of the legal norms of human rights and acts as a formal indictment of the antidemocratic state and a rejection of its authoritarian claims.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ (Slaughter 182)

⁶⁶ (Austen) (wa Nyatetũ-Waigwa) (Mengel 163) (Cooppan 48)

⁶⁷ (Slaughter 215)

⁶⁸ (Slaughter 215)

⁶⁹ (Slaughter 150)

In the case of *Thirteen Cents*, however, Azure is not dealing with an authoritarian state proper, and one would be hard-pressed to call post-apartheid South Africa anti-democratic in its legal framework and famed constitution. Edward Mengel writes that

although most of these [post-apartheid *Bildungsroman*] novels are open-ended and we cannot be sure about the fate of their heroines/heroes, often there is at least a glimmer of hope at the end, which implies a positive further development. The trajectories of their plots may thus be read as symbolic representations of the country's future.⁷⁰

Setting aside the disagreement of other critics including Ralph Austen, with this conclusion, if we consider the trajectory of *Thirteen Cents* as a symbolic representation of South Africa's future, we come to a puzzling impasse. Surely *Thirteen Cents* cannot mean that South Africa as a country will be destroyed? What *Thirteen Cents* does show is that networks of power other than the state can be far more relevant in the lives of the subject, that there are, effectively, nations within a nation. This observation still serves as an indictment of the state proper, but rather in showing how a democratic state can fail its most vulnerable citizens. Azure is, in effect, stateless—prevented from claiming his rights as a South African due to the prohibitive violence of an informal network of power relations—though he is not technically a refugee, for whom Arendt's term 'statelessness' is normally reserved. And finally, the novel serves not only as an indictment of the state but of adults more broadly. Indeed, Slaughter suggests that one feature of the *Bildungsroman* is to reflect the bourgeois reading public back to itself⁷¹. In this case, this audience is shown an image of their own savage neglect and callousness

⁷⁰ (Mengel 164)

⁷¹ (Slaughter 156)

towards South Africa's most vulnerable children, trapping children like Azure into a melancholic existence that cannot be solved by mourning⁷² nor by the redemptive power of submitting their testimony to the public sphere.

⁷² (Cooppan 47)

CHAPTER TWO: Diasporic and Multiracial Multiplicity
*in Yewande Omotoso's **Bom Boy***

Our capacity to reflect upon ourselves, to tell the truth about ourselves, is correspondingly limited by what the discourse, the regime, cannot allow into speakability.¹

Omotoso's 2011 novel *Bom Boy* begins with the following words:

Friday 13th July 2001
A thing had begun to grow like a tree in Leke Denton's throat.²

“A thing”: what thing? The “thing” on Friday 13th as it appears here, and more generally in the register of horror is that which lies at the limits of the terrible, that which cannot be represented in language because it so utterly other to the realm of language, the ‘proper’ realm of the human. “The thing” growing in the throat of Leke Denton, *Bom Boy*'s eight-year old protagonist, is the indescribable and hypochondriac³ symptom that prevents him from entering language through speech: acutely laconic, Leke speaks fewer than eight hundred words in a 250-page novel. The tree-in-throat symptom is also the embodied sense of fear Leke has towards his upcoming birthday party organized by his adoptive parents. This fear is mixed with a yearning for interpersonal connection that is only fulfilled in Leke's dream life, where “there was no question that he could be the life of the party.”⁴ In his waking life Leke hides his party invitations instead of distributing

¹ (Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* 121)

² (Omotoso 1)

³ Following Ann Anlin Cheng's *Melancholia of Race*

⁴ (Omotoso 1)

them to his classmates. Leke is a lonely mixed-race, multinational transracial adoptee who finds in his childhood that there is not a place prepared for him in the language of his schoolmates or that of his parents—his two social communities. In the novel’s first pages, Leke’s socially marginal status is clearly established: he is teased and outcast for being an adoptee of a different race than his parents, called “kid-for-hire”⁵ at school, where there is a culture of other kids bullying and mocking him. His adoptive parents do not adequately disabuse him of the “kid-for-hire” notion, telling him nothing about his birth parents, and Leke senses that they lie about their acquisition of him. Leke’s name also resists finding a ‘place’ in a national, cultural or linguistic framework or narrative. He is frequently asked some version of “what kind of a name is that?”⁶ but he has no answers. His white adoptive mother Jane says, “it was the name you came with,”⁷ and when Leke Googles it he finds a range of unconnected referents in different languages, bringing him no closer to a sense of his origins. Jane’s nickname for Leke: “Lek,” is a homonym for ‘lack’ in a South African English accent. Cheng posits that “racial melancholia... has always existed for raced subjects both as a sign of rejection and as a psychic strategy in response to that rejection.”⁸ In this chapter I explore how Leke begins at a melancholic point of non-subjectivity, a ‘gap’ in both language (his silence and ignorance of his origins) and sociality (his acute and embodied isolation), and then trace his journey from this ‘lack’ into a subjectivity generated and sustained by embodied and linguistic intersubjectivity.

⁵ (Omotoso 2)

⁶ (Omotoso 183)

⁷ (Omotoso 104)

⁸ (Cheng 20)

A diasporic African Bildungsroman?

Bom Boy—set in Cape Town, charting the coming-of-age of mixed-race Nigerian-South African protagonist Leke, and shot through with Yoruba culture—is inarguably an African *Bildungsroman*. For Ralph Austen and others, however, the hero's conflict of an African *Bildungsroman* tends to be a rather explicit negotiation between a 'traditional' African paradigm and a 'modernised' (neo)colonial world.⁹ While Leke's story incorporates this tension—particularly in its treatment of western, fringe-western and African discourses and epistemologies of health—*Bom Boy* folds together paradigms of 'traditional' and 'modern,' Yoruba and South African, black and white, through its presentation of Leke's mixed-race heritage and multicultural and multicosmological perspectives. Leke's mature multiplicitous racial, national and class identity, and his intergenerational transnational narrative, resonates both with theorizations of diasporic identities and with Omotoso's own history. Omotoso's Bajan-Nigerian family moved to South Africa in 1992, contending with the entangled classism and racism in the country at the time.¹⁰ Though she is often identified with third-generation Nigerian writers—Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Helen Oyeyemi, Taiye Selasi, Chris Abani and others, who are Nigerians living out of the country and often writing about transnational experiences—Omotoso takes an explicit stance against the appellation 'Afropolitan'¹¹ that is often assigned to this group, with their lives and works reflecting the global networks and hybrid identities engendered by economic and educational migration to the west. Omotoso insists

⁹ As discussed by Ralph Austen in 'Struggling with the African Bildungsroman.'

¹⁰ (Fasselt and Omotoso, "I'm Not Afropolitan" 233)

¹¹ (Fasselt and Omotoso, "I'm Not Afropolitan" 235)

instead that she is, “of the continent,”¹² in larger part a rejection of Afropolitanism’s unquestioned classism of an African elite’s access to international—especially western—mobility. In *Bom Boy*, Leke is born of a traumatised and poor coloured mother, a mixed-race Nigerian-white father, and raised by wealthy white parents. Leke's identity is intra-African transnational, multiracial, but decidedly not ‘Afropolitan.’ Scholarship on Omotoso’s works is currently sparse, which is surprising considering that *Bom Boy*, published seven years ago, won the South African Literary Awards prize for first-time published authors, and was shortlisted for the Nigerian Etisalat prize¹³ for debut works of fiction. Rebecca Fasselt’s 2015 essay “‘Nigeria’ in the Cape’ discusses *Bom Boy* as a novel largely about migrancy, resisting both Afropolitanism as a theoretical frame and the overwhelming stereotyping of Nigerians in South African literature and the public sphere, suggesting that *Bom Boy* offers new ways of considering connections between the two countries through a ‘critical Afropolitanism’.¹⁴ Due to the focus of my project, my reading considers the psychological and social forces affecting Leke’s subject formation, while the novel addresses issues of xenophobia centrally through the figure of Leke’s father Oscar.

The use of the term ‘diaspora’ has shifted much in its use over time, and here I use it neither in the sense of a ‘victim diaspora’¹⁵ in which diasporic populations are forced to leave due to their countries’ inability to adequately provide them a home any longer—for political, disaster-related or other reasons,

¹² (Fasselt and Omotoso, "I'm Not Afropolitan" 235)

¹³ Now the 9mobile prize

¹⁴ (Fasselt, Afropolitanism and Alienation 121)

¹⁵ (Zeleza 40)

nor in Gilroy's terms of the Black Atlantic—as the middle passage is not part of the novel's or its characters' historical context. From the twentieth century onwards, technologies of communication and travel have presented new opportunities for economic and educational migration generating new diasporic forms that can resist the diasporic subject's total assimilation into the new country.¹⁶ However, I do later consider how *Bom Boy* complicates diaspora theorization in its largely unexamined formulation of diaspora as an embodied *community* of diasporic subjects, in the sense of Khachig Tölölyan, who writes, "diasporas are the exemplary communities of the transnational moment."¹⁷

The Icarus Girl, the 2005 debut novel from Nigerian-British Helen Oyeyemi, shares some themes with *Bom Boy* as a novel charting identity and subject formation within what Avtar Brah calls 'diaspora space.'¹⁸ Mixed-race eight-year old protagonist, Jessamy 'Jess' Harrison who swings between painful social anxiety and an outgoing self, is confronted by her frustrated cousin: "I wish you'd just decide how you were going to be and sort of... well, BE it."¹⁹ Within a Yoruba cosmology, Jess is an *abiku*²⁰—a spirit child—but she grows up in London

¹⁶ (Clifford 307)

¹⁷ (Tölölyan 5)

¹⁸ Brah introduces the term in *Cartographies of Diaspora* (1996). She defines diaspora space, "the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dislocation as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural, and psychic processes. It is where multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed, or disavowed, where the permitted and the prohibited perpetually interrogate, and where the accepted and the transgressive imperceptibly mingle even while these syncretic forms may be disclaimed in the name of purity and tradition. Here, tradition is itself continually invented." (Brah 205)

¹⁹ (Oyeyemi 228)

²⁰ Christopher Ouma's pithy explanation suffices for this brief discussion: "The concept of *abiku* originates from the phenomenon of spirit-children among the Yoruba community, referring to children who die and are believed to come back again, tormenting their mothers. They are said to occupy multiple worlds (the bush, the spirit world, and the earth) and their topological significance in African literature has

where her screaming fits are read as 'weird' and psychotic rather than as evidence of unperformed rites, and her troubled relationship with a spirit she names TillyTilly is read as dissociative identity disorder (DID) rather than the entwined spiritual and physical existence of *abiku* children. Christopher Ouma suggests that "there is a new African diaspora whose cultural production invokes uneasy, rather than seamless, entanglements between ...western psychoanalysis and Yoruba cosmology,"²¹ and he examines how the radically different cosmologies with their interpretive regimes (in this analysis, Yoruba animist and western psychoanalytic, particularly Lacanian) of Jess's dual heritage create particular challenges of subject formation for diasporic Africans, and how these regimes of interpretation become racialized when transplanted.²² Like Jess, Leke is considered weird by his schoolmates, and that weirdness is cast through a lens of race: Jess who "can't make up her mind if she's black or white,"²³ and Leke who's called "kid-for-hire,"²⁴ because he is visibly not the biological child of his parents. Like Jess, Leke is a friendless, strange and mildly obsessive child—he loves to play repetitive games with himself like, "tearing strips of white paper ...then shuffling the around on the floor,"²⁵ he single-mindedly buys only atlases and globes with his pocket money and is represented throughout as a severely socially anxious person and reluctance to try anything new. These personal idiosyncrasies and the

allowed writers and critics to comment on the complexity of the interfaces of identity, particularly in regard to colonial modernity and African tradition and in relation to evolving postcolonial African worlds."

²¹ (Ouma 203)

²² (Ouma 189)

²³ (Oyeyemi 90)

²⁴ (Omotoso 2)

²⁵ (Omotoso 72)

many medical settings of the novel tempt the reader to diagnose Leke on the Autism Spectrum, but—like *The Icarus Girl*, which explicitly invites and resists the diagnosis of DID—*Bom Boy* refuses a diagnosis within western medical epistemology. In *The Melancholy of Race*, Anne Anlin Cheng writes that

If in the classic hypochondriac we see a person endlessly preoccupied with his or her body's signification, its legitimacy and the origins of its failure, then the assimilating racial-ethnic body can also be said to be hypochondriacal in that it is too a body continuously plagued by questions of its own authenticity and etiology.²⁶

Leke emerges in *Bom Boy*—with all his embodied symptoms that keep him from participating in intersubjective life—not a clinical case but as a diasporic individual seeking his place—in Cheng's words, an authenticity and etiology—at the intersection of multiple cultural, social, personal and political histories. Ouma makes a strong case for the similarities between subject formation in a Lacanian model and in a Yoruba cosmology as both requiring language and narrativity to structure identity and the unconscious, and the interpersonal transference accomplished by language²⁷, while insisting on the fraught, entangled nature of their similarity and coexistence. One area where Leke and Jess part ways, however is in Leke's lack of access to an embodied Yoruba community, whether in abroad or in Nigeria.

Lack, desire and melancholic childhood

Leke's origin story, which is presented in non-linear snippets focalized by each of the novel's central characters, is briefly thus: Leke is born to Elaine, a poor

²⁶ (Cheng 69)

²⁷ (Ouma 195)

coloured woman working as a cashier, while Oscar, Leke's father, is in jail after an attempt to kill Elaine's previous boss and abuser in order to break a Yoruba curse that hangs over him and his family. Elaine's waters break at the post office, where she meets Jane, a white Capetonian woman who drives her to hospital and supports her during the birth. Oscar dies in prison shortly thereafter and Elaine feels she cannot raise Leke alone, so she leaves Leke on a bench for Jane to find, who raises him as her own.

Smiling and crying... [Jane] hoped something she knew she would never admit to anyone, not even Marcus. **She hoped Elaine was gone and was never coming back. Even if it meant she were dead.**"²⁸

This secret—Jane's psychological murder of Elaine—is something Jane carries throughout her motherhood, and is evidence of her "greedy longing"²⁹ to be a mother, a longing that is thwarted by her body's 'lack'—a miscarriage and many failed attempts at conception. Jane thus installs Leke as the object who stands in place of her lack, and lies to Leke about how she came to adopt him. In the novel's first few pages, eight-year-old Leke finds a photograph of Elaine hidden away, and correctly intuits that the woman is his biological mother—but he does not confront Jane about the photograph. After waking in tears from a nightmare in which Elaine callously watches him die, Leke asks Jane, "Did my mother throw me away?"³⁰ He knows that Jane's response—"I don't know what happened, Leke," is a lie that doesn't "explain the photograph."³¹ This picture is an heirloom signifying what Marianne Hirsch terms 'post-memory'—which I use loosely here as denoting

²⁸ (Omotoso 204) (my emphasis)

²⁹ (Omotoso 204)

family or community memory of the experiences and stories of previous generations—but, unlike most instances of post-memory, which are consciously handed down, its narrative, which is also Leke’s genealogical narrative, is withheld from him.

In Lacanian discourse, the individual is formed as such through a sense of their own lack—the lack that precipitates desire and forces the realisation of a separate self, the lack of bodily unity that is misrecognized in the wholeness of the *imago* in the mirror stage, the lack of the discursive place of the subject who self-reflects, and so on. But because of Jane’s attachment to Leke as that which remedies her lack (of motherhood), Jane permits an almost suffocatingly close relationship with him, which allows Leke to remain partly in the pre-linguistic Lacanian order of the Real where the mother-child pair co-identifies. Because Jane allows Leke to be and participate in so many of her desires—in particular, her love of gardening, which she shares with Leke and teaches him to tend for a wide range of plants—Leke’s journey towards individuation is hindered: Jane is there to fulfil his lack of sociality and coherent subjectivity, and he for her. In this situation, communication between mother and child takes place through their bodily connection in presence—in touch and its affective potential, requiring no language to mediate. Jane heals Leke simply by touching him; she “could always get at the itch by placing her hands on his throat. Her presence alone made the irritation disappear,”³² removing Leke’s responsibility to accept his symptoms as effects of his own body, and preventing him from accomplishing individuation. Jane’s unhealthy attachment to Leke also renders Marcus impotent in his role as a co-

³² (Omotoso 6)

parent, denying Marcus the opportunity to perform the Lacanian ‘paternal function’ of symbolically saying ‘no,’ and instantiate the process of separation, forcing Leke to form his desires in language and thereby develop as a subject. Fasselt does not read this aspect of their relationship as in any way troubling for Leke’s development, but focuses on the dual promise and disappointment of transracial adoption as proffering the possibility of ‘new families’ in a new South Africa, and secondly, as inevitably fraught with and pressured by the racial and class tensions of broader society.

When Jane dies from cancer, Leke is literally entwined with her in death, discovered “coiled around the stiff body.”³³ It is thus death who performs a macabre paternal function, dividing Leke once and for all from his mother. However, instead of the ‘normal’ effect of separation, which is for the child to enter language, Leke exits language into “his own world:”

Ten-year-old Leke had grown up overnight, he resolved to retreat into his own world. He knew he couldn’t stay there forever but he’d stay for as long as possible and return as often as he could.³⁴

A month after Jane’s death Marcus embarks on a twelve-day trip, leaving Leke with Lightness, their domestic worker, and Leke begins a three-month retreat into complete silence, described as his “grow[ing] up overnight.”³⁵ Such a ‘growing up’ entails a deeply pessimistic form of maturity that recognizes the external world as fearful and likely to disappoint, and something that should be distanced—it is not the maturity we expect from a socially integrated, healthy adult nor as the generic

³³ (Omotoso 194)

³⁴ (Omotoso 194)

³⁵ (Omotoso 194)

telos of a *Bildungsroman*. Marcus eventually coaxes Leke to speak, which he does so perfunctorily, never expressively or interrogatively. Until his early twenties, Leke succeeds in living as much as possible in his own world, where his imagination is inhabited almost solely by Jane's memory. For Cheng, "the melancholic ego is formed and fortified by a spectral drama, whereby the subject sustains itself through the ghostly emptiness of the lost other." Leke, repeating the rituals of planting only four o'clocks, the perennial flower that Jane began to love in her last days; interpreting the world through Jane's botanical language, a discourse of plants³⁶; and living in a garage alongside Jane's old car, melancholically continues to invest himself into an identification with Jane. For work, Leke learned "the quiet language of computers,"³⁷ and at almost all cost avoids speaking and bringing his body into spaces of socialization demanding interaction and affectivity, in the sense expressed generally by Brian Massumi—the "ability to affect and a susceptibility to be affected."³⁸ In a moment in his early twenties, where Leke allows himself to acknowledge his loneliness, he ponders his life:

Maybe he'd used silence as a balm to the uncertainties of life...
Perhaps he'd thought that if he said nothing, if he barely breathed the
world would shrink to a size he could fit into.³⁹

³⁶ For example, he calls his landlady 'the Rhododendron,' (Omotoso 26), and describes the shopping mall near his home "like an enchanted forest, but instead of trees and bushes there were elevators and escalators, and in place of animals there were sales people. Instead of fruit, clothes sprouted in the shop windows, waiting to be picked." (Omotoso 77)

³⁷ (Omotoso 21)

³⁸ (Massumi 61)

³⁹ (Omotoso 161)

Leke admits that he had succeeded in shrinking himself into “the space of a smudge.”⁴⁰ A smudge: a small mark signifying nothing but the error of its creation—this is the silent world that Leke inhabits. Since his smudge world is outside of language, so too is Leke. Mourning Jane—in LaCapra’s phrasing, ‘working through’⁴¹ the trauma of her death—would require a process that would amount to Leke mourning the loss—and absence—of his own self due to his total identification with her.

While Jane’s trauma is secreted within her psyche and symptomized in her lies and silence about Leke’s origins, Elaine’s trauma is visible on her skin and she communicates it affectively, with Elaine featuring in the novel primarily through her bodily presence and her discomfort in language. Half of her body was severely burned by her ex-employer, Malcolm Feathers, from whose house and employment she escaped by running away. Elaine also harbours “less visible scars... her panic if Oscar looked too long at her, the paranoid way she covered herself,”⁴²—the affects of trauma-induced fear and shame. Though her skin is “pale and freckled,” which, according to her mother was, “good skin... an attractive option,”⁴³ (i.e. closer to white), Elaine is written into the novel through the precarity of the black female body: poor, traumatized, child-like,⁴⁴ without agency and without a voice, appearing so insubstantial that Oscar comments that “you could scatter her with a puff of wind.”⁴⁵ Passages focalized by Elaine are saturated

⁴⁰ (Omotoso 161)

⁴¹ (LaCapra, *History in transit : experience, identity, critical theory*)

⁴² (Omotoso 229)

⁴³ (Omotoso 47)

⁴⁴ She has to “shop for clothes from the children’s section.” (Omotoso 48)

⁴⁵ (Omotoso 85)

with unpleasant bodily sensation—particularly with strong, bad smells and physical discomfort like hunger, headaches, fatigue, cold and pain. While pregnant and after Leke is born, an overworked, exhausted and lonely Elaine is often silent, speaking most frequently to Leke to gently say “Sh, sh,”⁴⁶ and crying. These scenes reverberate with Duiker’s *Thirteen Cents*, where protagonist Azure finally finds a mother figure in his hallucination of Sara Baartman, who cries by his side and barely speaks: both exemplary of the indigenous black mother crushed to silence by the traumatic violence of white patriarchy. Instead of being subjected *into* language by violence in varying degrees of ‘permissibility’—e.g. Foucault’s theories of subjection—subjection to highly traumatic violence can repel its victims *from* language. Through embodied affect, Elaine quietly transmits to Leke the trauma of her separation from Oscar, and her precarious helplessness at the nexus of racial and historical trauma. Leke and Elaine’s symptoms that remove them from social participation—a tree in Leke’s throat, a blurring of his vision when he tries to read the letters from his father, a rash on his skin, and Elaine’s arm-folding and painful shyness—are utterly embodied. These symptoms, especially after Jane’s death, are signs of what Patricia Clough calls traumatic “memory without consciousness,”⁴⁷ since Leke is not aware of why he cannot speak, nor why he cannot read, and they function to separate him from others to protect him from dealing with the painful emotions of rejection/abjection that he associates with a racist sociality.

⁴⁶ (Omotoso 96)

⁴⁷ (Clough in Leys 6)

Leke's Bildung as emergence into intersubjectivity

Leke's journey into subjectivity resists a dialectical interpretation more common to the traditional *Bildungsroman* and even the African *Bildungsroman*, because he begins from nowhere, insofar as his dream life—the only part of his life in which he identifies with his own desires—cannot be considered in any way a subjecthood since it is wholly internal. Leke's own subjectivity then, can only emerge when he permits intersubjectivity. In *Becoming Black*, a discussion of African diasporic identity, Michelle Wright argues that

there is a twentieth-century intellectual tradition of African diasporic counterdiscourses of Black subjectivity that ... understands Black subjectivity as that which must be negotiated between the abstract and the real, or in theoretical terms, between the ideal and the material.

In line with Wright, the novel presents Leke emerging into subjecthood through these realms of the real and the abstract—importantly, in that order—first through intersubjective haptic connection and then through linguistic interaction comprising stories and the abstraction of an imagined community into which he is interpellated.

Bildung as haptic impressionability

Leke's liminal stage⁴⁸ of formation begins at the margins of a mall—a socioscape governed by commodities and the promise of 'retail therapy'—where he lurks and watches women and discovers an object-mediated sociality. He begins to help women in the mall with small tasks; they are grateful, smile, and treat him kindly.

⁴⁸ The liminal state is middle stage in the liminal *Bildungsroman* according to Wangari wa Nyatetũ-Waigwa, where the hero exists on the periphery of the daily life of society and learns the lessons he needs to mature and reintegrate into the social world as an adult. Nyatetũ-Waigwa's model explicitly parallels anthropologist Victor Turner's stages of certain African initiation rites.

In an attempt to recall and recreate this good feeling of being seen, Leke steals small objects from the women, which he later impresses onto his body—a bangle, which he, “forced ...up his bicep, enjoying the tightness of its hold on his skin,”⁴⁹ a pair of earrings which he “squeezed ... between his thumb and index finger; the gold stem left a small indentation,”⁵⁰—marking himself temporarily with the pleasurable memory of an intersubjective encounter but displacing that intersubjectivity onto to the less threatening object. Ahmed’s affect and surface collide here in a quite literal way: with the impression of these objects and the emotions they elicit—including those of his childhood—Leke escapes objectivity and moves towards subjectivity by wilfully creating the surface of his body with positive affect instead of the negativity and abjection to and through which he was subjected as a child.

Bildung as haptic healing

After the object-centred approach at the mall proves limited—his libidinal and affective displacement cannot actually dispel his isolation—and he is banned for lurking, Leke discovers the healing power of intentional *human* touch through donating blood at his workplace. The nurse’s warm, firm touch releases his ‘favourite memory’ about Jane in the controlled environment of the nurse’s office, where he is not treated unkindly for his body or his reticence. Leke visits many doctors after this first encounter, seeking their non-threatening gaze and touch, which release scenes and memories from his childhood and their attendant affects,

⁴⁹ (Omotoso 78)

⁵⁰ (Omotoso 122)

remnants of the maternal identification in the register of the Lacanian Real. We can consider this behaviour as closely related to hypochondria, which Cheng considers through a racial lens as “denot[ing] an effort at negotiating such a loss by constantly seeking and staging the question of origin.”⁵¹ However, in his search for origins, he does not appear *as himself*—perhaps because he is still searching for who this is—Leke instead poses as clients of the medical insurance company he works for, also using their accounts to pay for the sessions. Despite this, Leke slowly becomes affective, porous to feeling through these encounters. After visiting a slew of western clinicians, Leke visits a physiotherapist, a homeopath and a Hellerworker, whose more holistic and psychosomatic modalities of healing work to help Leke connect the feelings and memories evoked in the sessions *to himself*, and to make personal meaning and an identity from them. After leaving the homeopath frustrated—she does not touch him but instead asks him to reflect on himself—Leke realises and asserts in spoken language (albeit to himself) that there is no adequate substitution for the loss of Jane: not driving her car nor reviving her in memory and imagination.

“Love is shit! He looked at his reflection in the rear-view mirror and spoke to an absent Dr Meyers. “Love is useless. It has no real power.”

At ten years old, loving Jane, but unable to will her to live, the much celebrated and denigrated concept was a disappointment.

“Useless,” he repeated, leaving Red outside... loving a car had not worked either. Yes it lived on, continuously revived by mechanics and technology, but so what? It did not love back. (Omotoso 192)

In this scene Leke makes one of a very few unprompted propositional statements as himself, articulating his position, taking a stance in relation to the

⁵¹ (Cheng 83)

world. He then also uses that proposition (“love is shit”) as a framework to analyse who and how he loves. These independent activities of language and focalized thinking through are Leke’s first steps in working through his trauma and the loosening of his identification with Jane. He looks in the rear-view mirror, looking both backwards as though into memory, and at a partial reflection of himself, a delayed mirror stage in which he identifies as himself through misrecognition. ‘Love’, which connected him to and identified him with Jane—is ‘shit’, was not able to sustain her, and neither can it sustain him in her death. Leke also uses his own language here; Jane would never say ‘shit’. It is the beginning of his subjecthood: through language Leke claims his own opinions and, through narrative focalization, expresses a desire “to be loved back,” a desire previously manifesting as the compulsions to steal, stalk, and visit doctors.

Bildung as world-reading and world-telling

In addition to the doctors’ touch, Leke is welcomed into sociality via language in the letters from his father—a conflation of the *Bildungsroman*’s recurrent trope of literacy education, and what Ato Quayson identifies as a central factor of diasporic literature, what he calls “genealogical accounting [which] provides a distinguishing past to the person or community.”⁵² In these letters Oscar gives Leke an account of himself, which is also an account of Leke’s origins. In this telling, he offers Leke a place in a symbolic order of their Yoruba family culture that is enfolded into folk tales, songs, a philosophy privileging the collective over the individual, as well as Oscar’s happy memories of being inducted

⁵² (Quayson 151)

into this cosmology by his own father. When Leke receives the envelope of Oscar's letters from Marcus, "his hands wouldn't stop shaking. He put the pages down on the bed but as he studied the words his eyes clouded."⁵³ Again Leke's fear of what he might find at his origins is embodied, and prevents him from entering language. Meanwhile, Leke has been stalking Tsotso, a female colleague who eventually becomes Leke's first real friend, and he asks her to read him the letters. This education—of his paternal cultural origins—brings an other, Tsotso into the centre of Leke's journey to self, and mingles the modalities of orality and the written, blurring the reductive separation of tradition and modernity too often mapped respectively onto these modalities. Through these letters, and for the first time, Leke experiences being planned for, being known, and he finds a subject position (Oscar writes, "Leke—my bom boy!"⁵⁴) that has been created for him in a Yoruba cosmology and his father's love, allowing him to enter into the Lacanian "world of discourse... [a] parent's linguistic universe."⁵⁵ Ralph Austen places the 'educational' aspect of the *Bildungsroman* under the banner of literacy, where, in traditional European novels of formation, unprescribed reading precipitates the autodidactic process of *self-formation*, like Goethe's quintessential *Wilhelm Meister*. Austen also demonstrates the importance of a mentor in literacy education⁵⁶ particularly in the African *Bildungsroman*. In line with Oscar's Yoruba worldview and a wider African philosophy of *ubuntu*, Leke's literacy

⁵³ (Omotoso 169)

⁵⁴ (Omotoso 232)

⁵⁵ (Fink 5)

⁵⁶ The role of the mentor has also been shown to be central to the feminine *Bildungsroman*. See Esther Laboviz's *Myth of the Heroine* (1986), and, Elizabeth Abel and Marianne Hirsch, *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development* (1983).

education is founded on an intersubjective connection with Tstotso, and the knowledge it provides is not makes no claims to universality, is not scientific, nor does it aim to assimilate Leke into western modern society but centres on a Yoruba cosmological order that provides him particular and non-western epistemological approaches and modes of belonging.

For Joseph Slaughter, in *Human Rights, Inc.*, literacy as seen by the postcolonial *Bildungsroman* and the modernizing-development project is a technology that enables development at both the level of individuals—towards the development of their full individual personality—and at the level of the state, made up as it is of individuals who are obligated to use their literacy and ‘full personality’ for humanitarian aims, meaning to organize, regulate and build a modern nation-state, that is, to become good citizens. Leke is, however, already a productive member of a capitalist state, literate in all the ‘obvious’ ways. The literacy/education strand of his *Bildung* thus provides something else: the foundations for a Yoruba subjectivity rather than for citizenship under a nation-state, suggesting the importance of alternative, i.e. non-academic, literacies in contributing to the *Bildungsheld’s* community integration. In a 2005 essay, Harry Garuba proposes the terminology ‘animist materialism’⁵⁷ to consider cosmologies, including Yoruba cosmologies, that conceive of the material world as animated by spirit. Importantly for Garuba, animist materialist frameworks allow for the new and unfamiliar—including the modern, the western, the scientific—to be subsumed within one worldview that is necessarily flexible and dynamic. Though Oscar is a biologist, staking his career on the scientific method, at the heart of his

⁵⁷ (Garuba)

letters to Lee is a family curse that he calls ‘the darkness’, and the coexistence of these cosmological approaches exemplifies an animist materialism. Leke is interpellated into ‘the darkness’, whose multigenerational narrative order is another ‘gap’ that Leke is fated either to fixate upon and repeat, like his father did, or work through. Besides the curse, there is another gap in Oscar’s account that he transmits to Leke: his ‘oyinbo’ mother. In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Judith Butler discusses Foucault, who “makes clear”

that any discourse, any regime of intelligibility constitutes us at a cost. Our capacity to reflect upon ourselves, to tell the truth about ourselves, is correspondingly limited by what the discourse, the regime, cannot allow into speakability.⁵⁸

The cost of Oscar’s self-establishment in this Yoruba ‘regime of intelligibility,’ is the erasure of his white, ‘oyinbo’ mother from his origin story. Though she is mentioned as central to his upbringing, she and her influence are overlooked in Oscar’s recounting of his culture, childhood and beliefs. As a child, Oscar is teased about his ‘oyinbo’ mother, who is denied the legitimacy of true belonging, not allowed into speakability *qua* Yoruba subject. His mother—a white Capetonian—is also a representative of a social and discursive regime founded on a white-dominant culture of conquest, symbolized by the Rhodes memorial at the University of Cape Town, which he pits in jocular but pained arguments with his colleagues against the legendary Yoruba queen Moremi, whose more humble statue back in Nigeria represents Yoruba mores of self-sacrifice and collective belonging. In a move that is both rejection of his mother’s otherness (and the otherness she bequeaths to him), and an attempt to embrace a wholeness for

⁵⁸ (Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* 121)

himself in a single discourse, Oscar subsumes his mother's difference into Yoruba lore that stresses the value of multiplicity and embraces indeterminacy, allowing him to tacitly acknowledge the multiplicity of his heritage. Oscar recounts a story about Esu, the trickster god, who challenges a friendship by presenting two men with a man walking between them, who "wore an outfit where half was red and half was white."⁵⁹ Each man sees a different half and the friends argue, rejecting the possibility that they may merely have different perspectives on the same situation. This indeterminacy resonates with Oscar's mixed-race heritage, Elaine's two halves and Leke's multiplicitous origins. Oscar also tells Leke about Moremi, who consulted the river goddess Esinmirin on how to defeat their enemy, the Igbo. On Esinmirin's instruction, Moremi married the Igbo king to spy for the Yoruba, thereby ensuring their triumph. In exchange, however, Moremi sacrificed her child to Esinmirin. For this, she is claimed by Yoruba people as a second mother, conceptually allowing Oscar to understand himself as having two Yoruba parents. In his letters, Oscar tells both this version and his own version of the story, where Moremi sacrifices herself to save the child, a symbolic reinterpretation of his mother sacrificing her participation in her home community to be with her family. Oscar's comfort with retelling and reinterpreting his cultural heritage⁶⁰ signals a flexibility and porousness in his approach to it and indeed is an important property of animist materialist paradigms. This approach, of reading and re-telling the world within a single regime of interpretation both allows and prevents Oscar's working through the trauma of

⁵⁹ (Omotoso 186)

⁶⁰ See Rebecca Faaselt's "Nigeria" in the Cape: Afropolitanism and Alienation' (p. 130) for other interpretations and adaptations of this story as approaches to nation-building.

his own mother's barring from speakability within the regime, that is, his mother who cannot be spoken of and cannot speak as a Yoruba subject.

In Quayson's terms, Oscar's letters induct Leke into an affective economy of the Yoruba diaspora that "material objects such as private heirlooms and public monuments encapsulate... while songs, rituals and stories provide narrative shape and justification,"⁶¹ providing Leke with a paradigm through which he can read the world as one in which he has a place and a name prepared especially for him. If he, like Oscar, can subsume the multiple discursive regimes of his world into one—as suggested by Garuba's animist materialism—he may be assured an available subject position for him at all times. Leke, however, maintains remains open to this cosmology as merely one of many in which he exists.

From the none to the many: Leke's 'third space' amongst worlds

Bom Boy ends with Leke visiting a sangoma to address his role in the family curse into which he is interpellated—deciding with the support of Tsotso to go only once, and not allow the curse to control their lives. In a new display of interpersonal reliance, Leke asks Marcus to help pay for the appointment, and he invites Tsotso to join him: "You don't have to come with me but I'm asking you to. I'll do it either way."⁶² This is Leke's strongest exercise of agency in the novel, and the degree of community and plurality implicated in this agency is complemented by the sangoma's interaction with Leke's ancestors. "Each time a different ancestor spoke Sis' Lerato would wriggle in her body and seemed to take on the

⁶¹ (Quayson 146)

⁶² (Omotoso 245)

persona of whoever was speaking.”⁶³ Many of his ancestors speak to and through Sis’ Lerato, some light-hearted and joking, some deeply serious. In this interaction, Leke’s skin itches. Instead of saying “it’s scratching,” as he did as a child, here he claims his body and its sensations as his own, saying, “my skin’s itching.”⁶⁴ Leke emerges from this final episode calm, hopeful and self-possessed, though without a clear picture of the future. This self-possession, as demonstrated throughout this chapter, is instantiated not by external social pressures coercing Leke into conformation with social expectations nor by his maturing into a pre-ordained subjecthood—as the traditional *Bildungsroman* would have it—but by Leke’s halting journey of opening himself to others, allowing the intersubjective encounter with the other to *initiate* his self-reflexive subjectivity rather than simply transform it from one subject position to another. Sis’ Lerato is the ultimate symbol of intersubjective plurality of self that is reflected in the novel’s plurivocal, temporally and spatially non-linear, chaotic, synchronous form. The text’s narrative progression is organized not by causality but by Lacanian synchronicity and cyclical repetition, neither principle requiring unidirectional temporality or a linear spatial journey. Events ending one section reverberate with events beginning the next section taking place in a different space and time and are focalised a different character. Because the reader is privy to Leke’s family story before he learns of it—and is privy to some episodes that he may never discover—the reader understands Leke also through an intersubjective lens.

⁶³ (Omotoso 248)

⁶⁴ (Omotoso 248)

As Leke matures and forges a subjectivity, the divided worlds he occupies begin to overlap increasingly. While awake, for example, “Leke felt in a dream and knew with a forceful certainty that with his next step he would turn to wind and fly.”⁶⁵ His waking and dream lives swirl into each other from their strict separation in his childhood and youth, and other realms that were previously separate merge, and those that were non-existent emerge as already intertwined: through the co-existent touch and memory he experiences in his doctors’ visits, his identification with his own body and mind occur simultaneously. Temporally, Leke emerges as a mature subject in the present through a previously unknown past from his father’s letters, and through the recuperation of repressed childhood memories. Culturally, through both Oscar’s letters and through his own encounters with a *sangoma*⁶⁶ in his dream and waking lives, Leke understands himself as subject to and in both Nigeria and Cape Town’s social and spiritual cultures. Such hybridity finds counterparts in diasporic and post-colonial *Bildungsromane* like in Ben Okri’s *Famished Road*, whose protagonist lives amongst the palimpsested worlds of spirit and the living; and in the motifs of multiplicitous cultures and spirit worlds in Oyeyemi’s *Opposite House*, where the diasporic female protagonist navigates her mental instability and sense of displacement through both Igbo and Cuban spiritual orders. In the normalization or even celebration of overlapping worlds, these novels resist the realist *Bildungsroman*’s representation of the ‘education of the hero,’ as linear progress into a modernity marked by secular individualist western values that Vazquez

⁶⁵ (Omotoso 237)

⁶⁶ South African traditional healer

writes as “rationalism, materialism and pragmatism[, where ...]pirituality, fantasy and myth are usually rejected as worthless superstitions,”⁶⁷ and where a singular, coherent, or monophonic identity is the hallmark of social adjustment. Instead, incommensurability, disjuncture, multiplicity and contradiction are navigated without an insistent drive to synthesise them. It is an animist materialism that best describes the new worldview from which Leke’s finds a subjectivity: Yoruba myth, South African traditional healing, and a world and family comprising modern values—Marcus and Tsotso both support Leke but remain somewhat sceptical of the sangoma’s work—all co-exist within Leke’s cosmos.

It is in this tradition that I have been using the term *diaspora* to denote Leke as a second generation diasporic subject, but it is necessary to address that diaspora theory tends—with good reason—to consider diasporic identities importantly as communal, where members of diasporas share memories and cultural practices from their homeland—practices that inevitably transform in new contexts, over time and in subsequent generations. Within the novel however, Leke never finds a Yoruba community in which to participate, so he is a diasporic subject who discovers this part of himself while isolated—Yoruba traditions are thus not enfolded into his life via his community. Avtar Brah offers the useful paradigm of ‘diaspora space,’ as “the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dislocation as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural, and psychic processes,”⁶⁸ allowing for a broad consideration of diasporic identity, including

⁶⁷ (Vázquez 90)

⁶⁸ (Brah 205)

that which is not in direct contact with others from a diasporic collective. A host of factors coincide to render Leke—the isolated diasporic subject—particularly susceptible to social abjection in a city so deeply divided by race and by class: Leke’s racial difference from his adoptive parents, his quiet personality, the racialized trauma he inherits from his biological mother, and the lies and secrets he inherits from his adoptive parents which, in his situation, undermine his grounds for subjectivity. Though Leke never meets his father, the genealogical accounting—in other words, a believable founding myth inaugurating one into a symbolic order—Oscar offers in his letters suggests that a convincing story about one’s birth and origins can offer a basis for subject formation that is an alternative to an obviously biologically inherited place within a family. Taking its place alongside Helen Oyeyemi’s *The Opposite House*⁶⁹, Chris Abani’s *Virgin of Flames* and other works that emphasize the instability or multiplicity of any subjectivity that the diasporic, mixed-heritage *Bildungsheld* can occupy, *Bom Boy* can be considered a diasporic *Bildungsroman* with a delayed subject-formation, though different from these other works in its intra-Africa focus. The non-synthesizable subjectivities exemplified in these works are engendered both by the immediate co-existence of two or more distinct cosmologies, and because of what can be lost, suppressed or warped through the intergenerational and geographical ruptures of migration. In addition, these subjects are often disproportionately influenced by their socially-perceived racial identities, the visibility of which tends to override cultural difference and multiplicity in favour of stereotype and plays into racist

⁶⁹ I hesitate to include *The Icarus Girl* as a *Bildungsroman*, as it does not detail the protagonist's life past age nine.

social formations of inclusion and exclusion that exacerbate the structural trauma on the diasporic subject. And finally, like Black, the Nigerian-Salvadorian protagonist of *The Virgin of Flames* who lives in Los Angeles, Leke does not participate in a diasporic community which could nurture and affirm this part of his new identity. Leke instead seeks what is similar and available in Cape Town, generating a multiplicitous cosmology incorporating South African traditional practices with Yoruba values and lore, a multiplicity that is suggested to be the setting for a future reunification with his lost, but not dead, mother.

CHAPTER THREE: Multi-racial subjectivity
in Zoë Wicomb's Playing in the Light

Zoe Wicomb's 2006 novel *Playing in the Light* is a story of haunting, of secret pasts that silently infest the present. The protagonist Marion, a racist white Afrikaans woman in her late thirties, discovers that her parents were coloured people who took advantage of their light skin and pulled strings to register as white under apartheid law. In the process, they renounced their previous lives and families, raising Marion in anxious isolation from both white and coloured society, fending off the ghosts of their past selves which constantly threatened to re-emerge. Like Wicomb's more well-known novel *David's Story* (2001) and interrelated collection of short stories *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987), *Playing in the Light* explores themes of the entanglements, false dichotomies, historical and archival erasures, and political complicities in a history of racial identities in South Africa—more specifically, coloured and white identities in Cape Town and their connections to the UK. The novel's title riffs on *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992), a critical work in which Toni Morrison addresses questions including, "how [are] 'literary whiteness' and 'literary blackness' made...?"¹ Wicomb explores how colouredness, blackness and whiteness are made in the racial crucible of post-apartheid Cape Town, examining their political and affective distinctions and dependencies on one another.

¹ (Morrison xiv)

An otherwise cloistered and isolated woman, through her friendship with Brenda, the new young coloured employee at the travel agency Marion runs and owns, Marion begins to leave her house and comfort zone, learns more about herself, reckons with her fraught history, and begins to integrate more healthily with the world. However, Marion relies on her relationship with Brenda to explore her own coloured identity, usurping Brenda's time, space and energy in an echo of colonization, slavery of the Western Cape, and white domination of native peoples. Brenda's role in the narrative thus superficially appears to be as a supporting character or sidekick, serving the story arc of Marion's delayed coming-of-age. However, as suggested by Andrew van der Vlies, Brenda's role as a secondary figure is put greatly into question by the strong possibility that she is in fact the narrator-author of the entire work. Much of Wicomb's work, including *Playing in the Light*, tests what it means to offer an authentic and truthful narrative. Her works are typically considered not to offer essentialised 'answers' to the questions of racial identity, truth-telling and narrative authenticity they pose, but rather that they uncover and prod the complex ambiguities, tensions and unresolved questions that inform identities and constitute ranges of truths that have various faces—a mode of story-telling that is highly responsive to the tortuous and obscured histories of coloured people in South Africa. In *Playing in the Light*, these questions are set against the faint background of the TRC, which also acknowledges the various forms that truth can take: the individual's narrative and memory, factual evidence as well as the social constraints which construct individual subjectivities in widely different ways, recognizing that truth can look

very different depending on one's social vantage point.² I thus take seriously van der Vlies' suggestion that the sassy, ironic Brenda—once English literature student and Marion's coloured employee—is not only the focalizer of Marion's (and her father John's) story, but is also the implied writer and narrator of the novel. Van der Vlies suggests that Brenda occupies such roles for some of the novel's text—in particular, Marion's father and aunt's stories, which she could have obtained via interviews—but for reasons of style, both in the unflattering characterization of Marion in passages focalized by her, and the garish symbolism saturating the free indirect discourse in sections even focalized by the dead Helen, seem to signal a budding writer educated in a western canon, whose second language is English, I embrace the suggestion as typifying the entire work. On the novel's last page, Marion and Brenda argue because, while Marion has been abroad, Brenda has been interviewing Marion's father and writing his story:

That's enough. Get out [of my car]. I know my father's fucking story.
Actually, Brenda says, I suspect you don't.³

I thus read the work as an exercise in the ethics of narrative, of problematizing the telling of another's story and an effort to tell the truth while acknowledging that the truth has many faces and many, often conflicting, facts. Indeed, Marion (through Brenda's pen) frequently gestures explicitly to the challenges of having one's story told, both by oneself and by another. Additionally, since Marion's 'race' changes over the course of the story, the notions of a stable identity and a stable

² (Van der Vlies, *Ambiguities* 949-961)

³ (*Playing* 218)

perspective from which to speak are problematized both by the content and the narrative form that complicates the relations of characters to the text itself.

Marion's journey of self-exploration is initiated by her uncanny experience of a face she sees on the cover of a newspaper. This face, along with the novel's other specters, repeatedly haunt her dreams and mindscapes, troubling Marion until she discovers, works through and mourns their origins in traumas repressed by her parents, following Cooppan's psychoanalytic model of post-apartheid fiction "that has trauma as its content, narrative as its melancholic modality, and mourning as its cure."⁴ Towards the end of the novel, the still emotionally uptight Marion leaves South Africa for her first real holiday, finding in England and Scotland, "a place to cry,"⁵ and where she reads Nadine Gordimer's *The Conservationist* and JM Coetzee's *In the Heart of the Country*. Both white-authored South African novels feature white protagonists who live on farms where secretly killed bodies are buried. Mehring of *The Conservationist* is haunted and disturbed by the phantom presence of an unknown black man buried hastily by the police in a shallow grave on Mehring's property, and whose corpse surfaces after heavy rains. Mehring is psychically persecuted by the man, whom he constantly sees in his peripheral vision and whose hand he imagines dragging him into marshy ground—a potent symbol of how the country's violent, deadly racist past and reliance on cheap black labor disturbs the psychic and material comfort of white South African landowners today.⁶ Magda of *In the Heart of the Country* is haunted by her colonial heritage, and her unhinged mind fixates on anti-

⁴ (Cooppan 47)

⁵ (Wicomb 191)

⁶ (Robolin 365)

fantasies. Some of these end up occurring in the material world: her fear/fantasy of being raped by Hendrik, the black farm manager, and the fear/fantasy of killing her father, whose body she and Hendrik bury secretly on the farm. In this way, her fantasies figure as ghosts of an uncertain future that is intimate with a violent colonial past. “Magda’s mad murders and phantom couplings,”⁷ (in Marion’s words) are thus emblematic of a white South African present that is haunted by both future and past temporalities, by fear and guilt respectively. Magda’s spectral world of language entangles her personal past and her heritage as a white South African, which forms a phantom double that haunts her. In her neurosis, Magda’s reality seems to haunt itself; even the scenes we understand as actually happening are uncannily surreal. The grave she and Hendrik dig for her father is too small for his body, and she herself enters it before burying him, thinking, “I could make this my second home.”⁸ In Coetzee’s unsentimental prose we read the macabre scenes of Magda toiling to manipulate the body into the hole.

I kneel and push at it with all my force... Now shoulders and head will pass through, but feet and knees refuse to slide further... The fault is not in the knees, I see, but in the spine that will not flex. ...Will I have to cut the tendons at the knees? Burial is all a mistake. I should have burned the body...⁹

Marion of *Playing in the Light* reverses the trajectory of burials in these two works: she actively exhumes the corpses haunting her, metaphorically loosening her rigid spine, flexing her tendons and climbing out of the psychic crypt in which her most intimate self and family history is buried.

⁷ (Wicomb, *Playing* 205)

⁸ (Coetzee 97)

⁹ (Coetzee 101)

After a brief review of the pressures facing coloured identity, I adopt a psychoanalytic approach allowing an analysis of Marion's ghosts as manifestations of psychic repression, drawing from Gabriele Schwab's *Haunting Legacies*, which explores how trauma and traumatic memories can be passed down through generations even through secrecy and silence.¹⁰ Following Schwab and Derrida, I utilize the concept of the crypt as a psychic space in which to 'bury' secrets, and employ it alongside a hybrid of theories concerning affect, subjectivity and subject formation. I engage chiefly with Judith Butler and her work wielding Foucault with Freud and Lacan, and with Stuart Hall's notion of articulation as an active process of constant self-resubjectivation in which one (re)locates oneself ideologically and socially. I also engage Schwab's schematization of Fanon's psychic decolonization as part of a process of re-articulating subjectivity and identity in a world racially divided by histories of colonization.

Coloured identity and Wicomb's work

The Population Registration Act of 1950 lumped together as 'coloured' ("a person who is not a white person or a native") South Africans whose heritage could be traced back to native peoples of the Western Cape: Khoikhoi, Griqua, and San; South East Asian slaves; the progeny of white and black relations; and any other non-white, non-black, non-Indian, non-Chinese, thus creating a 'miscellaneous' race. In 1983, first lady Marike de Klerk, remarked in a campaign speech,

...The definition of a Coloured in the population register is of someone who is not a Black, and not an Indian, in other words a non-

¹⁰ Though Schwab's approach to and accounts of intergenerational trauma are routed partially through her inheritance as a German vis-à-vis the holocaust, some reworking of her thinking is necessary throughout this paper.

*person. ... They're leftovers. They're people who were left over after the nations were sorted out. They're the rest.*¹¹

Despite de Klerk's opinion, coloured identity was strategically positioned as a buffer or border identity between white and black races; coloureds were offered more privileges and freedoms than blacks but fewer than whites. The precarity of this position had the effect of dividing the oppressed non-white population through an unwitting or ambivalent coloured acceptance of the racist order due to a meagre relative privilege within the system. However, coloured indignation at political inferiority to whites was accompanied by the reactionary desire to become as respectable as whites through performative elements of culture and taste that they believed distinguished them from black Africans, an approach termed 'assimilationist', by historian Mohamed Adhikari.¹² Underlying this impulse is thus the hegemonic nature of these racially categorized cultural hierarchies and a colonial conception of 'civilization', where white cultural norms were seen as essentially, not contingently, more respectable than coloured and black cultural norms. To entrench this fragile position, coloureds exercised disdain and superiority over blacks, perpetuating racial prejudice and racist systems.¹³ This lack of solidarity with blacks entailed a troubling and troubled complicity with the oppressive apartheid order¹⁴ that is still being worked through today. In the way that a borderline is neither here nor there in spatial terms but merely a divider, coloured people and coloured identity are often disregarded and marginalized in

¹¹ (Hope, Fear, Shame, Frustration 481)

¹² (Hope, Fear, Shame, Frustration 475)

¹³ (Erasmus 16)

¹⁴ (Erasmus)

national political considerations and discourses of here/there and us/them, figuring as the content-less slash in these discursive constructions, like de Klerk's 'non-person'. Wicomb's fictional work, like that of many contemporary coloured theorists and writers, greatly complicates these borderlines, and her oeuvre is often read as dealing with how individual and collective memory (and the gaps therein) carry these fraught legacies of coloured identity, even though Wicomb herself has, as JU Jacobs cites, "no truck with the identity mania."¹⁵ Jacobs theorizes coloured identity in Wicomb's novels with chaos complexity theory which he reconceives as diasporic chaos theory. Chaos is, he writes, citing Minoli Salgado, "a form of generative disorder: 'entropic disorder [that] creates new kinds of order, jumping to a new level of order and contributing to ever-increasing complexity,'"¹⁶ rejecting a linear understanding of heritage and genealogy. Other critics' readings overlap with this use of complexity theory as they highlight the attempts of Wicomb's characters to trace the multi-directional lines of their family history in efforts to work through generational trauma and shame, and generational complicity linked directly to privilege and whiteness.¹⁷ Stuart Hall's work on cultural identity suggests that an individual or group's cultural identity can be articulated not only in shared practices but also across and through sites of difference, dislocation and divergence, a strand of thinking often applied in analyses of Wicomb's work.¹⁸ Homi Bhabha discusses the hybridity of coloured subjectivity as quintessentially post-modern and post-colonial, the coloured

¹⁵ (J. Jacobs, *Playing in the dark/playing in the light* 3)

¹⁶ (Salgado in Jacobs 10)

¹⁷ (Olaussen) (Propst)

¹⁸ (Jacobs)

subject being one within whom cultural practices with divergent origins merge. Bhabha writes that, “the coloured South African subject represents a hybridity, a difference ‘within’, a subject that inhabits the rim of an ‘in-between’ reality.”¹⁹ Wicomb considers this nonsenseical—on what possible ‘rim’ but a symbolic one do coloured people live? Does this mean that others, black and white, live in ‘centers’? How useful is this really to theorizing life?²⁰ Wicomb’s work, in particular *Playing in the Light*, has also been discussed as representing coloured identity in tension between insides and outsides: the slippages between private and public worlds, between internally and externally experienced emotions and knowledge.²¹ Today, many coloured writers grapple with a history of coloured complicity with the white apartheid regime, and the silencing and shame engendered by such complicity. The internal and external contestations over coloured identity also form part of a country-wide struggle over stakes to nationality: who may be considered an ‘authentic’ South African. *Playing in the Light* engages in these conversations, where silence, shame, complicity, roots, and routes figure as central themes through which to explore constructions of coloured identity in post-apartheid South Africa.

Soul-suicide, silent haunting and subjectivity

What I call middle-class society is any society that becomes rigidified in predetermined forms, forbidding all evolution, all gains, all progress, all discovery. I call middle-class a closed society in which life has no taste, in which the air is tainted, in which ideas and men are corrupt.²²

¹⁹ (Bhabha 13)

²⁰ (Wicomb, Shame and identity)

²¹ (Dass) (Robolin) (Van Heerden)

²² (Fanon 175)

Fanon's words aptly frame the white middle-class world-view of the Campbells: interiority and creative exploration are highly discouraged for fear of deviating from what Helen guessed were middle-class norms—"[t]here was no gaiety in this new, silent world,"²³ "there was no question of letting up... vigilance is everything; to achieve whiteness is to keep on your toes... but they... cannot progress beyond vigilance."²⁴ Helen, Marion's mother, dead at the time of the narration, is shown as the driving force of her coloured family's posturing to inhabit whiteness and have it inhabit them. This is a painstaking and all-encompassing straining that includes maximum social isolation and "maintain[ing] a home of unforgiving hygiene,"²⁵ stripping their lives of the possibility for relaxation, expression and joy.

Deborah Posel offers that the "common sense" of apartheid racial categorisation was a circular logic allowing for subjective interpretations of the interplay between socio-cultural and phenotypical factors to determine race. Posel traces how the apartheid state's racial categories moved from more generally descriptive to ultimately normative categories that explicitly acknowledged their socio-legal, constructed status, allowing for leeway in interpretation and categorization. According to the Population Registration Act of 1950,

white person means a person who in appearance obviously is, or is generally accepted as a white person, but does not include a person who, though in appearance obviously a white person, is generally accepted as a coloured person.

²³ (Wicomb, *Playing* 146)

²⁴ (Wicomb, *Playing* 152)

²⁵ (Wicomb, *Playing* 151)

In this discourse, “racial hierarchies ratified and legitimized the social and economic inequalities that were in turn held up as evidence of racial differences.”²⁶ Posel suggests that this fluidity on the state’s part to determine race—the inclusion of ‘race by association’ clauses—was intended to preserve the racial, class and economic security of the many whites with black or coloured ancestry. In addition, it allowed white-presenting and white-performing coloureds with a high social status to be classified as white, encouraging assimilationist aspirations and coloured political loyalty to a white supremacist state as a useful by-product. As long as access to economic and social capital was limited for people who looked non-white, socio-cultural and phenotypical factors would come to reinforce one another. By concealing this materialist element in apartheid racial classifications, race was constructed to appear ‘obvious’ even in the absence of strict boundaries demarcating racial categories. With this

close, “commonsense” association of racial and class hierarchies, coupled with the acceptance within the state that racial classifications were somewhat fluid meant that social and economic mobility could sometimes enable a change of race.²⁷

In the early 50s when John, Helen’s pale husband, unwittingly landed a job reserved for whites, Helen, also pale, took it as a sign that she and her family would not have to suffer the newly created apartheid state’s restrictions imposed on coloured people. Exploiting the Act’s “accepted as...white” clause, Helen invests time in a white Anglican church where she knows a local councillor worships, finds a job reserved for whites, stays out of the sun, and purges from her life anything

²⁶ (Posel 95)

²⁷ (Posel 97)

she feels may betray her coloured past. However, her attempt is not simply to be seen as white by others and remain privately coloured, but to internalise the process and see herself also as white. Helen's is an attempt at full re-subjectivation to inhabit a new subject position as white, with an identity that is congruent in terms of the hegemonic discourse of race and whiteness, in which she ranks urban over rural and English over Afrikaans in a hierarchy of respectability.

In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Butler reads Freud and Lacan's notions of subjectivity against Foucault's, first to articulate their common ground, and then to develop a theory of discursive power that is grounded in the subject not simply as a site and product of discourse, but as an individual with both a body and psyche. She compares Foucault's notion of the soul to Lacan's "subject-ideal as the... norm that installs the subject within language and available schemes of cultural intelligibility,"²⁸ and the Freudian psyche's "ego-ideal, which the super-ego is said to consult... to measure the ego."²⁹ It is in these psychoanalytic terms that she explains Foucault's proposition, "the soul is the prison of the body," explaining that the soul, "becomes a normative and normalising ideal according to which the body is trained, shaped, cultivated and invested."³⁰ She also demonstrates that because we are never wholly subjected by discourse—our subjectivity constantly made and remade to approach the norms of our subject-ideal, subjected and resubjected—we are never transformed once and for all into our subject-ideal. These repetitions tell us that there must exist a "psychic

²⁸ (Butler 86)

²⁹ (Butler 86)

³⁰ (Butler 89)

remainder,”³¹ not subjected by discourse, and thus wherein lies the potential for resistance to discursive power. This psychic remainder is what haunts Helen’s life.

In order for Helen’s resubjection, she needs an affidavit from a local councillor attesting that she is “generally accepted as a white person.”³² But in tacit exchange, Councilman Carter elicits sex from an ashamed but goal-driven Helen. From his comments about her body and phenotype, “in spite of the reddish-auburn hair she was dark... a certain prominence about those cheekbones,”³³ Carter knows she is coloured and knows his power over her. Helen becomes a white subject through sexual violation and a betrayal of her morals. Butler notes that, “this viable and intelligible being, this subject, is always produced at cost, and whatever resists the normative demand by which subjects are instituted remains unconscious.”³⁴ But, unlike Butler’s schema, Helen is not unconscious of what “resists the normative demand,” as she is fully aware both of the violent cost of her subjection and the “psychic remainder” of her former coloured self that resists “the normative demand” of whiteness. So to allow a white subjectivity to become her inner identity, Helen must make her subjection unconscious; she must forget, and commits what Gabriele Schwab cites as “soul murder”—but of course, to herself, so it is a ‘soul suicide’—the killing “of what is most essential to a person while leaving his or her body alive.”³⁵ Helen never tells John of Carter’s violation,

³¹ (Butler 88)

³² (Population Registration Act)

³³ (Wicomb, *Playing* 139)

³⁴ (Butler 86)

³⁵ For more context: “Trauma theory speaks of “soul murder.” Of course, the discourse of soul murder relies on personification, but not in the naïve sense of a literal equation. Speaking of “soul murder” refers to the fact that one may “kill” what is most essential to a person while leaving his or her body alive. For Art [(in *Maus*), his father’s destruction] of [Art’s dead mother’s] diaries is a symbolic soul murder.

and we learn about it in passages focalized by Helen though offered with a similar narrative voice as the rest of the novel, suggesting a consistent narrator throughout.³⁶ Helen is shown to think of her whiteness as a rebirth, and she symbolically buries her old self by cutting up and throwing into the trash the blouse in which she was raped. “[Helen] may have been defiled, but she’d also been obliterated, and believing in miracles of rebirth, her own thoughts had remained pure.”³⁷ John too has a secret, one that he tells Marion after her discovery of her parents’ lies: for his racial registration, he betrayed his family, swearing that he keeps no company with non-whites, and agreeing never to socialize with non-whites. Schwab explores Abraham and Torok’s concept of the crypt: “*Designed to circumvent mourning*, a crypt buries a lost person or object, or even a *disavowed part of oneself or one’s history*, while keeping it psychically alive.”³⁸ Psychically burying her obliterated self, Helen seals her crypt with an impermeable self-referentiality and social isolation, “protect[ing] the silence and secrecy with maxims about the self: It is best to keep oneself to oneself...”³⁹ Having internalised the apartheid racial hierarchies—like Gerald, in my analysis of *Thirteen Cents*—Helen sees whiteness as respectability, which promises “viable and intelligible... subject[hood].”⁴⁰ Respectability, part of a discourse of class and taste, exists

Psychoanalysis and trauma theories insist that such acts have material consequences for both those who perform and those who witness them.” (Schwab 18)

³⁶ Again, I am inclined to side with Van der Vlies’ interpretation of Brenda as the narrator. This, however, would entail that Helen’s rape was invented by Brenda, as apparently Helen kept no record of it and told no-one.

³⁷ (Playing 144)

³⁸ (Schwab 2) (my emphasis)

³⁹ (Playing 61)

⁴⁰ (Butler 86)

largely through the circulation of the affects disgust and shame. In the introduction to his seminal work on disgust, William Miller writes,

The emotions that constitute our experience of being lower or lowered—shame and humiliation—exist in a rough economy with those passions which are the experience of reacting to the lowly, failed, and contaminating—disgust and contempt.⁴¹

In this economy of affect, Helen projects her shame of being coloured onto a lower class: non-whites, expressing disgust at others without feeling that she is directing it also at herself. She and John use racial slurs in their home, including “hottie se kind,”⁴² and “kaffirs.”⁴³ There is a powerful moment where Helen expresses a panicked disgust towards herself: Marion’s father John thinks back to Helen’s canceling the subscription to the plastic flowers delivered weekly to their home, demanding in a voice “shrill and hysterical,”⁴⁴ that they be immediately removed. She is provoked to this by a conversation she had at work in which “a chic customer spoke of her future mother-in-law’s vulgarity, her pride in plastic bouquets, to which Helen nodded in a flush of embarrassment.”⁴⁵ She panics at what she now judges—through a white woman’s eyes—as her own performance of vulgarity⁴⁶. The flowers are one of the objects in the text and in the Campbells’ life imbued with, “the garrulousness of history,”⁴⁷ haunted objects that symbolically “clamour

⁴¹ (Miller x)

⁴² ‘Hottentot’s child’, (Playing 124)

⁴³ (Playing 55)

⁴⁴ (Playing 6)

⁴⁵ (Playing 6)

⁴⁶ Catherine Rottenberg’s “‘Passing’: Race, Identification and Desire,” offers a compelling theoretical argument combining Butler’s performativity and Bhabha’s discussion of race to show the limits of transposing a theory of gender performativity directly onto race, grounded in the context of American passing novels of the early twentieth century.

⁴⁷ (Playing 152)

to tell of a past”⁴⁸ of who Helen used to be—or, more threateningly for her—of her ghost, some ‘true’ inescapable self that is characterized by an essential vulgarity, represented by colour and colouredness. The plastic flowers brought joy to John’s life, and he protests their removal in vain. Helen has nothing to replace the flowers, joy and the colour she loses, and her family’s already sterile life grows whiter and more deathly pallid with time, with Helen and John described as, “leeches by vigilance, white and loveless.”⁴⁹ Despite keeping no friends, no art or colour in their home, no keepsakes save one or two photographs and her “identity card marked WHITE,”⁵⁰ Helen surprisingly plots a way to keep her dark-skinned mother, Tokkie, in her life. Tokkie visits weekly, posing as the family’s domestic servant, never able to tell Marion, with whom she was very close, that she was her grandmother. When Tokkie died, Helen prohibited their family from attending the funeral for fear of being seen in public as a member of a coloured family. Helen refuses to undergo the literal rituals of mourning for her own mother, leaving her with guilt that she also does not address. This shameful secret of familial disavowal, along with all the others, Helen buries in her inner ‘crypt’.

Exhumations, exorcisms and re-subjection

When we first meet Marion, she is in her “luxury block” where security is tight and a “respect for property”⁵¹ is guaranteed. All visitors are registered and monitored—though Marion has none, not even her new boyfriend. A guinea fowl,

⁴⁸ (Playing 152)

⁴⁹ (Playing 153)

⁵⁰ (Playing 116)

⁵¹ (Playing 2)

however, with black and white markings, flies into her balcony and dies, an ominous invader overladen with narrative symbology.⁵² We thus read Marion having inherited her mother's performed fear of the other—both the stranger and neighbor who could expose her secret colouredness. Yet within Marion's fortress-like home, it is her most intimate space that begins to haunt her: her four-poster bed, “a bower for an *egte* [genuine] fairy princess, who would lie a hundred years chaste in gauzed limbo.”⁵³ Marion's cherished inner sanctum represents to her the resting place of beauty and delicacy—but also of chastity, isolation, concealment, and stasis: Helen's ideals of respectable middle-class womanhood. The value of chastity arising from the violence of being raped—a personal and historical fact for women of colour in Cape Town⁵⁴; isolation and concealment of the body, from the fear of a gaze that could ‘out’ her as coloured⁵⁵; and stasis, from the anxiety of doing whiteness wrong. As a child, Marion's original subjection was to these values, turning Helen's rigid view of whiteness into Marion's Freudian ego-ideal, or Foucauldian soul, and accompanied with crude stereotypes of black and coloured identity. One of Marion's early memories is recounted: on a hot summer night in their family garden, she takes off her clothes, pretending to be

a mermaid under the moon, diving and tossing...

Helen...swallowed her scream and spoke quietly, hissing with rage and disgust. ...How could she behave like a disgusting native, rolling half naked in the grass? ...Marion...had upset her mummy. She was stricken

⁵² Narrator-Brenda lays it on thick from the very first page, heavy-handedly explaining her metaphors and symbology: “the balcony, the space both inside and out,” the guinea fowl “declassified by the ruffling of its black-and-white patterned plumage.” (Playing 1)

⁵³ (Playing 2)

⁵⁴ (Erasmus 13)

⁵⁵ See Amy Robinson's fascinating discussion of this within the American phenomenon of ‘passing’, in ‘It Takes One to Know One: Passing and Communities of Common Interest.’

with guilt and remorse.⁵⁶

As a child, our ego-ideal shifts from a narcissistic view of the self to match that which elicits a love response from our parents.⁵⁷ Marion's visceral expression and play is proscribed, and—motivated by “guilt and remorse,”⁵⁸ she “grows older [and] the silence draws her in,”⁵⁹—she soon becomes her mother's ego-ideal, the fairy princess: beautiful and delicate though pale, chaste, isolated and silent. However, in the crypt-like space of Marion's four-poster bed, the fairy princess ego-ideal turns into a fearful, maleficent phantom, and Marion is not veiled like a princess but instead, like a corpse: “she seems to gag on meters of muslin, ensnared in the fabric that wraps itself round and round her into a shroud from which she struggles to escape.”⁶⁰ But about these gagging panic attacks, she thinks, “there is no point in dwelling on such moments.”⁶¹ Marion has also inherited from her mother a ‘no-nonsense’ attitude towards emotion, or—more harshly and accurately—an attitude of emotional suppression, the psychic burial of painful and uncomfortable emotions that threaten the composed outward appearance that matches her sense of middle-class respectability.

One day at work Marion is struck by an uncanny face on the cover of a newspaper belonging to her coloured employee Brenda. She steals the paper, and is troubled by the “eyes of the stranger [that] hold hers accusingly, calling her to

⁵⁶ (Playing 60-61)

⁵⁷ (Laplanche and Pontalis 138)

⁵⁸ (Playing 61)

⁵⁹ (Playing 153)

⁶⁰ (Playing 2)

⁶¹ (Playing 3)

account... hiss[ing] a command to remember, remember, remember.”⁶² The face belongs to Patricia Williams, an anti-apartheid activist who was grotesquely tortured, and who gives her testimony in the TRC. “The face makes her think of Tokkie, the old coloured servant who indulged her as a child,”⁶³ and whose presence transformed the hardened Helen, “that she grew soft and spoke kindly.”⁶⁴ But Williams’ face does not have the reassurance of the memory of Tokkie, but “detaches itself from the page and has taken to persecuting her.”⁶⁵ The ubiquitous haunting and the discomfort it elicits mean that Marion can no longer avoid addressing her inner life, and she is convinced that the connection between Williams and Tokkie is the key to the mystery. She tries to get information about Tokkie from her father, “whom she has always thought of as transparent,”⁶⁶ but he obfuscates and encrypts Tokkie in his language: “he is dissembling... panicking, prattling... speaks guardedly.”⁶⁷ Understanding his uncharacteristic prevarication as signaling the profound implications of Tokkie’s true relationship to their family, Marion admits to herself that “her parents... have always kept something from her... There is something secret, something ugly, monstrous at the heart of their paltry little family.”⁶⁸ Marion decides to do her own research, which means colonizing Brenda’s colouredness, networks, and her space, time and energy.

⁶² (Playing 54)

⁶³ (Playing 56)

⁶⁴ (Playing 69)

⁶⁵ (Playing 73)

⁶⁶ (Playing 58)

⁶⁷ (Playing 58)

⁶⁸ (Playing 58)

Marion arrives uninvited, unannounced and empty-handed one evening at Brenda's family home in Bonteheuwel, a township in Cape Town with a majority coloured population. Though the family is alarmed at her intrusion, she is welcomed—while Marion internally judges Brenda's family with reductive stereotypes—"Mrs Mackay[']s] face is kind, open and artless, as only, she imagines, the faces of the poor can be,"⁶⁹—even as it dawns on her that her own ghastly decorum is uncomfortable and embarrassing for everyone. Her entitlement to Brenda's space and time is highlighted through the panic she feels when Brenda says,

If I were to come to your house, I wouldn't expect to do the dishes... What can Brenda mean about coming to her house? No one has ever come to her flat.⁷⁰

Despite the fact that this visit is essentially colonial—one-directional, imposing and without reciprocal invitation, Marion *is* beginning to expand her horizons beyond the comfort zones of her home and her workplace. This is only one instance highlighting the problematics of friendship in post-apartheid South Africa, where racialized and class dynamics of power are shown to still significantly constrain the possibility for authentic relationships. Brenda's mother finds out about a 'Tokkie' from Wuppertal, so Brenda accompanies Marion to the small town. On this trip—Marion's second willing and significant journey away from her comfort zone—that Brenda suggests to Marion that her parents were play-whites, which Marion uncomfortably accepts. In Wuppertal Marion also twists her ankle, forcing her to acknowledge her dependence on Brenda, who

⁶⁹ (Playing 68)

⁷⁰ (Playing 71)

drives Marion's car back to Cape Town. Unable to drive Brenda home, Marion puts up her first house guest, with Brenda sleeping on the couch in her flat's living room, the symbolic entrance of a coloured woman into Marion's psyche. When Brenda hears Marion loudly contending with a nightmare, Brenda somewhat bizarrely decides to comfort Marion by joining her in bed, a practice she only recently stopped with her own mother. Marion awakens with Brenda, a coloured woman, in her most private space—that bower for a fairy princess. Thus Brenda serves both as an actual guide in re-subjecting Marion to a new set of forces that interpellate her as a coloured subject, and as symbolic double—a coloured woman in Marion's bed—signaling her re-subjectivation. The uneasy shifting of power between them and Marion's reliance on both Brenda and her identity speak more broadly to the entanglement of racial identity, culture and trauma in South Africa.⁷¹ Marion later visits the library to learn about what Brenda (and Helen) call "play-whites," that is, coloured people who pass as white, but in the records she can find no entry or information about 'play-whites'—their existence is ignored or intentionally obscured from public view. In this way, like Leke, Marion's familial racial identity does not exist in South African social discourse.

At this early stage of her racial re-subjectivation in the novel, Marion does not articulate her subjectivity through discourses of hybridization, creolization, integration or other contemporary discourses of coloured identity⁷², but of crossings between still-separated positions:

I was white, now I will have to cross over; but if those places are no longer the same, have lost their meaning, there can be no question of

⁷¹ See more about this in Sarah Nuttall's *Entanglement* (2009).

⁷² As discussed by Adikhari, Erasmus, Bhabha and others

returning to a place where my parents once were. Perhaps I can now keep crossing to and fro, to different places, perhaps that is what the new is all about—an era of unremitted crossings.⁷³

The polysemic term ‘crossing,’ is contextualized here with the primary meaning of traversing between places, (subject) positions, as in the phrase “crossing to and fro.” But the movement of Marion crossing subject positions, from white to coloured, and crossing back unremittedly—crossing twice, thrice and more—hints also at double-crossing and a narrative of betrayal and ambivalent loyalty, one of the unfortunate stereotypes of coloured people emerging from their racially and politically ‘in between’ position imposed by the discursive and material violences of colonialism and apartheid. And yet ‘crossing’ also gestures towards a scientific discourse of hybridization, albeit within a somewhat problematic racial discourse emanating from the fiction of ‘pure’ origins. Since hybridity is not the term’s first obviously suggested meaning, we can imagine that Marion may one day reach a point where ‘crossing’ could mean a crossing, or blend, of her multiple socio-cultural heritages. ‘Crossing’ also signals conflict—to cross a person, to cross a boundary. This movement is thus shown not to be easy work, but generative of violence and anxiety.

If her mother Helen’s re-subjectivation as white—consciously chosen and then repressed—was a move that entrenched colonial structures within Helen’s psyche, then it is not unfair to assume that Marion’s own re-subjectivation and re-articulation should be a process of psychic decolonization. In her discussion of how

⁷³ (Playing 107)

trauma is inherited by the subsequent generations of both victims and perpetrators, Schwab reminds us that affects,

open up ‘past histories of association.’ [Ahmed in Schwab] The movement between signs and affects ‘does not have its origin in the psyche, but is a trace of how such histories remain alive in the present.’⁷⁴

Marion’s task of re-articulation, then, includes her unlearning “histories of association,” that overdetermine black and coloured bodies as affectively ‘disgusting’. Schwab offers a summarized version of Fanon’s argument of the stages in colonized people’s “struggle for liberation,” pointing out that these stages are coterminous with the renegotiation of affective relationships to the forces of our subjection.

1. Identification with the aggressor
2. Unilateral rejection of anything identifiable with colonial or racist culture
3. Idealizing fixation on one’s own precolonial heritage
4. Integration of one’s history as a colonized person and acknowledgment of one’s conflicted identity formed in the struggle with a violent history (Schwab 108)

We see that the phases Fanon identifies are accompanied, if not generated, by different emotional or affective states. Phases 1, 2, and 3 are based on guilt, shame, and idealization, and phase 4 is based on mourning, integration, and reparation.⁷⁵

Schwab then alters this schema to propose stages of decolonizing perpetrators’ (or their descendants’) minds, in which the perpetrator first identifies with the victim (step 1) performs the same steps 2 and 3 (rejection of colonial culture, and idealizing the victim’s precolonial heritage), with the final, integrative step:

4. Acknowledgment of one’s conflicted identity as participant or inheritor of a violent legacy and willingness to assume responsibility and

⁷⁴ (Schwab 113)

⁷⁵ (Schwab 108)

participate in the collective struggle against oppression, violence, and war.⁷⁶

Marion's situation prevents her from fully investing in either schema. Her re-articulation requires a hybrid of steps for the psychic decolonizations of both oppressed and oppressor: she must acknowledge that her mother's desire to be white, and the horrific cost with which she achieved it, were the actions of a victim; but she must equally acknowledge the ways in which she and her family have perpetrated racism and unequal systems that oppress non-white people. In Marion's "identifying with the oppressed", she meets rather nervously with Elsie, her father's sister, works to expunge her prejudices against Brenda, and entertains a flirtation with Vumi, a black South African. Marion implicitly understands that step 2—"rejection of anything identifiable with colonial or racist culture"⁷⁷—is an almost impossible task for her to undertake; she would have to outright reject her mother's role in her life, merely mirroring the unhealthy repression, the soul-suicide that Helen enacts upon herself. Marion also does not follow the formula of step 3, an "idealizing fixation on one's own [oppressed] precolonial heritage."⁷⁸ On her biggest trip yet, she travels to the United Kingdom, in part to connect with the home of her colonial Scottish ancestors. The past she explores in the UK resists identification with oppressed peoples, aligning rather with a colonial identity and white South Africanness: "she is a colonial at heart."⁷⁹ Her reading selections—Nadine Gordimer and J.M. Coetzee—come from the

⁷⁶ (Schwab 108)

⁷⁷ (Schwab 108)

⁷⁸ (Schwab 108)

⁷⁹ (Playing 197)

“handsome” lady “with the brisk English voice,”⁸⁰ from the famous Clarke’s bookstore in Cape Town. Marion is inspired by her mental image of the woman as respectable middle-class, to “defy expectations of an uncultured Afrikaans girl,”⁸¹ judging herself within an all too familiar hierarchized vision of class, education and taste—her mother’s vision. While reading Gordimer’s *Conservationist*, Marion obsesses over the woman-in-Clarke’s and whether she recommended the novels because she saw Marion as a version of Antonia, “a play-white girl with coarse features, cheap make-up and a giveaway hairline of frizzy roots.”⁸²

How many versions of herself exist in the stories of her country?
She is in the grip of something like a fever, a delirium that fixates on the-
handsome-woman-at-Clarke’s...she will not let the woman down. ...Up
and down inquisitorial steps she scuttles, offering various clever replies—
humble, defiant, cold, apologetic...until finally, drained of esprit de
l’escalier, she is rid of the image of the-handsome-woman-at-Clarke’s. Or
at least of her fine English voice.⁸³

Unlike her parents’ burial and avoidance of the secrets that haunt them, Marion intentionally engages with the phantom of the Clarke’s woman, asserting her own agency by trying out different articulations of herself in relation to what the woman-at-Clarke’s symbolizes: her mother’s subject-ideal of respectable, educated, English, middle-class South African whiteness. Through this active dialectic, akin to a LaCaprian ‘working through,’ Marion exorcises the phantom and its symbolic hold over her, claiming her agency by refusing to let the woman’s presence command her ego-ideal. After this exorcism, Marion is free to act of her own accord, and she “decides to carry on reading, to get to know those dark decades

⁸⁰ (Playing 190)

⁸¹ (Playing 191)

⁸² (Playing 190)

⁸³ (Playing 191)

when the Campbells were playing in the light.”⁸⁴ Despite Marion’s psychic exhumations, mournings and burials, which release her psyche to become “free and uninhibited,”⁸⁵ able to make new libidinal attachments and be more open— affective—to the world, she remains an ambiguous figure both in her likability and her re-articulated racial politics, which fall far from what could be called psychic decolonization.

From changes in their political racial identity, both Marion and her mother Helen reorient themselves towards the world, hesitatingly approximating performances of the racial identity of their subject-ideal. At one point, Brenda reproaches Marion for wondering if she should give money to some men on the street in Brenda’s neighborhood: “You’ll never make a decent coloured person.”⁸⁶ Marion’s re-articulation of her subjectivity as coloured is faltering and unsure— like her mother’s attempts to ‘be’ white—because she sees racial subjectivity as a static subject position constructed by stereotypes, a position which she must inhabit and then cross to another, rather than be comfortable in who she is, able to laugh at herself for little faux pas. The novel is peppered with rhetorical questions that invent and recycle stereotypes based on race, like Marion’s interaction with her father’s sister Elsie, who laughs before

a tugging of her jersey, as if her midriff is in danger of showing. Is that what coloured women do when they grow old, tug at the hems of their jerseys? Even before the thought is fully formed... Marion finds her own hand fluttering awkwardly to the hem of her shirt.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ (Playing 191)

⁸⁵ (Freud 245)

⁸⁶ (Playing 184)

⁸⁷ (Playing 166)

In this moment Marion ‘crosses’ to colouredness, impulsively imitating Elsie yet becoming neither more coloured nor more white, merely awkward. In the novel’s last few pages, Marion invites Brenda back to her flat. Despite Brenda knowing the intimate details of Marion’s life and self-exploration, Marion still seems to barely know Brenda. Marion is shown to chalk up this ignorance not to her own lack of curiosity and her taking Brenda for granted, but to some undefined force: “How peculiar that Marion has no idea who Brenda would call.”⁸⁸ After this evidence of her superficial interest in Brenda’s life, she drives Brenda home. In the car, Brenda hesitatingly tells Marion that she has begun writing Marion’s father’s story. Marion is incensed, kicking Brenda out of the car onto the street to walk or find her own way home. Furious, she says,

So in the guise of a do-gooder, you went back to prise more out of a lonely, senile old man who was grateful for your visits? Sis. How dare you? Why don’t you write your own fucking story? ...

Writing my own story, I know, is what someone like me is supposed to do, what we all do, they say, whether we know it or not... Now your father, there’s a story—with his pale skin as capital, ripe for investment.⁸⁹

Marion remains imprisoned by her attachment to the secrecy of her family’s history; her panic, horror and shame prevent her from engaging in a negotiation of curiosity, level-headedness, or simply giving her friend the benefit of the doubt and a little patience. We see that she feels that family’s story is her property, to be shut up, hidden from the light, “inviolable,”⁹⁰ and individual rather than

⁸⁸ (Playing 216)

⁸⁹ (Playing 218)

⁹⁰ (Playing 2)

collective—Brenda too sees it as property, as “capital,” also not an unproblematic approach.

This novel warns us then, of the psychic awkwardness and emptiness of character resulting from imitation of others based on an ego-ideal modeled on stereotypes of class, taste and race, and the danger of sealing ourselves off from collective stories. The charge given and undertaken by Wicomb in this work and her oeuvre at large is not only to question our ideas of identity and subjectivity based on race, but also to engage with our ghosts—to write them into the world, to talk them into existence, tell and re-tell them, and integrate them into our selves—emancipating our psyches and societies from a haunted, ‘in-between’ existence and ever closer to an asymptotic reality.

CONCLUSIONS: The Borderline Bildungsroman

Trauma, healing and intersubjectivity

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon posits that the black man exists in a “zone of nonbeing, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born.”¹ Fanon’s poetics do not offer much in the way of hermeneutic suggestions, and the “extraordinarily sterile and arid region” can be interpreted variously. Scholar Lewis Gordon understands Fanon’s “zone of non-being” in two important ways: through “disaster of appearance,” and “disaster of recognition.”² For the black subject, Gordon writes,

to appear means to over appear. Thus, to appear at all becomes a disaster. ... The theme of melancholia—living loss—returns. For those who want to overcome that loss, it requires an attachment to appear within the system. But the added frustration is that the pathologies of such appearance are generated by such a system.³

For the not-yet mature Azure, Leke and Marion, to appear in the anti-black world of post-apartheid Cape Town (with its differing social expressions in each of their cases), is disastrous. To appear in either language or body means to be subject to others, to their gaze, their violence and their judgments. Joseph Slaughter writes that

Speech, as Stanley Fish has repeatedly insisted, “only occurs in communities,” and the discursive relations of a public sphere incorporate The People as a political, social, cultural and sentimental reading and debating society, which is to say that a public speech community is “both sociological and textual.”⁴

¹ (Fanon 2)

² (Gordon 11)

³ (Gordon 10)

⁴ (Slaughter 154)

To appear in a “sociological and textual” community means to be affective, to be vulnerable to the structures and norms (either imposed or internalised) that shut these characters out of society and language in the first place, and to risk the safety of their internal worlds which allow them to exist, but not as subjects with agency and desire. And yet, to appear—to be vulnerable, affective, etc—is the necessary condition for subjectivity, and for self-formation. Austen writes,

The African *Bildungsroman* is not, any more than its European predecessors, an ideological instrument either for or against a specific form of modernity but rather a *reflection on the possibilities of self-formation—through inherited culture, formal education, and more autonomous Bildung—within a specific set of historical contexts*.⁵

To introduce his study on nation, narration, and psychoanalysis in African literature, Ato Quayson asks, “how is the narrative of the nation to be elaborated from the perspective of the ex-centric?”⁶ *Thirteen Cents*, *Bom Boy* and *Playing in the Light*—each fulfils Austen’s hypothesis and simultaneously allow us to consider Quayson’s question. Each lays out the conditions within which—in this study, ex-centric racially ambiguous South African—protagonists can create a sense of self and become subjects, and each considers the possibilities for their subjectivity in those conditions, allowing us to begin to parse the differences between theirs and the subject-formation of those belonging to a clear ethno-cultural group, like in Sindiwe Magona’s *To My Children’s Children*. A specific problem for these protagonists, of course, is that they are not members of an internally-defined minority group, but on the borderlines of racial groupings—an individual minority that prevents them from achieving a subjecthood grounded on

⁵ (Austen 214) (my emphasis)

⁶ (Quayson 76)

the collective nature of all minority discourse [that] derives from the fact that minority individuals are always treated and forced to experience themselves generically. Coerced into a negative, generic subject position, the oppressed individual responds by transforming that position into a positive, collective one.⁷

This is how Abdul JanMohamed and David Lloyd had it in 1987 anyhow, at a political moment when South Africa was three years away from the end of apartheid, and the USA was thirteen years away from a ‘multiracial’ option on the national census, where the discursive space for minorities in the public sphere was more fragile than today.

Franco Moretti suggests that European *Bildungshelds* are forced to negotiate a zero-sum calculus of happiness vs. freedom, where happiness is won through the conformation of one’s personal will to normalisation and to social rules at the expense of freedom, and freedom is won by aggressively pursuing one’s individual desires at the expense of happiness.⁸ Our racially ambiguous protagonists, however, do not have the option to normalise by the rules of the South African society, which divides people and communities by race and prescribes different norms for these racial groups. They thus cannot find happiness via conforming, and yet their entrance into subjectivity—and into greater freedom—is radically intersubjective rather than a solipsistic approach to self-realisation. Our protagonists are thus not forced take such zero-sum approach, as they simultaneously achieve the freedom and happiness that accompanies the possibility of existing as a subject in a community at all. Azure of *Thirteen Cents* demonstrates this point in the negative: he achieves neither

⁷ (JanMohamed and Lloyd 10)

⁸ (Moretti 75-127)

happiness nor freedom as he is prevented from subjective self-formation and intersubjective connection. The narrative of the nation that these racially ex-centric stories permit us to observe is one in which apartheid racial logic and the trauma reverberating around such a logic's material effects remain powerful determinants of subjective possibility, but that if psychic healing is a possibility for an individual, these obstructions may be overcome and new subjective positions that escape apartheid racial logic may be articulated.

As many have claimed and shown, South African literature of the post-apartheid era—replete with trauma, and aimed at healing—can frequently be read as complementary to the content and form of the TRC,⁹ as both honour multiple narrative perspectives surrounding the same violent event or situation, both attempt to uncover suppressed secrets, and both are grounded on the belief that healing can only take place once truth is out in the open, in the public sphere. Through their narratives of trauma and healing, these novels bridge the gap between western, language-focused theories of trauma that take the individual psyche as the primary object of analysis and post-colonial approaches that privilege the body as the site of trauma and the social structure as the object of analysis. Internally, the novels show that structural trauma catalyses individual, historical trauma, which may isolate individuals from society and language, and the healing of such trauma must take place at the level of language and through

⁹ This is an incredibly widespread approach that has generated a huge body of work including many essays in the collection from which this study has drawn deeply, *Trauma, Memory and Narrative in the Contemporary South African Novel*, as well as Shane Graham's salient 2009 work, *South African Literature after the Truth Commission: Mapping Loss*.

the claiming of one's own narrative, as Western trauma theory suggests. It is these racially ambiguous characters' lot to consciously and actively rearticulate themselves towards the forces that interpellate them, and towards the people whose gaze—falling as it does on a face or identity unclassifiable in South Africa's singular racial categorization system—demands an account. This self-formation is thus radically different from that of an individual belonging to a singular racial grouping, whose journey is to accept, resist or transform the social norms that delineate horizons for subjectivity, rather than articulate a subject position from a gap in racial discourse. The novels also suggest that for fully formed subjectivity, healing must also take place at the level of the body, which bears the effects of structural trauma, including poverty and racism, and that this healing requires that the individual bring their body into socialization with others, rendering themselves affective and vulnerable.

Due to the protagonists' social timidity or isolation—even by the end of their stories when they have discovered a realm of subjectivity—it is the external, fictional condition of these narratives that allows for their placement in the public sphere. Though memoir and autobiography are popular genres in post-apartheid South Africa, addressing the past and its wounds—in particular the loss and movement towards recuperation of the native mother—the socially-anxious or socially-object protagonists of the novels analysed here would either not choose to or be unable to place their own story in the public sphere. That these stories are able to become part of the public sphere and a national consciousness proves the appropriateness of the genre for this work of national healing and the education of the reader—a process that runs parallel to the education and development of

the *Bildungsheld*. In these cases, the reader learns that the apartheid categories of race are not sufficient, natural or particularly useful for classifying people, and that there is a wide range of permutations of cultural, political and phenotypical identities that cannot be mapped onto a singular racial identifier.

Conclusions and further considerations

When we say that race is socially constructed, we tend to mean that it is a loose term defined differently in different contexts with various proxies used as racial identifiers, with racial ascription a politically or economically motivated act. Phenotype, cultural affinity, laws and political affiliation are some of these different proxies, and social 'norms' tend to demand that each individual display a constant racial identity across all the various attributes we use to determine race, and thus a subject position in a racist society. The racial identifiers of characters Azure, Leke and Marion, however, do not 'agree' with one another to summate each into a person conforming to the norms of one race only. It is their lot, then, to consciously and actively rearticulate themselves towards the forces that interpellate them, to the people with whom they interact and who demand from them an account of themselves. They thus move towards realizing Stuart Hall's hope of a 'politics of articulation,' which encourages the individual to escape a totalization of identity impressed upon them by social norms, and a social approach that recognizes the individual in the articulation they themselves assert. Our protagonists do not use the language of a stable racial identity as a discourse fundamental to their identity and subjectivity, but, in the framework of

Roquemore and Brunnsma¹⁰, as either transcendent—that is, avoiding racial self-identification, preferring to articulate themselves towards other discourses and interpellations—or, in the case of Marion, a (tentative) protean identity¹¹, in which she attempts to cross the boundaries of races but not blend them—she sees herself from moment to moment as either white, or coloured. I hope that this insight can help to serve as a starting point for theoretical conversations regarding South African mixed-race identity, understanding its intersection with and departure from coloured identity and culture. It is thus a petition for recognition, both from coloured identity studies and for the global field of mixed-race studies, to consider mixed-race identity in South Africa as a distinct identity from the communal, creolized coloured identity, with social challenges different from those of coloured populations, though not homogeneous across first-generation mixed-race South Africans. I must clarify that fighting for a piece of the representation pie is not what I am advocating for mixed-race or racially ambiguous subjects. Instead, in our moment of often reductionist, divisive identity politics, it is a plea to abandon racial stereotyping, which so often is highlighted in treatment of mixed-race and racially ambiguous individuals. Because these *Bildungsromane* end at the beginning (or, in Azure’s case, the ultimate impossibility) of their protagonist’s subjectivity, we do not see the protagonists then wielding their new-found agency in the world to affect others; that is, we see only a glimmer of their developing sense of politics, ethics and social responsibility. In South Africa today, racial self-identification is a political act, as it inevitably invokes histories and legacies of

¹⁰ Developed in *Beyond Black: biracial identity in America* (2002)

¹¹ (Aspinall and Song 20)

oppression and domination waged along racial lines, and bears the implicit demand to give an account of oneself, articulate oneself towards that history—and present conditions—of power relations. It is therefore of critical importance for future theoretical and sociological work to explore and map the social and psychological challenges and possibilities for political and ethical engagement on the part of mixed-race individuals. On what philosophical, theoretical or social grounds are the ethical and political stances of ambiguously-raced South African subjects founded, beyond the ethical commitments towards their immediate community?

Ultimately in this work I argue that these *Bildungsromane* trace an ontological change in the protagonist rather than a change in their ideological positioning. With varying severities and dimensions of non-subjectivity as markers of different pre-mature states of the protagonists in these novels, their journeys of self-making occur through an increasing intersubjectivity facilitated by language—when they discover or create personal, familial and intergenerational histories that had previously been silenced, and by the body brought into social contact, rendered affective and vulnerable, but thereby also available to be reinscribed as legible and viable.

I further hypothesize that the more marginal the hero—that is, the less available a coherent and empowered subject position is to them at the beginning of the novel—the more likely the trajectory of change of the *Bildungsheld* will skew towards the ontological rather than ideological.

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