



“Coloured” Past in Post-Apartheid South African Fiction: Slavery, Gender, and Anachronism

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Summary

This dissertation examines a set of novels concerned with the history of slavery, “coloured” identity and the politics of gender and sexuality in post-apartheid South Africa: Achmat Dangor’s *Bitter Fruit*, Anne Landsman’s *The Devil’s Chimney*, Rayda Jacobs’s *The Slave Book*, and Zoë Wicomb’s *Playing in the Light*. Each writer’s engagement with the history of slavery highlights discursive and material continuities between the colonial, apartheid and post-apartheid eras. By investigating, or making visible, figures of anachronism, these novels qualify the celebratory rhetoric of the “new” nation by pointing to the continued challenges facing the democratic state, particularly in relation to the social position of “coloured” women. In doing so, they challenge the narrative of progress implicit in the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which moves from the horror of the apartheid past to the multi-racial democracy of the “rainbow” nation. Representations of the female slave in these texts raise questions about the construction of contemporary “coloured” identity and the logic of raced reproduction in post-apartheid South Africa. Through their examinations of motherhood, domestic labour and domestic space, these literary works reveal the persistence of a gendered and racialised logic of reproduction in contemporary South Africa that was first generated under slavery and thus marks the state as anachronistic.

While deploying the work of American critics such as Hortense Spillers, Lee Edelman and Valerie Rohy, this dissertation remains attentive to the historical specificity of the South African context. At the same time, the novels considered here demand a reconsideration of the space of the nation itself. Invoking a broader history of slavery through their allusions to the North American slave narrative and to the types of forced migrations that occurred under slavery, these texts invite a reconception of the nation state and ask us to consider South Africa’s place within transnational networks of capital.

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Introduction

In his 1989 lecture to the ANC seminar, “Preparing Ourselves for Freedom: Culture and the ANC Constitutional Guidelines”,¹ Albie Sachs argued that, in order for South Africa to build a truly multi-cultural and liberated society in the aftermath of apartheid, culture could no longer be considered merely a political “weapon” or tool of the anti-apartheid struggle. Sachs, a prominent anti-apartheid activist, was appointed by Nelson Mandela to serve as a constitutional court judge in 1994 and subsequently played a key role in the legalisation of same-sex marriage in 2006. While he is thus more closely associated with the state judiciary and the legal transformation of South Africa, in his lecture he identifies culture, and literature in particular, as a key medium through which South Africans can potentially “remake [them]selves” (189).

Significantly, Sachs played a key role in establishing the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)²: established by the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, No. 34 of 1995, the TRC was the central mechanism by which South Africans attempted to come to terms with apartheid in the immediate transition period.³ The Commission was mandated to use the testimony of both the victims and perpetrators of human rights violations to investigate the apartheid past in order to help the nation overcome the traumatic legacies of apartheid, so that its peoples could be reconciled and South Africa could move forward into a democratic future. The TRC constructed a narrative of the apartheid past that attempted to deny its power in the present. At the same time, the Commission’s hearings were marked by an urge towards inclusiveness; they aspired to represent the whole range of South African experiences under apartheid—black, white and “coloured”, men and women, victim, perpetrator and collaborator. While setting out to uncover the “truth” of apartheid, the TRC was a fundamentally narrative project whose work of witnessing and uncovering hidden histories has been continued in the literature of the transition period.⁴ By engaging with the history of slavery, the fictions I examine here complicate the linear narrative of

progress from apartheid to democracy produced by the work of the TRC by highlighting the perpetuation of forms of social organisation first established under slavery, particularly in relation to race, gender and sexuality.

This dissertation examines post-apartheid fiction that is concerned with the previously repressed history of slavery. More specifically, I consider four novels published between 1998 and 2006: Anne Landsman's *The Devil's Chimney* (1998), Rayda Jacobs's *The Slave Book* (1998), Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* (2004) and Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* (2006). Dangor and Wicomb are the best known of the writers considered here; both began publishing during the apartheid era and their post-apartheid writing has received considerable critical attention. Jacobs and Landsman, on the other hand, emerged on the literary scene only after the end of apartheid and while Landsman's second novel, *The Rowing Lesson* (2007), garnered significant critical acclaim, Jacobs's work remains less well known. These writers also represent a wide variety of South African identities: while Dangor, Jacobs and Wicomb were all classified as "coloured" under apartheid, Dangor is South African Indian, Jacobs identifies herself as a Cape Muslim and Wicomb was raised in a Griqua community in Little Namaqualand; Landsman, the only white writer considered, is Jewish and thus occupies the privileged space of whiteness liminally.

Together, the work of these writers engages, both literally and figuratively, with the history of slavery in a variety of rural and urban contexts. While *Bitter Fruit* and *Playing in the Light* are set in contemporary South Africa, *The Devil's Chimney* represents both the post-apartheid and colonial periods. *The Slave Book*, on the other hand, is a work of historical fiction set in the early nineteenth-century in the years before the emancipation of the slaves. While these novels taken as a group by no means provide a complete representation of post-apartheid fiction dealing with the history of

slavery, they showcase a diversity of approaches towards the subject. Together, these novels combine attention to the historical experience of life under slavery with a consideration of the material, discursive and rhetorical legacies of slavery, particularly as they affect contemporary intramural social relationships.

Significantly, one critique of the TRC has been the temporal limitations placed on its inquiries, which covered the period from the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960 to the first democratic elections in 1994, a scope which prevented an acknowledgement of legal and discursive continuities between the colonial and apartheid eras. This sharp demarcation of the apartheid past from the democratic present was an important strategy of the new state, which sought to establish a “non-racial” society in South Africa and thus to differentiate its policies from that of the apartheid government’s. However, without dismissing the importance of this ambition, Sachs points to the potential problems associated with this perspective on South African history. In his discussion of apartheid-era literature, Sachs critiques its binary construction of past and future as mutually exclusive, arguing that “[a]mbiguity and contradiction are completely shut out, and the only conflict permitted is that between the old [apartheid] and the new [post-apartheid], as if there were only bad in the past and only good in the future” (187). Here, Sachs addresses the need for ambiguity in specifically temporal terms. The corollary to a past that is entirely “bad” is a future that is entirely “good”; a perspective that could, potentially, obscure continuities between the apartheid past and the democratic present. Thus, to disrupt the binary of past and future is also to acknowledge the “ambiguity” of the present and enable an exploration of the continued challenges to democratic freedoms in post-apartheid South Africa. In drawing attention to the persistence of forms of social organisation first established under slavery, the writers whose work I consider demonstrate the ways the past continues to inform the present. Drawing on a growing body of historical scholarship, my work remains sensitive to the historical

specificity of slavery in South Africa even as it considers how literary and figurative engagement with such “deep” histories challenges contemporary imaginings of the nation.

Why Slavery?

Nicholas Southey (1992) notes that South African slavery has, until recently, received relatively little attention from historians⁵; similarly, there had been very little popular knowledge of the institution in South Africa. This situation has begun to change in recent years with the publication of a number of new academic studies, as well as more popular histories and historical fiction.⁶ Slavery was a feature of South African history from the mid-seventeenth century when the Cape Colony was first established by the Dutch. According to Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch (1988), the majority of African social and political institutions were increasingly affected by the slave trade from the fifteenth-century, whether through the demographic impact of slave raiding or a growing economic dependence on the trade. She estimates that between 1450 and 1900, approximately 11.7 million slaves were exported from West Africa to the Americas; during the same period, approximately 7.4 million slaves were transported across the Sahara to the Mediterranean region, with another 5 million being exported across the Indian Ocean (19-20).⁷ Thus, while as an importer of slaves—including African slaves—South Africa’s relationship to this global trade was somewhat different to the rest of the continent, it was similarly entangled in it and in the wider processes of global capitalism slavery represented. Robert C.H. Shell (2001) notes that upon their arrival at the Cape in 1652, the Dutch, who already practiced slavery in their East Indian colonies, “introduced a legal system partly based on slave holding” (xxx).⁸ In 1653, just one year after its establishment, the first slave—Abraham van Batavia—was imported

to the Cape Colony by the Dutch East India Company (Shell xxx). Slaves were imported to South Africa from various parts of East Africa and the Indian Ocean Region, creating an ethnically and linguistically diverse population⁹ that eventually began to reproduce itself, both through formal relationships including marriage and extra-marital casual relationships that included coercive practices. Indeed, as will be discussed in Chapter One, Dangor suggests that the sexual violence suffered by slave women continues to affect contemporary social constructions of “coloured” women.

In South Africa, the labour of imported slaves was supplemented by that of the indigenous Khoisan population, who were interpolated into the colonial economy through the system of *inboekstelsel* or apprenticeship. Indeed, Eldredge and Morton’s edited collection, *Slavery in South Africa: Captive Labour on the Dutch Frontier* (1994), argues for a broader understanding of slavery in South Africa, one that would recognise the *de facto* slave status of Khoisan¹⁰ and Bantu-speaking peoples along the colonial frontier.¹¹ Under the *inboekstelsel* system, children born to Khoisan women on white farms were subsequently apprenticed to their mother’s master until they were 25 years old. Since their mothers stayed to care for and protect their children, this practice often resulted in the perpetuation of Khoisan women’s labour on farms beyond the period of their own indenture. I will argue that the similarity between this practice and the law of uterine descent which governed slavery in South Africa—under which the child of a slave woman was also a slave—is further suggestive of the material continuity between slavery and apprenticeship in South Africa.¹² Significantly, motherhood is a key concern of all the novels considered here.

In “Slavery and South African Historiography” (1994), Fred Morton notes that academic research on slavery has largely focused on the Western Cape, rather than the colonial frontier. This is despite the fact that slavery provided a principle motivation for

the Great Trek in the early nineteenth-century. The Great Trek—a central event in the consolidation of Afrikaner identity which Landsman explores in *The Devil's Chimney*—is the name given to the exodus of thousands of Afrikaners beyond the colonial borders in protest at British rule and the British abolition of slavery. The trek eventually led to the formation of two independent polities—the Transvaal and the Orange Free State—which were later incorporated into the Union of South Africa in 1910. Morton argues that frontier slavery was a systematic and inextricable “part of a process of expansionism and consolidation” (3). Not only did the Voortrekkers continue to use the *inboekstelsel* system to exploit Khoisan labour, but they also captured slaves from nearby Khoisan and African populations to meet their labour needs. Indeed, the labour of these captured slaves often became tied to specific farms through the process of cadastral transfers, in which the sale of a farm included the transfer of the farm’s labourers from one owner to another. Shell (2001) argues that the “increasing frequency of cadastral transfers provides compelling evidence of a *de facto* enslavement of rural and urban Cape slaves and their offspring” (117) in the nineteenth-century. Along the frontier, African children were particularly highly prized as slaves because they were more easily controlled and acculturated; indeed Jan Boeyens (1994) notes that the tribute demanded by colonial officials from African chiefs in the Transvaal “became increasingly equated with indentured children” (197). As a number of historians have argued, existing systems of dependency and client relationships in Southern African societies made these societies particularly vulnerable to being incorporated into the colonial slave system established at the Cape.¹³ Indeed, in his concluding essay to *Slavery in South Africa*, Morton argues that frontier slavery ultimately began to erase the differences between indentured “apprentices” and legally owned slaves so that, “as the distinction between imported slaves, enslaved Khoikhoi, San and people of mixed

descent became blurred, every person of color became subject to enslavement in South Africa” (Morton 257).

Morton’s research not only highlights the increasing association between race and slave status in colonial South Africa, but also traces a historical trajectory between slavery and the development of the industrial migrant labour system that was a key feature of the South African economy in the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In other words, his argument points to the continuity of coerced labour practices even after the official abolition of slavery. Such continuity is further evinced by the institution of the Prize Negro—an institution represented by Rayda Jacobs in her novel *The Slave Book*. Prize Negroes were slaves taken from slave traders captured by British forces after the abolition of the slave trade in 1808; they were subsequently indentured for a period of fourteen years and distributed to farmers in the British colony. As Christopher Saunders (1984) notes, Prize Negroes constituted a form of coerced labour that helped to ease the transition from slavery to wage labour in the colony (37). Similarly, Nigel Worden argues that the period of apprenticeship that followed the abolition of slavery¹⁴ was an attempt to transform the system of slave labour that underpinned the colonial economy into a system of wage or contractual labour.

Significantly, Worden also notes that while the hours of field labour a former slave could be expected to perform were regulated under apprenticeship, this was not the case for domestic labour: “apprentices” were obliged to “perform domestic labour as before at any hour and for any number of hours exactly as when in a state of slavery” (Worden 124). Given that South African slavery instituted a gendered division of labour whereby female slaves worked primarily in the house while male slaves performed the majority of field labour, the colonial state’s failure—or refusal—to regulate domestic labour had a greater impact on female apprentices. At the same time, Worden’s

observation points to the persistence of bonded labour within the domestic space of the white home specifically, the legacy of which is evinced in both apartheid and post-apartheid society by the continued reliance of white households on the labour of black and “coloured” women.

As Pamela Scully has shown in *Liberating the Family?* (1997), the majority of freed women tried to avoid “permanent domestic labour for other households” (177). Former slave women’s attempts to avoid domestic labour in white households further suggests that white domestic space was a place that held the threat of violence—physical, sexual and psychological—for those women. As I will argue in the following chapters, in forcing female apprentices to remain in “a state of slavery” (Worden 124), the colonial state rendered them anachronous figures, excluded from the narrative of progress that the abolition of slavery represented. All four novels represent domestic labour and suggest the ways in which the continued demand for black and “coloured” women’s labour within white households perpetuates a social relationship first established under slavery. In this way, the figure of the maid recalls the slave woman, whose ability to transgress the boundaries of private and public space can potentially destabilize the social hierarchy that such spatial organization underpins. The writers considered in this dissertation thus recognize that the history of slavery provides a crucial framework for the investigation not only of racial hierarchies but also the intersection of race and gender and the regulation of domestic space.

“Coloured” Identity and the History of Slavery:

As the following chapters will show, the history of slavery in South Africa is particularly relevant to the “coloured” population and to the reconfiguration of that identity in the post-apartheid era. Since the term “coloured” incorporates a number of

heterogeneous groups and was subject to change during the period of apartheid, it will be helpful to historicise it in some detail before moving to the novels themselves.

“Coloured”, in the South African context, refers to a population group that is heterogeneous in terms of ethnicity, geography, language, class, and religion. Under apartheid, it operated as an intermediary category in the racial hierarchy and was defined negatively, as neither black nor white.¹⁵ However, the term “coloured”, implicitly meaning of “mixed” racial heritage, first emerged in the early nineteenth-century to describe the combined population of free blacks, Khoisan and newly freed slaves. As Robert Shell (2001) explains, by the time of emancipation the slaves imported to the Cape Colony came from a wide variety of locations—including East Africa, Madagascar, the Mascarenes and the Indonesian Archipelago. At the same time, the slave population also held a high proportion of what he terms “creole”, or locally born slaves. These “creole” slaves were the result of relationships among the slave population and between slaves and Khoisan apprentices working on white farms, as well as between slave women and European men. The diversity of identities subsumed under the category “coloured” not only highlights the arbitrariness of the term as a racial signifier, but also the arbitrariness of “race” more generally.

Under apartheid, “coloured” was one of three racial categories—white, black and “coloured”—that were defined and managed through dual discourses of heredity and space. Initially, the apartheid state sought to make miscegenation illegal, first by prohibiting inter-racial marriage under the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949) and, later, inter-racial sex under the Immorality Act (1950). The subsequent Population Registration Act of 1950 sought to classify every South African as one of these three racial groups, while the Group Areas Act of the same year determined people’s access to public and private spaces based on that classification. The process of classification itself was difficult and relied on what Deborah Posel (2001a) ironically refers to as

“common sense”, that is, on pre-existing racial prejudices. For example, that members of the same family could be classified differently attests to the flexibility and fictional nature of “race” that the apartheid state attempted to deny through the very system of classification.¹⁶ The further proliferation of sub-categories of “coloured” identity after 1950 suggests the elasticity of the category; it was forced to absorb the excesses of apartheid’s racial imagination in order to assure the definition of both “white” and “black” identity.

While apartheid policies constructed a particular version of “coloured” identity, historian, Mohamed Adhikari (2005) argues that a nascent “coloured” identity first crystallised in the late nineteenth-century at the time of the mineral revolution. At that time, “the rapid incorporation of significant numbers of Bantu-speaking Africans into the burgeoning capitalist economy served as the catalyst for assimilated colonial blacks to assert a separate identity and organise politically under the banner of colouredness” (xi). Adhikari’s analysis emphasises “coloured” people’s own agency and self-identification *as* “coloured”, as a means of ensuring and maintaining relative privilege in relation to the state compared to black Africans. Adhikari’s analysis, then, counteracts understandings of “coloured” identity that render it a category imposed from above, while also acknowledging the historical foundation for charges of complicity regularly levelled at “coloured” communities.¹⁷

The need to reassess “coloured” identity and the relationship between “coloured” people and the nation was highlighted by the results of the first democratic elections in 1994, in which the National Party was re-elected in the Western Cape. The success of the formerly white supremacist National Party was attributed to the so-called “coloured vote” because of the high proportion of “coloured” people living in that province. Accusations of betraying the liberation movement and majority rule were

subsequently levelled against the “coloured” population.¹⁸ In her influential essay, “Shame and Identity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa” (1998b), Zoë Wicomb argues that the re-election of the National Party represented the “failure [...] of the grand narrative of liberation” (92). Indeed, public reaction to the election results exposed a tension between the non-racial rhetoric of the new “rainbow” nation and people’s continued investment in existing racial identities. Two strategies that have been employed by “coloured” people as they negotiate their place in the post-apartheid nation have been to recover the repressed history of slavery and their previously disavowed Khoisan heritage.¹⁹ As Pumla Dineo Gqola (2010) explains, however, both of these strategies can also be politically conservative and have the potential to reinforce racist conceptions of identity.

In *What is Slavery to Me?* (2010), Gqola examines the continuing influence of slavery across a range of social and cultural discourses. Her discussion of the Khoisan revivalist movement and the attempts by South Africa’s Malaysian diaspora—most of whom are the descendants of slaves—to develop a relationship with modern day Indonesia points out that both of these cultural movements articulate a desire for authenticity and belonging that have historically been denied to “coloured” people. Following Wicomb (1998b), whose novel *Playing in the Light* is the focus of Chapter Four, she further notes that “coloured” people’s assertions of Khoisan heritage—or “brownness” (27)—are also an attempt to claim an African heritage and a shared history of suffering and discrimination.²⁰ Similarly, Gqola notes that while the label “Cape Malay”—used to describe a specific Muslim “coloured” community in the Western Cape—was largely rejected during the anti-apartheid struggle, there has been a recent surge of interest in the history of that community. Attempts to claim Indonesia as an “ancestral homeland” (138) may be complicated by their resultant “denunciation of contemporary South Africa as a valid/valuable home” (141). Like Khoisan activists,

those Cape Malays who identify Indonesia as their home also attempt to disavow the processes of intercultural exchange—both coerced and voluntary—that contributed to the formation of “coloured” identity. In doing so, they reinforce a racist narrative of “coloured” identity in which “coloured” and “African” are mutually exclusive categories of identity.

Gqola’s discussion of the resurgence of Cape Malay identity and Khoisan revivalism points to a failure of non-racial politics in post-apartheid society, where people continue to grapple with the material and discursive legacies of colonial racism and apartheid policies. While this conservative turn to ethnic politics is not confined to “coloured” people, it does suggest an anxiety about how to frame or claim belonging in a South Africa that aspires to be a “post-racial” society.²¹ The novels examined in this dissertation examine the socio-historical processes that gave rise to the category “coloured”, as well as the establishment of “white” and “black”. In doing so, they suggest the possibilities opened up by an investigation of “coloured” identity to deconstruct the idea of “race” itself.

“Coloured” Identity and Anachronism:

In order to examine the aesthetic politics of the novels discussed here, I deploy the work of a number of literary and cultural theorists, including Hortense Spillers (2003), Lee Edelman (2004) and Valerie Rohy (2009). Spillers is a scholar of black counter-cultures of modernity and has written about the continuing effects of slavery on the social construction of black gender identities in the United States. Edelman and Rohy are both queer theorists, who have also investigated the relationship between race and sexuality in America. All three of these theorists use psychoanalytic methodologies which are useful for investigating trauma and enabling the articulation of silence, and

each has demonstrated concern with slavery in particular. While these critics have investigated slavery in the North American context, historians have explored the significant role that American segregation and “Jim Crow” laws played as a model for apartheid in South Africa.²² Furthermore, my deployment of these theories is carefully balanced by due attention to the historical specificity of the South African context.

In *Anachronism and its Others: Sexuality, Race, Temporality* (2009), Rohy examines modern discourses of ethnology and sexuality to explicate the fantasy of linear time that underpins narratives of progress. In these narratives, the past and the present are rendered as discrete and separate from one another. Rohy further explains that narratives of progress require, even as they disavow, figures of anachronism: “[t]he vision of futurity promoted by white, heteronormative culture requires the threat of a past that atavistically persists in the person of abject subjects” (Rohy x). Drawing on Freud’s use of the recapitulation hypothesis—which suggests that the development of humankind (phylogeny) is reflected or repeated in an individual’s development (ontogeny)—she identifies an analogy between blackness and queerness in American literature that renders black and queer people figures of anachronism. That is, both blackness and homosexuality have been constructed, in evolutionary and psychoanalytic discourses, as antagonistic to progress: blackness represents, in discourses of scientific racism, the primitive pre-history of human civilisation; similarly, homosexuality has been conceived of as a failure of progress into the adult stage of sexuality which is motivated by the impulse to reproduce. Thus, under the system of white-supremacist hetero-patriarchy that characterised South African society during the colonial and apartheid eras, women, blacks and homosexuals were all marginalised and came to carry the symbolic burden of anachronism for a white society represented as normative and future-oriented.

The concept of linear time Rohy discusses can be identified in the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which sought to turn “the page of history” (Boraine 5) and bring the apartheid era to an end in order to achieve a democratic future for the new “rainbow” nation. As such, the Commission attempted to consign apartheid to a past that was distinct from the national present, obscuring continuities between the apartheid and post-apartheid eras. As noted above, Sachs suggested that much apartheid-era fiction represented a similar version of the past. It is my contention that in post-apartheid literature, representations of slavery, and particularly the figure of the female slave, make visible the operations of anachronism and thus challenge the politics of the new nation.

In light of the historical relationship between slavery and the “coloured” population in South Africa, the politics of anachronism are particularly relevant to “coloured” identity in the post-apartheid era. Significantly, given that the term “coloured” served to perpetuate the subservient status of former slaves through the language of race, historian John Edwin Mason notes that “[n]o later than 1838, *coloured*, meaning the combined population of former slaves and Khoisan, had entered Cape Dutch as *gekleurde*, as if *coloured* were the past tense of the verb *to colour*” (276).²³ As such, from the inception of the category, “coloured” identity has been rendered anachronistic, the effect of an event that has already taken place, rather than a form of autonomous self-fashioning in the present. This formulation imposes what Hortense Spillers calls ethnicity’s “powerful stillness” (“Mama’s Baby” 207) onto the body of the “coloured”, erasing both the socio-cultural production and the creative processes of identity construction involved in shaping “coloured” identity.

More specifically, as Zoë Wicomb (1998b) has argued, the body of the “coloured” woman bears the socio-symbolic burden of miscegenation, the “shame” of

having “mated with the coloniser” (91). The “coloured” woman’s body not only marks the failure of the fantasy of “racial purity” for a dominant white population invested in ideas of racial superiority, but is also the vehicle by which that failure is reproduced.

The way in which “coloured” women’s bodies are positioned within a system of racialised reproduction is a concern of all four writers examined here, whose work raises important questions about motherhood and the political appropriation of women’s reproductive capacity. In *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004), Lee Edelman elaborates his theory of reproductive futurity, in which he argues that the non-reproductive nature of homosexual sex is made, in contemporary cultures of the globalizing West, to represent the perversity of all desire, which seeks its own perpetuation rather than fulfilment. By contrast, heterosexual sex is associated with reproduction through the figure of the child in order to disavow the painful jouissance of desire and to give sex an ideological meaning and a utilitarian function. While Edelman’s account is particularly interested in the figure of the child, I am concerned with the consequences of reproductive futurity for “coloured” women, their experience of motherhood and their relationship to their bodies.

As I will argue in the following chapters, Edelman’s account of reproductive futurity demonstrates that it is a fundamentally patriarchal ideology. Under reproductive futurity the woman’s body is symbolically appropriated for its capacity to represent reproductive function and yet, even as she produces the future in the figure of the child, the mother—as vehicle—is herself relegated to the past. Thus while Edelman is primarily concerned with the politics of homosexuality, his work is useful for thinking through the position of women within discourses of racialised reproduction. Indeed, within such an ideology the “coloured”, or person of mixed racial ancestry, can be perceived to occupy a position analogous to that of the homosexual. In discourses of racialised reproduction, the multiple origins of the person of “mixed-race” are opposed

to the patriarchal concept of a single origin or source, figured by the father, thereby threatening the linear transmission of “racial” identity.

The anachronistic status of the “coloured” body as represented in post-apartheid literature casts doubt on the possibility of change in South Africa, suggesting instead the perpetuation of racial and patriarchal ideologies. This dissertation investigates literary engagements with the history and legacies of slavery in post-apartheid fiction in order to suggest that these writers identify the perpetuation of these ideologies as a challenge to the democratic transformation of South African society. While the Truth and Reconciliation Commission attempted to overcome the traumatic apartheid past in order to enable a democratic future for South Africa, the novels considered in this dissertation query the optimistic narrative of progress implicit in the TRC’s work. Focusing on questions of gender, sexuality and “coloured” identity, this dissertation traces the persistent legacies of slavery made visible by the literary fiction of the post-apartheid moment. In particular, through their examinations of motherhood, sex, domestic labour and domestic space, these literary works reveal the persistence of a gendered and racialised logic of reproduction in contemporary South Africa.

Structure:

Chapter One, “Slavery, Sexual Violence and Narrative Truth in Achmat Dangor’s *Bitter Fruit*”, considers the novel’s attention to the history of slavery in South Africa as a means of challenging the normative, nation-building narrative of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and represents the dissertation’s most sustained engagement with the TRC. As I will show, Dangor’s novel metonymically invokes the figure of the female slave through the history of the Cape Malay and tropes of concupiscence and illegitimacy, most notably in association with the character of Lydia

Ali. I argue that the rape of Lydia by an Afrikaner policeman can be read as an effect of the survival of the social relations that enabled the rape, without accountability, of women of colour under slavery. I argue that Dangor's novel contradicts the claim made by Meg Samuelson (2007) that, in post-apartheid literature the raped woman becomes a centre around which a family and, allegorically, a nation can cohere, depicting instead the eventual disintegration of a family confronted by the trauma of rape. At the same time, Dangor's novel draws attention to the ways in which the TRC process attempted to recuperate the "coloured" victim of rape through her inscription as "a mother of the nation". In doing so, the TRC emphasised the "coloured" woman's material body and its biological and reproductive capacities in a way that rendered her anachronistic. By highlighting this discrepancy between the celebratory rhetoric of post-apartheid "equality for all" and the continuing psychosocial reality of trauma, *Bitter Fruit* asks what options are available to women beyond the roles of mother or victim in a post-apartheid society that remains invested in patriarchal ideals.

While the first chapter is concerned with the rhetorical legacies of slavery in the immediate aftermath of apartheid, Chapter Two, "History, Narrative and Disavowal in Anne Landsman's *The Devil's Chimney*", is concerned with the material vestiges of the slave economy in rural South Africa and white women's complicity with that economy. *The Devil's Chimney* is set in the town of Oudtshoorn in the Little Karoo, once known as the ostrich feather capital of the world, where the farming economy relied on slave labour. I argue that Landsman's attention to the discursive production of white identity in South Africa is structured around a disavowal of the inter-racial relations that existed under slavery. In particular, Landsman suggests that narrative modes such as the *plaasroman* and "black peril" narratives work to support the racial hierarchy first established under slavery and continue to police inter-racial relations. Similarly, her attention to the historical development of the Afrikaans language challenges its cultural

construction as a “white man’s” language and thus allows for a deconstruction of white Afrikaner identity. Furthermore, through its sustained engagement with the question of motherhood, and particularly the institution of white motherhood, *The Devil’s Chimney* illustrates how white femininity depends for its perpetuation on the labour of black women and highlights the need for an intersectional feminist approach to negotiating intramural relations in post-apartheid South Africa.

Narrated by Connie, an alcoholic Poor White living in post-apartheid South Africa, the novel interweaves the stories of a number of women—Beatrice, Nomsa, Pauline and Connie herself—set in different historical periods in South Africa. The text’s attention to the colonial as well as to the apartheid and post-apartheid eras highlights material and discursive continuities between the past and the present that challenge an unqualified celebration of the “new” democratic South Africa. As a result, Landsman’s novel provides an alternative historical narrative to that of the TRC, one that highlights historical instances of supposed reconciliation—most notably the 1910 Act of Union—that had the effect of reaffirming South Africa’s racial hierarchy, rather than promoting racial equality. I further argue that the disappearance of Pauline, a “coloured” maid, in 1955—the same year the ANC adopted the Freedom Charter—symbolises the erasure of specifically “coloured” identity from liberation politics. In drawing a connection between Pauline’s slave heritage and “coloured” disenfranchisement, *The Devil’s Chimney* points to the ways in which the racial legacies of slavery continue to inform contemporary political and racial identities.

Chapter Three, “‘Coloured’ Identity and Citizenship in Rayda Jacobs’s Historical Fiction”, considers the relationship between citizenship and sexual politics suggested by Rayda Jacobs’s *The Slave Book* (1998). Jacobs’s work has garnered critical attention by virtue of its frank engagement with the creation and management of

Muslim identity under slavery at the Cape. *The Slave Book* can usefully be read in terms of both national politics and a broader, international history of slavery. I argue that Jacobs's attempt to validate a specifically "coloured" identity should be read in light of the backlash against "coloured" people in the wake of the 1994 vote for the National Party in the Western Cape. In this light, Jacobs's engagement with the North American slave narrative tradition works to claim a shared history of suffering and resistance under slavery for South Africa's "coloured" population. Slave narratives such as Frederick Douglass's autobiography gained significance during the American civil rights movement in the 1960s as testament to both the history of racial discrimination in the United States and black people's resistance to such discrimination. Subsequently, neo-slave narratives began to draw on the slave narrative tradition to address the continuing racism of American society. By invoking a narrative tradition that is absent from South Africa, Jacobs's challenges the conception of "coloured" people as complicit with white power and suggests the need to recover the history of "coloured" resistance to racial discrimination and apartheid.

However, as I will argue, Jacobs's history of "coloured" identity is notably heteronormative and the novel's marriage plot serves to tie legal freedom to heterosexual marriage. I will argue that this strategy disappointingly relies for its efficacy on the abject figure of Kananga—a black slave overseer who rapes other male slaves. As I will show, Jacobs's representation of Kananga's sexual desires is indebted to historical accounts of slavery; historians such as Robert Ross and Robert Shell have argued that homosexuality among male slaves was a result of imbalanced sex ratios in the slave population, rather than being a legitimate form of desire. The novel's conservative sexual politics thus raise questions pertinent to debates about the sexual rights guaranteed under South Africa's new constitution. Indeed, Jacobs's reclamation of "coloured" political legitimacy comes at the expense of LGBT identities and the

citizenship of LGBT people, debates around which had been prevalent since the constitutional process began in the early 1990s. This, in turn, suggests that reclaiming the history of slavery is not automatically a liberatory gesture, but one that must be accompanied by due attention to both the implicit bias of the archive and the contemporary context in which that history is recovered.

Chapter Four, “Maternal Cosmopolitanism and Narrative Identity in *Playing in the Light*”, considers the continued circulation and relevance of apartheid-era racial categories in order to address the perpetuation of racial thinking in the democratic nation. Wicomb’s second novel considers the effect of the 1950 Population Registration Act—which classified all South Africans as White, Black or “Coloured”. The novel traces its protagonist Marion’s response to the discovery that her parents were “play whites” and her subsequent efforts to reconstruct her identity. Marion’s mother, Helen, we learn, exchanged sexual favours for an affidavit certifying that she and her family were white. Thus, her agency over her own body provides a significant counter-narrative to representations of “coloured” women as passive victims of sexual violence. At the same time, however, the novel makes it clear that Helen’s decision is not a completely free choice.

Marion’s re-evaluation of her own family history highlights the role played by narrative, and particularly historical narrative, in constructing identities and a sense of belonging. In particular, Wicomb’s engagement with the discourse of racial “passing” challenges the fixity of “racial” identities and the historical construction of white and “coloured” identity. *Playing in the Light* asks us to consider how “coloured” identity is imagined in the post-apartheid era, and the persistent relevance of apartheid classifications in interpersonal and intramural relations in contemporary South Africa. Wicomb is also concerned with literature’s potential to intervene in these issues and the

novel's allusion to Olaudah Equiano's autobiography and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* elaborate upon both the possibilities and limitations of narrative. Her reference to Equiano's work, in particular, challenges us to think about the possibility of speaking or writing as an individual, rather than as a representative of a "race". I will argue that the novel ties the question of representation and representativeness to contemporary South African writing through Wicomb's critique of the reception of black women's autobiography. She suggests that the critical tendency to read all black and "coloured" women's writing as autobiography works to position them anachronistically in terms of their histories and the history of the nation, refusing them a role in imagining the future. Wicomb's novel is possibly the most sophisticated and self-conscious of the texts examined here and asks if it is possible to recover the slave past all four authors consider in their work, while further suggesting that such narrative witnessing might actually disguise a desire to assign blame for the violence of the past.

The novels addressed in this dissertation are concerned with the perpetuation of forms of social organisation that are no longer necessarily enforced under the law, but which nevertheless persist. The end of apartheid—like the abolition of slavery—brought with it the promise of new freedoms. Without discounting the need for optimism, the novels discussed here highlight continuity as much as change, warning against an unqualified belief in the South African "miracle". All four authors express a cautious optimism in the power of narrative to contribute to the process of transition and transformation in South Africa; at the same time, they are concerned with the obstacles that continue to challenge that process. Whether the fictions engage with slavery in material and economic terms—as in the historical fiction of Rayda Jacobs or Anne Landsman—or figuratively—as in the work of Achmat Dangor and Zoë Wicomb—these texts are concerned with what legal freedom might mean for "coloured" identity in the post-apartheid moment. Does the history of sexual abuse perpetrated against slave

women continue to affect the sexual desires and freedoms of “coloured” women? Do the relationships “coloured” women have to motherhood continue to be affected by social anxieties about miscegenation? How might the retrieval of the connections between the “coloured” and Afrikaner populations influence the post-apartheid reconfiguration of those identities? Has the end of apartheid changed the relationship of “coloured” people to the nation?

Finally, as the following chapters will show, the novels of Dangor, Landsman, Jacobs and Wicomb all suggest that attention to the history of slavery can enable a reconception of the nation itself. In gesturing towards this broader history, literary engagement with the history of slavery challenges the myth of South African exceptionalism and offers a new perspective on the nation’s history and relationship with the rest of the African continent. In Dangor’s novel, Silas Ali’s Indian heritage points to South Africa’s place not only within the British Empire but also within the Indian Ocean World that Jacob’s historical novel also suggests. Similarly, both Jacobs and Wicomb make reference to the North American slave narrative tradition and, in doing so, they position the South African history of slavery within a broader historical framework. By contrast, Landsman’s novel is firmly rooted in the South African landscape until the very end of the novel, when the prospect of visiting the sea also suggests the possibility of change. Thus, while Landsman is primarily concerned with the history of frontier slavery and the construction of whiteness, she also suggests the possibility for the history of oceanic slavery to open up new ways of conceiving the nation.

Chapter One:

Slavery, Sexual Violence and Narrative Truth

in Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*

Achmat Dangor's novel, *Bitter Fruit* (2001), was a finalist for both the Man Booker Prize and the Impac-Dublin Literary Award in 2003. The novel is set in 1998, just as the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) are completing their interim report¹ and is centrally concerned with questions of gender, history and politics in the newly democratic nation. The novel's focus on sexual violence depicts rape as one of the "new struggles" (Dangor 77) facing South Africa and suggests that the work of the liberation struggle is not yet done, while also drawing attention to gender and the function of gender in the negotiation of new national and ethnic identities. Rape is recognised as "an urgent concern for most South African women" (Human Rights Watch), as demonstrated by Human Rights Watch (HRW) statistics: "During 1994, 32,107 cases were reported, an increase of 16 percent on the previous year: eight-eighth rape cases, on average, are reported each day, a yearly rate of 149.5 rapes per hundred thousand population" (HRW).² For Helen Moffett (2006), the high rates of sexual violence in South Africa "suggest an unacknowledged gender civil war" (130). Despite this, it was rare for women testifying before the TRC to mention experiences of rape, other than in elliptical terms: "Of nearly 9000 cases of violations only about nine have claimed they have been raped. Yet, in our research we came across many cases of violations [that] could be described as rape or where women knew of others who had been raped" (Meintjes quoted in Ross 23). In their submission to the TRC on the importance of making gender a focus of the Commission's inquiries, Beth Goldblatt and Sheila Meintjes note that, from the 1970s, "specific and systematic sexual forms of torture" (8) were used, not only in police detention, but by anti-apartheid political organisations too.³ Women's silence around sexual violence has been attributed to a sense of shame and the perception of rape as a "private", rather than a political crime.⁴ The continued understanding of rape as "private", and thus apolitical, allows it to remain an unspoken means of regulating the public sphere.

The novel's attention to sexual violence is not limited to South Africa's recent past, however; instead the novel's engagement with the history of slavery highlights discursive continuities between colonialism and apartheid. In doing so, *Bitter Fruit* counteracts the temporal limitations of the TRC's work—which only covered the period from 1960-1994—and thus challenges the narrative of South Africa's past the Commission was seen to produce. The novel's engagement with the work of the TRC is focalised through the Alis, a “coloured” family living in Johannesburg: Silas, a lawyer, liaises between the Commission and the Minister for Justice; his wife, Lydia, works as a nurse; and their son Mikey is a university student. Narrative action turns around the revelation, at the beginning of the novel, that twenty years earlier Lydia was raped by a security policeman, Lt. Du Boise, in retaliation for Silas's political activities against the apartheid state. Furthermore, it is later revealed that Mikey is not Silas's biological son but, rather, was conceived through that act of rape. Alternative narratives, in the form of diaries, pose an implicit challenge to the TRC's construction of a particular national history, one that could, the novel suggests, enable the revitalisation of racist and patriarchal values in the democratic state.

Bitter Fruit's sustained engagement with the TRC has prompted a number of critical readings of the novel which consider it in relation to questions of history, voice and silence, trauma and “coloured” identity.⁵ In particular, critics have noted the tension Dangor suggests between a desire to acknowledge the past and a political imperative to “forgive and forget”. In *South African Literature after the Truth Commission* (2009), Shane Graham argues that through its characters' journeys around Johannesburg, *Bitter Fruit* creates a “peripatetic” archive, a spatial record of the city's history that refutes the theoretical break between the past and the present. In doing so, he suggests that the novel poses the question of “how to preserve and give voice to the past without being

trapped in it or possessed by it” (94). Lydia Ali’s rape, the central event of the novel, has also drawn critical attention, notably from Meg Samuelson.

For Samuelson (2004), “[t]he novel’s miring in a shameful discourse of ‘blood’ threatens its otherwise salutary efforts to grapple with the limited discourse available in which to speak rape” (3), allowing women’s reproductive capacity to be appropriated by nation-building discourses. However, while Samuelson suggests that “the history [Dangor’s] novel prioritises [...] is one of bloodlines”, I will argue that the novel’s attention to the specific history of slavery not only exposes “race” as a social construct rather than a biological fact, but also demonstrates the concomitant development of sexual stereotypes that made “coloured” women’s bodies available for exploitation. This chapter addresses the intersection of racial and patriarchal ideologies in both the colonial and apartheid eras as depicted through *Bitter Fruit*’s attention to the figure of the “coloured” woman, attention which points to a resurgence of those ideologies in post-apartheid South Africa.

Race, Sex and Anachronism:

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) provides a crucial framework for *Bitter Fruit*’s engagement with questions of history, slavery and sexual violence. Indeed, as Ronit Frenkel (2008) notes, with sections entitled “Memory”, “Confession” and “Retribution”, the novel provides alternatives to the TRC’s terms “speak grieve, and heal” (159), through which South Africa’s past and its transition to democracy might be understood and mediated. The Commission was established by the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, no. 34 in 1995⁶ to help the new nation overcome the legacies of apartheid, and move towards the democratic multiculturalism of the “rainbow nation” espoused by the Commission’s chairman, former Archbishop

Desmond Tutu. Despite its commendable goal of national reconciliation there have been a number of criticisms of the processes followed during the hearings. Many have accused the TRC of encouraging a kind of national amnesia about apartheid in order to fulfil its mandate, while others have criticised the manner in which it dealt, or failed to deal, with the testimony of women and women's experiences under apartheid.⁷ For Mahmood Mamdani (2002), one of the most significant problems with the TRC was that it did not declare apartheid itself “a crime against humanity” (42), instead the “Commission’s analysis reduced apartheid from a relationship between the state and entire communities to one between the state and individuals” (33-4). As a result, Mamdani argues, the scope of the Commission’s restorative justice was greatly reduced, while the history of apartheid became a “drama played out within a fractured political elite: state agents against political activists” (56).

Bitter Fruit's depiction of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission exposes a tension between the desire for an official account of apartheid—one that will act as a reference point by which to measure the progress of the new state—and the multiplicity of individual experiences that such an account cannot accommodate. As I will show in more detail later in this chapter, the diaries of both Lydia Ali and Silas's father, Ali Ali, are incorporated into the novel in ways that trouble the official narrative generated by the TRC. Both Lydia's and Ali's diaries tell stories of sexual violence and are associated with repetition, rather than the kind of progress the TRC sought to enable; in this way, the novel suggests that individual accounts of trauma threaten to complicate the narrative of progress the democratic state sought to establish. Repetition is one of a number of temporal aberrations that Valerie Rohy (2007) describes as anachronistic—that which disrupts the fantasy of linear time. For Rohy, anachronism is both disavowed by, and structurally integral to, imperial narratives of progress: “[t]he vision of futurity promoted by white, heteronormative culture requires the threat of a past that

atavistically persists in the person of abject subjects” (x). Given that Rohy’s account of anachronism can help to illuminate the novel, it will be worth exploring in some detail here.

Drawing on Freud’s use of the recapitulation hypothesis, Rohy identifies an analogy, in nineteenth-century scientific discourses, between blackness and queerness since both figure abject atavism in evolutionary discourse. The recapitulation hypothesis emerged from nineteenth-century scientific racism and posited that phylogeny—the development of the species—was recapitulated, or repeated, in ontogeny—an individual’s development. Thus, the repetition compulsion proposed by Freud at the level of individual neuroses found support in scientific theories of human progress and evolution. Often, such theories rested on an essentialist understanding of race, in which racial groups were understood to be coherent and distinct from one another, even as they stood at different points along a continuum of human progress. This understanding of race created a hierarchy, at the top of which was European man, who was understood to be the pinnacle of human development and civilisation. Conversely, black Africans, and more specifically the Khoisan of Southern Africa, represented the most primitive form of man and, as such, the prehistory of mankind. The persistence of so-called primitive peoples, these figures of anachronism, signified a threat of degeneration: European civilisation’s return to a primitive state of existence marked by the physical sign of blackness. This threat was articulated most notably through colonial discourses of sexuality and miscegenation.

Rohy’s work builds upon earlier studies of nineteenth-century racism by critics such as Sander L. Gilman (1985a), who has described the association in nineteenth-century iconography between the “Hottentot” or black woman and the prostitute.⁸ This association rested on the threat each was perceived to carry of contamination and

disease; a threat that in both cases found support in discourses of evolution. The European prostitute, who was “perceived as the essential sexualised female” (240), was the subject of a number of studies in the nineteenth-century which placed her within the lower classes of beauty (243-5). The use of such hierarchical classification points to the extension of evolutionary thought beyond the question of race.

Gilman notes that lesbianism was also connected to prostitution as a similar form of sexual deviance. Given that, in Freudian theory, homosexuality is considered to arise from arrested development and thus represents a more “primitive” form of human sexuality, the discursive associations between the “Hottentot” female, the prostitute and the lesbian, points to the gendering of evolutionary concepts. According to Gilman, similar gender politics are evident in Freudian theory too, when Freud “ties the image of female sexuality to the image of the colonial black” (257). The black female served “as an icon of black sexuality in general” (231), which was perceived in terms of lasciviousness and excess: “this animallike [sic] sexual appetite went so far as to lead black women to copulate with apes” (231). The excessive sexuality of the black female, constructed by theorists of evolution and signified by their “more developed” (232) genitalia, was thought to lead them to forsake their humanity and embrace bestiality. Similarly, the threat of disease carried by the prostitute was understood in terms of degeneracy, a movement backwards or downwards on a scale of evolutionary development, which echoed imperialist fears of miscegenation. Thus, both disease and miscegenation could be perceived in terms of regression, and both threats were located in the female body, which was, as such, marked as anachronistic.

If, in colonial discourses, the purported lasciviousness of the black female marked her as “perverse” and was the ultimate signifier of her alterity, for Lee Edelman, the non-reproductive nature of homosexual sex is made, in contemporary cultures of the

globalizing West, to represent the perversity of all desire, which seeks its own perpetuation rather than fulfilment. By contrast, heteronormative discourses use the figure of the child to disavow the painful jouissance of desire, and to give heterosexual sex an ideological meaning. If, as Edelman argues, this ideology of futurism “generates generational succession, temporality and narrative sequence” (60), then the figure of the homosexual, positioned antagonistically to futurity, also becomes what Rohy terms a figure of anachronism.⁹ The ideology of reproductive futurity is fundamentally patriarchal: Edelman notes that the patronym assures the continuation of the patriarch in fantasy, even after the death of his corporeal self, and further acts to assure that the future is reproduced in its present guise. The corollary to this is the fleshiness of the maternal body, which guarantees the mortality of the mother: thus, even as she produces the future in the form of the child, woman is relegated to the past and refused anything except a symbolic and undifferentiated role in that future.

Furthermore, as Rohy (2009) points out, “the trope of the-child-as-future produces the child as already belonging to the past” (45), the association of women with children thus serves to mark them, too, as belonging to the past. This infantilisation is not limited to literary representations: Mahmood Mamdani (1996) notes that as part of colonialism’s implementation of patriarchal norms, adult women were often classified as minors (64). The invocation of nature used to justify the collapse of the category of woman into that of mother that underpins reproductive futurity is little more than a figure of language posited to “designate something that’s absent from nature as such [...] the system of values, the moral economy, that [...] all social subjects [...are] made to value *as nature itself*” (Edelman 57-8). The relegation of women to the “natural” time of maternity, as opposed to the political time of history, is thus a rhetorical strategy designed to assure the continuation of a patriarchal society.

Therefore, if, as Rohy observes, “the ordinary concept of time as a linear procession requires an empirically stable past” (23), I would suggest that in post-apartheid South Africa, the TRC attempted to produce an account of apartheid that would function as just such a past, from which the new nation could move on and progress to a democratic multiculturalism. Such an understanding of the TRC’s narrative project would, however, require a figure of anachronism capable of disturbing the projected future of the new nation. For Dangor, the figure of woman and, as I will argue later, more specifically the “coloured” woman, constitutes such a challenge to the idealistic vision of the “rainbow” nation.

As previously noted, Mamdani (1996) attributes the categorisation of women as minors to the patriarchal nature of European colonialism. Similarly, the representation of women as childish in *Bitter Fruit* can be seen as part of the patriarchal construction of women as vulnerable to sexual violence, which is construed as instinctual rather than a facet of patriarchal power. Both Lydia and later Mikey’s friend Vinu are described as childish, and both are the victims of sexual assaults that reflect on the politics of the apartheid state: Lydia is raped by Du Boise in revenge for Silas’s political activities and Vinu is sexually abused by her father, an anti-apartheid activist.¹⁰ Both women are also forced—through the confessions of their abusers—to confront the fact of their victim status, and it is this challenge to their autonomy that renders them childlike in their vulnerability.

Not long after she has been forced to confront the memory of her rape, Lydia is informed by Silas that Du Boise has applied for amnesty on a number of charges and has named her as a victim, a move that will force her to appear before the Commission. Hearing this, she breaks down and starts “crying, a soft, childlike, whimpering sound that she had hoped no one would ever hear again” (161). Du Boise’s application for

amnesty has named Lydia as a victim, despite all her efforts to refuse that title. The power given to him by the state to name her as his victim generates a sense of shock that precipitates her regression into a childlike state: like a child she is represented as vulnerable and in need of protection. Similarly, when Vinu tells Mikey that she had an “affair” with her father, Johan, while they were living in exile in Holland, he rejects her story of romantic love and tells her that it was “rape [...] simple, crude rape” (210). At this point, Vinu begins to weep “the way he imagines she wept as a child” (210). Denied the fantasy of romantic love, Vinu must accept the abusive nature of her relationship with her father and acknowledge her status as victim. For both Lydia and Vinu, victimhood is associated with sexual violence and being named as victims imposes an external recognition of their vulnerability that socially infantilises them. While Edelman’s theory of reproductive futurity sees the figure of the child as a symbol of a meaningful future and is, as such, a positive image, for these women, the association with childhood reflects a backward movement, an undoing of adult autonomy that marks it as disempowering. Lydia and Vinu’s interpretations of, or means of dealing with, the circumstances of their assault are discarded in favour of those of their abusers.¹¹ These women do not get to make their own meanings; rather they have the identity of victim thrust upon them externally, leaving them in need of the protection of the patriarchal institutions of the state.

In *Bitter Fruit*, women’s anachronistic status is related directly to their body and specifically to their genital organs. Lydia describes “those child’s lips that a woman’s poes [vagina] has” (16); this reference to children marks female sexuality as childlike and primitive. It also refers to the reproductive, as well as sexual function of the vagina, reaffirming the heteronormative association between women and childbirth and tying female sexuality to motherhood. Childbirth fixes women in place within the domestic order in society. Since Lydia is subsumed into the role of mother, unable to speak, to

signify, except with “those child’s lips” (16) it is also a place associated with the past.

The fixed position of women under patriarchy is one outside history: Mikey, eating a fig from the tree in his garden, “thinks of a woman’s sex, ancient and eternal, no young girl would have such gritty sweetness” (39). In this instance, a woman, figured by her “sex” (39), is both ancient (primitive) and eternal (static) and stands, as such, outside the linear progress of history. The distinction made here between a woman and a young girl can be read in terms of reproductive capacity: a woman can bear children while a girl, a child herself, cannot.

The fig tree from which Mikey eats, described as normally barren, bears an “unseasonable abundance of figs [...] Most are already overripe and have burst open, oozing a white sap on which ants have feasted and fruit flies died greed-filled deaths” (38). Just as the lasciviousness attributed to the black woman in colonial fantasy carries with it the threat of contamination and degeneracy, so the reproductive excess of the fig tree is seen to be deathly. From its very title, *Bitter Fruit* signals a preoccupation with reproduction and the novel abounds with images of flowers, trees, roots and decay. The rapid ripening and fruitfulness of the fig tree, which we later learn is of short duration, would seem to suggest an anxiety regarding the equally rapid, and perhaps unsustainable, development of South Africa into a democratic nation. Similarly, Silas notes, looking out of his office window, that “the jacarandas had blossomed early this year [...] the place had lost its softening purple haze much too soon” (100). In the novel, the natural order prefigures political growth, and its ensuing decay suggests the fear of an abrupt end to the South African “miracle”. Both human and vegetative reproduction are employed symbolically in the novel in ways that allow Dangor to explore the passage of time: images of vegetative growth and flowering create an urgent sense of time passing, of time speeding up: “the jacarandas had blossomed early *this* year [emphasis added]” (100). Women, on the other hand, produce children who figure

the future, and yet those women remain outside the historical time to which that future belongs—“both ancient and eternal” (39).

The invocation of the child as a means of ensuring the reproduction of the present in the future has racial implications which demonstrate the ways in which patriarchy can come to support racial ideology. While celebrating the divorce of her parents—one Indian, one Afrikaner—Vinu laments, “[w]hy don’t they marry their own kind? [...] That way, they won’t have to *discover*, years after they’ve brought children into the world, that they’re culturally incompatible, and the children won’t have to suffer’ [emphasis in original]” (164). Here, in a startling repetition of apartheid logic, the welfare of children is used as a justification for racial segregation. Furthermore, the “suffer[ing]” (164) of the children of inter-racial marriages is explained in terms of cultural incompatibility, recalling what Shaun Irlam has described as the refraction of post-apartheid society “into separate communities grown more insular and often focused on quite divergent interests’ (698). Similarly, Daniel Herwitz has argued that the politics of the “rainbow” nation “remain within the ambit of racialism, giving predominance within the new nation to differences based on color” (76). Disappointingly, post-apartheid South Africa’s project of reconciliation seeks to create harmony between various “racial” groups, rather than to dismantle the fantasy of race that constructed them. *Bitter Fruit* suggests that the perpetuation of a racially-differentiated society relies on the logic of “reproductive futurity” (Edelman 2004), which necessarily remains tied to the gendered symbolism of patriarchy, in which women are understood as those who “reproduce the boundaries of ethnic/national groups, who transmit the culture and who are the privileged signifiers of national difference” (Kandiyoti 376-7).

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Narrative Agency:

One characteristic of the TRC that has come to fore repeatedly is its investment in narrative. Mark Sanders (2000) points out that, because the Commission was dealing with four different notions of truth—“factual or forensic truth; personal or narrative truth; social or “dialogue” truth and healing and restorative truth” (17)—it could not help but take a narrative approach to synthesising its findings in order to produce reconciliation. Indeed, the subtext of the Commission’s title is a movement from truth to reconciliation, which could be read as an attempt to make meaning of, or meaningful, the truth of what life was like under the apartheid state. This linear movement towards meaning is a fundamental characteristic of narrative (Edelman 152) and suggests, too, an investment in notions of modernisation and progress that is to be found throughout the Commission’s rhetoric.

One example of this rhetoric is the memoir by the Commission’s deputy chairman, Alex Boraine (2000), entitled *A Country Unmasked: Inside South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, which details his experience in helping to establish and oversee the Commission and its work. The emphasis in Boraine’s writing is on closure, new beginnings and a better future for South Africa. The “sordid history” (Boraine 3) of South Africa under apartheid is described as a “drama” (2),¹² while, in the post-apartheid era, the “*page of history [emphasis added]*” (5) needs to be turned in order to move forward into a multicultural future. This page is to be turned by “the whole nation: ordinary people, government agencies, *poets, writers, historians, academics*, and whoever cares about the future [emphasis added]” (8). It seems significant that broad categories such as “ordinary people” and “whoever cares about the future”, need to be supplemented by the addition of “poets writers, historians, academics”, by those, in other words, who are invested in the production or study of

narrative. As such, Boraine suggests that narrative, whatever its subject, is always concerned with the future. However, within *Bitter Fruit* two personal narratives are explicated alongside the story of the TRC hearings and complicate any unqualified association between narrative and the future. Lydia's diary and the diary of Ali Ali then can be seen to challenge the official "story" of the TRC. While the TRC project is involved in turning the "page of history" (Boraine 5), Lydia's and Ali's diaries, and their stories more generally, engage with the discourse of rape in ways that are more suggestive of repetition than progress. These diaries can be considered as unofficial narratives that function to undermine the totalising and unifying nature of the TRC's official history.¹³

Lydia begins her diary on December 6th 1978, three days after she was raped, and stops writing on May 16th 1994. Mikey, reading his mother's diary, considers this a "random date" (130) to stop writing, but later discovers that it "was the day they completed the TRC White Paper, ready to go to parliament" (134). This use of dates suggests that the TRC's official process replaced individual efforts to come to terms with apartheid and its legacies and effectively places Lydia's personal account of her ordeal in opposition to the officially sanctioned work of the TRC, an opposition compounded by her refusal to testify before the commission. The effect that reading his mother's diary has on Mikey, and the subsequent discovery that he is a "child of rape" (126), is traumatic: he is "overcome with horror" (129). Yet even while reading the diary he distinguishes between Lydia's account of the "reality of his own birth" (127) and "the vast *fictions* of great histories [emphasis added]" (127) in a way that suggests that autobiographical stories of apartheid can significantly complicate or disrupt the TRC's official account.

For Mikey, learning the truth of his birth requires a reassessment of his relationship with both Lydia—whose “every tender touch, hug, or kiss on the forehead [...] no longer seemed like a spontaneous, simple, motherly gesture” (129)—and Silas, whom he now knows is not his biological father. The extent to which this discovery undermines his sense of identity is suggested by the description of his bed the next morning as “a warm, rather unkempt womb” (130); learning of the circumstances of his conception initiates a process of self-transformation, a kind of imaginative re-birth that will eventually lead him to execute the man who raped his mother and flee to India. While Mikey’s actions appear to be motivated by a desire for justice and retribution they also ironically echo those of his adopted patriarch and Silas’s father, Ali Ali. While in much postcolonial literature there is an allegorical relationship between the family and the nation,¹⁴ suggested in this instance by Lydia’s sister Martha’s description of the Alis as “the future of the new South Africa” (111), in *Bitter Fruit*, Mikey’s discovery, facilitated by Lydia’s diary, contributes to the disintegration of the Ali family. Thus the collapse of the Ali family unit depicted in the novel signals a pessimism regarding the national future, and positions Lydia’s diary antagonistically to the nation-building work of the TRC.

Unlike Lydia’s diary, which the reader accesses through Mikey’s clandestine reading, the contents of Ali’s diary are never revealed. Instead his story, which is described as a “fable” (196), is related to Mikey by Imam Behardien. The use of the word “fable” suggests a fictional narrative designed to convey a lesson or moral; here the fictional quality of the story serves to mark Ali and his diary as oppositional to the TRC and its quest for truth. The Imam tells Mikey that Hajera, Ali Ali’s sister, was raped by a British colonial officer in India; Ali later avenged her by murdering the officer and then fled, eventually, to South Africa. As I previously argued, Mikey’s own act of vengeance and subsequent exile is thus a seemingly conscious re-enactment of

Ali's life story. Repetition in this instance is associated with revenge, the antithesis of the TRC's goal of national reconciliation. Yet, that vengeance is enabled by Mikey's assertion of a particular history—the history of Ali Ali—as his own, in defiance of his biological origins. Mikey's execution of Du Boise is a symbolic erasure of his biological patriarch and, consequently, a means of identifying with Ali: shooting “directly into Du Boise's face” (276), Mikey abolishes the “unmistakeable lineage to be found in the shape of a nose, the contour of a cheek, or, even more telling, the depth of an eye” (186). In this way, *Bitter Fruit* connects the negative idea of repetition with both a repression of certain histories and acts of revenge. The interrelationship between the Afrikaner and “coloured” populations—represented here by the biological relationship between Mikey and Du Boise—is disavowed and a “pure” Indian heritage is assumed in its stead, pointing to the possible re-emergence of racial politics in South Africa.

The disruptive and cautionary potential of unofficial narratives is further highlighted at Silas's fiftieth birthday party, where he is presented with both a copy of the TRC's official report and, by Lydia, with his father Ali Ali's diary—another instance in which the two types of narrative are juxtaposed. Lydia describes the diary as “a piece of history, personal, extremely private in many ways, but it also belongs to all of us” (258). As “a piece of history” (258), the significance of the diary exceeds the personal value it might hold for Ali Ali's family; for Lydia, it has a national dimension. Lydia's words, surprisingly, echo the logic of the TRC, by which the testimony of individuals stands metonymically for the history of the nation. Yet the effect the diary has on its author's son—the character most closely associated with the Commission and its ethos—is that of painful displacement.

Lydia saw the grey face of a man suddenly uncomfortable with his surroundings.
What am I doing here? he was asking himself. She knew that look: he was in

danger of losing control, the sediment of a brutally suppressed self-awareness was seeping out. My father did not give a damn about me until he was on his deathbed. Shall I proclaim to the world that I am a bastard, branded by this unlikely oxymoron of a name? (258)¹⁵

The sight of his father's diary forces Silas into a confrontation with his personal past which, until then, he had successfully "suppressed" (258). The shock of remembering his father and his childhood, of being forced to remember, suggest that the appropriation of individual pasts for the good of national reconciliation carries with it a certain violence, a displacement into the past where Silas, rather than being a successful lawyer is once again a "tsotsi from Newclare" (259) with an "oxymoron of a name" (258).

Ali Ali's journal represents for Silas the antithesis of his "deliberate strategy" (122) of "forgetfulness" (122); a strategy implicitly connected, through Silas's professional position, with the TRC. Silas's work is a "*containment* of history" (155), a philosophy he extends to his private life as the incident with his father's diary demonstrates. The word "*containment*" indicates the restraint of something within particular parameters and even imprisonment, which further suggests that history is something that needs to be contained, that is straining to be released, is powerful, dangerous and unstable. Given the stable and complete past that the TRC's process is seen to produce within the text, the concept of containment also raises the possibility of alternative and multiple histories. As examples of such alternative narratives, Lydia and Ali's diaries demonstrate the disruptive, and potentially violent, consequences of denying the continuing effects of apartheid by consigning it to history and "turning the page" (Boraine 5).

The strategy of deliberate forgetting is associated throughout *Bitter Fruit* with the practice of confession, which provides the title for the second section of the novel.

When considering the problem of speaking about her rape, Lydia compares the act of testifying before the TRC to religious confession. One journal entry reads: “confess your sins, even those committed against you [...] but confess it only once. There true salvation is to be found. In saying the unsayable, and then holding your peace for ever after” (127). Confession, as the quotation above suggests, always carries with it a trace of guilt, thus, to testify before the TRC—described as a “public confession” (156)—is to accept the “inverted guilt” (130) of the victim, perhaps even to name oneself as guilty of complicity.¹⁶ Lydia’s journal provides an alternative to this “public confession” (156), one which, in Freudian terms, suggests a process of working-through rather than repression. For Freud, working-through involves a deliberate attempt to address the symptom, rather than the unconscious, and thus compulsive, repetition of the past that repression generates.¹⁷ Mikey recalls seeing Lydia write; she is “[b]ent over, absorbed, an intensity that lasts for hours [...] hers is not the posture of a fictionalizer [...] something deeper, a delving into herself” (29). For Lydia, keeping a journal is a means of self-reflection, of processing her own trauma and dealing with the “hysteria” (129) that only occasionally becomes apparent in her writing. By contrast, the novel depicts the TRC as advocating a particular form of forgetting, in which an event or experience is spoken and then pressed into the service of history, in a denial of its power in the present. In *Bearing Witness* (2003), Fiona Ross discusses the various interpretations and uses made of testimonies after the TRC hearings and suggests that the “individuals’ lack of control over their testimonies may be experienced as alienation and appropriation” (101-2). By writing her own account, Lydia attempts to take control of her own story and, in doing so, of how she is represented, a privilege not necessarily enjoyed by those women who testified before the TRC.

Shane Graham (2003) has noted that, when passing judgement on applications for amnesty, the Commission accepted the “perpetrator’s version of events, even when

it directly contradicts the evidence given by his victims [...which] inevitably throws the victim's accounts of the past into conflict with the perpetrator's themselves" (12). Here, narrative agency was afforded to the perpetrator rather than the victim, whose personal 'truth' is subordinated to the need for national reconciliation. If the TRC made individual testimonies representative of national suffering under apartheid, then it makes sense to consider how such testimonies have been represented to the nation. This is particularly the case with regard to women's testimony.

Three special hearings on women were held Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg between August 1996 and July 1997, in an attempt to rectify women's perceived role as secondary witnesses, whereby women testified on behalf of men rather than about their own experiences.¹⁸ However, as a number of scholars have noted, the manner in which the TRC approached these hearings, as well as subsequent media coverage of them, constructed women's experience under apartheid as characterised by sexual violence, as well as emphasising their role as wives and mothers.¹⁹ In Fiona Ross's words, "'woman' was not a neutral category but a category that carried assumptions about the nature and severity of particular harms, particularly *sexual violence*" (25). Both Ross (2003) and Russell (2008) also point to the way in which questions from Commissioners drew out, and emphasised, incidents of sexual violation from women's testimony in a manner that obscured their political activism; rather than being recognised as politically engaged members of the anti-apartheid struggle who were detained and tortured for that reason, many of these women's stories were decontextualised, implying that, as women, they remain vulnerable to such abuse outside the parameters of the anti-apartheid struggle. The focus on women's experience of sexual abuse under apartheid also served, as Barbara Russell notes, "to trivialise experiences of any violation less terrible" (56) and, as such, to obscure the more quotidian violence of apartheid.

If, as Njabulo Ndebele (2002) argues, the TRC marks “the restoration of narrative” (27) in South Africa, *Bitter Fruit* demonstrates that narratives never exist independently of social relations of power. As Shane Graham (2003) notes, “to narrate a story requires an agent, but in testimonial literature the narrative describes the destruction of the author’s agency” (14). This destruction of agency, of the power to determine one’s own identity is illustrated through the character of Vinu, who initially frames her incestuous relationship with her father in terms of romantic love: “I loved my father, loved him in an incredible way. It was beautiful” (208). Her father, however, seeks counselling during the breakdown of his marriage and “confessed, said he had abused his daughter” (209). Johan’s “confession” of abuse places the incident within the symbolic framework of the TRC and forces Vinu to face the reality of her betrayal by her father: he “reduced our love to a case of child abuse” (209).²⁰ In a manner more directly related to the TRC, Du Boise’s application for amnesty, an application which names Lydia as one of his victims, will force her to appear in front of the Commission, despite her determination not to. In this way, the Commission enables Du Boise to reassert control over Lydia; her testimony will not only be a verbal recollection of the events of her rape, but a repetition of the power dynamic between them, as Lydia is named as Du Boise’s victim. These incidents thus highlight the narrative agency held by the confessor, whose contrition, evinced by their participation in a national narrative of reconciliation, would in itself seem to absolve them of their wrongdoings, leaving the victims of their crimes without recourse to name themselves as anything but victims.

The power of the diaries of Lydia and Ali to disrupt and undermine a character’s sense of self (in Mikey and Silas respectively) points to the continuing relevance of those histories to post-apartheid South Africa. Furthermore, the potential denial of narrative agency by the TRC is shown, in the novel, to extend beyond victims of human rights abuses as defined by the Commission, to those who suffer domestic or familial

sexual abuse. This corresponds with Lucy Graham's (2012) observation that, in the post-apartheid era, discourse around rape has increasingly focused on "previously unmentionable acts such as male rape and the abuse of children within families and communities" (140). Given that both Lydia and Ali's stories revolve around acts of rape, *Bitter Fruit* would seem to posit sexual violence, and the patriarchal and racial ideologies that underpin it, as centrally connected with the "new struggle" (77) for the democratic nation, an issue which the TRC fails to, or is incapable of, properly addressing.

Sexual Violence and the TRC:

The rape of Lydia Ali is established as a pivotal event in *Bitter Fruit*: the novel begins with Silas's recognition of Lt. Du Boise, his wife's rapist, an encounter which results in a chain of recollections and revelations that eventually leads to the disintegration of the Ali family. At the same time, Meg Samuelson (2004) notes that "the novel presents itself as unable to give voice to women's experiences of rape" (13). The scene of Lydia's rape is made available to the reader through the eyes of men; first through Silas's memory and then "through the uninvited intrusion of her son into the private space of her diary" (13). For Samuelson, having Mikey and Silas mediate the reader's access to the scene of rape points to the gap between experience and representation, which might be read as an attempt by Dangor to highlight his own, potentially problematic, position as a male author writing about the rape of a woman.²¹

This tactic also serves to reinforce the novel's attention to the patriarchal construction of rape as an attack on male honour, rather than as a physical assault on a woman, a perspective the novel seeks to critique. This patriarchal perspective is evident in the circumstances of Lydia's rape, which—as an act of retaliation by apartheid security

forces against Silas's political activities—is marked as a signifying act between men, a crime of property in which Lydia's body is marked as a passive object.

Nancy L. Paxton notes that in Britain between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, the term “rape” referred to “the theft of goods or the abduction of a woman [...and] was generally conceptualized as the theft of male property” (quoted in Samuelson 2007, 121-2). Similarly, in “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, G.C. Spivak points to the naturalisation of the woman's body as territory in the Hindu practice of *jauhar*. In India, *jauhar* was the legally and socially sanctioned “self-immolation of aristocratic Rajput war widows or imminent war widows” (99), in order to die honourably and protect themselves from rape at the hands of invading armies. Spivak notes, too, the persistent re-inscription of this act in patriotic tales and its role “in acting out Hindu communalism” (99). The heroism of this act of self-sacrifice resides in its benefit to the Hindu community, whose honour and purity is assured when the death of these women forecloses the possibility of miscegenation.

Bitter Fruit's engagement with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission similarly points to the manner in which patriarchal discourses of rape operate on a national, as well as individual level. The lawyer who offers Lydia the opportunity to testify as part of the TRC's Human Rights Violation hearings describes the treatment of women, by both sides, during the anti-apartheid struggle as “the last festering wound” (156), the final obstacle to national healing. This rhetoric points to a metonymic slippage between the national territory, literal or figurative, and the female body that is characteristic of patriarchal discourses (Spivak 99). The ease with which an individual woman's experience of rape is appropriated by national discourse is suggested when Lydia also describes the memory of her rape as a “wound” (14), in this case to Silas's ego. This, in turn, highlights the essentially figurative role of women in patriarchal

conceptions of rape: Lydia as a subject is not the concern of the TRC; rather the Commission is interested in her potential as a symbol of national healing. Similarly, Lydia considers herself an absent subject in Silas's recollection of her rape, which is dominated by memories of Du Boise and the black policeman who helped him: "you don't remember my face, my tears" (14). For Lydia, her absence from his memory of that night marks Silas's attempted appropriation of her rape, his desire to feel "[her] pain as his pain" (121).

Writing of the night she was raped, Lydia reveals that Silas "could have made me loyal to his affronted manhood, turned me into a soldier perhaps, a fearless bomb planter or a ruthless arms smuggler" (129). Instead, his "silent revulsion" (129) served to undermine the integrity of his political ideals, suggesting that the patriarchal discourse of rape, which afforded sexual violence a political currency, is incommensurable with the types of freedom espoused by the liberation struggle. This, in turn, raises questions as to the integrity of the democratic state that the liberation struggle gave rise to; a state that uses the "rape victim [as the brave], stoic image of violation, grave-faced symbol of women in the struggle" (119). Lydia's experience of rape and Silas's reaction to her assault have made her acutely aware of the patriarchal attitude to rape. Recognising Silas's investment in patriarchal values, she uses its terms against him; baiting him, during an argument, with rhetoric of male honour and revenge.

'If you were a real man, you would have killed him on the spot, right there in the mall, splatter his brains against a window, watch his blood running all over the floor.'

'You're joking.'

‘Joking? He took your woman, he fucked your wife, made you listen to him doing it. I became his property, even my screams were his instrument. Now you’re a man, you believe in honour and all that kind of kak...’

‘Lydia, stop it.’ (17)

Here, Lydia not only declares that Du Boise made her his “property”, but also implies that he could only do so because Silas had reacted as if she was his property in the first place: “your woman [...] your wife” (17). I don’t mean to suggest that Lydia believes herself to be either man’s “property”, but rather that she understands her construction as property within the patriarchal discourse from which she speaks.²²

During her argument with Silas, Lydia invokes a discourse of masculine honour in order to taunt him, to declare him not “a real man” (17); Silas, on the other hand, dismisses such rhetoric as a joke. This scene simultaneously highlights the necessity of gendered identities to the hetero-patriarchal discourse of rape, and points to a dissolution of those identities within the Alis’ marriage. If Silas is not “a real man” then Lydia progressively attempts to perform that role for him, drinking beer “to taste like a man” (16) and taking care of “insurance policies, birth certificates, expired vehicle registration papers [...] matters that are usually the preserve of husbands” (31). Lydia’s use of patriarchal rhetoric seems designed to shock and to hurt, to demonstrate the epistemic violence that such discourse does to women. While it becomes evident throughout the novel that Silas has gradually disengaged from such patriarchal values, Lydia insists on holding him accountable for the “silent revulsion” (129), through which he alienated her on the night she was raped.

Legacies of Slavery:

As well as its problematic treatment of women's testimony, the TRC process has been criticised for the temporal limitations of its inquiries, which covered the period from the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960 to the first democratic elections in 1994, a scope which prevented an acknowledgement of legal and discursive continuities between colonialism and apartheid.²³ In this light, *Bitter Fruit's* challenge to the historical narrative constructed by the TRC takes a particular form in the novel's engagement with the history of slavery. The focus of increased critical attention in recent years, slavery in South Africa combined the importation of slaves from Asia, East Africa and Indonesia with the subjection of native Khoisan and Bantu-speaking peoples to various forms of coercive labour.²⁴ According to Hermann Giliomee, slavery was not only fundamental to the construction of "coloured" identity, but of white identity too: "To virtually all colonists in the western Cape their own survival and that of slavery as an institution had become identical" (90). Thus, the history of slavery provides an important perspective from which to investigate the delineation of what would become Afrikaner and "coloured" identities and the simultaneous production of a social hierarchy that would find its fullest expression in the policies of the apartheid state.

The novel's engagement with slavery is most evident in the portrayal of Lydia's family, the Oliphants: originally from Cape Town, they moved to Johannesburg so that Jackson, Lydia's father, could find work. The family is forced to live in Soweto—a black township—when Jackson's "coloured" identity card is rejected by government officials; demonstrating both the ludicrous nature of the apartheid classification system and the profound material effects that system had on its subjects. This denial of the Oliphants' "coloured" status also serves to underline the association between the geographical location of the Western Cape and a specific form of "coloured" identity.

While Silas is also “coloured”, we know that his father, Ali Ali, travelled from India to South Africa voluntarily to escape the British colonial authorities, rather than as a slave.²⁵

There he married his third wife, Silas’s mother, a white woman known as Ouma Angel. Lydia’s family’s origins, however, are vaguer: Oliphant, we are told, is “Scots in origin” (82) but no other details are provided. Lydia herself is described as being “of durable Malay stock” (124), a term which has a particular resonance with the history of slavery in South Africa. According to Robert C. H. Shell (1994), “[b]etween 1652 and 1808, approximately 63,000 slaves were imported into the Cape from the Indonesian archipelago, India, Madagascar, the Mascarenes, and Africa” (12); thus it is possible to infer that a high proportion of South Africa’s slaves were imported from the Indonesian archipelago, where Malay is spoken. Furthermore, as Shell has noted, a creole language known as Malayo-Portuguese was spoken in the early years of the Cape settlement, which was later “transformed into a purified Malay as it became the religious language of the Cape Muslim slaves” (Shell 30), who were later referred to as “Cape Malays”. The combination of “Scots” (82) and “Malay” (124) thus identifies Lydia and her family as “mixed-race” and of slave descent, while the combination of “durable” and “Malay” testifies to the abiding influence of slavery on identity in contemporary South Africa.

Hermann Giliomee has noted that the introduction of slavery into the early Cape settlement helped to determine the nature of the society that developed there.

Slavery transformed the social ethos of [Cape] society, defining freedom and the status hierarchy. High status belonged to those who were free, kept slaves and did not have to work with their hands. To be a servant doing manual work in the employ of someone else carried the connotation of slave status, which the burghers at the Cape did everything possible to avoid. (12)

Thus, while enslavement in South Africa was justified through ideologies of racial difference that asserted white people's superiority, Giliomee suggests that certain forms of labour could actually impinge upon or qualify a person's whiteness, further suggesting an association between labour and blackness. One notable difference between slavery at the Cape and slavery in North America was the establishment of a gendered division of labour, whereby female slaves worked almost exclusively within the domestic sphere of the household, and men were put to agricultural labour (Shell 1994 21). Thus, Lydia's mother, Mam Agnes's employment as a cook for "white couples in Durban's posh areas" (57) represents the perpetuation of an economic relationship between the white and "coloured" populations first established under slavery.

In order to release her mother from the "humiliation of privileged servitude" (57), Martha Oliphant, Lydia's eldest sister, abandons her ambition to go to university. The privilege that distinguishes Mam Agnes's position as servant from slavery is the legal freedom which marks her as an autonomous subject, rather than someone's property. However, the novel suggests that the continued use of black and "coloured" women's domestic labour in white households constantly re-inscribes the position of social inferiority attributed to "coloured" people under slavery and the humiliating memory of being claimed as property. Silas also alludes to the connection between slavery and labour in the novel; while admiring Mikey's friend Vinu, he describes her beauty as "honed on the same bastard *whetstone* as I [emphasis added]" (222). The connotation of labour, domestic or otherwise, carried by the word "whetstone" is linked directly to the creation of what Silas describes as a particular, "bastard" (222) kind of beauty, marking "coloured" identity as illegitimate and inextricable from a history of coercive labour.

Silas's own family history points to the heterogeneity of "coloured" identity and he dismisses the idea of a single "coloured" identity as a social construct: what he did not realise at the time of his marriage to Lydia was "that we were not necessarily the same, just because we were both coloured" (107). However, he also observes that the "vast genetic pool" (101) of the "coloured" population can be understood to have a common source in the history of slavery.

The son of a slave-owner takes as his bride a captive slave child, they produce a bastard child, this bastard marries yet another child of master and meid, miesies and boy, and so forth, ad infinitum, basic piel-en-poes [penis and vagina] history. (101)

According to Silas, the coercion of slave women, and indeed children, is "basic" (101), or foundational to the history of the "coloured" population. Furthermore, Silas's use of Afrikaans phrases, such as "piel-en-poes" (101), attributes a particular ethnic identity to the slave-owner, suggesting the biological and historical connections that exist between the "coloured" and Afrikaner populations. Silas's account of the history of slavery also creates a tentative association between marriage and slavery, as both institutions historically robbed women of their will. According to Hermann Giliomee, "[d]uring the first eighty years of the settlement, when European women were in short supply, many European men married manumitted slaves from the East" (15). However, in order for a female slave to marry a European coloniser, she first had to be granted her freedom. Given that slavery denied the slave's will, or agency, manumission restored her will to the female slave but only so that she could submit it to her husband in marriage. This process thus presupposes a desire for, and consent to, marriage that could not have been articulated or recognised under the conditions of slavery.²⁶

In *Bitter Fruit*, when Lydia returns home from the hospital, she realises that Silas and Du Boise—her husband and her rapist—have become increasingly associated in her mind: “Silas, you should not have brought my rapist home [...] your bodies, your smells, even your sounds have become all mixed up” (123). If the rape of Lydia is understood as a signifying act by a man whose intended audience is another man, an act in which Du Boise “took” (17) Lydia from Silas and made her his “property” (17), then the conflation of the two men in Lydia’s mind suggests the fluidity of their respective positions: the one who takes and the one who is taken from are interchangeable. As such, the figures of husband and rapist become emblematic of a particular kind of male identity under a patriarchal system which construes women as property. Indeed, as Frances Ferguson notes, in ancient law—both Hebrew and Saxon—marriage was the most common way to resolve rape: “marriage recasts rape, so that marriage is a misunderstanding corrected or rape rightly understood” (quoted in Horeck 64).

One consequence of the gendered division of slave labour at the Cape was the increased surveillance to which female slaves were subjected, and which made them “ever vulnerable to physical abuse” (Eldredge 99). Indeed, Shell notes that, by the nineteenth-century, slave women usually slept in the kitchen “and a taboo [was] established forbidding the male owner from entering the kitchen at night” (256). This taboo serves to simultaneously acknowledge and deny the possibility of a slave master raping his female slave and further suggests that the violence to which female slaves were exposed was often sexual in nature. Similarly, Giliomee notes that the “slave lodge in Cape Town was used as [a] brothel not only by passing sailors but also by Burghers and company servants” (39); as with manumission marriages, the impossibility of a slave woman freely consenting to work as a prostitute means that some degree of coercion should be assumed. Significantly, while Shell argues that the diversity of slave origins made the development of a common slave culture difficult, the Cape Town slave

lodge was a notable exception; there, a play “about a ravished Cape slave woman [...]was ‘regularly performed’” (19). The figure of the raped woman thus becomes an image around which the slave community at the lodge could cohere and further suggests the ubiquity of sexual violence in the slave woman’s experience.

In *Liberating the Family* (1997), her study of the sexual politics of the Western Cape in the nineteenth-century, Pamela Scully suggests that, after the emancipation of the slaves in 1838, rape became a way for white men to reassert control over the bodies of black women whom they could no longer own and control as property.

These white men’s sense of identity had in part derived from their power over others: with the ending of slavery, the power over the bodies of black men was symbolically and, in some senses, actually curtailed. If the bodies of black women were also no longer legally owned, the sexual economy that made all women subject to the power of men made black women a nearby and easy target for sexual abuse. (356-7)

While Scully’s argument is congruent with Giliomee’s claim, discussed earlier, that slavery was constitutive of white colonial identity in South Africa, she extends this analysis through attention to the gender, as well as racial, dynamics of the nineteenth-century Cape. As the above quotation demonstrates, the figure of the black female slave is positioned at the intersection of racial and patriarchal forms of authority to which she has no social access and where sexual violence becomes a means of perpetuating racial domination.

Hortense J. Spillers, writing about the contribution of slavery to the discursive production of black women in North America, argues that through their commodification on the slave market female slaves were relegated to the realm of the flesh, marking them as “the principal point of passage between the human and the non-

human world” (“Interstices” 155). Flesh, in Spillers’s understanding of it, is distinct from the body, which is understood as coherent and socially meaningful. The flesh, with its “zero degree of social conceptualisation” (“Mama’s” 206) lacks such coherence and meaning; in this respect, it corresponds to the body-in-bits-and-pieces that characterises the subject before the Lacanian Mirror stage. For Lacan, the Mirror stage—in which the child looks in the mirror and sees an image which is external to the self and therefore fictitious—marks the entry of the subject into the Symbolic realm of language, the social order, and is accompanied by the child’s assumption of a coherent and unified body image, or what he calls *gestalt*. Thus, the body is associated with entry into Logos and human subjectivity, while the flesh remains at the threshold between “the human and the non-human” (“Interstices” 155). However, as Jane Gallop (1985) has cogently argued, the temporality of the Mirror Stage is more complex than a simple progression from the infantile experience of dissociation to oedipal subjectivity; rather, it consists of a complex combination of anticipation and retroaction.²⁷ Just as the subject creates a fictitious identification with a self they will use to build the future upon, they simultaneously project an alternative, fractured image of what they were before the Mirror stage into the past. As such, the subject is always a split subject and, in a sense, narrated. Spillers draws on Lacan’s theory to argue that the status of the slave as anterior to human subjectivity is discursively produced as a means of displacing the constitutive lack of the phallic subject onto the racial and sexual other. The slave cannot move beyond the amorphous, fleshy body-in-bits-and-pieces to the abstract and fantastic wholeness offered by the Symbolic. She becomes, instead, an ethnically inscribed “memorial” to the prehistory of the unified subject, a figure of anachronism.

In *Bitter Fruit*, both Lydia and Vinu are described in terms of the sexual availability once attributed to the slave woman. A former acquaintance of Lydia and Silas once commented that “Lydia was born to be a courtesan” (94). Similarly, Vinu,

teasing Mikey, declares herself “saved from ‘concubinage’ because the Lord Vishnu [Mikey] was too busy with his books to ‘truly’ see her beauty” (26). For Mikey, the “suggestiveness” (26) of Vinu’s language is “entirely rhetorical” (26), yet it demonstrates the perpetuation of a language in which “coloured” women are associated with concupiscence and prostitution. In “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe” (2003), Hortense Spillers suggests that the “phenomenon of marking and branding [slaves] actually ‘transfers’ from one generation to another, finding its various *symbolic substitutions* in an efficacy of meanings that repeat the initiating moments [emphasis in original]” (207). For Spillers, the mutilation of the slave’s body is possible because the slave is conceived of as “flesh” and it is through such mutilation that their status as flesh, as “vestibular to [human] culture” (“Interstices” 155), is reasserted. This cultural marginalisation of black people and black bodies is perpetuated through what she refers to as “dehumanized naming” (“Mama’s” 210), a process that is evident in *Bitter Fruit* through the novel’s association of Lydia and Vinu with “concubinage”. This association, in turn, transfers onto these women’s bodies the status of “flesh” and, in doing so, “repeat[s] the initiating moment” (207) in which the female slave is made slave by being made flesh. Indeed, Vinu’s declaration that she is “saved” (26) makes it seem as if Mikey’s disinterest alone prevents him from sexually exploiting her and further suggests that she expects her intimate relations to be exploitative or coercive to some degree. Vinu’s comments thus suggest that the sexual history of slave women helped to shape what “coloured” women think of as “normal” sexual behaviour.

Considering her own sexual desires, Lydia acknowledges “decades of sexual hunger [...] the swollen darkness, bruised and *discoloured*, of the place in which she had imprisoned her sexuality [emphasis added]” (248). This description not only recognises the pain of sexual repression, but also makes a connection between that repression and “coloured” identity. Lydia’s sexuality is “discoloured”, marked by colour in a way that,

like a bruise, suggests pain and possibly violence. As I explained in my introductory chapter, under colonial and apartheid legislation, “coloured” came to be used as an intermediary category between White and Black; it could refer to people of “mixed-race”, South African Indians and Chinese. Thiven Reddy argues that the category “coloured” functioned to stabilise South Africa’s racial order; the negative definition of “coloured” identity—described as “a person who is *not* a white person or a native [emphasis added]” (Reddy 74)²⁸—allowed the category to absorb the excesses of both White and Black identities and desires and, in doing so, secured their stability in the fantasy of apartheid’s racial order. Such an understanding of the apartheid classification system helps to explain the association between “coloured” identity and miscegenation. For Zoë Wicomb (1998b), the “coloured” body—and more specifically the “coloured” woman’s body—bears the “shame” of inter-racial desire so that others won’t have to. Wicomb argues that Sarah Bartmann, a Khoisan woman who was exhibited in Europe between 1810 and 1815, exemplifies the convergence of racial and sexual objectification that continues to inform the perception of “coloured” women’s bodies.²⁹ Similarly, Sander Gilman (1985a) argues that the perceived physical excess of Bartmann’s steatopygia was translated by European observers and scientists into a sexual excess that carried with it the threat of racial degeneration. Thus, the constructed concupiscence of the “coloured” female signifies the possibility of miscegenation, and marks her body as a source of shame.

This shame is evident, not only in Lydia’s denial of her own sexual desires, but also in her assumption that Vinu would be aroused at the thought of Lydia’s incestuous kiss with Mikey: “The sheer force of its perversity would be enough to make her [Vinu] irresistible to Mikey. ‘Fuck me, the way you fuck your mother.’ No, she did not want to become a young woman’s fantasy, a crude, squatting inducer of orgasms” (250). Lydia’s perception of Vinu’s sexual desires assumes not only their “perversity”, but also

a particular inclination towards incest.³⁰ The association between “coloureds” and incest is explained, by Mikey, as the result of apartheid housing regulations: “Someone, long ago, removed the need for the ‘separation of sibling sexes’ from apartheid housing specifications. [...] ‘Coloureds are used to living very close to each other’ [...] Explained all the abuse, the rape, a non-white disease” (240). Here, sexual abuse is considered to be a result of a particular arrangement of domestic space in a way that recalls the way domestic proximity enabled the rape of slave women by their masters. Furthermore, Mikey’s comment demonstrates an awareness of a stereotype of “perverse” and abusive sexuality attached to “coloured” identity and exposes it as artificial, a product of apartheid’s racial policies. In this way, apartheid ideology displaced sexual “perversity” from the white subject onto the “coloured”, allowing the white body to signify the “good” sex of reproductive futurity, showing the links between anachronism and abjection which Rohy has discussed in a different context.

Slavery, Repetition and Hysteria:

Given that rape was an integral part of the female slave’s experience, the rape of Lydia by Du Boise, an Afrikaner, can be read as a repetition of the social dynamics that facilitated the rape, without accountability, of female slaves; an act understood in the novel as constitutive of “coloured” identity. Lydia’s subsequent effort to repress the trauma of rape allows for the creation of a “coloured” family unit, given that Silas believes Mikey to be his biological son. This too is a repetition: the social repression of the act of rape obscures the figure of the white rapist, just as the disavowal of interracial rape, through legislation such as the Immorality Act of 1950, enabled the fantasy of the “racially pure” Afrikaner elite. The dangerous consequences of repression are evinced when Lydia’s recollection of the night she was raped is followed almost

immediately by an act of self-harm, in which she cuts her feet on broken glass. During their argument, disturbed by his own memories of that night, Silas grabs her by the arms and shakes her, causing her to drop the beer glass she is holding. Lydia then kisses Silas, and leans her head on his chest, “weeping, making gentle dancing movements with her feet” (17). Silas, looking over her shoulder, realises that “her feet [are] dancing, delicate little steps, on the jagged edges of the broken beer glass” (17). Lydia’s self-inflicted injury leads to her hospitalisation where, in traction, she becomes literally immobilised, returned to the slave’s “essence of stillness” (Spillers “Mama’s” 224), by the memory of her rape.³¹

Lydia’s act of self-harm is an attempt to manage—or contain—the trauma of her rape; we are told that the infliction of “this physical pain was Lydia’s way of displacing a much deeper, unfathomable agony” (21). This strategy recalls the Freudian hysteric who, like the slave, is denied access to speech and must resort to speaking through her body.³² In *The Daughter’s Seduction* (1982), Jane Gallop argues that women in patriarchal societies are “threshold figure[s]: existing between ‘within the family’ and ‘outside the family’” (146). While enabling the construction, and reproduction, of the family unit, the woman is denied a secure place within it. For Jane Gallop, hysteria, whose symptoms are unique to each subject, is associated with a rejection of the substitutability of women under patriarchy.³³ In these terms, Lydia’s act of self-harm can be read as a hysterical act that testifies to the singularity of her experience of rape in the face of pressure to submit to a narrative of national reconciliation. Shortly before the climax of their argument, Silas entreats Lydia to testify before the TRC, but Lydia refuses on the basis that “Archbishop Tutu has [n]ever been fucked up his arse against his will” (16). Here, Lydia makes Archbishop Tutu representative of the TRC as a whole, implicitly identifying the Commission as masculine and therefore unable to identify with her experience of sexual violence, which the Commission constructed as

happening only to women. To participate in the TRC hearings would be to position herself as a “threshold figure” (Gallop 1982 146) in relation to the nation as well as the family. To forgive Du Boise would be to rehabilitate him and to allow him to assimilate into the newly democratic nation while relegating herself to its periphery.

In evoking the figure of the female slave, Lydia bears the burden of anachronism in the text. This burden is suggested in a number of references to her as squatting, as if under the weight of the symbolism her body carries: “she had the squatted-down resolve of a woman not ready to be loved” (153); “she did not want to become a [...] squatting inducer of orgasms” (250). As noted earlier, Spillers considers the slave to be “the essence of stillness [...] an undynamic human state, fixed in time and space” (“Mama’s” 224), a state later embodied by Lydia as she lies in traction in her hospital bed, “like a living corpse” (50).³⁴ Given that Lydia’s recovery—both physical and psychological— involves her regaining the ability to walk, *Bitter Fruit’s* focus on Lydia’s legs asserts mobility as a means of distinguishing between free and captive subject positions.

While her hysterical “speaking body” allows Lydia to assert the singularity of her experience of rape in relation to the TRC’s nation-building project, the novel suggests it might also be understood within a different historical narrative. The text emphasises that Lydia *dances* on glass; her act of self-harm is referred to as the day “she danced on broken glass” (151). At a later point, the novel explicitly relates dancing to “coloured” identity: “In coloured families, it was said, kids learned to dance before they learned to read or swim” (260). Dancing, we are told, “was a necessary skill, one that had all the saving social graces you would need” (260). If, as suggested earlier, mobility distinguishes between freedom and enslavement, then the association of “coloured” identity with dancing suggests an anxious over-determination of “coloured” subjects as mobile, and thus free, in a way that recalls the structure of disavowal. In his essay on

“Fetishism” (1927), Freud argues that disavowal works to simultaneously acknowledge and cover over the fact of sexual difference. Similarly, the cultural connection between “coloured” identity and dancing both acknowledges the history of slavery that once (socially) immobilised the slave population and denies the relevance of that history to contemporary “coloured” identity.

Bitter Fruit's description of dancing as a “social grace” (260), furthermore, points to a need for grace in society, for acceptance as human in a society organised around racial categories which carry with them the memory of slavery. As such, Lydia's self-harm is given a “racial” dimension through the textual insistence on the motif of “coloured” dancing. The relationship of “coloured” identity to dancing is also suggested by Rayda Jacobs's short story “The Bet”, from her collection *The Middle Children* (1994), in which a group of white friends suspect that an acquaintance, Sabah, is a “play-white”—a “coloured” person passing as white. In an attempt to confirm their suspicions they decide that one of their number, Allan, will ask her out on a date; concerned, Allan asks Jill, Sabah's colleague, if she dances. Jill replies: “Of course she does. They're the best dancers, you know. Haven't you seen the coon carnival?” (81). Here, the ability to dance becomes a signifier for “coloured” identity even as Jacobs's reference to the “coon carnival” helps to clarify the relationship between “coloured” identity, dancing and slavery that Dangor's novel also suggests. According to Denis-Constant Martin, the New Year's festivals that take place annually in Cape Town pre-date the emancipation of the slaves and constitute a “fusion [...] between the celebration of the anniversary of emancipation and New Year” (371). Arguably then, the New Year celebrations are inextricable from slave culture in Cape Town. Martin further argues that the parades that take place throughout the city assert “coloured” people's rights over that space, even as the adoption of the “coon” as the central figure of the festivities points to an ambivalence about “coloured” identity itself (376-9).³⁵ Dancing, then,

becomes a trope for figuring the contradictory and difficult relationship between “coloured” identity and the slave past.

Lydia’s hysterical dance allows her to articulate that which cannot be signified through language. Through the motif of dancing, Dangor reinforces the connection between Lydia’s individual trauma and the history of slavery, tying her experience of rape to the historical rape of female slaves. The elision of slavery from considerations of the nation and national history in South Africa perpetuates a disavowal of the subjectivity of the enslaved and their descendants. For this reason, *Bitter Fruit*’s attention to the history of slavery challenges the way in which the new nation is imagined and questions which subjects and identities are considered valid within it.

The Reproduction of Sexual Violence:

Dangor’s treatment of the theme of rape in *Bitter Fruit* not only illuminates the gendering of rape, but also the racial ideology that underpins its social function in patriarchal societies. One of the clearest examples of this in the text is Imam Behardien’s biographical tale of Ali Ali, Silas’s father, a tale which, like the novel itself, centres on an incident of rape and is in fact the third rape narrative in the novel. Ali’s younger sister, Hajera, is raped and made pregnant by a British officer in colonial India. The Imam describes Hajera as “strange” (200) and “provocative even in the way she allow[ed] her body to respond to the rhythms that inhabit[ed] it” (200), suggesting that she had incited her rapist through her failure to control the “provocative” “rhythms” of her body. The Imam’s description is thus a patriarchal strategy to produce the rape victim as guilty. Significantly, however, it is only “[w]hen Hajera is found to be pregnant” (200) that her rape becomes a source of “disgrace” (200). The British soldier denies all accusations, asking why he would “soil himself with the body of a ‘coolie’

girl” (200).³⁶ Her family, too, are disgraced, prevented from finding “a nice young Muslim boy to marry her” (200), and fear that the child will have “tell-tale blond hair and blue eyes” (200). Hajera’s personal trauma is overshadowed by the taint of miscegenation her pregnancy carries with it, and yet, it is only the threat of miscegenation that prevents a total erasure of her ordeal through the institution of marriage. As noted earlier, Ferguson argues that marriage acts to retrospectively transform rape into a man’s legal access to his wife’s body (quoted in Horeck 64). In Hajera’s case, however, marriage is not an option, not only because the British soldier would refuse to “soil himself” (200) through marriage to an Indian woman, but also because their mixed-race child represents a threat to the identity of Hajera’s community.

As I mentioned above, Lee Edelman has described hetero-patriarchy’s investment in the figure of the child as a means of disavowing the *jouissance* of sex, a strategy which constructs non-generative homosexual sex as “perverse”. At the same time, his discussion of the figure of the child points to the ways in which certain forms of heterosexual sex might also be conceived as “perverse” in a racist society. What Edelman terms “the fascism of the baby’s face” (151) is the imperative to produce a particular type of future; the figure of the child must conform to a specific image, to whatever “face a particular politics gives the baby to wear” (151). Just as the patriarchal figure of woman is understood to reproduce cultural identity, so the figure of the “Child enshrines [...] an insistence on sameness” (21), a sameness that I would argue is threatened by miscegenation. The “mixed-race” child—product of an illicit desire—figures a failure of sameness and thus fails to dissociate inter-racial sex from the *jouissance* of desire which, in turn, threatens to disrupt meaning and the social order.

This attitude is evident in the Imam’s characterisation of rape, which serves to foreground the “mixed-race” child as the ultimate injury, rather than the violence done to the woman.

There are certain things people do not forget or forgive. Rape is one of them. In ancient times, conquerors destroyed the will of those whom they conquered by impregnating the women. It is an ancient form of genocide [.....] The Romans and the Sabine women, the Nazis and Jewish women in the concentration camps, the Soviets in Poland, Israeli soldiers and Palestinian refugees, white South African policemen and black women.

You conquer a nation by bastardizing its children. (204)

Here, the raped woman is reduced to a violated and anonymous body, which will bear the “bastard child” of conqueror and conquered, product of the nation’s defeat and, as such, the nation’s shame. Such a conception of rape is also inherently patriarchal, constructing women’s relation to the nation as a strictly maternal one, repressing other possible identities and eliding the physical violence of rape, by which their children will be “bastardiz[ed]” (204).

In Hajera’s case, the woman’s violated and thus shameful body is further erased when her story is subsumed into that of her brother. Ali’s flight from India to South Africa is described as “a veritable hajerah” (203), a reference to “the Prophet’s first pilgrimage” (200), which provided his sister Hajera’s name. As such, Hajera’s life story is collapsed into a narrative of male quests: there is no room for her within the “fable” (196) of Ali Ali’s life beyond providing motivation for his actions. That motivation itself arises out of a politics of blood and a fantasy of racial purity which considers the raped woman as a source of contamination, a threat to the “purity” of the race. Mikey Ali’s appropriation of Ali Ali as his progenitor and role model thus suggests an investment in the racial ideology underlying this discursive construction of rape. Given that Mikey is himself a “mixed-race” child of rape, his decision to kill Du Boise, to erase the “unmistakeable lineage to be found in the shape of a nose, the contour of a

cheek” (186), participates in an ideology of racial purity, even as it reveals the fictive basis of that ideology.³⁷ If, as Edelman suggests, “the human face [...is] the face of everything we recognise as human” (70), then Mikey’s desire to “obliterate Du Boise’s face” (276) is a denial of his humanity, a rejection of any society in which Du Boise is recognised as human. By executing Du Boise, he also fulfils Lydia’s exhortation to Silas to kill her rapist, to prove that he is a “real man” (17) and in doing so, Mikey claims a patriarchal as well as a racialised nationalist subjectivity. His decision to travel to India, to Ali Ali’s place of origin, creates a sense of repetition; just as Ali Ali travelled to South Africa having avenged his sister, Hajera’s rape, so Mikey will travel to India, having avenged the rape of his mother. In this way, Dangor signals the possibility, and the danger, of a return to a patriarchal society structured around an ideology of racial purity.

In *Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women?* (2007), Meg Samuelson argues that, in post-apartheid literature, a preoccupation with inter-racial rape signals a symbolic appropriation of the bodies of raped women: “raped women are transformed into mothers, who, through the ‘mixed race’ issue of rape, procreate the ‘rainbow’ nation” (2007 122). This social logic serves to support the multicultural rhetoric of post-apartheid society; figuring the “mixed-race” child as a redemptive symbol of inter-racial harmony in the wake of apartheid violence. For Samuelson, this means that value is placed on a woman’s reproductive capacity—cultural and biological—which serves to cover over the actual trauma of rape and effectively limits the possibilities for women’s participation in national life.

Both Lydia and Hajera bear children of rape yet, in Dangor’s novel, the redemptive potential of motherhood found elsewhere in post-apartheid literature is denied to them. Shortly after her rape, Hajera is sent away from her family home to hide

the shame of her pregnancy. “The baby dies while Hajera is feeding her” (201) and she is accused by the hospital nurses of strangling the child. Charged with murder and declared insane, she spends the rest of her life in a “madhouse” (201). A criminal trial is avoided through the charge of insanity, a convenience which local opinion attributes to an official desire to keep the scandal of Hajera’s rape quiet. Yet when understood to have killed her child, she becomes a monstrous figure who must be contained. Hajera herself is described as being “buried alive” (201) by this string of tragedies and her incarceration in a madhouse symbolises the liminal state she finally occupies between the human and non-human. We are told that, in “India, in those days, there [were] no asylums for Indians, only madhouses” (201). Such institutions position their inhabitants as “threshold figures” (Gallop 1982 146), at once part of, but removed from, human society. Hajera’s pregnancy precludes the possibility of a marriage which would allow her to remain a part of her community; whether this is entirely due to her loss of virginity or also, in part, to a perceived “contamination” through contact with a racial “other”, or both, is not clear. In any case, the threat of miscegenation, understood in colonial discourse to signify racial degeneration, contributes to Hajera’s abjection by her community, who can no longer rely on her to reproduce their identity. Furthermore, her subsequent—alleged—act of infanticide marks a rejection of maternity as a means to redeem rape, while also placing her beyond any role understood as human. Thus, in refusing, or being refused, the possibility of motherhood as a means of reconciliation with her community, Hajera can signify nothing other than madness.

Unlike Hajera, Lydia Ali raises her son, Mikey, as Silas’s biological child. But, like Hajera, she has an ambivalent relationship to motherhood which results, at the end of the novel, in her departure from her family and her refusal to bear the “[b]urden of the mother” (281) any longer. When she discovers that Du Boise has made her pregnant, Lydia resolves to “refuse her body its right to bear more children” (120). This

decision means that Lydia's attempts to reclaim her sexuality, repressed as it has been since Du Boise raped her,³⁸ take place outside the ideology of reproductive futurity (Edelman). Thus, while as a mother, Lydia can be interpolated into discourses of national progress as a symbol of a multi-cultural future, her decision not to have more children, as well as her refusal to testify before the TRC, suggests her resistance to such discourses.

Lydia's complicated relationship to motherhood is subsequently compounded by her incestuous relationship with her son, Mikey. Lydia and Mikey kiss just after she learns that Du Boise is applying for amnesty, a move that will force her to testify at a public hearing.³⁹ Having rejected Silas's attempts to comfort her, and his sexual advances, Lydia initiates a kiss with Mikey: "It was Mikey whom she held now, and drew to her, and kissed, the way she had always wanted to draw a man to her, at her behest, for her own comfort and pleasure" (162). The emphasis here is on Lydia's agency and reads as an attempt to reassert control over her body. Having kissed him, she then leads Mikey to her bed, where he falls asleep. Gazing at him Lydia longs "to reach out and touch him, tenderly, as a mother would touch her son, but knew that that was impossible now" (162). Having kissed her son, she realises that "that kiss was indelible, a gesture impossible to withdraw. Like Du Boise's penis, an irredeemable act of intrusion" (166), effectively comparing the act of rape with incest.⁴⁰ This realisation recognises a disjunction between biological reproduction and motherhood; Lydia might still be Mikey's biological mother but, having kissed him "carnally, on his lips" (166), she has exceeded the boundaries of the maternal. Lydia's transformation from the victim of rape to perpetrator of incest deconstructs the narrative of redemptive motherhood that Samuelson identifies as typical of post-apartheid literature. In doing so, *Bitter Fruit* asks what options are available to women beyond the roles of mother or victim in a post-apartheid society that remains invested in patriarchal ideals.

The Violence of Patriarchy:

If motherhood is the preeminent role available to women in patriarchal societies, it is a role regularly performed within the institution of marriage. Indeed, Silas suggests that, for a “coloured” woman at least, marriage is a necessary prerequisite for motherhood: “in [Lydia’s] community, a single woman who wanted a child and the occasional companionship of a man was seen as no better than a whore” (93). This comment forms part of Silas’s meditation on attitudes to female sexuality, and his process of disengagement from patriarchal values. Remembering the first time he made love with Lydia, Silas recognises that his earlier attitudes to women and sex were problematic.

[B]ack then he did think of women who were no longer virgins as soiled and passed around. He recalled how he could not help but search for the bloody evidence of her virginity’s denouement. Ah, how insufferable we must all have been back then, oppressed and oppressive, dark-faced and dark-minded because we could think of nothing but our suffering. (94)

Silas’s attitude towards female sexual morality is immediately connected to “our suffering” (94) under apartheid. The combination of “oppressed” (94) and “oppressive” (94) acknowledges a connection between discourses of race and gender and suggests that the violence of the racial order supported, and was supported by, that of the gendered hierarchy that traversed it. Silas’s movement from a “dark-minded” (94) perspective on female sexuality to what is, implicitly, a more enlightened view, provides a linear narrative of development which contrasts with instances of repetition in the novel, which are, in turn, associated with patriarchal and racial ideologies.

Aware that his sexual relationship with Lydia is failing, Silas contemplates the possibility that she will commit adultery and hopes that he would “[r]espond with

dignity” (147) if she did. Silas does not depend on Lydia for his dignity, but rather on his capacity to acknowledge and accept her sexual autonomy. Despite aspiring to dignity as a means of coping with the increasing fragility of his marriage, Silas finds that it can also be an obstacle to intimacy. Having told Lydia of Du Boise’s intention to apply for amnesty, Silas’s attempt to comfort his wife becomes a sexual advance which she quickly rejects. After he apologises, Silas’s humiliation is compounded when Lydia retorts: “It’s all right, you are my husband [...] you have every right” (161). The invocation of rights here is an interesting comment on the possible disparity between human rights as they exist in the South African constitution and the patriarchal rights of men to women’s bodies assumed within marriage. While the South African constitution supports gender equality, the symbolic appropriation of raped women’s bodies as symbols of national healing, demonstrated by the TRC, points to a perpetuation of patriarchal constructions of the female body as property, available to men when and as they choose. The most obvious instantiation of such an attitude in *Bitter Fruit* is, of course, the rape of Lydia by Du Boise. Silas characterises his decision to leave the house after Lydia rejects his advances as “[h]is dignity reasserting itself, his damn manly pride” (161), and as the loss of an opportunity to restore intimacy between himself and his wife. Silas’s disengagement with patriarchal ideology in the novel is not a clean break, returning to the comforting familiarity of gender roles—asserting “his damn manly pride”—brings with it the end of intimacy, both sexual and emotional.

Lydia’s withdrawal from intimacy with Silas began shortly after they were married; predating both the trauma of her rape and the reawakening of that trauma brought about by his sighting of Du Boise. Interestingly, Silas’s sense of alienation from his wife is figured in the novel by images of moonlight. Even in the early days of their marriage, he recalls “half-drunken Sundays when Lydia refused to make love to him and he fell asleep, waking up when the sun in the square window gave way to cold

shards of moonlight” (11). Having told Lydia of his encounter with Du Boise, Silas remembers the night Lydia was raped, when those “shards of moonlight” (11) changed, and “the moon was caught in the bars of a window that seemed familiar yet [...] further away” (11). Later in the text, “[s]hards of moonlight” (267) also illuminate the billiards table on which Lydia makes love to a young Mozambican man, João, at Silas’s fiftieth birthday party—an act Silas understands as her “public demonstration of freedom” (272).⁴¹ The connotation of violence carried by “shards” is expressed elsewhere when Lydia cuts her feet on “broken beer glass” (17) at the beginning of the novel, in an attempt to displace the psychic pain of her rape onto her body. Such violence finds epistemic form in Silas’s conflation of rape and consensual extra-marital sex through the image of moonlight. The “jagged edges of the broken beer glass” (17) find their own echo in the attempts of Silas’s “jagged mind” (267) to transform the scene of his wife’s adulterous lovemaking “into something sordid, so enabling him to dismiss it, to call her cheap, a whore” (267). There is a recognition here of the violence done by the patriarchal production of women as property, a violence that harms men as well as women, that precludes intimacy in favour of power. Silas cannot enact the desired transformation, however, recognising instead that “in pulling the young man to her” (267), Lydia is finding a particular kind of release: “Now not every man would be a rapist to her” (267).

Dangor uses the association between Silas’s alienation from Lydia with moonlight to invoke a sense of cyclical time which stands in opposition to the narrative of progress established by the TRC, and which is suggested in the “post” of post-apartheid. In *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (1998), Jean-François Lyotard has noted “the pointlessness of any periodization of cultural history in terms of ‘pre-’ and ‘post-’, before and after, for the single reason that it leaves unquestioned the position of the ‘now’, of the present from which one is supposed to achieve a legitimate perspective

on a chronological succession” (24). In *Bitter Fruit*, Dangor demonstrates that the stability of the present moment in post-apartheid South Africa is established through recourse to the female body. Rather than recapitulating such social logic, as Samuelson (2004) suggests, Dangor’s novel exposes, in order to challenge, the figuration of women as “ancient and eternal” (Dangor 39), the fixed point from which to chart the establishment of a new political order.

As I have argued, Dangor’s novel rejects the social logic, identified by Meg Samuelson (2004; 2007), in which the raped woman becomes a centre around which a family and, allegorically, a nation can cohere, depicting instead the eventual disintegration of a family confronted by the trauma of rape. The failure of the Ali marriage is accompanied by a critique of, and withdrawal from, patriarchy and its values, highlighting the patriarchal nature of marriage itself. In this instance the allegorical relationship between the family and the nation recalls Mamdani’s critique of the TRC’s approach to national reconciliation (2002): according to Mamdani, the Commission’s emphasis on individual suffering rather than institutional violence allows for institutional continuities between the apartheid and democratic states. Similarly, *Bitter Fruit* suggests the need to assess the gender politics of the new state if apartheid-era discourses of race and gender, and the violence they carry with them, are to be overcome.

HIV/AIDS and the Displacement of Anachronism:

As I have argued above, *Bitter Fruit* traces continuities between the social position and experiences of female slaves and “coloured” women under apartheid. Dangor further suggests the perpetuation of such connections through attention to the figure of the HIV-positive mother. In order to explore this more fully, I will now return

to Lydia's recovery, which is achieved in part through regaining her mobility. When she first returns to her feet, on crutches, Lydia walks "like a child" (120) and her gradual recovery culminates in the purchase of her own car, which becomes "the real instrument of her freedom" (272), granting her independence from Silas. In this instance, the comparison to a child does not seem infantilising so much as suggestive of new beginnings, a sense reinforced by the description of Lydia as a "strange insect emerging from a cocoon they had mistakenly assumed was her permanent, incarnate being" (169-70). Significantly, we learn that Lydia's transformative process includes her decision to "see a counsellor" (173). Thus, it is not only "[t]ime and distance [...that] will help to free her" (281) from the slave's "essence of stillness" (Spillers "Mama's" 224), but also her verbal—rather than hysterical or corporeal—articulation of the trauma of her rape. At the same time, the novel's somewhat ambivalent ending refuses to endorse the possibility that Lydia can free herself of what she calls the "[b]urden of the mother" (281), which, I have argued, is also the burden of figuring anachronism.

The changes Lydia makes to her life when she leaves hospital also involve a new career: she will be "part of a research team doing 'control tests' on HIV-positive mothers. Testing the effectiveness of a new drug to stop the transmission of HIV from mothers to their unborn foetuses" (169). The leader of this project is a woman, Rachel Moss, who like Lydia, is the wife of a prominent politician associated with the TRC. Rachel describes Lydia as "a kind of prodigal daughter" (171), thus positioning her as someone who might be part of the future of the nation, rather than responsible for ensuring that future through biological reproduction.⁴² Despite the hopeful potential of this medical research, I would argue that the HIV-positive mother in Dangor's novel represents the latest instantiation of the social logic by which Lydia herself was constructed as a figure of anachronism. In this way, *Bitter Fruit* acknowledges the HIV/AIDS crisis, as well as sexual and gender violence, as one of the "new struggles"

(77) facing post-apartheid South Africa. Indeed, the novel draws an association between the anti-apartheid struggle and the HIV/AIDS crisis through the character of Julian, a friend of Silas and a former ANC activist who, in the novel's present, is trying to "formulate a 'comprehensive HIV policy' that would soon be redundant, given that the president was about to retire and his designated successor had strong views on how this 'scourge ought to be tackled'" (229). Julian is referring here to Thabo Mbeki, whose presidency was marked by a number of controversies surrounding his government's response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, including their refusal to supply funding for the kind of medical intervention for HIV-positive mothers that Lydia becomes involved with.⁴³

For Neville Hoad (2006), Mbeki's refusal to accept that HIV/AIDS is a sexually transmitted disease emerges from his critique of nineteenth-century racism, which constructed the black body as sexually "perverse" and diseased.⁴⁴ In an analysis of Mbeki's speech at the internment of Sarah Bartmann's remains in 2002, Hoad argues that the "deeply racist construction of blackness as pornographic spectacle continues to haunt the present and unavoidably informs the administration's difficulty in publicly representing African sexuality [...a task that is] increasingly urgent in the face of the HIV/AIDS pandemic" (94-5). Thus, for Hoad, Mbeki's response to the HIV/AIDS crisis points to the very real, material consequences of the discursive legacies of racism and slavery in South Africa.

In *AIDS: The Challenge for South Africa* (2001), Alan Whiteside and Clem Sutner suggest that the use of sexual violence as a weapon during the anti-apartheid struggle contributed to the spread of HIV/AIDS in South Africa. This suggestion is further supported by the work of Goldblatt and Meintjes (1997) who note the use of sexual violence as a weapon by both sides of the anti-apartheid struggle and Walker,

Reid and Cornell's work, *Waiting to Happen* (2004), which also highlights the connection between politicised sexual violence and the spread of HIV.⁴⁵ In *Bitter Fruit*, then, the HIV-positive woman is positioned as the latest in a long line of abject female bodies that begins with the female slave and who share experiences of sexual violence and difficult relationships to motherhood. While the law of uterine descent—by which the child of a slave followed the condition of the mother, rather than the father—decreed that the slave woman bore her child into the condition of social death, for the HIV-positive mother, the threat of death is far more literal and it is this burden that Lydia and her team wish to ease. The HIV-positive mother is, in a sense, being positioned in the place that Lydia—as a “coloured” woman and victim of rape—once occupied. The logic of displacement at work here not only qualifies the tentative optimism of Lydia's recuperation but also the narrative of progress epitomised by the TRC. For Valerie Rohy (2009), narratives of progress *require* a figure of anachronism against which such progress can be measured; there will always be some figure to take the place of the figure of the “coloured” woman. Indeed, the end of the novel sees Lydia leave Johannesburg and her family to return to Cape Town; her journey, another instance of cyclical movement in the novel, will also return her to the city most closely associated with slavery, suggesting, once again, the impossibility of leaving that past behind.⁴⁶

Conclusion:

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission attempted to overcome the violent and divisive legacy of apartheid by acknowledging individual traumas through the Human Rights Violation Hearings. These hearings allowed for the construction of a selective historical narrative that perpetuated gendered stereotypes and

failed to consider the discursive debts apartheid politics owed to colonial ideology.

Thus, the Commission's pursuit of intramural reconciliation took place within a discourse of racialism that understood white, black and "coloured" to be distinct and coherent biological identities. This, in turn, supported a continued investment in patriarchal understandings of gender, whereby women are responsible for cultural, as well as biological reproduction. While Dangor thus identifies motherhood as central—and problematic—in the relationship between gender and nation, *Bitter Fruit* can only envision the displacement of the "[b]urden of the mother" (281) onto the figure of the HIV-positive woman.

Unlike men, who represent political modernity, within the social logic of patriarchy women signify the "natural" time of maternity, the family and traditional values. These values provide a point of origin from which a society can pursue modernity and progress while marking the women who embody them as anachronistic. As critics such as Irlam (2004) and Herwitz (2003) have noted, the rhetoric of the "rainbow" nation understands a multicultural South Africa to consist of co-operative but separate racial and ethnic groups, rather than as a society free from the fantasy of race.

Dangor's engagement with the history of slavery considers how that history has shaped the production of "coloured" identity and his analyses of gender suggest ways it might be deconstructed. If slavery entailed a disavowal of the slave's subjectivity, then a failure to recognise how slavery has contributed to "coloured" identity poses an implicit challenge to the inclusion of subjects marked as "coloured" in the new nation. The racial and patriarchal ideologies reproduced by the TRC enable the fleshiness of the slave to be inherited by the "coloured" woman, imposing on her the burden of anachronism. Those ideologies also construct rape in strictly hetero-patriarchal terms, in which women are understood as property and repositories of male honour. As such, the

figure of the “coloured” woman comes to serve as that abject subject, the atavistic threat that Rohy identifies as enabling futurity and the narrative of national progress.

Bitter Fruit demonstrates that literary, as well as critical, discourse provides a space in which national and ethnic identities can be investigated, destabilised and renegotiated. The opposition between personal and national histories created through the inclusion of Lydia and Ali’s diaries marks Dangor’s novel, and perhaps the novel form more generally, as engaged with the disruptive potential of multiplicity. While the rhetoric of “rainbow” nationalism allows for the simultaneous existence of multiple culture groups, it denies or minimises the extent to which those groups interact, whether through inter-racial sexual relations or through the gendered social reproduction enabled by black and “coloured” domestic labour in white households. By attending to the position of women, Dangor’s text, on the other hand, exposes the way in which certain culture groups—in this case “coloured” and Afrikaner—have been mutually constitutive. The TRC’s attempt to turn the “page of history” (Boraine 5) is also an attempt to create an origin; a new starting point for a new nation. In order to imagine a single, national future—even if that future is multicultural—it must first narrate a single past, allowing for a linear movement from apartheid to democracy. As Valerie Rohy has noted, such narratives depend on the abjection of certain subjects marked as anachronistic. Literature’s capacity for multiple narratives, on the other hand, allows for the dialogic relationship between past and present suggested by Lacanian theory, in which “the future *precedes* the past, for our retrospective projections change the history, and long-past events may only belatedly take on the meaning they will seem always to have had” (Rohy 2009 23).

Dangor’s work does not suggest an opposition between literature and reconciliation, however, instead it points to a need for vigilance with regard to the

discursive space in which reconciliation takes place. If, as *Bitter Fruit* suggests, the “coloured” woman remains burdened by the history of slavery, then the discursive continuities between colonial and apartheid regimes need to be recognised and addressed if the racial and gendered ideologies of those regimes are to be overcome by the newly democratic nation. As demonstrated by Mikey, the consequences of revenge are bloody and herald repetition rather than change. At the same time, Lydia’s refusal to engage with the TRC process is, in part, a refusal to say “the unsayable, and then hold [...her] peace for ever after” (127). The journey she embarks on at the end of the novel seems emblematic of the journey all South Africans must take to find reconciliation. The novel’s focus on questions of gender and sexual violence highlights the need, too, to implement the equality enshrined in the constitution and identifies gender as a site of an important “new struggle” (77). If, during the anti-apartheid struggle, the fight for gender equality was perceived as potentially divisive to the cause of liberation, in the post-apartheid era, it has become necessary to consider the construction of gender categories and the ideological meanings they carry in order to extend liberty to all South African citizens. While this chapter has focused particularly on the historical association between slavery and “coloured” identity, in the next chapter, on Anne Landsman’s *The Devil’s Chimney* (1998) I will consider the relationship of whiteness to slavery and the potential for that history to help renegotiate white identity in the post-apartheid era.

Chapter Two:

History, Narrative and Disavowal in Anne Landsman's *The Devil's
Chimney*

Anne Landsman is a white South African writer based in New York whose work is particularly concerned with white and Jewish identities in South Africa. Her first novel, *The Devil's Chimney*, was published in 1998 and is set in the small town of Oudtshoorn, in the Little Karoo. Once a centre of the international ostrich feather trade,¹ Oudtshoorn's rural location allows Landsman to excavate a deep history of land and the relationship between land and white identity in South Africa. Telling the stories of four women—Beatrice and Nomsa, Pauline, and Connie—set in the early, mid- and late twentieth-century respectively, the novel is also concerned with women's place in South African history and the role white women played in constructing and maintaining white supremacy. Thus, while concerned with feminist politics, Landsman's text acknowledges the intersections of gender, race and class that make such politics difficult in a multiracial context. These intersections find a common source in the history of slavery which underpins not only the economic structure of Oudtshoorn's feather trade but also the multiple narratives and narrative modes that constitute the novel.

The Devil's Chimney consists of a number of narrative strands and in order to clarify these and their relationships to each other, it will be helpful to give an overview of the novel's plot here. The novel is narrated by Connie, an alcoholic "poor white" living in post-apartheid South Africa. She and her husband Jack work for the South African Tourist Board, running a dog kennel beside the Cango Caves, which are now Oudtshoorn's primary attraction. As noted above, Oudtshoorn was once the capital of the global ostrich feather market and continues to feel the effects of the 1914 feather market crash. Connie narrates the story of Beatrice Chapman, an English settler, to various audiences including Jack, her deaf sister Gerda and her dogs. It becomes clear that telling Beatrice's story is Connie's way of dealing with the traumatic death of her own child, some forty years earlier, and her abusive relationship with Jack. Interspersed

within her narrative of Beatrice's life, a number of comparisons between herself and Beatrice related in asides constitute Connie's own story, which culminates in her estrangement from her sister once Gerda confesses to having taken Connie's child at birth. Connie tells us that her marriage to Jack was "a shotgun" (12); they married because Connie was pregnant and Jack blames her for the death of their child. Their subsequent relationship is characterised by alcoholism and emotional and sexual abuse. Connie displaces her own sense of guilt about her son's death onto Beatrice, who "lost" her daughter Precious in the Cango Caves in 1914. Beatrice, then, becomes both a role-model and a scapegoat for her; someone with whom she can empathise over the loss of a child and someone whose transgressions can be identified as the root of social ills.

According to Connie, Beatrice and Henry Chapman arrived in Oudtshoorn in 1910 at the height of the feather boom, and took over an ostrich farm called Highlands. Henry's disinterest in farming meant that they quickly came to rely on the farm's Khoisan foreman, September and his Xhosa wife, Nomsa² who worked as Beatrice's maid. The situation at Highlands is the subject of much local discussion and "people in Oudtshoorn said it was a disgrace to watch a Coloured man come into town and order things and drive around as if he was the *baas* [boss]" (18). Henry's increasing resentment of September's authority on the farm led to a number of clashes between the two men, the last of which resulted in September's death. Unlike her husband, Beatrice fell in love with South Africa and the farm and was determined to stay and make a life there. When Henry abandoned her and disappeared into the Karoo a year after their arrival, she was forced to take on the role of farmer which resulted in her transgression of a number of gender and racial norms, causing further scandal in the local community. For Beatrice, however, the experience was liberating and accompanied by a sexual awakening that resulted in an affair with her Jewish neighbour, Mr Jacobs, and a coercive encounter with Nomsa and September. Beatrice subsequently became pregnant

but did not know who the father was, a situation further complicated by Henry's return to Highlands shortly afterwards.

Henry returned to Highlands unhinged by his experience on the Karoo and his behaviour becomes increasingly unpredictable and dangerous. He is obsessed with going back to England and much to Beatrice's dismay, he planned to sell both as many feathers as he could—risking the ostriches' lives in the process—and the farm at Highlands to finance their journey. September opposed Henry's plan to pluck the ostriches out of concern for the birds' welfare but to “show [September] a lesson” (193), Henry killed him. The Chapmans never returned to England, however: when Henry tried to sell the feathers, he learned that the market had crashed and, like the other farmers in Oudtshoorn, he was destitute. He later wandered into the ostrich enclosure at Highlands while drunk and was killed by two birds. Meanwhile, Beatrice was in labour, aided by September's grieving widow, Nomsa. We learn that September was the father of Beatrice's daughter, Precious, and that Nomsa later fought to take the child from Beatrice in a magical scene in the Cango Caves. Having been successful, Nomsa took Precious and placed her in the care of her *ouma* on a neighbouring farm before returning to Highlands where, according to Connie, she and Beatrice spent the rest of their unnaturally long days together.

Like much post-apartheid literature, *The Devil's Chimney* is interested in questions of history, narrative and identity and Connie's narrative acts serve to connect personal experiences to moments of key social and political change. The majority of critical analyses of the novel focus on its engagement with landscape, space and the *plaasroman* tradition, and particularly on the symbolic function of the Cango Caves. For Wendy Woodward (2000), the caves are “a liminal space: they are atavistic, a vortex of evil power, mystery and loss, but they are also the positive space of

sensuality” (33) that allows people to transcend fixed identities. For Shane Graham (2009), the caves function as part of the novel’s broader project of “mapping” loss. Graham uses the term “mapping” “to refer to Connie’s negotiations both of the literal, physical Karoo landscape and of the figurative landscape of shared or social memory” (143). He describes the Cango caves as “vivid embodiments of [...] loss or absence” (146). In addition to the attention given to the operations of space in the novel, critics have also remarked on its genre and style, with Jill Nudelman (2008) arguing that the novel’s “engagement with the fantastical and the improbable, and thus the imagination [...] allows the artist to uncover the truths of the past and rewrite a nation that celebrates difference and diversity” (122).³

While Connie’s engagement with history is indeed imbued with fantastical and imaginative elements, I will argue that a number of other South African genres inform her stories, particularly the *plaasroman*⁴ and “black peril”⁵ narratives. These literary genres provide frameworks through which Landsman explores dominant cultural articulations of white identity in South Africa. At the same time, the oral nature of Connie’s storytelling represents a challenge to the authority of these narratives of whiteness; indeed, *The Devil’s Chimney* suggests that whiteness in South Africa is structured around a disavowal of inter-racial relationships. As I will show, such disavowal relies in turn on the social regulation of sexuality, and female sexuality in particular. The novel challenges the conception of whiteness as homogenous through attention to the marginal positions of the Jew and the “poor white”, even as it associates these identities with the threats posed to the normative white population by “miscegenation” and racial passing. Indeed, by framing female sexuality in terms of the biblical tale of the Fall from Grace, the novel highlights the potential threat that female desire was perceived to pose to the white patriarchy. At the same time, Landsman is attentive to the way in which white society relied on black and “coloured” labour and

how such labour supported white motherhood in particular. *The Devil's Chimney*, then, renders white women complicit with the racial order and poses questions about the role that narrative can play in negotiating historical acts of complicity and in opening up new forms of social relationship.

As suggested above, Connie's status as a "poor white" points to Landsman's interest in deconstructing whiteness. As Tiffany Willoughby-Herard (2007) notes, the term "poor white" referred to a marginalised and racialised form of whiteness that posed "a threat to the idea of white supremacy in South Africa" (492). In "*Whiteness Just Isn't What It Used To Be*" (2001), Melissa Steyn investigates how white identity and attitudes to "whiteness" have changed in South Africa since the end of apartheid. According to Steyn, "[i]f colonial narratives provided the social identity of whiteness, postcolonial narratives must help to redefine and complicate identities for those interpolated by discourses of whiteness by bringing them into dialogue with other identities" (xxviii). She goes on to argue that the "master narrative" (vi) of whiteness, which was consolidated in the aftermath of the Act of Union in 1910, has become fragmented in recent years, leading to a proliferation of "*petit* narratives" (xxxiii) of white identity.⁶ These narratives articulate a wide range of positions with regard to the current status of white identity in South Africa; despite their differences, however, the majority of the responses Steyn analysed expressed a characteristic sense of loss or dispossession that suggests an anxiety about white people's place in post-apartheid South Africa.

The master narrative of whiteness identified by Steyn consists of three key elements, all of which are examined in some form in Landsman's novel: land, language or culture, and racial purity. In particular, Steyn notes the significance of land ownership in the colonial and apartheid eras: "whiteness for white South Africans

meant entitlement to the land (and everything in it) against any odds” (35). The white claim to the land was a defensive one, however, and it was constantly under threat from both the country’s majority black population and the forces of modernity that drew white South Africans—and particularly poor Afrikaners—from the land and into the cities. The white tradition of *plaasroman* or farm novel—which will be considered in the next section—endeavoured to constantly reinscribe white people’s relationship to the land in terms that justified their claims to and right to use it.⁷ Indeed, Rita Barnard (2007) argues that “the function of pastoral ideology [...characteristic of the *plaasroman*] was not so much to assert positive values like rootedness, simplicity, and tradition as to signify racial difference” (73). Thus, Landsman’s engagement with the *plaasroman* or farm novel tradition is also an engagement with cultural articulations of whiteness.

The *Plaasroman* Tradition:

In *Writing Woman, Writing Place* (2004), Sue Kossew notes that the rural setting of *The Devil’s Chimney* necessarily situates the novel within the *plaasroman* tradition. Kossew further positions Landsman within a tradition of white women writers, such as Olive Schreiner, Pauline Smith, Doris Lessing and Nadine Gordimer, for whom “the farm novel provides a textual space in which the intersections between gender, race and power-relations are inscribed by national mythologies and are therefore open to reinscription over time” (121). In his seminal contribution to the study of South African pastoral, *White Writing* (1988), J.M. Coetzee had earlier illustrated the relationship between such “national mythologies” (Kossew 121) and the *plaasroman*. He identifies a number of key characteristics of the farm novel genre which include: the historical occlusion of black and “coloured” labour from representations of rural life; a

representation of the South African landscape as atemporal or “outside history”; and a feminisation of the land that supports a patriarchal social order. Landsman’s novel addresses a number of these conventions, focusing particularly on questions of gender and inter-racial relations in order to investigate the “place” of white women in South Africa and the possibility of belonging.

In *White Writing*, Coetzee describes two distinct and rival “dream topographies” (6) or mythic conceptions of the landscape articulated through the *plaasroman* which serve to justify white ownership of the land. The first of these topographies is “a network of boundaries crisscrossing the surface of the land, marking off thousands of farms, each a separate kingdom ruled over by a benign patriarch with, beneath him, a pyramid of contented and industrious children, grandchildren, and serfs” (Coetzee 6). This description resonates with Beatrice’s attempt to make Highlands “her country” (Landsman 43), a process by which she becomes the “Queen Bee” (32), rival to Mr Jacobs, the “Ostrich King” (37), and trespasser into a world of trade and commerce that is decidedly male. Not long after her arrival in South Africa, having been abandoned by Henry and driven by a desire to find a sense of belonging, Beatrice is forced to take control of the farm. In donning men’s clothes and cutting her hair short, she attempts to ingratiate herself within the male-dominated ostrich feather trade in Oudtshoorn. But her need to perform masculine identity suggests the rigidity of socially acceptable gender roles, even as she subverts them. Significantly, the local community interpret Beatrice’s behaviour not only as a transgression of gender norms, but also of the racial hierarchy: “people had to look at her twice to see if she was White because by now her skin was very brown. Of course all the mothers were afraid that their daughters would catch what Miss Beatrice had” (43). By claiming roles usually reserved for men and trespassing into the public world of commerce, Beatrice becomes a threat to white racial purity, a threat deemed potentially contagious.

The public reaction to Beatrice's behaviour also suggests that it is the duty of white women to become mothers; similarly it falls to mothers to protect their daughters from catching "what Miss Beatrice had" (43). This accords with Deniz Kandiyoti's (1994) understanding of the role of women in patriarchal society as those who "reproduce the boundaries of ethnic/national groups, who transmit the culture and who are the privileged signifiers of national difference" (376-7). As Coetzee notes, in its attempt to naturalise white land ownership, the farm novel relied heavily on gendered symbolism; "the genre invokes a myth in which the earth becomes wife to the husband-man" (7). The feminine earth is made fertile and fruitful by the labour of the farmer, who must—in this heteronormative metaphor—be male. This metaphor also accounts, in part, for the occlusion of black labour from literary depictions of the farm; as Coetzee explains, "[i]f the work of hands on a particular patch of earth [...] is what inscribes it as the property of its occupiers *by right*, then the hands of black serfs doing the work had better not be seen" (5).

Coetzee's description of farm labourers as "serfs" (6) in a white farmer's "kingdom" (6) raises the issue of the affective economy that bound black labour to white farms and suggests the degree to which South African farms continued to rely on the kinds of paternalistic labour relations instituted under slavery. In *The Devil's Chimney*, Connie tells us that "Nomsa worked at Highlands for a long time. She started there when she was just sixteen" (16). Nomsa, then, began working at Highlands long before Beatrice and Henry arrived in South Africa, and in fact, there is no mention of how the Chapmans acquired their labour force.⁸ This situation is suggestive of cadastral transfers, whereby slave labour was sold alongside a particular piece of property, the increasing frequency of which Robert Shell has argued "provides compelling evidence of a de facto enserfment of rural and urban Cape slaves and their offspring" (117). In Landsman's novel, Connie's attention to Nomsa's personal history, however brief,

points to the way the myth of the South African farm as an autonomous patriarchal “kingdom” (Coetzee 6) is enabled by a labour system derived from slavery.

In the second dream topography identified by Coetzee, the landscape is represented as “a vast, empty, and silent space” (7), an image that *The Devil’s Chimney* repeatedly challenges through its representation of both the Karoo and the Cango Caves. When Henry Chapman abandons his wife and Highlands he ventures out into the Little Karoo in what becomes known as his “big walk” (17). As Kossew notes, Henry is the antithesis of the “trope of the male explorer as active and phallic” (132) since he is repeatedly represented as feminine, with “hands that were soft as a baby’s” (Landsman 16-17) and “a big white hat on his head, like a girl” (17). But while Henry’s “big walk” is motivated by his distaste for the masculine world of the farm, it ironically recalls the Great Trek, a seminal event in Afrikaner nationalist history.⁹ The Great Trek was a mass migration in the mid-nineteenth century of Dutch, German and French settlers, later known as Afrikaners, beyond the borders of the colony and away from British control. One major point of conflict between the settlers and the colonial administration was the abolition of slavery which, at the time, was the main source of labour in the colony. Abolition was thus seen by many Afrikaners as a threat to their livelihoods and their security; trekking beyond the borders of the colony allowed them to keep their slaves and perpetuate the social order.¹⁰ Lost, cold and alone on the veld, Henry wistfully hopes to “run into a Voortrekker, with his big fat wife and his big fat bible, *maybe a slave or two* [emphasis added]” (27). But the year is 1911 and the Great Trek is over; Henry’s comment remains significant, however, for its association of this constitutive myth of Afrikaner identity with the history of slavery.

The connection between the Great Trek and the perpetuation of slavery in the novel is further cemented by Henry’s use of the term “Voortrekker”, which, as Giliomee

notes, distinguished those settlers who left the Cape colony for political reasons, including their opposition to the abolition of slavery, from the trekboers, who “had been crossing colonial boundaries since the mid-1820s, [and] were concerned about the lack of sufficient pastures” (144). In addition to their efforts to maintain control of land and slave labour, the Voortrekkers attempted to preserve the existing social hierarchy and were concerned about the possibility of “social levelling” (152) in colonial society.

On the frontier it was not so much a *racial* hierarchy that the burghers wanted to preserve; but rather their fight was against the *gelykstelling* or social levelling of people belonging to different status groups—master and servant; people born into the Christian community and those the missionaries had converted; and finally—and perhaps most important—burghers who farmed and defended the land and non-burghers. (152)

Yet, even if the burghers did not frame their discontent in racial terms, the social categories Giliomee identifies—labour, religion and social status—were central to the process of racialisation in South Africa.

In *The Devil's Chimney*, while on his “big walk”, Henry stumbles across the grave of a Voortrekker’s wife: “All you can read is her name—Johanna Jacoba” (28). While Connie initially suggests that “Johanna Jacoba could have died of so many things” (28), she later insists that she “must have died in the back of an ox-wagon, with her baby” (117). Here, the causal relationship Connie establishes between Johanna’s death and motherhood serves to reinforce the stereotypical representation of Afrikaner women as mothers. As Anne McClintock notes in *Imperial Leather* (1995), the figure of the *volksmoeder*—or mother of the people—is a paradoxical one that simultaneously “recognizes the power of (white) motherhood” and “contain[s] women’s mutinous power within an iconography of domestic service” (378).¹¹ She further argues that the

symbolism of the *volksmoeder* subjugates Afrikaner women to patriarchal authority within nationalist discourse while “[the effacement of] Afrikaner women’s historic agency also erases their historic complicity in the annals of apartheid” (379). Thus while Johanna’s grave—as material evidence of women’s participation in the Great Trek—speaks of the unacknowledged cost paid by women in the service of nationalism, Connie’s insistence that Johanna’s death is related in some way to her status as a mother arguably endeavours to reassert Afrikaner women’s essential innocence in the *political* history of Afrikaner nationalism.

Significantly, the novel’s engagement with the history of the Great Trek asserts the historicity of a space that is usually represented as empty and atemporal. In “Museums and the Reshaping of Memory”, Patricia Davison (2002) argues that spaces such as museums and heritage sites often serve to “give material form to authorized versions of the past” (145). But in *The Devil’s Chimney*, those official histories are also re-shaped by Connie’s narrative voice. In Landsman’s novel, the colonial narrative of the discovery of the “interior” by white settlers is transformed by Connie’s narrative act. The tour of the Congo Caves is first described in the novel’s preface and presents a conventional narrative of colonial history. The tour re-enacts the discovery of the caves by an Afrikaner man, named van Zyl, using a tape recording in which the sounds of a whip, an axe and the screams of van Zyl’s slave Klaas predominate. By including this brief reference to van Zyl’s slave, Landsman’s text once again renders the colonial history of South Africa inextricable from the history of slavery. The use of an audio recording overpowers—or drowns out—the other histories already recorded within the caves. Indeed, the presence not only of “bushmen”¹² paintings, but also etchings left by the victims of a landslide, and more recent graffiti to which Connie draws our attention, inscribe the caves as a palimpsestic space in which numerous histories coexist. Despite evidence to the contrary, a tableau at the entrance positions the indigenous Khoisan

outside the caves, suggesting that, unlike colonial settlers, they have no knowledge of that space. This denial of Khoisan indigenous knowledge supports the perception of the South African landscape as “a vast, empty, and silent space” (Coetzee 7), which, in turn, validates the narrative of European discovery that the rest of the tour constructs.¹³

Connie tells us that the tableau represents “a Bushman family doing their daily chores the way they did them thousands of years ago” (4). By depicting the Khoisan engaged in domestic labour and performing tasks as they have done for “thousands of years” (4), this tableau simultaneously represents them as unchanging and primitive and disavows the violence used to incorporate them into the colonial economy.¹⁴

In *The Devil’s Chimney*, the Cango Caves are associated not only with competing versions of history but also with both sexual desire and a desire for communication with others. Indeed, Stuart Thomas (2012) argues that Landsman “uses instances of sexual union to build on critiques of the *plaasroman* to open up the possibility of unconditional hospitality not only between people and landscape but also between people within landscape” (171). In particular, Thomas reads the scene of lovemaking between Beatrice and Mr Jacobs in the Cango Caves as depicting the dissolution of boundaries between the self and other that allow for the possibility of radically revised forms of interpersonal relationships.¹⁵ Thomas’s reading provides an interesting analysis of the Cango Caves and the symbolic role they play in the novel as a space of discovery, exchange and loss, but his somewhat utopian conclusions cannot be easily sustained alongside a consideration of the struggle over Precious from which a section of the caves took its name: the “Devil’s Chimney”. While the space of the caves might open up the possibility of discussions and exchange not available elsewhere, it is not entirely free from older forms of social relationship. For instance, when fighting with Nomsa in the caves, Beatrice calls her name and Connie tells us that “[t]his time it came out of the past, out of the kitchen at Highlands, an old order from before” (243).

Here, Beatrice re-enacts the authority she once exerted over Nomsa as her maid, suggesting the difficulty of eschewing such deeply entrenched power dynamics which, in South Africa, are also entangled with relationships to the land.

Coetzee has argued that the *plaasroman* delineated an ideology of land ownership that justified the appropriation of land from indigenous people by white settlers, while Rita Barnard identifies land restitution as “the chief mobilising myth of the antiapartheid struggle” (74). Both critics suggest the interconnection of political and literary narratives of land in South Africa. Similarly, Jennifer Wenzel (2000) argues that, in the post-apartheid era, conceptions of the land and, consequently, the literature that depicts it, are changing. Whereas the *plaasroman* outlined a cultural imperative for newly urbanised Afrikaners to “return to the land” (96), Wenzel suggests that the Land Commission and the broader objective of national reconciliation has changed the dominant narrative of land ownership to one about a “return of the land” (96) from white people to black and “coloured” South Africans. As a result, the very notion of land as property has been scrutinised so that, according to Tony Buckle, property is reconceived not as “a relation between people and things” (quoted in Wenzel 96) but as “a relation between people, concerning things” (quoted in Wenzel 96). As suggested above, the representation of the white farmer as husband to the land justified his ownership of it. This claim to the land simultaneously obscured the reliance of white farmers on black and “coloured” labour and denied “the fact that black South Africans also have a pastoral tradition—that they too have a sense of place and an attachment to ancestral land” (Barnard 73). The concept of property as a relationship between people and things supports the master narrative of whiteness identified by Steyn in which white identity is pure and tied to ownership of the land and which consequently erases black and “coloured” people’s claim to the land. By contrast, the reconception of property as a relationship between people about things acknowledges the affective and material

relationship of all South African people to the landscape and each other; land ownership is something to be negotiated between people, rather than simply asserted.

For Beatrice, the farm offers the prospect of a new start and the possibility of belonging. At the same time, her attempts to assert her authority over the farm take place within the colonial-masculinist framework that would deny her the position of farmer in the first place. It is only by dressing as a man and exploiting the labour of her “coloured” workers that Beatrice can be transformed into the “Queen Bee”. Landsman’s novel asks how white women can lay claim to belonging in South Africa without recapitulating the racial and gender politics that subtended colonial settlement, which denied indigenous claims to the land and which understood women’s social value to lie in their capacity for social and biological reproduction. Connie, a “poor white” provokes similar questions about belonging and dispossession. While she tells us at one point that her mother grew up on a farm, she did not, suggesting that her family has been dispossessed of their land; she must find another way to belong. The difficulties of laying claim to white identity in post-apartheid South Africa are further suggested in the next section, which considers the oral mode of Connie’s narration and the racial and gendered history of the Afrikaans language that Landsman’s novel invokes.

Orality and Afrikaans:

One of the most striking characteristics of *The Devil’s Chimney* is the oral nature of Connie’s narrative. Although, as Christopher Warnes (2004) notes, “there is little evidence that orality in the novel refers to any kind of traditional culture” (60),¹⁶ critical debates around orality can help to illuminate the significance of Connie’s story-telling. Orality has long held a central position in discussions about African literature, with critics such as Abiola Irele (2001) maintaining that, while white South African writers

like J.M. Coetzee and Nadine Gordimer “have a claim to be considered African writers [...] their expression has no connection to the African imagination” (15). Similarly, for Irele, since “oral literature represents the basic intertext of the African imagination” (11), “coloured” writers like Bessie Head could not claim a connection to the “African imagination” because her somatic “blackness” could not guarantee her access to an oral literary tradition. However, I will argue that the development of Afrikaans alluded to in Landsman’s novel disturbs the essentialism at work in Irele’s formulation by pointing to the inter-racial relations and oral culture underpinning the production of this creole language. Furthermore, the association between Connie’s status as a “poor white” and the oral nature of her story-telling highlights the way in which oral cultures are racialised in a colonial context.

In *African Novels and the Question of Orality* (1992), Eileen Julien identifies an evolutionary logic underpinning the critical opposition of orality and literacy, which marks orality as the primitive antecedent of civilisation’s print culture. That is, print cultures are understood to develop out of oral ones, marking oral cultures as implicitly undeveloped and anachronistic. This kind of evolutionary thinking is often accompanied by an essentialist impulse which “equates an accidental phenomenon (mode of language) with essence: writing is European, orality is African” (8). Orality has become a sign of an “authentic” African past and traditional culture free from European influence, and, as a result, has become a necessary feature of any “African novel”. This association of oral narrative—which Isabel Hofmeyr (1996) notes is “often assumed to be traditional in theme, premodern in literary style, and order-affirming in its ethical orientation” (88)—with the past, denies its dynamic presence in contemporary African cultures and refuses it any relevance to the future. Furthermore, Julien notes a correlation, in an increasingly globalised world, between a lack of literacy and

disenfranchisement (21) that marks oral cultures as incompatible with contemporary politics.

The kind of evolutionary thinking that Julien critiques is reproduced, to some degree, in *The Devil's Chimney* when Connie, the 'author' of the oral texts-within-a-text is characterised as anachronistic: born prematurely, her mother repeatedly tells people she "never caught up" (43) and her maids similarly remark that "madam talks young" (43).¹⁷ Representations of Connie as childish sustain the cultural construction of oral narratives as "primitive", even as Landsman's incorporation of oral modes within a literary text challenges the idea that orality and writing are both "exclusive domains" (Julien 21) and "successive moments" (Julien 21) in literary history. The simultaneity of orality and writing that the novel demonstrates echoes a tension between its outer frame and Connie's narrative acts. Landsman's engagement with the processes of oral storytelling thus serves to distinguish the novel's politics from Connie's own, which remain invested in racial prejudices, while complicating the distinction between past and present that evolutionary logic depends on.

While Julien notes that oral literature is often understood as a repository for an "African essence" (10)—to the point, she argues, that "[o]rality" has become a metonymy for 'African'" (10)—Landsman's novel problematises this essentialist construction of "African-ness" by drawing attention to the historical development of the Afrikaans language. On one of her frequent visits to the Oudtshoorn museum, Connie notes "a picture of C.J. Langenhoven, the father of the Afrikaans language, right there by the front door" (80). Here, Langenhoven might be identified in Lacanian terms as the Name-of-the-Father, the symbolic Father of the Afrikaner nation. Historically, C.J. Langenhoven—best known for having written the old South African anthem, *Die Stem*—was a major figure in the struggle to have Afrikaans recognised as an official

language in the colony after the second Anglo-Boer war, a struggle that Hermann Giliomee (2004) associates with the “attempt to imagine a new political community with [its] own name and a language enjoying parity of esteem with English in the public sphere” (33). Langenhoven’s particular conception of Afrikaans established an association between the language and racial purity: to him it was “...the one and only white man’s language which was made in South Africa and which had not come ready made from overseas” (quoted in Giliomee 2004 35). By identifying Langenhoven as the “father” of Afrikaans, the novel also associates Afrikaner nationhood with Langenhoven’s perspectives on racial purity and gender.¹⁸

While Langenhoven argued that the vernacular use of Afrikaans demonstrated its value as a living language, he also insisted that in order to be recognised as an official—and political—language in South Africa, Afrikaans must also be a literary language: “If Dutch is our language we must speak it; if Afrikaans is our language we must write it” (quoted in Giliomee 2004 35). If Afrikaans was to be recognised as the civilised, white man’s language that Langenhoven believed it to be, then it must prove itself through literature.¹⁹ In nineteenth-century Europe, increased attention to oral and “folk” literatures was supported and encouraged by a growing “equivalence between language and nation” (Casanova 2004 78) that established literature as the “voice” of a nation. This, in turn, gave literature an important political dimension.²⁰ Thus, Langenhoven’s arguments on behalf of Afrikaans and the Afrikaner nation in the early twentieth-century reflect the logic of nineteenth-century European nationalism. An Afrikaans literature would enable the Afrikaner nation to inscribe itself in world literary and geopolitical space, that is, to claim a level of cultural sophistication and development equal to European cultures, even as it asserted its autonomous “African” identity. The cultivation of an Afrikaans literature would, therefore, support Afrikaner political claims in a South Africa under British rule.

Despite Langenhoven's assertion that Afrikaans was a "white man's language", in the late nineteenth-century, the "terms by which Afrikaans was known all pointed to a strong association with poorness and 'colouredness'" (Hofmeyr 1987 96-7).²¹ Indeed, the historian Robert C.H. Shell (2001) tells us that Afrikaans developed in two main stages: the first stage consisted of a Malayo-Portuguese dialect, "characterized by a large number of 'loan words' and new and sporadic grammatical intrusions" (61); this was followed by a more intense phase of linguistic creolisation. More specifically, the second phase, known as "kitchen Dutch" (63), developed through the interaction of European, slave and Khoisan women in the domestic space of the kitchen and it "was only much later that men introduced the creole language into the public sphere" (64). Afrikaans, then, originated in a feminine space that was also a space of interaction between slaves and their owners: indeed, Shell notes that, by the nineteenth-century, the kitchen was not only the place where slave women worked but also where they slept (265). This, in turn, gave rise to a taboo "forbidding the male owner from entering the kitchen at night" (256), revealing an anxiety about the possibility of inter-racial sex between master and slave. Given that manumission marriages—whereby a female slave was freed in order to marry—presented the best opportunity for female slaves to be incorporated into settler society, the kitchen held the potential not only for communication between different social strata, but also the possibility of transition between them.²²

In *The Devil's Chimney*, the kitchen becomes the site through which the story of Beatrice and Nomsa's confrontation in the caves is circulated throughout the people of Highlands. The Bapedi tell the story to other "volgies who told the maids and the garden boys, and the children were standing right there in the kitchen, and the children went to tell their mas and their pas and their oumas and their oupas" (266). This description highlights the kitchen as a space of exchange between the different levels of

the social and racial hierarchy, which was first established in the domestic sphere and maintained, in part, through the continued use of black and “coloured” maids in white households. The progress of the story upwards along this hierarchy suggests the instability of fixed categories and, as such, signals the possibility of regression. It was not only the possibility of shared encounters within domestic space, then, but also the participation in speech acts—the exchange of a story—that can potentially destabilise established hierarchies, reaffirming the novel’s interest in narrative itself.

In “Social Cosmology, Religion and Afrikaner Ethnicity” (1994), Johan Kinghorn suggests that a confluence of language and race was at work in official discourses of Afrikaner nationalism too. He argues that one of the most significant contributions made by the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) to the development of Afrikaner identity and Afrikaner nationalism was its reinterpretation of the story of Babel as a creation story. Beginning with the Reverend J.D. Vorster’s influential gloss on the story, the DRC made Babel a constitutive part of Afrikaner cosmology: Vorster’s account understood the division of humanity into separate language groups as the fulfilment of its potential to “form races” (quoted in Kinghorn 398). Vorster’s language conflates biology and culture, confuses “language and lineage” (quoted in Kinghorn 398), so that language purity comes to stand metonymically for racial purity. Kinghorn’s work helps to clarify the importance of claiming Afrikaans as a white man’s language and the disavowal of its inception in slave culture. Indeed, Vorster makes his anxiety about hybridity and miscegenation explicit when he writes that “[f]rom one blood God made the nations of humanity. That is why races can enter into admixture, and it is always possible to *regress* to Babel’ [emphasis added]” (quoted in Kinghorn 399). Echoing the evolutionary logic of scientific racism, Vorster identifies cultural or linguistic admixture, as well as biological miscegenation, as a form of regression, a return to the confusion of Babel, which is the very antithesis of social order.

The disavowal of the hybrid origins of Afrikaans was thus a political move that sought to assert white Afrikaner identity as racially pure. However, Langenhoven's fight to have Afrikaans recognised as an official, and therefore political language, further involved the disavowal of women's contribution to the formation and development of the language. Langenhoven understood women's place to be in the home where their role was to “watch over the cradles of our young, nurse our aged and sick, brighten our homes with cheer and lighten our burdens with sympathy, comfort us in distress and encourage us in adversity, adorn our lives with the sweet influences of affection” (quoted in Vincent 1999 6). He contrasts this description of domestic tranquillity with the “mess of pottage of the hustings” (quoted in Vincent 6), distinguishing the private from the political spheres and relegating women exclusively to the former. Langenhoven's description of domestic space also erases the figure of the domestic servant, refusing to acknowledge the role that slave women played in the development of Afrikaans, and their continued contribution to Afrikaner domesticity.

The Devil's Chimney recuperates the domestic and feminine origins of Afrikaans by rendering oral narration a particularly feminine mode through an emphasis on embodied storytelling and storytelling as an activity shared between women. For example, when Gerda, tired of lip-reading, places her hand on Connie's throat in order to “hear” her tell the story of Beatrice (15), the novel represents story-telling as a physical act.²³ Furthermore, when Connie tells us that “Ma used to say I like to make stories up *but she did it too* [emphasis added]” (165), she suggests that story-telling is somehow a particularly feminine activity, something shared across generations. In light of Langenhoven's attitudes to women—which the novel marks as representative of Afrikaner society—it would seem that white women turned to story-telling when their voices were excluded from the political sphere. In “Not the Magic Talisman: Rethinking Oral Literature in South Africa” (1996), Isabel Hofmeyr argues that “[o]ne of the most

enduring stereotypes of oral literature is that it is primarily women who tell stories” (89)²⁴ and further suggests that the assumption that African women tell specifically fictional stories, primarily to children, is largely a result of how such stories were perceived by European missionaries.²⁵ Hofmeyr further argues that this characterisation of women’s stories as both fictional and traditional obscures women’s agency and “their manipulation of the politics of tradition” (91). While Hofmeyr is referring to the oral traditions of black South Africans, her work points to the ways in which assumptions about oral narratives can obscure the political dimension of the stories that women tell. Similarly, while Landsman’s representation of story-telling as a specifically feminine activity accords with the exclusion of women from the political sphere under Afrikaner nationalism, the stories Connie tells challenge the idea that women’s stories bear no relevance to history or politics.

The idea of story-telling as an activity between women is reinforced when Connie reveals that “[w]hat happened after that is the story you, Gerda, told me a long time ago with your hands and face and everything else” (87). While emphasising, once again, the embodied aspect of oral performance, this quotation also renders Connie’s story-telling a re-telling. Irele associates embodiment and performance with the idea of repetition: the nature of oral literature means that “the faithful reproduction of the text on each occasion of its realization cannot be a norm [...] the principle of orality is essentially one of nonclosure” (36). Thus, the novel’s association of storytelling, embodiment and repetition works to refute a fixed and linear narrative of the Afrikaans language itself, offering as an alternative the multiple tellings and retellings enabled by women’s intergenerational storytelling.

When Connie describes Langenhoven as the “father of the Afrikaans language” (80), she recognises the significant place he holds in the history of Afrikaner identity;

her use of that title also points to the way in which Langenhoven's account of the development of Afrikaans operated as a story of origins for the Afrikaner *volk*. As Hofmeyr notes, the literary production that accompanied the attempt to have Afrikaans recognised as an official language was dominated by historical fiction which constructed "an 'Afrikaner' history which could become a myth of national origin" (109).²⁶ The language's historical origins in the interactions of white settlers with slaves and Khoisan servants threatened the legitimacy of Afrikaans and Afrikaner identity, a legitimacy that was assured—or rather constructed—by the creation of a patriarchal myth of origins. Thus, the kind of oral performance Connie enacts within the novel—however far removed from the tradition of orature that Irele and Julien discuss—offers the potential to reinscribe the role of women and of slaves in the history of Afrikaans. In doing so, the novel points to the processes of cultural appropriation and exchange that underpin Afrikaner culture and whose disavowal was necessary in order to assert white superiority and "racial purity". At the same time, as I will show in the following section, the novel refuses to erase the role white women played in upholding the racial order. In particular, it deploys the conventions of "black peril" narratives in order to highlight the continued circulation and regulatory function of racial stereotypes of sexual behaviour.

Voice and Desire: *The Devil's Chimney* and "Black Peril":

In *State of Peril* (2012), Lucy Graham draws on Judith Butler's work to argue that "black peril" narratives, which she describes as "sensationalized accounts of white women raped by black men" (4), expressed a form of cultural melancholia. In these narratives, "'cross-racial sexual relations have been foreclosed...not just prohibited but foreclosed—in the sense of [being rendered] unthinkable'" (10). Graham's work is attentive to the political dimension of such foreclosures and she argues that the theme of

“protecting the white body from sexual threats became synonymous with safeguarding the purity and health of the white nation” (9).²⁷ In particular, she draws a connection between the perceived sexual threat posed by black men to white women in early twentieth-century “black peril” narratives and white anxieties regarding access to print culture and political rights: “For South Africans around the time of Union [in 1910] the era was one of competing nationalisms and print culture was a racially segregated and complex field that brought into relief all the dilemmas around exclusions from citizenship” (44).²⁸ Thus, “black peril” narratives expressed concerns about literature, nation and sexuality that illustrated the interconnection of these issues in much the same way that the debates around the status of the Afrikaans language—discussed above—did during the same period.²⁹

Significantly, for my purposes here, in her discussion of Francis Bancroft’s novel, *Of Like Passions* (1911), Graham suggests that the intersection of these concerns was articulated in part through the symbolic displacement of “violation [...] upward, from the sex organs to the organs of speech” (51) and, furthermore, that often “one sees in ‘black peril’ texts by white men [...] an emphasis on the suppression of women’s organ’s of speech” (53). Similarly, in a comparison of Bancroft’s novel with the American author, Thomas Dixon’s *The Clansman*, she identifies “a violent spatial intrusion [that] prefigures and provides a metaphor for the actual rape” (51) in both texts. Graham’s reading of Bancroft’s and other novels suggests that the bodily and spatial metaphors for rape deployed in “black peril” literature in twentieth-century South Africa reveal the genre’s underlying concerns with political voice and the space of the nation. *The Devil’s Chimney* is similarly concerned with voice, nation and sexuality and makes use of both the bodily and spatial metaphors Graham identifies in the scene where Beatrice rapes September.

In *The Devil's Chimney*, Beatrice enters Nomsa and September's *pondokkie*

[hut] without permission while they are sleeping, after having an erotic dream. Her act of trespass into their home demonstrates the extent of her authority on the farm and, as the scene unfolds, over the bodies of the labourers. As both a woman and an aggressor, the character of Beatrice disrupts the colonial script of "black peril" and this disruption is further elaborated through the homoerotic element of her sexual encounter with Nomsa and September. The first thing Beatrice does is put "her face close to Nomsa's, her lips right next to Nomsa's ear" (86)—recalling the conventional displacement of violation from the genitalia to the speech organs (Graham 51). As the aggressor, Beatrice occupies a masculine role; however, given that the description is of her lips—rather than her phallic tongue—pressing against Nomsa's ear, it would seem that the novel encodes this moment as homoerotic. Later on, however, "September put his hand over Miss Beatrice's mouth [...] Miss Beatrice felt breasts, and they were Nomsa's and she would have screamed if she could" (88). Here, while September's motive for covering Beatrice's mouth is not entirely clear, the action does suggest that homosexual desire between women of different races is unspeakable. Beatrice wants to scream at the touch of Nomsa's breasts but it is not clear if such a scream would express horror or desire.

Significantly, this is the only moment when September is active in this fantastical scene. Shortly after he covers her mouth, Beatrice is described as scaring September so badly "that his thing went back up inside his body" (89), and it is Beatrice who penetrates September, "pushing herself into" him (89). Here, not only are the gender roles assigned to aggressor and victim reversed but Beatrice is assigned the position of penetrator usually occupied by the male rapist, subverting "black peril" discourse's reliance on hetero-patriarchal identities. September, having climaxed, is described as "like some old man who has been shot in the stomach" (90), testifying to

the violent and coercive nature of the encounter. Even as this scene disrupts the typical image of a slave-master abusing a female slave, the description of Beatrice “on top of September again, twisting her hips and tightening them like someone wringing out a dishcloth” (89) renders her behaviour mundane and domestic, even as the incident is “grinding and sad” (89). The image of the dishcloth serves to connect inter-racial rape to a specifically domestic space, which recalls the forced proximity of slave-holding households.³⁰

As noted earlier, space—and more specifically the space of the nation—is another concern of “black peril” narratives. While Beatrice’s intrusion into Nomsa and September’s home suggests her transgression of boundaries in spatial terms, the blanket under which the three of them subsequently engage in some indefinable form of corporeal intimacy is also described as a “cave” (88). In *The Devil’s Chimney*, the Congo Caves operate as synecdoche of the body³¹ and can, in turn, be read as representing the body of the nation. Like the Marabar caves in E.M. Forster’s *A Passage to India*, the Congo Caves are erotically charged spaces, haunted by the suggestion of sexual violence. At a later point in the novel, when Beatrice is pregnant and Henry has returned to Highlands, the Chapmans take a tour of the Congo Caves. Her return to the caves stirs up Beatrice’s erotic feelings for Mr Jacobs and she “started to take off her clothes” (142). Forced to stop by Henry’s admonitions, Beatrice follows the group “like a blind person” (143). Another woman on the tour, Mevrouw [Madame] van Huyssteen, is also affected by the atmosphere of the caves: when she offers Beatrice her hand as a gesture of support, Beatrice realises the woman is “*poep-scared*” (143). Shortly afterwards she begins “whispering and moaning and suddenly Mr Johnny whispered Sssssh! as if they were in church” (143). Paralysed by fear, Mevrouw van Huyssteen can only whisper “*Bobbejaan* [baboon] to Miss Beatrice” (143) before having a seizure that renders her immobile, “like Lot’s Wife” (144). It is not entirely clear what frightens

Mevrou van Huyssteen, although her use of the word “baboon” as a derogatory term for a black person suggests that once again inter-racial sex is at issue. It also echoes Connie’s fear, expressed in the preface, that there is “a black man hiding in [the caves] somewhere waiting to get me” (7). Yet her comparison to Lot’s wife—punished for turning to look back, perhaps in longing, at the city of Sodom whose name came to stand for unspeakable sexual desires—suggests that what she is afraid of is her *own desire*. Mr Johnny’s attempt to silence her potentially sexual “whispering and moaning” (143), which is associated with the moral authority of the “church”, is thus also an attempt to disavow the possibility that white women desire black men, just as Henry’s “Don’t do that” (143) serves to control Beatrice’s expression of her desire for Mr Jacobs.

The continued influence of “black peril” discourses is suggested by Connie’s account of Pauline’s disappearance from the Cango Caves in 1955. Recounting the story Jack has told her, Connie represents what happened to Pauline in terms of a violent sexual fantasy, in which the “coloured” tour guide, Oom Piet, gives Pauline to the Devil, in exchange for one of his grandchildren having the opportunity to study abroad. The passage describing Jack’s fantasy contains sexually suggestive imagery and is decidedly violent.

When they got to the Devil’s Chimney, Oom Piet made sure the others went ahead of her, squeezing and pushing themselves through the narrow opening.

Pauline didn’t want to go but he forced her, taking out a knife and pushing her into the shaft. She was terrified but he made sure she kept moving. He even put his hand up her dress and cut off her panties with his knife. She was sobbing now, but she kept going. When she squeezed through the Letterbox, she came out into another cave which wasn’t the Ice Chamber, the way it’s supposed to

be. It was all black, and the stalactites and stalagmites were alive. There were huge bats the size of people. They surrounded her and took off her clothes. Then the Devil came in, with his skin and hair on fire. He took Pauline into his arms and she started to burn. He did awful things to her while she was burning, like putting his hand inside her which made her burn on the inside too. Finally she disappeared in a puff of black smoke which stuck to the top of the cave like a piece of skin. (8-9)

This passage highlights the coercive and violent nature of the imagined sexual encounter between Pauline and the Devil, while also making reference to skin and blackness in a way that emphasises the racial subtext of Jack's fantasy.

While "black peril" narratives describe the rape—or threatened rape—of white women by black men, Graham also notes the development of "white peril" narratives in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, that were concerned with sexual relations between white men and black women. These "white peril" narratives were written primarily by white women and were "historically [...] used to argue for legislation against 'miscegenation'" (6) and, according to Graham, were characterised "by a phobic inability to think of inter-racial sex in any other than violent and abased terms" (7). "Peril" narratives, then—whether "black" or "white"—were invested in policing inter-racial sex and the attendant threat of miscegenation. In light of Graham's observations, it is interesting that Connie's voice mediates Jack's fantasy; the idea that men found Pauline attractive leaves her "short of breath" (5) and she tells us that she has "never seen a pretty Coloured woman" (5). Connie, like the women writers Graham discusses, is horrified at the thought of inter-racial desire and miscegenation to the point that she loses her breath and, potentially, her voice, at the thought of it. Yet she is

haunted by Pauline whom she describes as “the ghost of someone else’s maid” (3), and in this respect, Pauline, and all that she represents, can be read as a phantom.

A phantom is a psychoanalytic phenomenon that Nicholas Abraham describes as the objectification “of an unspeakable fact *within the loved one* [emphasis in original]” (Abraham 1987 288). The phantom is not a symptom of the subject’s own unconscious; rather it represents the trauma caused by the thing the loved one cannot say, it is something “unspeakable” (290). Abraham used the concept of the phantom to theorise the inter-generational transmission of family trauma and, while Pauline is not part of Connie’s family, the repressed history of miscegenation within white South African families more broadly suggests that she might function as a social phantom. That is, she does not represent a repressed history of miscegenation in Connie’s own family, but rather the unspeakable possibility of inter-racial desire itself, the thought of which, leaves Connie “short of breath” (5).³²

Significantly, the novel establishes a connection between Pauline and slavery in a number of ways, reinforcing her association with a history of miscegenation within white domestic space. First of all, James C. Armstrong and Nigel A. Worden (1979) include the surname Cupido among a list they describe as “distinctively slavish, and [...] rarely found among whites” (121), which suggests that Pauline has slave heritage. By identifying Pauline as a maid, *The Devil’s Chimney* further contributes to her association with the history of slavery in South Africa: Cape slavery established a gendered division of labour whereby female slaves worked primarily in the house, with male slaves undertaking the majority of agricultural or hard labour. As Jacklyn Cock’s groundbreaking study, *Maids and Madams: Domestic Workers under Apartheid* (1989), shows, the association between female slaves and domestic labour continued to inform the way domestic labourers understood their role in apartheid society.

Using interviews conducted with both domestic servants and their white employers in the Eastern Cape between 1978 and 1979, Cock illuminates the relationship between maids and their madams that formed the cornerstone of white domestic life in South Africa. By attending not only to the working conditions of black and “coloured” domestic workers, but also to the effect that those conditions had on their own families, Cock makes clear that the intersections of gender, race and class “in the situation of black women in South Africa raises important questions regarding both the limits and the possibilities of feminist struggle” (1). Several of the women Cock interviewed used the rhetoric of slavery to characterise their working conditions: “‘I have been a slave all my life’ [...] ‘We are slaves in our own country’” (1).³³ These women recognise a continuity between slavery and the social position of domestic labourers under apartheid. Indeed, in *The Devil’s Chimney*, a logic of exchange similar to that of slavery seems to inform domestic service, as Connie tells us that all her maids “look the same and I call them Lizzie” (43). As well as recalling the practice of renaming slaves, Connie’s actions suggest that these women—all of whom are black or “coloured”—are essentially interchangeable, to be traded one for another.

In *Liberating the Family* (1997), Pamela Scully argues that the continued association between black women and labour after the abolition of slavery did not just contribute to an identification between race and class, but had consequences for gendered identity too. Black women’s labouring bodies were refused entry into a colonial ideal of femininity “which assigned women to a private sphere, and to modest, retiring roles” (42). The denial of this aspect of black women’s gendered identity allowed for the exaggeration of another: their sexuality. Even abolitionist discourse contributed to the sexualisation of the black woman: the portrayal of slave women as “vulnerable to sexual and physical abuse [...] embellished another mythology: that black men and women, but particularly women, were indeed ‘immoral’ and living outside the

bounds of stable families” (Scully 45). Furthermore, Scully argues that sexual violence became a way for white men to reassert control over the bodies of black women they had once dominated through the institution of slavery (356), while the social construction of those women as promiscuous made it difficult for them to prosecute their attackers. In light of Scully’s arguments, Jack’s fantasy of the rape of Pauline can be understood as a desire to reclaim access to and control over the body of the “coloured” woman once guaranteed by slavery.

Just as telling Beatrice’s story is a means for Connie to come to terms with the loss of her child, her narrative of the fantasy of Pauline’s rape allows her to articulate her experience of sexual violence. As she recounts Pauline’s imagined experience, Connie is being forcibly groped by her husband, Jack. This is but one occasion in the text where Connie suggests she has experienced sexual violence at Jack’s hands, although she never describes her experiences in terms of rape. Her fear of sexual violence is instead displaced onto the figure of a black man, lurking in the same caves where Pauline disappeared: “I imagine a black man in there somewhere waiting to get me and hang me up from the ceiling. Maybe Pauline is up there, turned into rock” (7). This image of a menacing black man waiting for her once again recalls the discourse of “black peril”. Connie’s perpetuation of this discourse in the post-apartheid moment demonstrates her own continued racism and suggests the persistent currency of such discourse in the present day. The story Connie constructs about Pauline—informed by Jack’s fantasies—enables Connie to displace her experience of rape in a way that reinforces stereotypes of both white and “coloured” sexual behaviours. The disciplinary function of such stereotypes is further suggested by the novel’s representation of marginal white identities, which will be discussed in the next section.

Borders, Chains and Racial Passing:

The novel's attention to both Jewish and "poor white" populations—marginal elements in the category of whiteness—highlights once again the imbrications of discourses of race and sex in South Africa. Jews and "poor whites" occupy positions at the borders of whiteness and were socially inscribed with the potential to compromise the "purity" of the white race through miscegenation and racial "passing". Elaine K. Ginsberg (1996) describes "passing" as a "transgression of legal and cultural boundaries" (2), an act which "presumes and simultaneously interrogates an essential, inherent identity" (4). For Jewish people in South Africa, the "essential" identity in question is the whiteness which they may, or may not, claim. Similarly, for the "poor white", their socio-economic position threatens their ability to access white privilege and they are consequently perceived as a threat to white supremacy.

Both Shell (2001) and Giliomee (2009) have noted the importance of class and wealth in determining race in colonial South Africa. Given the colony's economic dependence on slave labour, an association between blackness and labour, and blackness and poverty developed, whose corollary was the coupling of whiteness with freedom and wealth. As such, the label "poor white" is almost a contradiction in terms, a category that threatens to contaminate whiteness with both poverty and the stigma of blackness. As Louise Vincent (2000) notes, "[t]he escalating impoverishment of South Africa's rural white population in the years after World War I triggered a rapid exodus to the cities" (61); one result of this rapid urbanisation was a disintegration of older forms of social authority and control, particularly with regards to young women. In "White Working-Class Women and the Invention of Apartheid" (1995), Jonathan Hyslop argues that in the early decades of the twentieth-century, political agitation to prohibit inter-racial marriage exploited anxieties surrounding the morality—and

particularly the sexual morality—of working-class women as a strategy to mobilise support for Afrikaner nationalism: by focusing on “the ‘need’ for mixed marriage legislation, the Malanites were able to strengthen poor white identification with a racially defined identity, thus facilitating their task of Afrikaner ethnic mobilization” (66). The historical scholarship cited here illustrates that what Tiffany Willoughby-Herard (2007) calls the “racialization of poor whites” (492) was inextricable from efforts to reassert patriarchal control over white women, who were “perceived as the most vulnerable element and an entrance point to the white race” (Teppo 224).

In *The Devil’s Chimney*, when Jack discovers that Connie is pregnant and that he will have to marry her, he accuses her family of being “poor whites”, to which Connie replies: “That wasn’t fair of him. My mom and dad are very respectable” (13). By responding to Jack’s accusation with reference to her family’s respectability, Connie implicitly acknowledges the shame attached to the label “poor white”. The possibility that such shame is sexual in nature is suggested by the fact that Jack’s accusation is prompted by Connie’s pregnancy, which happens outside marriage. The association drawn here between particular sexual moralities and practices and specific “racial” or “racialised” identities is also evident in Beatrice’s musings on Jewish identity. Her question: “was the Jew part underneath?” (36), is an obvious reference to the Jewish practice of circumcision, which marks the Jewish body as both sexually and “racially” different.

In *The Roots of Anti-Semitism in South Africa* (1994), Milton Shain traces changing attitudes to Jewish people from the nineteenth-century to the mid-twentieth century. He suggests that, while most Jews in South Africa prior to 1880 were of Anglo-German origin and successfully integrated with “white” society, an influx of Eastern European Jews in the 1880s changed perceptions of Jewish people. Indeed, Shain

identifies “a frequently drawn parallel between Jews and Indians” (32) that evinces the racialisation of Jewish people. Economic factors also contributed to anti-Semitism in South Africa, where “[a]lleged Jewish speculation (and success) was especially irksome given the background of burgeoning poor-whiteism” (57). In *Plumes: Ostrich Feathers, Jews, and a Lost World of Global Commerce* (2008), Sarah Abrevaya Stein notes that Oudtshoorn—where the novel is set—was central to the global feather trade and was also referred to as “the Jerusalem of Africa” (xi), due to its high Jewish population. According to Stein, for “colonial administrators, missionaries and other European settlers [...] Jews’ whiteness was dubious at times: Jews were occasionally spoken of as ‘white niggers’, who would never gain full entry into white colonial society” (47). Stein further argues that the availability of “coloured” labour and government sponsorship of the feather industry enabled the “absorption [of the Jews] into plume commerce and white society” (42-3) in South Africa. The exclusion of “coloured” and black workers from the highest levels of the ostrich feather trade³⁴ created a space for Jewish businessmen, whose success subsequently facilitated their inclusion within white society. The role that economic success played in the incorporation of Jews into the category of whiteness in Oudtshoorn is highlighted by the denial of whiteness to Jewish people in other South African contexts and industries (Stein 43).

The contested nature of Jewish claims to white identity in South Africa is demonstrated in the novel by Beatrice’s reaction to discovering her neighbours, the Jacobs family, are Jewish.

Did the Jews run around with the Hottentots and Bushmen, the Xhosas and Zulus? Or did they come here on ships from the East with their spices and wheelbarrows, the way they jammed up the East End, shouting and being poor? But they were not always so poor, sometimes they were very rich and those were

the ones to worry about, *invisible* and clever, always one step ahead. Mr Jacobs, which Jew was he? Was there garlic in his pockets and a black beard covering his whole face? Or was the Jew part underneath? [emphasis added]. (35-6)

Mr Jacobs might be the “Ostrich King” of Oudtshoorn, but he is also, and more importantly, Jewish. Whatever their origins, Jewish people, according to Beatrice, are definitely not European and, most disturbingly, not always poor. This portrait points to the stereotypical association of Jewish people with commerce and trade even as it identifies their economic success as the means by which they will acquire the *invisibility* of whiteness.

In *The Devil’s Chimney*, the relation of Jewish identity to hegemonic whiteness is presented quite explicitly in terms of boundaries and their transgression, recalling the cultural boundaries crossed in the act of passing. Beatrice’s anger at discovering the Jewish identity of the Jacobs’ family is framed in terms of discomfort at their geographic proximity to her.

Your neighbours aren’t Jews. The Boers are bad enough and so are the Poor Whites but the Jews. That’s asking too much. They belong somewhere else. The night of the walking is spoiled. Ruined by Mr Jacobs and his *tribe* on the other side of the *fence* [emphasis added]. (36)

Beatrice’s description of Jewish people as a “tribe” marks them as racially different; not only are they a separate group, but they are bound together by different social structures. This tribal structure—which in a colonial context would have been understood as “primitive” in comparison to the modern category of nation—places Jews at the bottom of a hierarchical scale of whiteness that moves downwards from English to Boers to “Poor Whites”. This hierarchy is reiterated in the distinction made between Highlands—as Beatrice’s “country” (43)—and the Jacobs’ farm, which is described as a

“Zulu Kingdom” (62), implicitly racialising Jewish identity through association with an African ethnic group.³⁵

The boundary fence between Highlands and the Jacobs’ farm is, at one point in the novel, the subject of a legal dispute between Beatrice and Jacobs. The local magistrate resolves this dispute by deciding that Jacobs, not Beatrice, would have to pay to fix and maintain it: “the magistrate said he [Mr Jacobs] had to build the fence and Miss Beatrice should pay just less than half” (45). The magistrate’s decision causes outcry in the local community, with the male feather traders complaining that Beatrice—who has already transgressed certain boundaries in attempting to fulfil the male role of farmer—is interfering in their affairs. If we read the incident symbolically, with the fence representing the border between the ethnic categories of English and Jewish people—that is, the highest and lowest point along the continuum of whiteness respectively—the magistrate’s decision makes clear that it is the Jewish person who will be made responsible for maintaining that border, and blamed for any breach. By representing ethnic distinctions in terms of spatial boundaries, the novel once again recalls the *plaasroman* tradition, in which land ownership signified racial difference. At the same time, the boundary fence between Highlands and the Jacobs farm proves ineffective in the face of Beatrice’s and Mr Jacobs’s desire for one another.

Connie also makes use of spatial metaphors in the explanations she provides for Pauline’s disappearance. Her narrative of Pauline and her possible whereabouts, detailed in the novel’s prologue, expresses her anxieties about racial passing and miscegenation. Connie describes herself as haunted by Pauline, despite her own doubts as to whether or not Pauline is actually dead. She observes that sometimes, on the tour of the caves, “[t]he non-European tour catches up with the whites and then they have to wait behind those metal chains until the white tour has moved on” (6). She further

speculates that Pauline took advantage of such an occurrence and “slipped through and joined the white group” (6). Connie’s suggestion literalises the metaphoric invisibility of whiteness, allowing Pauline to “disappear”. If “coloured” people can pass as white, the fantasy of racial superiority breaks down. This is another instance where the novel conceives racial boundaries in terms of physical and temporal space: the two groups are separated by the physical barrier of the chains, a precaution should the non-white group *catch up*. The idea of Pauline, a “coloured” woman, catching up with the white group ironically affirms the evolutionary logic that supports the construction of racial boundaries in South Africa. Evolutionary discourse marks “non-white” people as primitive and threatening to white progress; this discursive logic subtends Connie’s fear that the act of “passing” which, in this instance is represented as “catching up”, will prove the distinctions made between them to be a fiction. As a result, for Connie, finding Pauline holds the promise of a return “to the way it was before” (2), to the clarity of the apartheid social order.

A second explanation Connie offers for Pauline’s disappearance is that she didn’t go on the tour at all, but simply left and walked away.

I think she walked back down to the parking lot and got a lift with some Coloured people to the main road. She started walking along the Outeniqua Pass like those Coloured men and women you see walking for miles and miles in the middle of nowhere [...] Sometimes, when I take the dogs out, I see her in the distance with those long thin legs. She turns around and I wave at her but she doesn’t wave back. She just keeps walking. (10)

The association drawn here between—apparently—aimless walking and specifically “coloured” identity recalls the colonial production of nomadic Khoisan people as vagrants. Historically, the mobility of Khoisan—who were later subsumed into the

category “coloured”—and Xhosa peoples posed a threat to the security of the settlers’ labour supply. Thus, before Ordinance 50 of 1828 removed restrictions on the mobility of Khoisan labourers, Ordinance 49 of the same year attempted “to bring blacks roaming about in the frontier zone under control and transform some into farm laborers” (Giliomee 2009 148). This involved the introduction of a pass system that Ordinance 50 would later remove, at least for the Khoisan population. These measures suggest the ideological and political conflict between the Afrikaner and British elements of the South African colony, at the time under British control. The freedoms granted under Ordinance 50 would later be revoked under the 1834 Vagrancy Ordinance, which once again inscribed the mobility of Khoisan, black Africans and freed slaves as a threat to the continued prosperity of the colonial economy.

In *Bringing the Empire Home* (2004), Zine Magubane argues that nineteenth-century British discourses regarding the problem of the metropolitan urban poor used images of Arabic and Khoisan nomads to conjure images of unproductive mobility and the dangers it represented to society (50). Magubane identifies the 1834 Cape Vagrancy Ordinance as one of the first instances of this comparison between the British urban poor and the Khoisan (51): the act, which was introduced in the same year that the process of slave emancipation began in South Africa, “was intended to control the movements of Khoikhoi servants and freed slaves” (51). This legislation thus attempted to restrict the freedoms available to newly emancipated slaves and Khoisan labourers; one effect of the measure “was to outlaw traditional means of obtaining economic subsistence” (51), thus perpetuating the forms of bonded labour on which colonial settlers relied. The ordinance also created the new label “vagrant” for the Khoisan and ex-slaves, which, as Magubane notes, carried connotations of criminality and disease.³⁶

Vagrancy thus became a means of identifying those forms of labour which did not contribute to the colonial economy with crime, disease and degeneration. Therefore,

Connie's depiction of Pauline and "coloured" people more generally as endlessly and aimlessly walking, reiterates colonial stereotypes of non-Europeans as unproductive and dangerous. That such stereotypes are applied to "coloured" people specifically—that is, to those of "mixed" racial heritage—suggests the metonymic construction of "miscegenation" as similarly unproductive and, potentially, regressive. The social construction of inter-racial sexual relations as threatening to white identity and the colonial social order is suggested by the novel's invocation of the biblical tale of the Fall, through which female sexuality is framed.

Female Sexuality and the Fall:

According to J.M. Coetzee (1988), the myth of Eden could never be transplanted to South Africa because, for the European settlers, "Africa was not a new world" (2). *The Devil's Chimney* does, however, engage with the story of Adam and Eve in one crucial respect: sin, original or otherwise, is attributed specifically to women. For Sander Gilman (1985b), man's fall from grace is always associated with female sexuality: "The Fall stems from the sexuality introduced into Eden and is proven by the pains that attend every labour. But also proving the Fall by a necessary, *eternal repetition* of it is the regular descent into degeneracy of women [emphasis added]" (203). Gilman's attention to the temporal dimension of the Fall from Grace highlights the way women's bodies are continually inscribed with the shame of Eve's act of trespass and, as a result, are marked as anachronous.

Both Beatrice and Connie suffer a physical fall just before they discover they are pregnant, literalising the metaphoric Fall of Eve (96-7; 12). Beatrice also recalls her sexual encounter with Nomsa and September as "the morning in the *pondokkie* where she *fell* onto the ground with him and Nomsa [emphasis added]" (170). These physical

falls precipitate moments of realisation for both women, as they are faced with the consequences of acting on their transgressive desires. Connie is relieved, and indeed excited, that a “shotgun” (12) wedding will resolve the problem of her pregnancy, the alternative being to give the child up for adoption. Jack, on the other hand “was mad as a snake. He wasn’t planning on getting married to a Poor White” (13). Jack’s reaction suggests that Connie’s pregnancy and their subsequent marriage also represents a fall in his social status. In this instance, the female body is that which both marks and potentially enables the breach of, the borders of identity, whether racial or class-based.

The social implications of Beatrice’s pregnancy are made clear when she contemplates the possibility that her child was fathered by September, rather than Mr Jacobs; the memory of her sexual encounter with Nomsa and September has to be repressed in order to believe that Jacobs is the father of her child.

It was on the other side of her mind, in the part where the earth is yours and the fullness thereof. Where you can eat from every tree and nothing makes you sick. But that is also the loud side, where underneath the waves are full and you can feel the beginning of the storm that will tear down the sky [...] She could only think of Mr Jacobs, because he was like a house that was safe. He walked through her dreams every night checking on all the locks and shutters. (170)

Here, Beatrice remembers her *ménage-a-trois* with Nomsa and September not as a coercive imposition of her desire onto her labourers, but as an Edenic fantasy of uninhibited desire that “never makes you sick”.³⁷ At the same time, she recognises that such desire has the potential to “tear down the sky” of the colonial order. Her encounter with Mr Jacobs, on the other hand, is compatible with security and the domestic order, signified by his comparison to a house. The implication here is that inter-racial sex and

the attendant possibility of miscegenation poses a threat to the South African social order.

As well as framing women's sexuality through the biblical tale of the Fall, *The Devil's Chimney* alludes to the story of Eden through frequent reference to snakes—associating them particularly with male authority and violence.³⁸ Given that Eve was tempted by a snake, the novel's representation of male authority in these terms subtly undermines the perception that women's sexuality alone threatens the social order. The phallic symbolism of the snake is emphasised in the novel and a connection is also made, in the case of Henry, between snakes and *sjamboks*, a rhinoceros hide whip and potent symbol of slavery.

In the novel, both the snake and the whip operate as interchangeable symbols of patriarchal power. On an expedition to round up the ostriches for plucking, Henry plays with his whip, using it to catch vultures around the neck and dragging them to the ground, “laughing his head off” (178). The cruelty Henry displays here gradually intensifies over the course of the novel, as he attempts to assert his authority over Beatrice and September; he is determined to pluck the ostriches to finance his return to England, despite their protests that it is too cold and the birds will die. After an argument about her presence at the plucking, Beatrice declares to him, “It's my farm, you know. It's mine and not yours. My father's money” (188). In this instance, Beatrice wins and accompanies Henry to the plucking yard but not before he reminds her that “You're my wife” (188) and “his eyes try [...] to point holes in Miss Beatrice's heart, the *sjambok* tucked into his belt like a snake” (188). Here, the *sjambok* represents the patriarchal power that Beatrice undermines by claiming ownership of the farm, while its comparison to a snake turns it into a symbol of violent male power.

While Beatrice successfully defies Henry, September is less fortunate. His death at Henry's hands is compared to that of the vulture Henry had killed earlier in the novel in a number of ways, highlighting the non-human status of "coloured" labourers in the eyes of their white employers. Even before his cruel toying with the vultures on the veld, Henry had "made fake wings from one of the bunches [of ostrich feathers] and held it against September's back. Fly away, my birdie, he sang" (115). A few days later, having plucked all the ostriches, Henry and September are alone in the sorting shed when Henry begins to play with his *sjambok*. "It wasn't long before the *sjambok* curled around September's ankle like a snake, and September fell down" (195). A violent struggle ensues which ends in September's death, an event indistinguishable from that of the vulture in Henry's mind: "When he wrapped the tail of the *sjambok* around September's neck all he saw was that fat old bird, too heavy to get off the ground. The sound of the neck breaking was just the same" (195-6). Speculating about the cause of the fight between Henry and September, Connie suggests that September "told Mr Henry about the dream that wasn't a dream, in the *pondokkie* [hut] in the morning" (194), thus revealing the possibility that he might be the father of Beatrice's child. Indeed, the description of September's death—he "*fell* down [emphasis added]" (195)—reiterates the language of the Fall that the novel associates with illicit sexuality. The possibility that September is the father of Beatrice's child is a threat to Henry's patriarchal authority in its most literal sense as well as to the racial hierarchy. Thus, by killing September with a whip, Henry seeks to both reassert his masculinity and his authority and to disavow the possibility of miscegenation.

Henry is not entirely without remorse, however, and the day after September's death he must struggle to suppress the memory of what he has done and of September's body "that was no bigger than a dog's" (202). For Henry, September's death has left "a hole in the air" (202). On his return to the feather sorting shed the next day, he was

overcome by nausea and “dug a hole in the ground with his hands and bent over it, feeling everything that was broken and skew coming up his throat like a dirty old river.

When he was finished, he covered up the hole with sand” (202). Here, the “hole” caused by September’s death is filled with Henry’s grief and remorse and covered over; similarly “[w]hen thoughts of September came into his head, he thought, April. Oh, to be in April” (201). Henry’s confusion of September-the-man with September-the-month serves to erase September’s subjectivity, just as the original practice of naming slaves after the month of their purchase denied their humanity and severed their natal ties.

Landsman’s play on language here highlights the way slavery has been subsumed into and made an indistinguishable part of the “natural order” of South African society. By drawing attention to the underlying economic and social structures of settler society, *The Devil’s Chimney* rejects what Sharae Deckard (2010) calls the “ideology of paradise as the labor-free acquisition of capital” (8),³⁹ highlighting, in the process, the imbrications of race, gender and class in South African identities. This is particularly evident in the novel’s depiction of motherhood and maternal labour, which, at Highlands, is inextricable from the ostrich trade.

Motherhood, Labour and Blame:

While Gilman’s gloss on paradise discourse attends to the connection between female sexuality and sin, Sharae Deckard (2010) notes that paradise discourse is concerned not only with sexuality but also labour. She argues that paradise discourse has a “tendency to fluctuate between the promise of labor-free delight—*paradise*, garden, goldland—and the ‘infernal’ shadow of its repressed material realities—*anti-paradise*, wasteland, depraved Eden” (3). Landsman’s attention to the intersection of economy and desire and the racialisation of maternal labour in *The Devil’s Chimney*

illustrates this dimension of the paradise myth. In doing so, the novel highlights the need for the ideology of motherhood to be interrogated and challenges the construction of motherhood as a “natural” site of feminist solidarity. While black women bear the physical burden of caring for children—the children of their white employers as well as their own—white women enjoy the symbolic value attributed to motherhood in patriarchal societies, a possibility denied to black women through the continued devaluation of the black family. In attending to the intersection between economics and reproduction, *The Devil’s Chimney* asserts the need to reclaim the affective dimension of motherhood and refuse the political appropriation of biological reproduction.

The Devil’s Chimney consistently points to the entanglement of systems of production, reproduction and consumption within the colonial economy. This is achieved in large part by the recurring comparisons made between Beatrice and the ostriches at Highlands. Her long neck and shorn head enable a physical comparison and just as the prettiest birds are branded with a star (22), so Beatrice is similarly marked with a star-shaped scar on her knee (69). The comparison between Beatrice and the ostriches situates her within the network of exchange that is the feather market, but Beatrice struggles against being the mere object of exchange and attempts to assert her agency by becoming the “Queen Bee”, rival to the “Ostrich King” Jacobs.⁴⁰ However, while farming provides Beatrice with the opportunity to overcome her status as an object of exchange, the success of Highlands continues to depend on the labour of her black and “coloured” employees.

Significantly, within the symbolic economy of Landsman’s text, the black woman’s body is identified, not only with the domestic work of the maid, but also the labour of reproduction, in all its forms. For example, on ostrich farms, “hotnot” women act as “human stepmothers” (50) for ostrich chicks, and are described sitting on ostrich

eggs until they are ready to hatch. This type of work recalls and exaggerates the appropriation of black women's bodies by white households through the role of the wet-nurse and the nanny. The metonymic slippage between economic production and biological reproduction is made most explicit in Beatrice's pun on the word "labour". Beatrice's description of childbirth evokes a mechanical or industrialised process, reinforcing the association between economics and reproduction: "Her belly was clenching like a giant fist and with it came the factory feeling that used to be in her head. But this time the machine was in her middle" (208). The entanglement of economic and reproductive labour is later complicated by race, when Beatrice's describes herself "working so hard, *like some slave man* in the bottom of a ship [emphasis added]" (224). Beatrice's reference to slavery suggests that, for some women, the work of pregnancy and mothering is unwelcome and not something they enter into freely. Her metaphor relies, however, on an erasure of the work that black women have historically performed in supporting white families in rural contexts in South Africa. Nomsa attests to the central role of the black woman in the care of white children when she recalls "all the white noses and bums she had wiped, long lines of them, so many that they were like guavas in a tree going *vrot* [rotten]" (242), while her own children live with relatives on a nearby farm. Indeed, it is Nomsa who is present to help Beatrice during her labour. The relationship established between the two women at this point is "an *old story* [emphasis added]" (173), according to Beatrice: "I'm collapsing like someone's stupid old tent. You come in and pitch it all over again" (173). Landsman's novel thus suggests the historical continuity of the key role that black female servants play in reproducing the institution of white motherhood in South Africa.

As discussed earlier, black women continued to be viewed differently to their white counterparts after the abolition of slavery. Their exemption from the law of coverture (Scully 86)—which denied married women the right to form contracts,

including employment contracts—also established an ambivalent relationship between black women and the gender ideology emerging in the nineteenth-century Cape Colony (Scully 42). Black women’s labouring bodies were refused entry into an ideal of femininity “assigned women to a private sphere, and to modest, retiring roles” (42); instead their relationship to the domestic sphere was largely understood in terms of their labour in white households.⁴¹ This challenge to black women’s gender identity persisted into the apartheid era, with a number of domestic workers complaining that “Because you are black she [the white employer] does not think that you are a woman” (Cock 1989 96). As noted earlier, Pamela Scully (1997) has argued that the denial of this aspect of black women’s gendered identity allowed for the exaggeration of their sexuality which, in turn, reinforced their perceived marginalisation with regard to the domestic sphere except in their capacity as maids in white households.

The continued construction of black women as promiscuous and immoral in the apartheid era is suggested in the novel when Connie’s mother threatens to send her to the Magdalena Tehuis if she gets herself pregnant: “That’s where they make the girls wear maids’ dresses and scrub the floors. It’s run by the Dutch Reformed Church. You stay there until your baby is born and then they give your baby away. That’s when you can come home” (12). In this scenario, the maid’s uniform is a sartorial representation of shame⁴² and sexual immorality that is accompanied by, or results in an exclusion from motherhood, as these women are forced to give their children up for adoption. The connection made here between the maid and sex outside marriage implies black and “coloured” promiscuity and forms an association between non-white identity and illegitimacy. In *The Devil’s Chimney*, black women bear the material and symbolic burden of maternal labour that refutes the myth of paradise as “the labor-free acquisition of capital” (Deckard 8) which, in turn, subtended European colonialism. Not only do black women attend to the physical work of rearing children—and ostrich chicks—in

the novel, but their bodies also signify shame; the shame of desire, of illegitimacy and of miscegenation. Despite the text's attention to the social symbolism attached to black women's bodies, however, it is Beatrice, a white woman, who becomes a figure of blame in Connie's narrative.

The affinity Connie feels towards Beatrice's throughout the novel is rooted in their shared trauma of losing a child. However, towards the end of her narrative, Connie seeks to distinguish her experience from Beatrice's, who "lost her baby as if she was a sock or a hanky" (262) whereas Connie "didn't even have [...] a minute with the baby which they say is like being anointed with oil the way the people get in the bible when things are going well" (262). Connie's reference to the Bible here obliquely recalls the discourse of paradise; unlike Connie, who never had the opportunity to be "anointed with oil", to enter paradise, Beatrice is depicted as carelessly throwing away her chance to be happy. However, according to Connie, the consequences of Beatrice's actions extend beyond the loss of her daughter and September's death to encompass the feather market crash and the end of apartheid.

I'm surprised people don't blame Miss Beatrice for what's happening in this country now but maybe they have forgotten. Lots of things happened on the day she lost Precious in the Congo Caves, screaming in the middle of all those ostrich feathers, and everybody said at the time that she was the one whose fault it was. Not just the child, but Oudtshoorn and Mr. Henry and the whole feather business. (246)

Beatrice's act of inter-racial sex and the "loss" of her daughter demonstrate her failure with regard to social ideals of white women's sexuality and motherhood. This failure, in turn, is blamed for the devastation wreaked on Oudtshoorn by the collapse of the feather trade, supporting, however tentatively, the social construction of inter-racial desire as

diabolical and destructive. Furthermore, by blaming Beatrice for “what’s happening in this country *now* [emphasis added]” (246), Connie recapitulates the biblical logic of the Fall which attributes man’s expulsion from Eden to Eve and thus identifies woman as the ultimate figure of blame.

I have argued that Connie’s desire to find Pauline and “go back to the way it was before” (2) is also a desire to return to the security of the apartheid social order in the face of the uncertain future brought about by the advent of democracy in South Africa. Indeed, the novel figures that uncertainty in the form of the loss or death of children around which the novel revolves: Beatrice’s daughter, Precious, and Connie’s son.

While the novel is careful to acknowledge the emotional trauma of both of these losses, their symbolic significance in the narrative cannot be overlooked. Beatrice’s “mixed-race” daughter figures a threat to the myth of racial purity that supported white supremacy in South Africa and which would find its fullest expression in the policies of the apartheid state. When Nomsa takes Precious and places her in the care of her *ouma*, then, she unwittingly enables the perpetuation of discourses regarding white racial purity.⁴³ Thus, Beatrice’s separation from her daughter signals the prohibition of inter-racial love and inter-racial families in the new state—a prohibition articulated through the *plaasroman* and “black peril” discourses. Indeed the final image of her, spending the rest of her days behind the wall that “sprang up in front of the house at Highlands” (267) in 1915 with only Nomsa for company, suggests that the threat she posed has been contained⁴⁴ and the only inter-racial relationship sanctioned by society is that between a white woman and her maid

Similarly, given the allegorical relationship between the family and the nation, the death of Connie’s child, whose sex she does not learn until the final pages of the novel, signals a loss of certainty about the future her child represented. Connie’s grief,

furthermore, mires her in her memories and in the past, so much so that she does not realise she has aged and continues to think of herself as an eighteen-year old girl. She is thus rendered an anachronous figure with an uncertain relationship to the nation's future; her inability to have more children suggests that genealogical claims to belonging have been foreclosed, both for her individually and for society more generally. Connie is motivated to change by her sister Gerda's confession about the fate of her son which, in turn is connected to the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The next section will discuss the significance of Gerda's confession and its relationship to the TRC, which will be read as part of the novel's broader engagement with, and revision of, South African history.

History and the TRC:

As previously noted, *The Devil's Chimney* begins with Connie's account of the disappearance of a "coloured" woman, Pauline Cupido, from the Cango Caves in 1955. Like Beatrice's arrival in 1910—the year of the Act of Union—Pauline's disappearance is associated with a specific historical moment—the adoption of the Freedom Charter. By connecting each woman's story to a moment of political significance, Landsman's novel focuses on the place of women in South African history and, in doing so, challenges the orthodox account of that history. For instance, although she only begins to narrate Beatrice's story in 1995, prompted by a visit to the Oudtshoorn museum with her sister Gerda, Connie tells us that ever since Pauline's disappearance, she has "been trying to remember things" (1). Connie's remembrances, then, stretch from the beginning to the end of the twentieth-century, exceeding the temporal framework of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which was mandated to investigate apartheid era crimes committed between 1960 and 1994. The novel thus provides a

longer process of historical recovery than that sanctioned by official discourses of nation building, one that is deeply invested in the recovery of women's experiences.

The stories of these women, in turn, qualify the narrative of progress from apartheid to democracy by pointing to instances of repetition and continuity that suggest the ongoing influence of colonial and apartheid social structures.

The TRC played a central role in South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy, offering a forum for people to tell their stories of life under apartheid, for the citizens of South Africa to express grief and contrition and, in this way, to contribute to the national project of reconciliation. The Commission was established by the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, No 34 of 1995, which deemed it "necessary to establish the truth in relation to past events as well as the motives for and circumstances in which gross violations of human rights have occurred, and to make the findings known in order to *prevent a repetition of such acts in future* [emphasis added]" (TRC website).⁴⁵ Thus, even as it self-consciously established four categories of truth to be investigated,⁴⁶ the Commission sought to establish the truth, or at least *a* truth, about apartheid in order to consign it to the past, where it would offer no threat to the present. The desire to demarcate the past from the present underpins nationalist narratives of development, in which time is understood as linear and one-directional, and in which the future represents progress and the past, regression and degeneration.

However, as Valerie Rohy (2009) has demonstrated in *Anachronism and its Others*, narratives of national progress rely on, even as they disavow, figures of anachronism. For Rohy, anachronism is that which disrupts the fantasy of linear time, and can include anything "from backwardness to prematurity, regression to anticipation, the 'primitive' to the future perfect" (xiv). For Rohy, anachronism is figured by abject subjects in American literature, including, for example, black and homosexual subjects

who threaten a future characterised as white and heterosexual. Such a future relies on what Lee Edelman (2004) has called the ideology of reproductive futurity, which signifies the future in the image of the child and which requires the symbolic appropriation of the reproductive capacity of women for its own reproduction and transmission. While the future which the TRC conceived for South Africa in the ideal of the “rainbow nation” was multi-cultural⁴⁷ rather than white, it too made use of the symbolic currency of motherhood. Indeed, as discussed in Chapter One, a number of critics⁴⁸ have noted that the TRC proceedings emphasised women’s roles as mothers in a way that reinforced existing gender relations. Landsman’s novel, on the other hand, seeks to disrupt stereotypical gender relations, exposing the social control of women’s sexuality as a constitutive element in the racial order that the democratic state sought to overturn. In doing so, the novel points to the possibility that narratives of the new nation—such as that produced by the TRC—might reproduce forms of regulation that support, rather than challenge, the idea of race itself.

The “newness” of the nation itself is called into question in the novel by the coincidence of Beatrice’s arrival in South Africa in 1910 with the Act of Union of South Africa, a piece of legislation that enabled political reconciliation between the Afrikaners and the British in the wake of the Anglo-Boer war. The Act thus represents a version of reconciliation that entailed the consolidation of white colonial hegemony, a version very much at odds with the TRC’s multi-cultural mandate. Connie tells us that Beatrice and Henry were “real English people straight from England, not the ones you get nowadays, *Roinekke* and *Boers* mixed up together” (16).⁴⁹ This comment acknowledges that the consolidation of white political power in colonial South Africa relied on the restriction of inter-racial sex—with the Boers and British inter-marrying to maintain their “white” identity, just as the 1950 Immorality Act sought to legally enforce the “racial purity” that formed the foundation of apartheid policy. At the same time, Connie’s remark also

inscribes another history of “mixing” that subtly undermines the myth of a “pure” Afrikaner *volk*. Situating Beatrice’s story within the context of the Act of Union thus allows the novel to suggest the limitations of political reconciliation, even as it acknowledges the possibility of intra-mural rapprochement.

The adoption of the Freedom Charter is another moment of historical significance alluded to in the novel. Adopted by the African National Congress (ANC) in 1955, the Freedom Charter was to be pivotal in shaping anti-apartheid resistance and advocated “a democratic state, based on the will of all the people [...] without distinction of colour, race, sex or belief” (1955). Yet the disappearance of Pauline Cupido, a “coloured” woman in that same year is suggestive of the potential problems with the Charter’s use of a binary opposition between black and white. In “The Freedom Charter and Ethnicity” (1989), A.J.G.M. Sanders argues that the charter did make provision for the recognition of ethnic identities, particularly in terms of language and culture, but I would suggest that by subsuming the heterogeneity of “coloured” identities into the category of “Black”—however politically inclusive that category might be—the charter foreclosed on the potential for “coloured” identity to destabilise the very notion of race. Given that the history of “coloured” identity in South Africa evinces the constructedness of “race” and the interrelations between different population groups, “coloured” identity is the point at which the fantasy of race is most likely to fail.⁵⁰ In *The Devil’s Chimney*, Pauline disappears in the same year that the charter was adopted, suggesting the possible erasure of “coloured” identities from public and political discourses. It suggests, too, the loss of an opportunity to interrogate the language and fantasy of “race”, rather than recapitulating it. Around the time of Pauline’s disappearance, Connie “started to wonder what it would be like if [she] disappeared suddenly like that, or died” (1). Just as Pauline disappears when the Freedom Charter erases “coloured” identity from the political landscape of the anti-apartheid struggle, so

Connie's fear of disappearing can be read as an unconscious anxiety about the political place of white South Africans.

While both Beatrice and Pauline's stories are associated with significant moments in South Africa's political past, Connie lives in the nation's present, a time dominated by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It is through Connie's relationship with her sister, Gerda, that the role and effectiveness of the TRC is most directly addressed in the novel. As already noted, Connie uses Beatrice's story as a means of mediating her own traumatic experiences and this process is, to some degree, self-conscious. For example, when Gerda asks Connie about Beatrice, Connie responds: "What is Miss Beatrice up to? [...] I'm fine, I say" (80). Connie's use of "I" suggests the degree to which she uses Beatrice's story to articulate her own. Yet, when she attempts to talk about the traumatic loss of Precious, Beatrice's daughter, and the death of her own child, Gerda tries to take control of the story. Bringing Connie home from the hospital, where she has been admitted for alcohol poisoning, Gerda gives Connie a pile of newspapers "showing me this thing called the Truth Commission" (247), but Connie just wants "to finish *my* story [emphasis added]" (247).⁵¹ Here, Connie's desire to finish her story is positioned antagonistically to the work of the TRC. Gerda, however, insists that she listen and confesses that Connie's baby did not die at birth but, rather, was given into Gerda's care by their mother, where he later died.

Trying to explain what happened to Connie's child, Gerda draws a series of images on the wall.

There's a stick-lady, with a baby, and then she draws a bigger stick lady and rubs out the first baby. She gives a baby to the big stick-lady and then she draws a third stick-person. The third one has no ears. My heart freezes all over again

I know what she's going to do. I can finish the drawing myself. The big stick-lady gives the baby to the one without ears. I take the pencil myself and draw ears that look like hooks. The ears equal the baby.

The big stick-lady feels better now. The other two have both lost something.

They're equal. (248)

Gerda's drawing illustrates the logic underlying her mother's decision to give Connie's baby to her; she attempted to compensate for Gerda's disability (her deafness) by giving her a child. However, the repeated use of the term "equal" in this passage suggests that such logic has a broader significance for post-apartheid South African society. As the language of the Freedom Charter indicates, the goal anti-apartheid struggle was to undo the racial hierarchies established in the colonial period and reified under apartheid. Yet, in this brief scene, Connie articulates an anxiety about the possibility that racial "equality" might be achieved through dispossession—most likely the political dispossession of white South Africans. The fact that Connie can only conceive the end of apartheid in terms of her own dispossession suggests her continued emotional investment in the racial hierarchy.

Significantly, after Gerda's confession Connie returns to the episode in the caves where Beatrice and Nomsa fight over Precious, this time considering the incident from Nomsa's perspective, rather than Beatrice's. This retelling assigns a motive to Nomsa's actions, making her appear rational and intelligent, rather than crazed and superstitious; Connie explains that she was searching for the "child of [her] husband" (268), trying to save Precious from Beatrice's "clutching hands and that chicken head" (268). By positioning this sequence after Gerda's confession, Landsman once again emphasises the role that narrative plays in Connie's attempts to process her personal trauma. Given that Gerda's admission prompts Connie's re-evaluation of her child's death and her

subsequent rapprochement with Jack, the novel does not dismiss the TRC and its quest for truth entirely. However, the “truth” alone cannot enable reconciliation; that work must be supplemented by the imaginative work of fiction. At the same time, as I have demonstrated, the novel acknowledges the way that narrative modes and language itself are imbued with historical relations of power in a way that requires careful negotiation. In the novel’s concluding paragraph, Landsman tentatively suggests that engaging with the past—particularly elements of history that had previously been repressed—in imaginative ways can allow for new forms of inter-racial relations.

Conclusion: Learning to Swim:

The novel ends on an ambivalent note: Jack’s revelation that their child was a boy—something he previously refused to tell Connie—enables a moment of shared grief between husband and wife that suggests the possibility of a happier future. However, Jack remains critical of Connie and scoffs when she expresses, in the novel’s final paragraphs, a desire to learn to swim. While Shane Graham (2009) argues that this desire to learn to swim “is too trite to be considered a serious engagement with the deep crisis of memory and forgetting that the novel renders so powerfully” (149), I would suggest that Connie’s new found interest in the sea represents a possible shift away from the land and the histories embedded within it. As Connie puts it: “I’m not sure if the *koppies* and bushes are for me anymore” (276). Connie’s desire to move away from the “*koppies* and bushes” (276) and swim in the sea also suggests her potential openness to new ways of conceiving the nation and her own identity, which has, throughout the novel, been firmly rooted in the landscape and legends of the Karoo. She tells us that “the beach in Cape Town [is] like Seal Island with all the black people lying down in the sun” (276). Even as her casual perpetuation of racist stereotypes—evident in her use

of animal imagery—suggests her continued investment in racist values, her words here inscribe the space of the beach with the possibility of relating with black people in a way that she hasn't before. Furthermore, Connie's choice of Cape Town beach is interesting because of its particular association with the history of slavery in South Africa.

That history is an implicit presence in the stories Connie tells, central to the social order that emerged in the colonial period and that was consolidated under apartheid. Under slavery, domestic space became the site of cross-cultural exchange and appropriation epitomised by the development of the creole language, Afrikaans. Such inter-racial relationships were later disavowed by white South Africans, whose claim to the land rested on their exclusive ability to make it fruitful, a claim articulated through the *plaasroman*. Similarly, "black peril" discourses represented inter-racial desire as inevitably violent and destructive, threatening both white "racial purity" and white political dominance. The history of slavery that emerges insistently in Connie's stories makes visible the processes of cultural exchange that formed the basis of white identity in the colonial era. Landsman's brief reference to the sea at the end of the novel also recalls the oceanic slave trade and South Africa's place within older transnational networks and it draws attention to a history that is not dependent on the bounded category of the nation. Connie's newfound interest in the sea might thus encode the possibility of telling new stories, remembering other histories and reimagining South African identity in a more fluid and inclusive way. At the same time, the novel can only point to this possibility, not guarantee its success. The image of the beach figures the border between the land and the sea, between the nation and the world beyond it; it is a liminal space in which Connie may, or may not, change. Yet even as Landsman points to the possibility of overcoming the kinds of social regulation implemented under colonialism and apartheid, the invocation of global networks of capital through the

image of the sea points to the ways in which even the potential fluidity of post-apartheid identities might be subject to new forms of regulation.

Despite the novel's ultimate ambivalence about South Africa's transition to democracy, *The Devil's Chimney* asserts the significant role literature can play in coming to terms with the changes wrought by the end of apartheid. Like Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*, *The Devil's Chimney* identifies sexuality as a key site for re-conceiving identity in post-apartheid South Africa. Landsman's novel demonstrates the degree to which the production of whiteness in South Africa relied on the disavowal of inter-racial relationships that were the inevitable result of a slave-holding society, the history of which constantly if unconsciously emerges in Connie's narratives. However, as I will argue in the next chapter, which considers the relationship between sexuality and citizenship in Rayda Jacobs' *The Slave Book* (1998), the recuperation of the history of slavery is not automatically a liberatory or progressive gesture.

Chapter Three:

“Coloured” Identity and Citizenship in Rayda Jacobs’s Historical Fiction

Rayda Jacobs's first novel, *Eyes of the Sky* (1996), won the Charles Bosman Prize for English fiction and her subsequent work—particularly her second novel, *The Slave Book* (1998)¹—has garnered critical attention for its frank engagement with the history of slavery and representations of Muslim life at the Cape. For instance, Pumla Dineo Gqola (2001) celebrates Jacobs's “*active participation in the construction of a historical memory [emphasis in original]*” (47), even as she acknowledges that representations of race in her work are, at times, problematic. Furthermore, Gabeba Baderoon (2009) reads the kitchen in *The Slave Book* as a site for the maintenance and transmission of culinary—and therefore cultural—traditions for female slaves and, potentially, as a site of limited resistance (99-101). While acknowledging the value of Jacobs's work for scholars of “coloured” and Muslim identities in South Africa, this chapter aims to extend the critique of her work to include an interrogation of the sexual politics of *The Slave Book* in light of contemporary claims to citizenship in post-apartheid South Africa. The chapter will focus primarily on *The Slave Book*, while also touching briefly on *Eyes of the Sky* (1998) and *Sachs Street* (2001), which together form a loose trilogy covering the period from the late eighteenth-century to the election of the ANC in 1994.

Eyes of the Sky is set in the late eighteenth-century in the Hantam, an area of the Northern Cape where the Kloots, an Afrikaner family, have a farm. The novel's interest in the relations between Afrikaners and the Khoisan is focalized through the romantic relationship between Roeloff Kloot and Zokho, a young San girl who is captured in a retaliatory raid after members of her tribe steal sheep from the Kloot's farm. Roeloff's sympathy for the Khoisan, already suggested by his friendship with the old San hunter Twa, is confirmed when he helps Zokho to escape and return to her tribe. When Roeloff himself is later forced off the farm by his jealous brother, he is reunited with Zokho and the two begin a romantic relationship. Given that Zokho leaves her tribe to be with

Roeloff, who has already been banished from the family farm, Jacobs's first novel positions inter-racial love outside social and familial structures. The relationship ultimately fails when Roeloff refuses to marry Zokho. In an act of revenge, Zokho abandons their son Harman to the elements and walks out into the veld alone, where she is later killed by lions. Roeloff subsequently marries Neeltje, the daughter of an Afrikaner farmer with whom he has found work, and is reconciled with his family, enabling Harman to grow up as a white man.

The Slave Book is set in the 1830s and begins when Harman, like his father, is forced off the family farm, this time for his own safety. Having shot at a neighbour while defending a group of San from an Afrikaner raid, he travels to Cape Town where his brother Martinus is a landdrost [magistrate], to find work. Harman's life seems set to follow the same trajectory as his father's when he falls in love with his employer's slave, Somiela; however, the novel moves the possibilities of inter-racial romance beyond the illicit when Harman and Somiela marry. Given that the novel is set in the 1830s, when the emancipation of the slaves was imminent, *The Slave Book* ties marriage to freedom, as evinced in Somiela's early release from enslavement through her marriage to Harman.² However, the final instalment of the trilogy, *Sachs Street*, disrupts this connection between marriage and freedom when Khadidja—a Muslim woman and distant descendant of Harman and Somiela—begins her journey of self-discovery by divorcing her husband. Following an abusive relationship with a white Christian man named Storm, with whom she conceives a child, Khadidja ultimately identifies religious compatibility as the best foundation for a romantic relationship, suggesting a conservative displacement of racial segregationism into a religious idiom.

The Slave Book's attention to the social transformation wrought by the emancipation of the slaves in the early nineteenth-century, and its particular concern

with “coloured” identities, usefully lends itself to a consideration of the reassessment of “coloured” identities in the post-apartheid era. Reading the novel’s marriage plot as a narrative of progress, this chapter will consider *The Slave Book*’s engagement with the African-American slave narrative tradition, both in terms of its own invocation of that tradition and its sexual politics. Marriage, in the novel, is a device through which to negotiate legitimacy in the wake of slave emancipation and relies for effect on the abject figure of Kananga, Zoetewater’s black overseer and a homosexual rapist. The novel’s reliance on the homo-hetero binary—in both its marriage plot and its representation of Kananga—to articulate socio-political legitimacy enables a consideration of the relationship between sexuality and citizenship in post-apartheid South Africa.

South Africa has some of the most liberal legislation in the world with respect to the recognition and protection of sexual rights. Most notable, perhaps, was the inclusion of the “equality clause” in the 1996 constitution, which states that:

The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, *sexual orientation*, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth [emphasis added]. (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996)

The nation’s transition to democracy enabled the pursuit of LGBT rights in the post-apartheid moment, including the legal recognition of same-sex marriage in 2006.³ Thus, in its legal recognition of the legitimacy of homosexual identities and same-sex relationships, South Africa differs from much of the rest of the African continent where homophobic legislation is often supported by political leaders such as Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe, who notoriously banned the organisation GALZ (Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe) from the Zimbabwe International Book Fair in 1995, claiming

that homosexuals were “sexual perverts” (quoted in Hoad xi).⁴ In *African Intimacies* (2007), Neville Hoad argues that such homophobic discourses are deployed by a neo-colonial African elite under the guise of anti-colonial nationalism as a means to protect themselves against the erosion of their power by the forces of globalisation. In asserting a distinctly heterosexual African identity, this elite also seeks to challenge colonial stereotypes of African sexuality as “perverse”,⁵ while simultaneously constructing homosexuality as an inherently foreign form of desire whose existence in African societies is deemed to be a result of colonialism and, therefore, necessarily a violent intrusion on, and threat to, indigenous sexual practices and forms of community.

While there is ample evidence of indigenous and pre-colonial forms of same-sex desire and practices across the African continent,⁶ attacks on homosexuality usually focus on recognisably Western forms of homosexual identity, such as “lesbian” and “gay”. In spite of constitutional protections, such discourses are also in evidence in South Africa, pointing to a discrepancy between legislative and lived realities. In “White Rapists Made Coloureds (and Homosexuals): The Winnie Mandela Trial and the Politics of Race and Sexuality” (1995), Rachel Holmes notes that Winnie Mandela’s defence during her trial on charges of kidnapping and assault relied on an understanding of “homosexual practice as a white, colonising depredation of heterosexual black culture” (284). Furthermore, Holmes notes that the ANC failed to address the homophobia generated by the trial in 1991, despite its commitment at that point to the protection of sexual rights. The occasion of the trial thus exposed the discrepancy between the official position of the ANC and the populist homophobic rhetoric deployed in support of Winnie Mandela.

In “A Different Fight for Freedom”, Mark Gevisser traces the history of gay rights in South Africa from the 1950s until the inclusion of the equality clause in South

Africa's draft constitution (1994). He notes that the earliest form of a gay rights movement emerged in the 1970s in response to the threat of increased repression from the apartheid state. Gevisser also notes that the early gay rights movement was dominated by white, middle-class men for whom the anti-apartheid movement held little relevance, creating tension between organisations such as the Gay Association of South Africa (GASA) and black gay activists such as Simon Nkoli. For Nkoli, the struggles for racial and sexual freedom could not be separated and he asserted that: "I cannot be free as a black man if I am not free as a gay man" (Nkoli quoted in Cock 2005, 191). GASA came under increasing pressure from the international LGBT rights movement—for whom Nkoli "became a *cause célèbre*" (Gevisser 55)—and, in 1983, were denied membership in the International Gay Association because of its apolitical stance on apartheid. It was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s that organisations like the Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand (GLOW) and the Organisation of Gay and Lesbian Activists (OLGA), began to bridge the divide between sexual rights and anti-apartheid politics. Indeed, Jacklyn Cock (2005) argues that the inclusion of the equality clause in the constitution was the result of "the ability of a male-dominated gay rights movement to form strategic alliances with the anti-apartheid struggle" (188) and that subsequent legislative changes continue to reflect "racialised class privilege" (197).

Work by Gevisser and Cock, among others, points to the intersection and mutual constitution of subject positions in South African society: LGBT identities are traversed by—or intersect with—race and class identities and cannot, therefore, be separated from the broader fight for freedom. At the same time, and as Cock's remarks make clear, access to the freedoms achieved since the end of apartheid continue to be mediated by and through a variety of subject positions. The legal recognition of same-sex marriage in 2006 represented a landmark in the fight for equal rights for LGBT South Africans,

and Vasu Reddy notes that “the redefinition of marriage in South Africa is in some respects a litmus test for the post-apartheid state’s recognition of queer citizens as full members of the polity” (345). At the same time, Reddy’s argument that legal judgements “emphasise the identity of applicants as a driving force in claiming and asserting the urgency of rights within an equality model” (346) points to the fact that such judgements require the ability—and indeed the desire—to conform to and articulate a coherent gay or lesbian identity in order for individuals to access constitutional rights. Such a requirement highlights the “racialised class privilege” (197) that Cock critiques as operating invisibly within a human rights framework, obscuring the differential availability of access for black or working-class South Africans to legal protections, as well as the potential disparity between such legal protections and lived experiences.⁷ As Mikki van Zyl notes, “*identifying* as homosexual in a climate of stigmatisation means being *visible*, and becoming visible could spell danger [emphasis in original]” (371), a danger evinced, for example, in the so-called “corrective rape” of South African lesbians.⁸

These scholars recognise the complexity of sexual identities in a South African context and their work suggests the significance of debates around marriage and family structures to understanding who “belongs” to the state and on what terms. As will be discussed in more detail below, *The Slave Book*’s plot connects marriage to freedom in a way that establishes progress as necessarily heterosexual and, as such, the novel participates in debates about what—or more specifically who—constitutes a citizen in democratic South Africa. Given that the control of sexuality—both heterosexual and homosexual—was a key component of apartheid policy, as evinced by the prohibition of inter-racial sex by the Immorality Act of 1950, sexual politics is a key site for the continued negotiation of South African identities in the post-apartheid era.⁹ This is made particularly evident in the novel’s representation of Kananga, a Mozambican *mandoor*

[overseer], whose immorality is epitomised by his rape of other male slaves.

Furthermore, Kananga's distinction as the only black African character represented in the novel highlights the interest Jacobs's work takes in specifically "coloured" identity, making it important to establish the context in which *The Slave Book* seeks to validate "coloured" identity.

Cultural Context: "Coloured" Identity and the 1994 Elections

In "Shame and Identity: the case of the coloured in South Africa" (1998b), Zoë Wicomb suggests that, as a result of the construction of "coloured" identity as a product of miscegenation, shame—"the shame invested in those (females) who have mated with the colonizer" (91)—is a fundamental component of "coloured" identity. Wicomb uses the trope of shame to describe "the shameful vote of Cape coloureds for the National Party in the first democratic elections" (92), which once again calls the political legitimacy of "coloured" identity into question. The so-called "coloured vote" to which she refers—in which the National Party was re-elected to government in the Western Cape in South Africa's first democratic elections—has been the subject of much debate in South Africa, and created a backlash against "coloured" people that suggests the vulnerability of both "coloured" claims to citizenship under the new dispensation and of the new democracy itself.

In August 1995, the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) held a conference¹⁰ to discuss the possible reasons for and implications of the election results in the Western Cape, a region whose population is predominantly "coloured".¹¹ The aim of the conference was to determine why the region re-elected the National Party—the party of apartheid—rather than the ANC.¹² As Jeremy Seekings (1996) argues in his paper, "From Independence to Identification", the National Party also won votes from

Indian voters in KwaZulu-Natal, a fact that challenges the argument that “coloured” voters have a “racial or cultural allegiance” to the National Party (32). Other critics, such as Pumla Dineo Gqola (2010) and Zimitri Erasmus (2001), have noted that African voters who didn’t vote for the ANC did not come under the same scrutiny that “coloured” voters did. That includes those who voted for the Inkatha Freedom Party, which, as Gqola, points out, also has a “history of collaboration with the apartheid state” (28). It is, as Wilmot James states, “perverse to argue that voting for a legitimate party, however despicable its history, is an act of treason” (42). Yet such arguments were made, positioning “coloured” people as “perverse” within a democratic framework; a history of complicity with colonial and apartheid governments rendered “coloured” claims to citizenship in the post-apartheid era tenuous.¹³ Furthermore, the process of reconceptualising “coloured” identity is made difficult by the persistence of racial thinking in post-apartheid South Africa and what Erasmus calls the “context of a re-emerging African essentialist lobby within the ANC nationally” (29). Thus the so-called “coloured” vote¹⁴ and reactions to it expose a tension between the purported non-racialism of the democratic “rainbow” nation and people’s persistent identification with old racial categories.

It is in the context of this backlash against “coloured” people in the wake of the 1994 elections that I read *The Slave Book*—published in 1998—as engaging with questions of “coloured” political legitimacy. According to Wicomb (1998b):

The shame of [the vote for the National Party] lies not only in that we have voted against citizenship within a democratic constitution that insures the protection of individual rights, the enshrinement of gay and lesbian rights, the abolition of censorship and blasphemy laws—but in the *amnesia* with regard to the National Party’s atrocities in maintaining apartheid [emphasis added] (95).

For Wicomb, the “amnesia” of the people of the Western Cape erases the history of apartheid violence to which they were also subject. Such deliberate forgetfulness is also apparent in a “failure or inability to represent [“coloured”] history in popular forms and consequently the total erasure of slavery from the folk memory” (6). As such, Rayda Jacobs’s representation of slavery in *The Slave Book* can be read as an attempt to write the history of slavery and of the “coloured” population into South African history, to confront the shame of the slave past and the difficult legacy it has bequeathed to “coloured” communities.

Wicomb’s assessment of “coloured” identity in post-apartheid South Africa also points to the contemporary importance of historical fiction. Jacobs’s work contributes not only to the post-apartheid reassessment of “coloured” identity, but also to debates around citizenship and belonging. Adhikari (2005) notes that in the early twentieth-century there was a growing consciousness among “coloured” people of “a common oppression dating back to slavery and the dispossession of the Khoisan” (38). However, he argues that this stemmed not so much from “an interest in the past for its own sake but as a means to justify [contemporary] social and political demands” (38). Similarly, *The Slave Book*, particularly in its sexual politics, can be read as an attempt to confront a history of sexual and political illegitimacy ascribed to “coloured” people in an effort to render their claims to citizenship valid in the present. One of the ways Jacobs does this is through her invocation of the North American slave narrative tradition, which allows her to position resistance to slavery in South Africa within a broader framework of political resistance to racial oppression.

The Slave Book and the African-American Slave Narrative:

The Slave Book is a work of historical fiction, a genre Jacobs describes in her author's note as "an arrogant attempt by a writer in a few hundred pages to inform and recreate" (7). Apart from the self-deprecating claim to arrogance, this description fits the often didactic tone of the novel, which relies heavily on archival sources, and historical studies, such as Robert Shell's *Children of Bondage* (2001). In acknowledging an intention to "inform and recreate", Jacobs also points to the lack of information or knowledge about slavery in South Africa, where, unlike in the North American or Caribbean context, no tradition of slave narrative or biography exists. Because South Africa does not have the same types of archival and testimonial materials on slavery that North America does,¹⁵ Jacobs has made use of the African-American slave narrative tradition—particularly the narrative of Frederick Douglass¹⁶—to lend weight to her fictional supplement to the history of slavery in South Africa, even as her novel points to the possibility of lacunae in the official record.

As Madhu Dubey (2010) notes, recent American novels of slavery—also known as "neo-slave narratives"¹⁷—emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when, "for the first time in the academic study of slavery the first person testimony of slaves was accepted as legitimate historical evidence" (333). These "neo-slave narratives" were part of a larger cultural movement to correct and supplement the historical record, as they "took on the task of [imaginatively] recovering the authentic perspectives of slaves on their own experiences" (334). According to Dubey, the inclusion of historical sources in "neo-slave narratives" published in the United States suggests an "investment in the truth-telling claims typical of realist historical fiction" (336). A similar investment is evident in *The Slave Book*, where Jacobs opens each chapter with an epigraph from a variety of sources, including archival sources and travellers' accounts

of the Cape, as well as Frederick Douglass's autobiography (1845) and Orlando Patterson's academic study, *Slavery and Social Death* (1983). The main body of the novel, however, is book-ended by a short prologue and epilogue narrated, we discover, by a Javanese slave named Sangora. In doing so, Jacobs unsettles the authority of those sources she cites by privileging the imagined, "authentic" voice of the slave over academic accounts.

According to Nigel Worden (2009), local conflict over an official memorial to slavery in Cape Town suggests the "increasing opposition to 'official' state control over slave heritage in a city of deep racial and political division" (39). Furthermore, while Dubey suggests that recent African-American "neo-slave narratives" are primarily concerned with the persistence of forms of racism instituted under slavery into the present, Worden argues that "by the late 1990s, the topic of slavery could also be used to mobilise and support new identities in contemporary South Africa"¹⁸ (33). In the case of *The Slave Book*, Jacobs's engagement with the North American slave narrative aligns the "coloured" slave past with other histories of oppression and struggle, a strategy which serves to counter the historical positioning of "coloured" subjects as complicit with the apartheid state rather than as agents of the liberation struggle. The historical trajectory from the struggle for emancipation to the Civil Rights movement in the United States exposes the role slavery played in establishing structures of racial discrimination that persisted after the end of slavery itself. In recuperating the history of slavery in South Africa, Jacobs's demands acknowledgment for the ways in which "coloured" people—as well as black Africans—were subject to such institutionalised racism.

The Slave Book's most direct engagement with the North American slave narrative is to be found in the epigraph to its first chapter, which begins, "I have found

that to make a contented slave it is necessary to make a thoughtless one” (13). The quotation is taken from chapter ten of Frederick Douglass’s autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), in which he is hired out to Mr. Covey, a notorious slave “breaker”. Given that this quotation is introduced in the first chapter, it resonates not only with that particular chapter, but sets the tone for the novel more generally, which seeks to imagine the intellectual and emotional life of slaves and their resistance to slavery. In the opening scene, Sangora and his stepdaughter Somiela are separated from Noria, Sangora’s wife and Somiela’s mother, at a slave auction. Noria is sold to an English doctor and remains in Cape Town, while Sangora and Somiela are bought by Andries de Villiers, a local wine farmer. On their first journey to de Villiers’ farm, Zoetewater, Somiela notes, as she “rock[s] back and forth between the barrels and the sacks” (20), that she “didn’t have to look at Sangora to know his thoughts. In his head he would be saying a prayer. In his eyes nothing would show” (20). For Pumla Dineo Gqola (2010), Jacobs’s attention to specifically Muslim slaves enables a disruption of the “excessive emphasis on [the slave’s] corporeality” (151) by acknowledging slaves’ capacity for a spiritual life. She argues that, while Sangora and Somiela’s “position on the wagon emphasizes their status as [...] property” (150-51), this is immediately contrasted “with what is revealed to be the inner workings of the slave characters themselves” (151). Jacobs’s novel foregrounds the thoughtfulness of her slave characters, which, in light of Douglass’s epigraph, can also be read as their discontent. Given that Douglass’s own political activism led to his position, not only as a key figure in the struggle for slave emancipation, but also as the father of the American Civil Rights movement, Jacobs’s reference to him serves to position her own text within a broad tradition of political struggle. Together with the novel’s focus on “coloured” identity, such a position might suggest that just as slave resistance has been

erased from the official history of South Africa, so too has “coloured” resistance to apartheid.

Even as the novel points to the possibility of slave resistance, it highlights the immediacy and ubiquity of the violence experienced by slaves. Upon their arrival at Zoetewater, Somiela in particular draws the attention of both male slaves and de Villiers’s wife and stepdaughter, who immediately seem to resent her presence on the farm. Indeed, when Somiela speaks back to Elspeth, de Villiers’s stepdaughter, she cuts off Somiela’s hair in a fit of jealous rage, wanting “to shame her, make her look ugly, take the little she had away” (32). Sangora’s attempt to make a complaint about Elspeth’s behaviour results in him being flogged and put in chains, contrary to the laws of the time. As will be discussed in more detail later, the inclusion of incidents like this one in the narrative points to the disparity between historical records—which rely, however sceptically, on changes in slave law to construct an account of the institution at particular historical moments—and the actual experience of slavery, further suggesting the impossibility of ever fully recovering that experience. The inadequacy of historical accounts of slavery points to the need for imaginative forms of what Gqola (2001), following Toni Morrison, describes as “re-memory” (45). Gqola’s use of this term to describe Jacobs’s work provides another way to align the text with African-American traditions.¹⁹

The eponymous slave book is mentioned for the first time by Sangora’s wife, Noria. When Harman visits Noria on Sangora’s behalf, she asks him to tell her husband that her new master has promised to set her free when he returns to England, so she won’t “go back in the slave book” (92). From this brief comment, we learn that the slave book is a record or register of the slaves at the Cape. The slave book, as represented in Jacobs’s novel, is evidently both a powerful symbol of bondage and of

official history; however, its representation in *The Slave Book* also serves as a challenge to the veracity of the historical record, as evinced when Sangora manages to have his name removed from it. Having run away from Zoetewater after attacking Marieta de Villiers, Sangora, with the help of a San guide, Geduld, makes his way to the small maroon community at Hanglip. Harman—who has been sent by Andries to find and return his runaway slave—soon catches up with Sangora. But rather than returning him to Zoetewater and slavery, Harman suggests that they stage his suicide and forge a new, free identity for him. This is soon achieved and, despite Andries de Villiers' suspicions that Sangora is still alive, his name is “crossed off in the slave book” (262). In this way, Jacobs questions the veracity of official narratives and official history.

According to David Johnson, “the pasts of South African slavery [as represented in post-apartheid literature have] been ‘put to work in the service’ of a particular idea of freedom—a story of progress from servitude to free labour and (after 1994) democratic citizenship” (514). This conclusion relies in part on his reading of *The Slave Book*, which he argues, “suggests an optimistic embrace of the post-apartheid rainbow-nation settlement” and, allegorically, “plots the journey of coloured South Africans struggling through the final years of apartheid and ultimately finding love and freedom in a racially mixed society” (510). However, such a reading disregards Sangora's epilogue to the text, which qualifies the celebration of emancipation with the news of the death of his wife Noria, the suicide of another slave, Tromp, and the murder of Harman. Indeed, the murder of Harman suggests the rejection of multi-cultural—as opposed to “multi-racial”—possibilities by the dominant social order. Consequently, the novel suggests that the potential for inter-racial love to contribute to the creation of new forms of community cannot be sustained in a racialised society. Rather, in Somiela's marriage to Salie—a Muslim slave from Indonesia—following Harman's death, *The Slave Book* points to the consolidation of cultural and religious—in the place of racial—identities in

the aftermath of apartheid. Furthermore, as I will go on to demonstrate, like many North American slave narratives, *The Slave Book*'s valorisation of heteronormative social structures marks freedom as necessarily heterosexual.

Marriage, Narrative Progression and Social Progress:

From its opening scene, *The Slave Book* announces an interest in family structures under slavery.²⁰ At the auction block we are introduced to three slaves—Sangora, his wife Noria, and Noria's daughter, Somiela—all of whom are about to be sold. Noria approaches Andries de Villiers just after he has bought Sangora, begging him to buy all three of them so that they can remain together. While Andries is "touched by the sincerity of her plea" (16), he nonetheless refuses to buy her; the family is separated as he takes Sangora and Somiela to Zoetewater, his farm, while Noria is purchased by an English doctor. The separation of Noria and Sangora—who are married in accordance with Islamic law—demonstrates the fragility of family structures, and particularly of marriage, under slavery. The novel continues to concern itself with family in the marriage, sometime later, between Somiela and Harman. Furthermore, the temporal setting of *The Slave Book*—in the 1830s—implicitly ties the narrative movement towards the marriage between Somiela and Harman to the social progress symbolized by the emancipation of the slaves.

In *Anachronism and Its Others* (2009), Valerie Rohy discusses the temporality of North American slave narratives to suggest the degree to which narratives of progress rely on and reproduce hetero-patriarchal identities. Focusing on the biographies of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs,²¹ she points out that both authors "anticipate the moment when *they will have been slaves*" (23) and, as such, "record a tension between the fact of anachronism and the fantasy of linear history" (23). That is, Douglass's and

Jacobs's narratives are structured not by a linear progression from slavery to freedom but by simultaneous processes of retrospection—in which the free author projects him- or herself into the past in order to speak *as* a slave—and anticipation—wherein a free future is imagined. For Rohy, such anachronism is both disavowed by, and structurally integral to, narratives of progress: “[t]he vision of futurity promoted by white, heteronormative culture requires the threat of a past that atavistically persists in the person of abject subjects” (x). Rohy identifies blackness and homosexuality as key figures of anachronism; both blackness and homosexuality were discursively constructed—in nineteenth-century discourses of scientific racism and psychoanalysis—in terms of primitivism and arrested development. In the slave narrative, where the author's blackness must be made compatible with the freedom white people take for granted, “freedom seems to demand, not merely enable, the recovery of the heteronormative roles and conventional practices that slavery systematically denied” (38).

For Rohy, marriage plays a key role in negotiating this demand. She describes Douglass's inclusion—in a narrative not otherwise concerned with marriage—of the full text of his “precisely dated marriage certificate” (36) as a commemoration of his “entry into textual history” (36).²² The significance of marriage to Harriet Jacobs's text is even more significant, given that her own past—particularly a liaison with a white man that produced two children outside of marriage—excludes her from what Rohy calls the “distinctly feminine temporality of the marriage plot, the privileged time line of female experience” (37). Marriage, according to Rohy, provides the structuring narrative of women's lives, one from which slave women are necessarily excluded even after the end of their enslavement, as a result of the sexual predations to which they are subject by their masters. As such, while the abuses Jacobs suffers under slavery are heterosexual—and therefore complicate any easy idealisation of heterosexual

marriage—Rohy argues that two scenes in the text serve to displace the burden of perversity from heterosexual desire onto the figure of the homosexual. The first is the bedroom scene with Mrs Flint, Linda Brent’s mistress,²³ whose jealousy of her husband’s attentions to the slave girl motivates her to make Brent “an object of her especial care, though not of her especial comfort” (quoted in Rohy 39), visiting her at night and whispering suggestively in her ear. The monstrous figure of Mrs Flint, who imitates her husband and performs his desire, could—in Harriet Jacobs’s text—only be a result of slavery. Similarly, the second scene Rohy identifies, in which Brent recalls her friend Luke’s master—“a mere degraded wreck of manhood, [...who] took into his head the strangest freaks of despotism” (quoted in Rohy 39)—hints at homosexual desire, once again connecting slavery to the perversion of gender and sexual norms.

Indeed, Rohy argues that Harriet Jacobs’s text “strives to render heterosexual crimes as individual aberrations, wholly separable from straight marriage and patriarchal familialism, whereas homosexuality can only signify exploitation” (43). This approach recuperates the heterosexuality of Jacobs’s white audience—that is, their heterosexuality does not necessarily implicate them in the horrors of slavery—and maintains marriage as a form of social legitimacy for freed slaves, even as it reinforces the construction of homosexuality as anachronous. In both Douglass’s and Jacobs’s texts, “heterosexual propriety comes to emblemise futurity and freedom, while homosexuality, rendered as the apotheosis of slavery’s perversity, remains the abject remnant of a terrible past” (23).

As Rohy’s work makes clear, marriage is a performative act that demonstrates an ability to conform to social norms, which qualifies a subject for freedom, while simultaneously signalling what she terms their “freedom *to be bound* in heterosexual commitment before the law [emphasis in original]” (36). While her work is concerned with the North American context specifically, where slavery differed both materially

and legally from the South African context, Jacobs's concern with marriage in *The Slave Book* suggests that a similar social logic was at work. In *Social Death and Resurrection* (2003), John Edwin Mason describes marriages between enslaved and free people as “the principle institution within which boundaries of culture and ethnicity were dissolved within working class communities at the Cape, making them the incubators of ‘coloured’ South Africa” (226-7). Furthermore, by elaborating on the metaphor of social death that Orlando Patterson (1982) uses to conceptualise slavery, Mason describes emancipation as a process of social rebirth, in which marriage played a key role (250). He writes:

Formal [Christian] marriage ceremonies also brought the [...] unions [of the slaves] recognition within colonial society and gave them a civil existence. Children were legitimated; property could be passed on to surviving spouses and heirs. Natal alienation was no more, and church state, and society formally recognized its passing (264).

As Mikki Van Zyl (2009) notes, “[m]arriage is the official ritual by which heterosexual relationships are consolidated, and the basis for hegemonic family forms” (368) and, as such, marriage remains invested with political significance, even after the abolition of slavery, as evinced by recent debates about same-sex marriage in post-apartheid South Africa.

In *The Slave Book*, Jacobs draws on the historical significance of marriage; the marriage of Harman and Somiela, an Afrikaner whose mother was San and a Cape-born slave, serves to bring together different elements of “coloured” identity—Khoisan, slave and Afrikaner—allowing their union to be representative of “coloured” freedom. Unlike Douglass's autobiographical account, in which, as Rohy (2009) argues, his marriage certificate marks his entry into public, textual history (36), in *The Slave Book*, the

marriage of Somiela and Harman, performed in accordance with Islamic law, remains liminal to such official histories, given that Islamic marriages were not recognised by the state until after the end of the apartheid. In this way, Jacobs's novel renders "coloured" identity legitimate within the heteronormative standards of South African colonial society, even as it offers an explanation for "coloured" marginality.

The regulatory function of marriage is highlighted in the novel's maroon episode, in which Sangora, having escaped from Zoetewater, takes temporary refuge with a band of runaway slaves in the mountains outside Cape Town. Even before Sangora reaches Hanglip,²⁴ he qualifies the type of freedom his escape represents: "this wasn't freedom. Waking up under a bush with mist in your hair and the wind in your ear was a different reality" (198). Here Sangora seems to be suggesting that "real" freedom can only be achieved within the same social structure that created slavery in the first place. This, in turn, recalls Orlando Patterson's (1982) argument that "[t]he idea of freedom [...was] intimately bound up with the rise of slavery" (viii); the concept of freedom can only exist in relation to that of unfreedom or slavery, thus, for Sangora, in order to be truly free he must be recognised as such by the society that enslaved him. Reaching Hanglip and saying goodbye to his San guide Geduld, whom he describes as the "last thread to his other existence" (204), Sangora finds himself in a dark cave that houses three men, a woman and a "whimpering infant" (206). The woman's name is Venus. One of the men tells Sangora: "'Venus lost two babies. She'll lose this one also'" (207). Presumably born outside marriage, the infant's social illegitimacy and subsequent death signals the novel's pessimism about the maroon community's future.

While no longer being forced to labour as slaves, the maroons nevertheless continue to live without the privilege of freedom, which includes access to forms of legal recognition and protection that might have helped the child to live. *The Slave Book* thus validates "coloured" identity only within the social system that produced that identity

and, as the maroon episode demonstrates, forecloses alternative forms of society or social belonging.

The novel's interest in validating "coloured" identity within the terms of colonial society is also evident in its treatment of polygamy. The possibility, under Islamic law, of a man having multiple wives is mentioned only briefly and is quickly dismissed. Soon after his arrival at Zoetewater, and at Sangora's request, Harman visits Noria at her new residence. Later, telling Sangora of his visit he also passes on the aforementioned message from Noria: "please tell Sangora five years is a long time. I'll understand if he finds someone [...] Tell him, God allows it" (92). Noria's reference to God marks polygamy as a specifically religious difference between Muslim and Christian marriages, but this is a distinction that Sangora rejects. Initially delighted that Noria will be set free in five years time, when her new master returns to England, Sangora "sank back down on his heels" as he absorbs the full import of her message: "She would think such a thing? Five years is nothing if there's something waiting for you at the end of it" (98). Once again, monogamous marriage is linked to freedom; at the end of five years Noria will be freed by her owners and she and Sangora will have the opportunity to be reunited. Despite the religious sanction of polygamous marriage under Islamic law, Jacobs—a Muslim writer—presents monogamous marriage as the only possibility, both in *the Slave Book* and in her later novel, *Sachs Street*. In rejecting the possibility of polygamy, or sexual practices considered deviant by colonial society, *The Slave Book* also rejects the association of "coloured" identity with deviant sexuality.²⁵

In "Queering Natal: Settler Logics and the Disruptive Challenge of Zulu Polygamy", T.J. Tallie considers how, within the biopolitics of colonial Natal—in which the heterosexual bourgeois family provided the model for normative sexuality—

Zulu polygamy, constructed by the colonial administration as “hyper-heterosexuality” (168), could be perceived as “queer”. For Tallie, the persistent practice of Zulu polygamy demonstrated the limits of colonial authority and control over African bodies and, as such, offered a disruptive threat to colonial hegemony. Interestingly, Tallie notes that the “rhetorical attack on polygamy drew significant strength from a near-axiomatic equation of the practice with female slavery” (176). Given that these arguments against polygamy were espoused in the decades after the British abolition of slavery, such a comparison constructed polygamy “as illegitimate, retrograde and destructive” (176) and, I would add, anachronistic. That is, Zulu sexual practices, associated by European settlers with slavery, were rendered incommensurate with colonial narratives of progress that included the abolition of slavery. Tallie goes on to note that “polygamy was never legally eliminated as an option, but instead relegated to the separate sphere of ‘Native Law’ until the end of apartheid” (181)—perhaps contributing to regional and later national²⁶ understandings of African sexualities as excessive and “perverse”.

Polygamous marriage remained a contentious issue after the end of apartheid, as South Africa attempted to mediate the legacy of what Mahmood Mamdani (1996) describes as indirect rule, which formalized a body of traditional practices into “Customary Law”. Christa Rautenbach (2003) explains that the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act of 1998²⁷ only recognizes and validates polygamy in the form of customary marriages—where customary refers to specifically African cultural traditions—not religious marriages, such as those formalised under Islamic law (123). For this reason, while polygamous marriage is permitted by Islam it is disallowed by South African law, making monogamous marriage the only legally recognized form of marriage available to Muslims in South Africa.²⁸ Jacobs endorses this position in the *The Slave Book*, which rejects polygamy as a legitimate form of social organisation, despite religious sanction. In doing so, the novel distinguishes the sexual practices of

Islamic slaves—and, by implication, “coloured” people more generally—from those deemed “African” by colonial and apartheid governments. Indeed, in Jacobs’s third novel, *Sachs Street*, Khadidja chooses to divorce her husband when he decides to take a second wife, suggesting that, for Jacobs, marriage is only valid as long as it remains within the law.

Even as *The Slave Book* constructs a broad picture of life under slavery, it focuses particularly on the romantic relationship between Harman Kloot and Somiela, de Villiers’s slave. The marriage of Harman and Somiela, which is central to the novel’s plot, distinguishes *The Slave Book* from its prequel, *Eyes of the Sky*, in which Roeloff Kloot refuses to marry Zokho, his Sonqua (San) lover. The distinction between the two texts is made explicit when, upon hearing of the possibility of Harman marrying Somiela, Roeloff Kloot thinks to himself: “the son would tread where the father hadn’t dared” (136).²⁹ This suggests that Harman and Somiela’s marriage signals progress within the broader scheme of Jacobs’s work, as well as within *The Slave Book* itself. Harman first reveals his intention to marry Somiela to his father, Roeloff, when he tells him that he intends to “speak to De Villiers about buying her [Somiela’s] freedom” (136). Then, in response to a query from his brother, he explains, “I will marry her” (136). Within these few short lines a narrative is established that moves from freedom to marriage. Furthermore, given that the intent to marry precedes Somiela’s freedom, in this instance, freedom for a female slave is understood as the freedom to be bound in marriage (Rohy 2009 36).

The metonymic relationship between marriage and slavery is evinced by the centrality of exchange to both, as demonstrated in Andries and Harman’s extensive negotiations about the terms of Somiela’s freedom. Furthermore, it is Andries’ attempted molestation of Somiela that prompts Harman to raise the subject of buying

her freedom in the first place and, therefore, sexual access to Somiela is central to the men's negotiation of her future. In *Liberating the Family*, Pamela Scully suggests that slave masters opposed slave marriage in order to ensure sexual access to their female slaves (30).³⁰ Likewise, in *The Slave Book*, while Andries is interested in Somiela for his own sexual gratification, she also represents the possibility of increasing the slave population at Zoetewater. This latter possibility might explain Andries' outrage at Harman's proposal when he asks "[d]o you think you can come here and negotiate a slave's freedom as if it were a sack of flour?" (182). The convergence of reproductive and productive labour in the body of the female slave is made clear when, on meeting Somiela for the first time, Andries's wife Marieta refers to her as a "naai-mandje" (25). The text explains: "[t]o naai was to sew or have sexual intercourse; mandje was a basket" (25). With this phrase, Somiela is rendered an instrument or vessel (a basket) for labour that can be either sexual or domestic. The metonymy of sewing and sex suggests that these types of labour are somehow equivalent and suggests, too, why many slave women attempted to extricate themselves from domestic labour as soon as they were free (Scully 94).

While the relationship between Somiela and Harman and their eventual marriage is central to the narrative movement of *The Slave Book*, it is not the only instance of marriage in the novel. As mentioned earlier, Noria and Sangora—Somiela's mother and step-father—are married under the Islamic faith; however, the novel's opening scene shows them separated at a slave auction, demonstrating the fragility of slave marriages. But the character who most clearly demonstrates the complications of marriage for slave women is Rachel, another domestic slave and Somiela's protector at Zoetewater. Shortly after Somiela arrives at Zoetewater, Rachel tells her that once "there was a man who wanted to marry me, but the seur wouldn't let me be baptised and wouldn't give me my freedom" (31). In her brief account, Rachel does not say if she returned this

man's desire to marry; her master's refusal to grant her her freedom means that she could not, whatever her wishes. While her master's refusal to let her marry highlights the social function of marriage as a means of gaining freedom for female slaves³¹—reinforcing the association between marriage and freedom—it also highlights its alternative function, as a mechanism for exchanging women between men. Thus, the novel cannot completely sustain the metaphoric relationship it establishes between marriage and freedom. Rachel's anecdote suggests instead that for slave women at least, marriage might represent a perpetuation of their status as property.

Marriage has already been highlighted as a key—and gendered—means for the exchange and accumulation of property early in *The Slave Book*, when we learn that Andries took ownership of Zoetewater through his marriage to Marieta. Its function in relation to property is highlighted again by Salie, Harman's rival, who, on hearing of Somiela's proposed marriage argues that “she would just go from one owner to another. *He* [Harman] owns her after that” (184). From the beginning of the novel, when Andries considers buying Somiela, the reader has been made aware of his intention to use her to increase the slave population at Zoetewater and this impression is later reinforced at various points throughout the text, including, for example, when Andries comments, in response to his wife Marieta's concerns about the relationship between Harman and Somiela: “Let them be [...] If there's a child, whose is it?” (104). Andries' argument exposes the colonial logic by which a slave woman's child is a piece of property. Yet the slippage between marriage and slavery also suggests the metonymic relationship between slave-holder and patriarch, suggesting that the social regulation of “coloured” women's bodies persisted after the abolition of slavery through the institution of marriage.

Pamela Scully notes that, in South Africa, freed women were made legally exempt from coverture—which prevented married women from entering into employment contracts and, as such, tied their labour to their own home—maintaining a distinction between former slave women and free women³² in terms of their relationship to labour. At the same time, marriage became a signifier of morality that helped to protect freed women from an “increasingly racist colonial discourse which represented them as sexually licentious” (Scully 110-11). Similarly, their engagement in domestic responsibilities for their own households helped to reconceptualise and redefine forms of labour previously performed exclusively for the families of their masters, and which signified the exclusion of slave women from the feminine ideal of domestic bliss.³³ For this reason, Scully argues, marriage offered both advantages and disadvantages for both slave and freed women in South Africa. On the one hand, the opportunity to create legally-recognised family structures offered these women the chance to access a degree of legal and social protection formerly denied to them. On the other hand, the gender identity of both slave and free women was qualified in ways that reinforced racial distinctions. Thus, the regulation of marriage, which is central to Jacobs’s novel, becomes the centre of a complex negotiation of identity in the emancipation era. The novel’s emphasis on the role of marriage in validating social identities simultaneously asserts the legitimacy of “coloured” identity and the fictional nature of race, as will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

Marriage, Motherhood and Miscegenation:

The prospect of the marriage between Harman and Somiela—a “white” man and a “mixed-race” slave—raises a number of anxieties about racial identity in the text. When Harman tells his brother of his plans to marry Somiela, Martinus is horrified:

“You can’t marry a slave. You’re a Kloot. You want to dilute the strain? What would happen if there were children?” (187). Martinus’ reaction demonstrates a slippage between the category of slave and racial identity here, in the assumption that marrying a slave would necessarily result in miscegenation—a dilution of racial purity. As a landdrost, Martinus is bound to uphold the laws of the colony and to maintain social order; thus when Harman reveals that his own biological mother was San, Martinus refuses to “accept what his brother had told him” (187). Roeloff’s refusal—in *Eyes of the Sky*—to marry Zokho has enabled Harman to assume the position of a white man in society, a position threatened by the prospect of his own marriage to Somiela. The potential danger that cross-racial marriage represents to the social order of the Cape is suggested both by the repressed familial relation between the Kloots and Boeta Mai³⁴—a respected member of Cape Town’s Islamic community whose grandmother was a slave—and the tie established between the de Villiers and their former slave Somiela, on her marriage to Harman.³⁵ Both *Eyes of the Sky* and *The Slave Book* highlight the political role that the regulation of marriage plays in maintaining racial hierarchies; Roeloff Kloot’s eventual marriage to Neeltje effectively erases his inter-racial romance with Zokho and reaffirms Afrikaner identity as white. Similarly, Harman’s attempted assimilation into the Muslim community at the Cape through his marriage to Somiela can be read as his “final exit from the prospect of enjoying white privilege” (Gqola 2010 159).³⁶

If, for slave women, marriage remained haunted by the issue of property, then motherhood was no less fraught. This is made clear when Somiela discovers she is pregnant shortly after she agrees to marry Harman. At this point, Somiela is no longer working at Zoetewater but has been moved to Cape Town to live with Elspeth—Andries’ stepdaughter—and her husband Martinus, Harman’s brother, after the birth of their first child. Somiela’s position as a carer for the newborn child in itself highlights

the different relationship to motherhood experienced by white women and slave women respectively; whereas Elspeth's entry into motherhood comes after her marriage to Martinus and represents the fulfilment of her feminine identity, for Somiela, childcare is another form of labour. Indeed, the value of this type of labour has been highlighted from the very beginning of the novel, when Noria tells Andries, "[m]y baby has died recently, there is milk still flowing from me. I can be a wet nurse if there are babies" (16). Noria's comments stress the economic value of her milk even as she brushes over the death of her own child, demonstrating her own awareness of the commodification of slave women's reproductive capacity.

Somiela is distraught to discover that she is pregnant and her conviction that "she couldn't tell Harman" (249) is interwoven with her concern about what her mother—"who'd talked to her so many times" (249)—and Rachel—"who'd warned her repeatedly" (249)—would say when they heard. The repetition of these warnings suggests the repeated experience of sexual violence for slave women. Noria's and Rachel's experience of motherhood came about through rape or exploitation, in pointed contrast to Somiela's experience.³⁷ Their touching attempts to educate Somiela about the dangers inherent in a relationship with free men are, as their own experiences attest, an inadequate form of protection. Rachel, in particular, tries to discourage Somiela's feelings for Harman because, as a white man, she deems his intentions untrustworthy.

As proof, she tells Somiela that her son, Arend's father was a Frenchman who "cared for me, or so he said. We were to marry. But nothing happened. In the end, he went away. *White men* are full of promises [emphasis added]" (115). This tale suggests the ways in which marriage—or at least the promise of marriage and the hope of freedom it carried with it—could be used to manipulate slave women and gain access to their bodies. In *The Slave Book*, marriage is both an avenue to and requirement for slave

women's freedom, and a mechanism to maintain the boundaries of racial and gendered identities.

Elsbeth de Villiers, herself a new mother, is horrified by the news of Somiela's pregnancy and is determined that the child will be Andries' slave. Her immediate assumption that Somiela's child will *belong* to her stepfather prioritises his relationship to the child over Somiela's, or indeed Harman's. As well as demonstrating the role white women played in marginalising slave women within a gendered framework, wherein motherhood is central to a feminine ideal, Elsbeth's assumptions render Somiela's attempted abortion a crime of theft. As such, Somiela's status as property is reinforced even as she seeks to exert agency over her own body. Martinus, Elsbeth's husband, also reacts with shock at the news of Somiela's pregnancy but he, unlike his wife, does not condemn Somiela for attempting an abortion. His motives for supporting her are, however, far from altruistic; as a landdrost, he is determined to avoid any association of his family name with miscegenation. Given that he knows about Harman's San heritage, Martinus's behaviour suggests an official awareness of the fictional nature of "racial purity", and points to conscious attempts by social elites to maintain that fiction and the social order it supported.

Harman's unsuccessful encounter with Martinus is immediately followed by a visit to his sister Bessie. Bessie too, is the illegitimate child of Roeloff Kloot and, as such, shares a special understanding with Harman. However, Bessie does have reservations about Harman's desire to marry Somiela, although they are somewhat different to those of Martinus. Bessie is a very religious woman and fears that it would be a sin for Harman to marry outside his faith, as Somiela—a Muslim—has already made it clear that she would not convert. The novel's juxtaposition of racial and religious difference suggests not only the numerous obstacles standing in the way of the

couple's happiness, but also the multiple axes of difference at work in the construction of the social order. Despite the text's attention to religion as a factor in the construction of racial difference, it is precisely Harman's revelation of his San heritage that convinces Somiela of the sincerity of his feelings for her. Immediately after Harman kisses her for the first time, Somiela tells him: "I know what *white* men want with slave girls [emphasis added]" (142), clearly demarcating their respective social positions.

Furthermore, she declares: "I won't have a white man's baby—like my mother did, or like Rachel" (142). Somiela's refusal to have a *white* man's baby is suggestive of the racial power dynamics and sexual coercion slave women faced on a daily basis;

Harman's intentions towards her are inextricable from his social identity as a white man, an identity that, to her mind, limits the possibilities of any relationship between them. In confessing that he is "a baster" (142)—a term used to describe the offspring of European and Khoisan relationships—Harman effectively prioritises his relationship with Somiela over the social privilege afforded by whiteness.³⁸

Somiela is shocked by Harman's revelation, and feels that his father should not have told him, wondering if "[p]erhaps you think you are tainted" (142) by your San heritage, a suggestion Harman roundly rejects. The suggestion that Harman thinks he is tainted is significant, however, given that at the end of *Eyes of the Sky*, the San hunters who discover Zokho's body describe her spirit as "tainted" (*Eyes* 227). The issue of being tainted that Somiela raises here can be related to the shame that Zoë Wicomb suggests characterises "coloured" identity through the discourse of miscegenation and which, as a result, is a burden borne more heavily by "coloured" women who are blamed for having "mated with the colonizer" (91). Indeed, Somiela's attitude, informed by Rachel's fears, suggests an internalisation of the negative connotations of miscegenation and points to the ways in which "coloured" communities policed their own sexual behaviour.

For Gqola (2010), Wicomb's formulation of shame "is a relationship with the past which forecloses on memory" (22); that is, the history of inter-racial sex and miscegenation must be forgotten if "coloured" people are to be free of shame. Through the figure of Zokho, Jacobs's work recognises the sexual and gendered dimensions of shame and *The Slave Book*, as a work of historical fiction, acknowledges the historical legacy of the concept. Such shame is dismissed, however, through the pride Harman takes in "his mother's people" (142), a move that echoes Wicomb's description of "current attempts by coloureds to establish brownness as a pure category, which is to say a denial of shame".³⁹ The racial and sexualised shame evoked by Somiela's remark: "[p]erhaps you think you are tainted" (142), is subsequently displaced onto class identity when Harman compares Somiela favourably to the de Villiers family, whom he describes as "common" (142). This attempted disavowal of shame cannot be entirely successful, however, given the intersection of race and class in the construction of identity in South Africa. Indeed, as Zimitri Erasmus (2001) notes in her introduction to *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place*, class identities are also articulated through a discourse of sexual respectability, whose antithesis is shame (13).

Somiela's pregnancy and reactions to it mark a complex intersection of social relations at a moment of enormous change. The abolition of slavery in South Africa presented a potential crisis that was contained, in part, by the consolidation of a nascent "coloured" identity which absorbed the excesses of desire that the institution of slavery once managed. The social fiction of racial purity is acknowledged as such through the novel's attention to Harman's San heritage and his familial connections to the Cape's Islamic community. Yet, despite the emphasis on cultural differences, *The Slave Book* also frames difference in terms of blood. Thus, when Roeloff Kloot first learns of Harman's desire to marry Somiela he cautions his son not to make life complicated: "You look like a Kloot [...] Black blood's a funny thing. You never know when it'll

surface” (137). While, at first glance, Roeloff seems to be referring to the potential visibility of miscegenation and Harman’s expulsion from white society as a result, his comment could also be read as an attribution of Harman’s unusual or “funny” (137) attitude—evinced by his desire to marry a slave—to his “black blood” (137). Harman’s own daughter, Si’am, we are told, was dominated by her “white blood [...] and she went off with a German to the *new world* [emphasis added]” (281). Here, blood signifies race and decrees a person’s character. People of “mixed-race”—like Si’am— can apparently be “claimed” (281) by a particular strain of blood, which, in turn, dictates their actions.⁴⁰ The “new world” of America could potentially offer Si’am a fresh start, where only her white heritage will matter. As such, *The Slave Book* reiterates the terms of dominant discourses of “coloured” identity, which construct it as a separate or distinct race, even as it attempts to disavow the shame of miscegenation.⁴¹

“too much female blood”: Homosexuality and Citizenship in South Africa:

As discussed above, *The Slave Book* makes use of a marriage plot to establish “coloured” identity as heterosexual and, therefore, politically legitimate in terms of what Lee Edelman (2004) calls reproductive futurity. Edelman’s theory of reproductive futurity posits that, in contemporary cultures of the globalising West, homosexuality is made to figure the corrosive force of *jouissance* in order that the practitioners of normative, reproductive heterosexual sex can disavow it.⁴² The reproductive potential of heterosexual sex, figured by the child, allows for the association of heterosexual identity with the future and gives heterosexual sex an ideological meaning. Conversely, the homosexual, who is made to represent the perpetuation rather than the fulfilment of desire, is associated with sterility, death and, potentially, regression.⁴³ At the same time, Edelman’s discussion of the figure of the child points to the ways in which certain

forms of heterosexual sex might also be understood as perverse. What Edelman terms “the fascism of the baby’s face” (151) is the social imperative to produce a particular type of future; the figure of the child must conform to a particular image, to whatever “face a particular politics gives the baby to wear” (151). Within the logic of raced reproduction—which legitimises reproductive sex as the means to satisfy the political demand to maintain racial boundaries—the figure of the “coloured” can be understood to occupy a place analogous to that of the queer. That is, for a racialised society, the “coloured” body marks the point where desire exceeds the political boundaries of colonial reproductive futurity, disrupting the unilinear transmission of “racial” identity and, as such, marking inter-racial desire as “perverse”. *The Slave Book* can be read as an attempt to construct a version of “coloured” history that retrospectively justifies their new political rights in post-apartheid society, to position “coloured” identity within the ideology of futurity that underpins national narratives of progress. Yet, as Valerie Rohy (2009)—following Edelman—demonstrates, such linear narratives of progress *require* a figure of anachronism, through which the very future it threatens is produced. Thus, in order to legitimise “coloured” people’s place in the national narrative of progress from apartheid to democracy, *The Slave Book* must displace the burden of queer anachronism onto a different body, in this instance, the black body of Kananga. Indeed, Kananga, the overseer at Zoetewater, can be read as an over-determined figure of anachronism in the novel, in terms of his blackness, his queerness and his particular slave status.

Kananga, the East African *mandoor* in *The Slave Book*, represents Jacobs’s most explicit engagement with the politics of blackness. While most of the other slaves at Zoetewater are described as Indonesian or San, and could, therefore, be subsumed into the category “coloured”, Kananga, who is originally from Mozambique, is portrayed as a black African. As Gqola (2001) has noted, Jacobs’s representation of black and Khoisan characters problematically echoes, rather than interrogates, colonial

representational strategies, so that “the representations of other Black bodies in her narrative echo colonial representations of the body of the Other” (56).⁴⁴ This is evident in the initial description of Kananga: “the massive bulk of the Mozambiquan rose up before them. Kananga had thick features, big hands and clumps of wiry hair flattened with grease” (27). Kananga’s massive bulk serves to establish him as a primarily bodily presence, which, combined with his “thick features” and “wiry hair” serves to distinguish him from Sangora, whose intellectual and spiritual disposition is reflected in the text by his “straight hair and fine features” (27). Furthermore, we are told that Kananga “hardly ever washed himself or his clothes, and gave off a powerful odour of rotting onions” (55). This comment, coming just after the *mandoor* strikes Sangora, suggests that Kananga himself is rotten and that those around him are contaminated by his presence, a suggestion which is later affirmed when, having been taken ill, a fellow slave reports that the doctor has diagnosed Kananga with a “diseased soul” (85). Thus, even though *The Slave Book* can be read as an intervention into the discursive legacies attached to the “coloured” body, the novel disappointingly reproduces a nineteenth-century iconography of black bodies that rendered them bestial, hypersexualised and inferior to white Europeans. Furthermore, the association of Kananga with disease resonates with representations of homosexuality as a form of contamination, which will be discussed in more detail below.

Jacobs’s characterisation of Kananga as Mozambican is particularly interesting given the changing status of Mozambican—or Mozbieker—identity in the Cape Colony. As Patrick Harries (2008) notes in “Culture and Classification: A History of the Mozbieker Community at the Cape”, towards the end of the eighteenth-century, slaves imported into the colony were increasingly drawn from East Africa, and particularly Mozambique, in what Robert Shell describes as the “Africanization of the slave force under the post-1795 administrations” (45). Mozambican slaves continued to be

imported into the colony even after the abolition of the slave trade in 1808: once captured by British forces the enslaved became known as “Prize Negroes” and, while technically free, were actually apprenticed for fourteen years and distributed without cost among slaveholders at the Cape. Christopher Saunders (1984) estimates that “as a direct result of the abolition of the slave trade over two thousand ‘Prize Negroes’ were taken into service in the colony in conditions of quasi-slavery in the years 1808-1815” (36), while “between December 1839 and the end of 1846—almost four thousand Prize Negroes had arrived at the Cape” (39-40). Saunders argues that while the legal status of “Prize Negroes” may have differed from that of slaves, their day-to-day lives did not. As a means of easing the transition between slavery and freedom, the “Prize Negro” population was subject to many of the same controls as slaves, including the “masters’ right by law ‘of claiming the gratuitous services of the children of prize negroes, from the age of five to eighteen years, [which] tended in many instances to perpetuate the advantages that have been derived from the servitude of this class”” (Saunders 1985 229). Saunders also points to the difficulty during this period of distinguishing between former slaves—who “usually continued to be called apprentices after their four-year period of apprenticeship expired” (237)—and former “Prize Negroes”, whose bondage was also termed apprenticeship. Like former slaves, “Prize Negroes” were also subject to laws, such as those concerning vagrancy, which sought to limit the movement of ex-slaves and Khoisan in order to maintain white access to their labour. These circumstances lead Saunders to conclude that “in assessing the nature of the transition from slavery to freedom, the emphasis—at least insofar as conditions of labor were concerned—should be on the side of continuity rather than discontinuity” (239).

The significance of the role “Prize Negroes” played in maintaining an economy based on slave labour is evident in the attempts by the Cape government to exploit both the labour of those already registered as “Prize Negroes” and the circumstances of

continuing slavery in parts of East Africa.⁴⁵ In fact, the importation of Mozambicans to the Cape Colony only ceased in 1883,⁴⁶ “as the government and employers considered it unprofitable” (Harries 38). The label “Prize Negro”, then, was used to hide the fact that the institution of slavery persisted beyond its legal abolition in the colony; simultaneously demonstrating and obscuring the persistent reliance of the colonial economy on unfree labour. In “‘Prize Negroes’ and the Development of Racial Attitudes in the Cape Colony” (2009), R. L. Watson argues that there was substantial opposition to the use of “Prize Negroes” in the colony on the basis that they represented a threat to white domination: “we would now...be going *backwards* and be visited with all the miseries connected with slavery, and instead of seeing our own population advance in intelligence and morality, and forming a civilised and industrious people we should see thousands of *blacks* swarming about towns and villages in filth and vice [emphasis added]” (145). Here, the presence of black Africans is explicitly connected with slavery and depicted as a source of “filth and vice”. Furthermore, black Africans—in the form of “Prize Negroes”—are perceived as a threat to white progress that renders blackness anachronistic.

Harries’ article notes a conflation of “Prize Negro” and Mozbieker identities, such that “the term ‘Mozbieker’ acquired a distinctly pejorative meaning” (33), reflecting the abjection associated with slavery. Mozbieker identity was also, until the twentieth-century, distinctively black, and Harries mentions that the term became “a colloquial epithet used to describe an individual of dark complexion” (37), a meaning which persists to the present day (52). Despite this, in 1891, Mozambicans were classified as “one of the six sub-sections of the category ‘Mixed and other Coloured Races [which] legally separated Mozbiekers from the black population” (44). This tension between the popular identification of Mozbiekers as black and their legal definition as “coloured” highlights the role that slavery played in the construction of

“coloured” identity. This situation began to change in the early twentieth-century, and while in the 1911 census Mozbiekers were still classified as “coloured”, by 1921 their status had been changed to “native” (Harries 46-7). As a result, the distinctive Mozbieker identity was abandoned and people chose to assert themselves as “coloured” rather than become “rightless natives” (47). Kananga’s Mozambican identity in *The Slave Book* thus troubles discursive constructions of black African identity as “authentic” and positioned oppositionally to “coloured” identity which, conceived of as “mixed-race”, was perceived as lacking a distinct or “authentic” cultural heritage. Indeed, Mozbieker identity in the Cape Colony demonstrates the porousness and political contingency of such categories as “black” and “coloured”.

In *The Slave Book*, Sangora describes Kananga as positioned “between the white man and the slave” (56), an intermediate position that resonates with constructions of “coloured” identity as situated between “white” and “black” on a racial continuum and which suggests, once again, the displacement of negative stereotypes of “coloured” identity onto Kananga’s black body. Furthermore, Harries claims that Mozbiekers, acting as guides and translators to colonial expeditions, also contributed to the colonisation of Southern Africa (39). This history serves to displace the burden of collusion, usually attributed to “coloured” people in their relationship with colonial and apartheid governments, onto the black population. Harries’ claim is reflected in the novel insofar as Kananga is shown to act complicitly with Andries de Villiers, the owner of Zoetewater. One of the first things de Villiers does after purchasing Sangora and bringing him to the farm is to forbid Kananga to touch him. De Villiers enables and manages the rape of other slaves by Kananga as a means of extending Kananga’s, and in turn his own, control over them. Thus, Kananga’s obedience is bought by the license de Villiers grants him to “take his pleasure with the males” (27).

Kananga's homosexual desires and frequent acts of rape against the other male slaves reinforce his position as a foil for Sangora, who is arguably the moral voice of the novel as well as its narrator. Through Sangora's observation of Kananga, we learn that his most frequent victims of sexual assault are Hannibal, a fourteen-year old Madagascan slave and Petroos, a "brown-skinned" (53) slave born in the Cape. Once again, Kananga is differentiated, this time from his victims, in terms of his blackness and, as Gqola (2001) notes, the representation of Kananga's "'savage'" (57) sexuality reiterates colonial stereotypes of African men. The transferential effects of Kananga's sexually abusive behaviour are made evident through Petroos, whom, we are told, never displayed any homosexual inclinations before arriving at Zoetewater. Once Kananga has been sold away from the farm, however, Petroos begins to sexually harass Hannibal, perpetuating the sexual violence Kananga initiated. He has become one of those with "too much female blood" (53) and is described as giggling and speaking in a high-pitched tone. The change Kananga has caused, not only in Petroos's behaviour but also, implicitly, in his "blood", is further evidence of Kananga's corrupting influence and "diseased soul" (85). The problematic representation of homosexual desire as "too much female blood" recapitulates early understandings of homosexuality as a gender disorder, while the reference to blood invokes the discourse of race, suggesting, perhaps, a correlation between racial identity and homosexuality, similar to the analogy Rohy identifies in discourses of scientific racism.⁴⁷

Keguro Macharia (2013) has identified a repeated trope in political prison writing by writers including Kenya's J.M. Kariuki and South Africa's Dennis Brutus, in which homosexual practices—particularly sodomy—are understood as acts of political betrayal or complicity with colonial power. For Macharia, "given the association of imprisoned activists with transformative politics, prison narratives by political activists across Africa delimit the domain of the political" (28) and, as such, the circulation of

homophobic discourses through such narratives rendered homosexuality a political concern. The availability of these discourses in South Africa is made evident by Macharia's reading of the South African poet Dennis Brutus, who, he argues, "aligns sodomites with two despised groups: the hegemony against whom oppressed people rebel and the collaborators who collude with these hegemony" (14). For Macharia, homosexuality is not only associated with whiteness, as in certain discourses of African nationalism, but also with black complicity in white and/or colonial forms of power. As discussed earlier, Winnie Mandela, during her trial for kidnapping in the early 1990s, described homosexuality as a form of white sexual abuse. Rachel Holmes argues that this conflation of male homosexuality and sexual abuse rendered homosexuality "incompatible with political dedication to the struggle" (288). Significantly, Holmes notes that Winnie Mandela had also previously claimed that "coloured" identity was the result of white sexual abuse: "You are called coloureds because not long after they [Europeans] landed here in 1652 these despicable people raped our grandmothers" (quoted in Holmes 284). As well as resonating with Macharia's conclusions, Winnie Mandela's remarks are suggestive of a metonymic relationship between certain racial and political identities that is articulated through the language of sexuality. That is, "coloured" identity is here rendered analogous to homosexuality in that both are understood to result from the violence and violation enacted by European colonialism, and, as such, "coloured" identity is perhaps equally susceptible to the forms of collusion that mark homosexuality as politically illegitimate. Winnie Mandela's comments then suggest a political motive for the assertion of a specifically heterosexual identity for "coloured" people that, I argue, *The Slave Book* attempts.⁴⁸

While Petroos can be read as an example of the contaminating effects of homosexuality, Hannibal, the other victim of Kananga's sexual violence, is representative of the relationship between homosexuality and political complicity

discussed by Macharia. Unlike Petroos, Hannibal is not associated in the text with homosexual desire; he does, however, take the place of Andries's informer following Kananga's sale away from the farm. While the exploitative nature of Kananga's relationship with Andries is suggested implicitly by his persistent illness, Hannibal's ill health suggests the ambivalence of his collusion: "the deception weighed heavily on him and was the cause of his headaches and fevers" (223). Just as Harman is about to leave Zoetewater, there is a fire in one of the barns, the result of a suspected arson attack. It is only in Sangora's epilogue that we discover that Hannibal was the perpetrator. This violent attack on Andries and his property suggests a response to, or rejection of, his cooption into a relationship of complicity with his master, one that echoes his violent interpellation into homosexual acts by Kananga.⁴⁹

In rendering Petroos—and homosexuality more generally—feminine, *The Slave Book* also recapitulates more recent historical understandings of homosexuality under slavery. One of the major influences on Jacobs's novel was Robert Shell's classic work *Children of Bondage: A Social History of the Slave Society at the Cape of Good Hope, 1652-1838* (2001), in which Shell argues that many negative stereotypes of slave behaviour at the Cape—such as violence—often explained in terms of racial inferiority, in fact resulted from an unbalanced sex ratio, with more male slaves than female in the population.⁵⁰ This argument is followed by an anecdote from a Swedish botanist visiting the Cape in the 1770s, who notes that male slaves were denied "the rights of nature" (75). The implication that homosexual sex was both an effect of slavery and against "nature" is made more explicit when Shell reiterates that:

[t]he extreme violence, murder, rape, gambling, *homosexuality, and bestiality* that characterized the behaviour of some of the burgher slaves described by

Robert Ross in his survey of the Cape crime records may be principally the result of the unbalanced sex composition [emphasis added]. (76)⁵¹

The equation of homosexual desire with murder and bestiality demonstrates some historians' inability to acknowledge homosexuality as a legitimate form of desire and renders sexual desire that is not heterosexual a perverse effect of slavery's exploitation of human sexuality more generally.⁵² Robert Ross (1979), on whose work Shell relies, argues that "[s]ince at the Cape a major field of the exploitation of slaves by their masters lay in the creation of the imbalanced sex-ratio, break-downs of slaves tended to occur in relation to their family life and *sexuality* [emphasis added]" (422).

The approach to homosexuality taken by Ross and Shell has been roundly criticised by fellow historian of Cape slavery, Patricia van der Spuy, who, in her article "What, then, was the sexual outlet for black males?" (1996),⁵³ suggests that in attributing homosexuality and other forms of violence to imbalanced sex ratios, the "proportionately few slave women who were present at the Cape have been held responsible for male slave discontent" (44-5). As well as positioning slave women "as entirely passive objects of male sexual needs" (van der Spuy 48), such an approach—which she notes is "based on questionable assumptions about the nature of sexuality" (48)—reiterates, rather than interrogates, colonial denigration of homosexuality. Furthermore, as van der Spuy points out, calling attention to the "deviant" sexuality of male slaves serves to differentiate them from their masters, who also had to contend with imbalanced sex ratios, an "issue [that] has been brushed under the carpet of 'miscegenation' because many settler men had sex with slave and Khoisan women" (46). By identifying male slaves with what, in their accounts, is a "perverse" form of sexual desire, Ross and Shell reinforce racial difference along the axis of sexuality, a strategy evident in Jacobs's representation of Kananga.

If Jacobs's work attempts to legitimate "coloured" identity in the wake of the 1994 elections, then her representation of Kananga also resonates with questions of citizenship raised by the South African constitution's protection of sexual rights, questions that are necessarily entangled with those of race. While "mozbiekers" were at one point categorised as "coloured", Kananga's sale away from Zoetewater signifies his expulsion from "coloured" identity as represented in *The Slave Book*, which consists of European, Khoisan and Indian Ocean elements. As such, even as "coloured" identity is made inextricable from South African history, it is also divorced from a specifically African identity. Ironically, given the virulent reaction of some strains of African nationalism to emerging LGBT movements on the continent, Jacobs's work positions the African body as queer, transforming the "shame" of miscegenation inscribed on the "coloured" body into a shameful and violent homosexuality associated with blackness. Some representatives of African nationalism consider homosexuality a by-product of colonialism and, as such, it is always already perverse.⁵³ For Jacobs, if "coloured" identity—which emerged from the colonial encounter in South Africa—is to be politically valid, then the illegitimacy associated with colonial power must be counteracted. Thus, even as Jacobs's work recapitulates the rejection of homosexuality⁵⁴ by some African Nationalisms as a politically legitimate identity, it shifts the point or origin for such corrupting desire to the black body. This, in turn, allows the "coloured" body to signify a heterosexual identity compatible with the ideology of reproductive futurity that underpins nationalist discourses.

Conclusion: Disturbing Progress:

The loose trilogy of *Eyes of the Sky*, *The Slave Book* and *Sachs Street* all share a concern with the repetition of both inter-racial romance and violence throughout South

Africa's history. In *Eyes of the Sky*, Roeloff Kloot discovers the diary of a Dutch ancestor, Anna Kloot, who travelled to the Cape with her husband. She records how, during the birth of her son Adriaan—the first Kloot born in the Cape—“[o]ne of the Koi-na women, Vygie, sat with [her] throughout the night” (*Eyes* 224). However, Anna's experience is ultimately one of betrayal, as she discovers Vygie and her husband were having an affair which produced a child. Her son Adriaan, moreover, fell in love with a Khoisan girl and abandoned his family to live with her in the veld. Roeloff's reaction to this family history is one of resignation, “[t]hings repeat themselves, Neeltje. Nothing's changed” (226). This is an example of how, in Jacobs's historical fiction, South Africa's history is overtly characterised by repetition and miscegenation, refuting the myth of racial purity even as it relies on the rhetoric of blood.

Despite its centrality to the narrative, the novel does not end with the marriage of Harman and Somiela. When his contract with Andries ends, and on the day that the slaves are emancipated, Harman and Somiela—who are already married under Islamic law—travel to the Hantam and the Kloot family farm with their daughter Si'am. We last see them when Harman is reunited with his childhood friend, Tuka, and Somiela is surprised “that she could be so happy under a miserable tree in the middle of nowhere” (280). Here the narrative proper ends and, in the short epilogue, Sangora reveals that soon after his return, Harman was killed by a neighbour, in retaliation for his defence of the San against an Afrikaner raid. Somiela remains with the Kloots for a number of years before returning to Cape Town and marrying Salie, another former slave from Zoetewater and Harman's rival. In this way, the epilogue functions to unsettle the emancipatory narrative established in the main body of the text.

The pessimism of Sangora's brief prologue and epilogue suggests that the possibility of a fresh start is always a false one. *The Slave Book* opens with the line: “It

rained that first day in 1838” (11), positing the end of slavery as a new beginning for those who had been enslaved. However, the phrase “that first day” is repeated in the next paragraph, in reference to the day Sangora and Somiela were first brought to Zoetewater by Andries de Villiers. In this way, the novel’s preface establishes and immediately disrupts the utopian possibility of new beginnings by juxtaposing, and reversing in narrative time, these two events: emancipation and a slave auction. The melancholy tone of Sangora’s introduction points to persistence and repetition rather than substantial change: “Some [slaves] even begged to stay on with the masters who’d maimed them” (11). The novel’s beginning, then, calls into question the potential for change, even as the main body of the text constructs a narrative of progress that ties marriage to freedom.

Through the figure of Kananga, a “Prize Negro”, *The Slave Book* associates anachronism—as blackness and homosexuality—with slavery specifically, suggesting the persistence of what the novel constructs as the perverse effects of slavery beyond the abolition of official institutions. If read as an affirmation of “coloured” political legitimacy, as symbolised by heterosexual marriage, *The Slave Book* hints at, even as it displaces, the enduring legacy of slavery for “coloured” identity. In this light, Jacobs’s novel suggests the continued relevance of racial discourses and the use of the language of sexuality to articulate, not only racial difference, but also political legitimacy.

Chapter Four:

Maternal Cosmopolitanism and Narrative Identity in Zoë Wicomb's

Playing in the Light

Playing in the Light (2006) is Zoë Wicomb's second novel and, like her first, *David's Story* (2001), has received a good deal of critical attention.¹ Like her own critical work, Wicomb's fiction raises questions about language, ethnicity and history that trouble fixed categories of identity. Her novels refuse the kind of narrative resolution that might be appropriated by official discourses of nation-building, focusing instead on the difficult and sometimes contradictory histories that cannot be assimilated into them. Her work is particularly concerned with the history and identity of South Africa's "coloured" population, including the history of slavery. Indeed, in what is perhaps her best known critical essay, "Shame and Identity: the case of the Coloured in South Africa" (1998b), Wicomb argues that "coloured" people's disavowal of their slave past contributed to the shame she identifies as a constitutive element of "coloured" experience. Notably, *David's Story* engages with the history of slavery through allusion to Sarah Bartmann, a Khoisan woman who was exhibited in Europe from 1810-1815, and who is associated with David's former comrade, Dulcie, a character who raises questions about both the literal and representational violence done to the bodies of "coloured" women.² *Playing in the Light* continues Wicomb's concern with both repressed histories and the discursive violence done to "coloured" women. The novel deals with the issue of racial passing, a topic that, according to Yvette Christiansë (2003) was not granted a narrative space at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which did "not permit [...] talk about the impossibility of race, only the passing of racialism" (375). That is, while the TRC condemned discrimination on racial grounds, it maintained the fiction of coherent and autonomous racial identities that passing fundamentally undermines.

In addressing the previously silenced history of racial passing, Wicomb's novel also draws attention to the continuing effects of the Population Registration Act (1950) and the Group Areas Act (1950) through which the apartheid state sought to disavow

South Africa's complex, cosmopolitan and multi-racial history by establishing fixed racial and spatial "places" for all South Africans. Wicomb's engagement with the history of slavery in *Playing in the Light* enables a consideration of the cosmopolitan dimension of South Africa's history as a colony that participated in the oceanic slave trade and imported slaves from various other parts of Africa and the Indian Ocean Region.³ In drawing attention to this history, Wicomb reconceives the nation as porous rather than hermetically sealed, multiple rather than singular and, through what a number of critics have identified as a cosmopolitan discourse, offers the possibility of new forms of interrelationship among South African citizens.⁴ As I will contend, in this novel, Wicomb revises the available model of motherhood to reconceive it as a cosmopolitan role involving forms of hospitality that disrupt the genealogical fantasy underpinning the nation state and that foregrounds women's agency rather than their biology. However, ultimately the novel cannot offer an optimistic solution to the problems of post-apartheid society, and its engagement with the politics of narrative suggest the ways in which "coloured" women's agency—both historical and contemporary—continues to be discursively curtailed.

Playing in the Light tells the story of Marion Campbell, a white woman living in Cape Town whose life is centred on running her independent travel agency and caring for her aging father, John. A burgeoning relationship with Geoff Geldenhuys, an Afrikaner who, unlike Marion, loves to travel, promises to widen her horizons, as does her tentative friendship with Brenda McKay, a young "coloured" woman whom Marion has recently hired. Marion's engagement with South African politics is limited; as an Afrikaner she voted for the nationalists but "knew deep down that those policies were not viable" (28). A similar kind of pragmatism is evident in her attitude to the TRC, when she dismisses those who "dwell [...] on the past" (78). Despite her rejection of the TRC process however, Marion is forced to confront her own past and that of her parents

when she begins to experience panic attacks. Indeed, after she sees the uncannily familiar image of Patricia Williams, an MK activist who was tortured by the security police, in a newspaper, she even begins hallucinating. These hallucinations and panic attacks prompt Marion's search for Tokkie, a beloved "coloured" servant whom she remembers from her childhood. Enlisting Brenda's help in the naïve belief that all "coloured" people know each other, the two travel to Wuppertal in an attempt to discover more about Tokkie. There, they learn that Tokkie was not a servant but Marion's maternal grandmother, a discovery which leaves Marion devastated. Brenda, however, is sceptical of Marion's denial that she knew of, or was complicit, with her parents' act of passing and "wants nothing to do with Marion's stories" (99).

Marion's subsequent investigations into her family history prompt her to meet with her Aunt Elsie, a former anti-apartheid activist who does little to ease her feelings of shame and guilt. Indeed, her increasing emotional fragility is suggested when she ends her relationship with Geoff. Marion's subsequent decision to travel to Europe in an attempt to reassess her life and reconstitute herself initially appears to be successful; she returns home and announces to a surprise gathering of friends that she will be looking for a new house so that she and her father can live together. However, the optimism of this party scene gives way to the novel's more ambivalent ending, in which, alone together for the first time since Marion's return, Brenda confesses that she has begun to write a book and has chosen Marion's father John as her subject. Furious at what she perceives to be Brenda's exploitation of her father, Marion ejects Brenda from her car and locks the door, at which point the novel ends. This abrupt ending refuses the easy and symbolic reconciliation their friendship would seem to have gestured towards from the beginning of the novel.

As noted above, *Playing in the Light* deals with two foundational pieces of apartheid legislation: the Population Registration Act of 1950 and the Group Areas Act of the same year. As Adrian Guelke (2005) explains, the Population Registration Act sought to classify and register every person in South Africa as one of three “races”: “Native (which subsequently became Bantu and then Black), White and Coloured. In 1959 the Coloured Category was sub-divided into seven sub-groups: Cape Coloured, Malay, Griqua, Chinese, Indian, Other Asiatic and Other Coloured” (25).⁵ According to Deborah Posel (2001b), the terms used by the Population Registration Act to define racial identity drew on both biological and cultural understandings of race, which enabled it to give “full juridical authority to the weight of social prejudice or ‘common sense’” (57); as a result, racial categorisation not only became universal but also constitutive of the social order, as “[r]acial differences were considered the primary determinants of other differences” (65). Elsewhere, Posel (2001a) suggests that the Population Registration Act was inextricably bound up with the apartheid state’s attempt to preserve the notion of white racial purity. In this respect, the 1950 Act differed from earlier segregationist legislation which accepted “that racial classifications were somewhat fluid, [and which, in turn,] meant that social and economic mobility could sometimes enable a change of race” (97). Given that a person’s racial classification determined their access not only to education, employment, social and political rights, but also, under the Group Areas Act, to public and private spaces, the apartheid state was clearly concerned with curtailing the possibility of social and “racial” mobility, that is, with preventing racial passing.

The Group Areas Act (1950) was responsible for “the enforcement of residential segregation in urban areas” (Guelke 26) as well as segregation in public spaces like cinemas.⁶ That is, it sought to reinforce spatially the racial distinctions elaborated under the Population Registration Act and which were further reinforced by the prohibition of

inter-racial marriage under the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949) and of inter-racial sex under the Immorality Act (1950).⁷ Thus the apartheid state deployed discourses of both heredity and geography in order to delimit the social space available to people and to shape the space of the nation more generally. Indeed, Posel (2001b) argues that apartheid's "principal imaginary was of a society in which every 'race' knew and observed its proper place" (52).⁸ However, while the apartheid state sought to foreclose the possibility of "passing" and miscegenation through both the proscription of inter-racial sex and spatial segregation, white reliance on the domestic labour of black and "coloured" women in particular made the possibility of complete segregation impossible, even within the private space of the white household.

The combination of heredity and geography in the apartheid state's attempt to maintain the fiction of white "racial purity" points to an anxiety about the potential for proximity to become intimacy. As I have noted in earlier chapters, this anxiety has a historical precedent in the nineteenth-century taboo that prohibited a slave master from entering the kitchen—where female slaves slept—at night and which similarly expressed social anxieties about miscegenation (Shell 2001 256).⁹ Furthermore, female slaves were the most likely to "pass" into whiteness through marriage to white men who were often their masters (Shell 2001). This potential for slave and "coloured" women to be assimilated into whiteness accounts for the cultural association of "passing"—or, in South African terms, "playing white"—with "coloured" identity that the novel interrogates.¹⁰

The possibility of slave women passing into whiteness through marriage further accounts for the patriarchal anxieties that developed around women's bodies. As both the vehicles for maintaining purity and as the sources of potential threats to it, women were arguably positioned as "threshold figures" (Gallop 1982 146) by the apartheid

state. I borrow this phrase from Jane Gallop, who has contended that women in patriarchal societies occupy an ambivalent position, somewhere “between ‘within the family’ and ‘outside the family’” (146), enabling the constitution and reproduction of the family (or national) unit even as they are relegated to its margins. If women under hetero-patriarchy are “threshold figures”, this liminal position was exacerbated for “coloured” women, whose bodies were socially inscribed with the history of miscegenation. In her essay, “Shame and Identity: the Case of the Coloured in South Africa” (1998b), Wicomb considers the historical burden of shame borne by “coloured” women: “the shame invested in those (females) who have mated with the colonizer” (91). Wicomb understands shame as carried by those women whose bodies are perceived to have facilitated miscegenation and whose pregnant bodies carry the trace of the sexual act. The shame attached to “coloured” women’s bodies is subsequently understood as a result of their engagement in the animalistic act of sex, with no consideration for the possible coercion or violence they might have suffered. For Wicomb, the “total erasure of slavery from the folk memory [...] has its roots in shame” (96) and this “amnesia” (95), in turn, enables the perpetuation of the discourse of shame in “the textual construction, ethnographic self-fashioning, and political behaviour of coloureds in South Africa” (92). “Coloured” women’s relationship to motherhood was further complicated by the history of slavery; the law of uterine descent—which decreed that the child of a slave followed the condition of the mother—meant that a slave woman bore her children into the condition of “social death”, wherein he or she had no claim to kinship or heritage.¹¹

For Hortense Spillers (2003), writing in the context of North American slavery, the law of uterine descent did not transpose the function of the father—who recognises the child by conferring a name—onto the mother; rather, uterine descent erased the possibility of entry into the socio-symbolic order at all. For the slave child, then, as

Spillers observes, “access to discourse must be established as a human right and cannot be assumed” (“All the Things” 425). Spillers further claims that slavery also denies the affective dimension of motherhood such as affection and nurture: “birth” in this instance “[is not] a reproduction of mothering precisely because the female, like the male, has been robbed of the parental right, the parental function” (“Mama’s Baby” 224).

Similarly, in South Africa, slave owners and colonial authorities refused to recognise the legitimacy of slave families; slave marriages were not recognised under the law until 1824 when new legislation was introduced as part of an attempt to ameliorate the conditions of slaves (Scully 1997 38). Indeed, Pamela Scully (1997) notes that slave owners often deliberately disrupted family units through the sale of a spouse or child away from the farm or household (30). “Coloured” women’s ability to mother their children, in Spillers’s sense of the term, continued to be disrupted even after the abolition of slavery. This was, in large part, due to the continued demand for their labour in white households and a persistent refusal on the part of white South Africans to recognise the families of slaves and former slaves.

Despite the refusal of colonial authorities and slave owners to recognise slave families, Scully notes that “slaves and bonded labourers forged emotional bonds which crisscrossed the farmlands of the Western Cape recognizing few barriers of distance, confinement, or law” (30). The denial of the slave family, then, did not result in an absence of familial ties, whether biological or fictive; rather, slavery required the re-conceptualisation of the family for the slave population. For instance, Scully argues that while “[b]lood ties to children and to mothers appear to have been a central part of slave women’s consciousness of family [...] these ties were also imbedded in a wider community of the unfree” (31). The maintenance of inter-personal relationships, including those that exceeded the biological model of the family, became a means of resistance for slaves, who “successfully built a culture of the unfree which rested on

intimate relationships denied them by slaveholders” (Scully 33). Similarly, Wicomb’s reframing of motherhood through the discourse of cosmopolitanism in *Playing in the Light* challenges strictly biological understandings of what constitutes “family” and, potentially, the nation.

In the post-apartheid era, the racial categories formalised under the Population Registration Act remain in use in discourses of racial redress; indeed, Posel (2001b) suggests that “[i]t may be one of the more disturbing ironies of the post-apartheid ‘transformation’ that it gives new salience to biological versions of race—a reinvestment in the significance of the body as a site of differentiation” (71). In *Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women?* (2007), Meg Samuelson has similarly argued that a revitalised interest in the racialised body has taken a particularly gendered form in the post-apartheid era, in the national appropriation of women’s bodies to function as “mothers” of the nation. This is particularly evident in the case of historical women such as Sarah Bartmann and Krotoä-Eva. As Carli Coetzee notes (2002), “[i]n current versions of Krotoä’s life, she is being constructed as mother of us all” (114) and a number of white South Africans are attempting to discover genealogical connections to her in order to “gain what can seem like legitimate access to the new rainbow family” (115). Ironically, “coloured” women are now being recognised as mothers in order to appropriate their bodies as symbolic sites around which a new multi-racial nation can cohere. For Christina Sharpe (2010), post-apartheid attempts to reclaim historical figures like Bartmann¹² for statist projects amount to a new form of objectification, in which their bodies are “overwritten with multiple histories and used in the service of a number of national and political agendas that involve not the emergence of history but its repression” (74). The history that is repressed in post-apartheid discourses about Bartmann’s life is, of course, the history of oppression and violence that women of colour suffered under slavery. The reconfiguration of Bartmann as a convenient symbol

of South African nationhood repeats the initial violence done to her under colonialism. This reconfiguration is made possible through a discourse of domesticity in which Bartmann is returned “home” (Samuelson 2007). Wicomb’s interrogation of the discourse of family in *Playing in the Light* exposes the violence which is the cost of the legitimacy—social and political—it confers.

Given that the apartheid state used the rhetoric of family to justify the political disenfranchisement of “coloured” and black South Africans, it might be tempting to read Wicomb’s exposure of the genetic and historical bonds between the Afrikaner and “coloured” populations in *Playing in the Light* as a means of undermining the legitimacy of such policies and exposing racial categories as fictitious. However, I would argue that the novel takes a more radical step by representing motherhood itself as a choice; both to give birth to a child and to raise—or “mother”—that child. In doing so, *Playing in the Light* destabilises what is often conceived as the inevitable bond between mother and child and challenges the validity of familial rhetoric as a paradigm for political belonging.

In light of the novel’s preoccupation with the relationship between intimacy and social space, this chapter begins with a consideration of the politics of space in the novel and the ways in which the various spaces Marion encounters are entangled in or associated with different histories, both official and unofficial. I will argue that the negotiation of these spaces and histories in the novel raises questions about the rhetoric of political progress disseminated by the post-apartheid state and the persistence of racialised thinking in South Africa. Marion’s own search for identity similarly raises questions about the genealogical fiction of the nation and the central position of the mother in post-apartheid discourses of healing and belonging. Her investigation into her maternal family creates a strong association between motherhood and “coloured”

identity in the novel. Indeed, the revelation of her parents' acts of passing demands her re-evaluation of her own mother Helen's past and identity, and the way in which racial thinking has affected Marion's relationship to her own body. Wicomb exposes the kind of discursive violence that Sharpe argues often accompanies the reclamation of women's history through Marion's narrative re-construction of Helen's life story, as she struggles to come to terms with her past and with her own identity. Helen's story poses questions of complicity, narrative truth and agency that are pertinent to the reconfiguration of identity in post-apartheid South Africa and which Wicomb negotiates through allusions to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and to the North American slave narrative tradition. The question of women's agency is a key concern of the novel and also central to its critique of autobiography; indeed, Wicomb suggests that certain kinds of narrative—such as life writing—position “coloured” women as mere witnesses rather than as creators in their own right.

Space, Place and History:

In the novel's opening pages, Marion moves between her home, her father's house and her office and this activity establishes the coordinates of her limited social world as well as the key concerns of the text. Her movement through public and private spaces is made inextricable from the novel's navigation of South Africa's past and the continuing effects of the strategies of social organisation established by the apartheid state. *Playing in the Light* opens on Marion's balcony, an ambiguous “space both inside and out” (1), immediately positioning her as a “threshold figure” (Gallop 1982 146). There, a guinea fowl suddenly and dramatically falls dead at her feet, “declassified by the ruffling of its black-and-white patterned plumage” (1). The reader is alerted at once to both the signifiers of race deployed by the apartheid state and to its supposed

obsolescence in post-apartheid South Africa, where the end of apartheid has, in theory, rendered racial classification null and void. However, as Wicomb writes elsewhere, in “the iconography of an informal and popular anti-apartheid movement of dissident, urban, whites in the 1980s [...the guinea fowl’s] speckled black and white [...] plumage came to represent an alternative to whiteness, a new multiracialism that chose to embrace indigenous blackness” (1998a 370). Thus, the death of the guinea fowl on the transitory space of Marion’s balcony arguably symbolises the demise of the radical multi-racial and/or non-racial politics espoused by the ANC during the struggle against apartheid and suggests the novel’s ambivalence towards the new politics of the “rainbow” nation.¹³ This opening image also announces the novel’s concern with questions of space and race and their imbrications.

The novel’s equivocal outlook on racial reconciliation is confirmed by Marion’s reaction to the dead bird: she leaves a note asking her maid to deal with its carcass, thinking: “[o]ne never knows what uses *such people* might have for a dead guinea fowl [emphasis added]” (1). Marion uses the phrase “such people” to differentiate herself from her maid, suggesting the persistence of racial thinking which, in turn, is connected here to the continued reliance of white households on the domestic labour of black and “coloured” women. As discussed earlier, South African slavery established a gendered division of labour whereby female slaves performed primarily domestic labour inside the house and male slaves attended to agriculture and hard labour. Under slavery, domestic space became a site for the construction of social, and more specifically racial, hierarchies which persisted long after official slavery had ended through the continued use of black and “coloured” women’s domestic labour. Indeed, the presence of black and “coloured” maids in white households undermined the racial segregation instituted by the apartheid state.

The continued significance of spatial discourse to the organisation of post-apartheid society was suggested by Thabo Mbeki's description of South Africa—in a speech given to parliament in 1998 while he was vice-president—as “two nations” (quoted in Ansell 2004 4). In that speech, Mbeki bemoaned the survival of social and spatial divisions along racial lines established under apartheid: he identified a “white nation” characterised by privilege and access to education and a “black nation” characterised by poverty and underdevelopment. For Amy Ansell (2004), the outraged “response to the two nations thesis suggested that, in a context wherein every major indicator of life chances and well-being continues to be cleaved by race, many South Africans remain wilfully blind to its continuing significance” (5). At the same time, her own research identifies “two nations of discourse” (7) in post-apartheid racial ideology, one black and one white. For David Harvey (1990), “the assignment of place within a socio-spatial structure indicates distinctive roles, capacities for action, and access to power within the social order” (419); thus, “different forms of produced space inhibit or facilitate processes of social change” (429). The two nations metaphor used by both Mbeki and Ansell recalls Harvey's understanding of space—and different types of space—as multiple and overlapping and acknowledges, too, the material consequences of the social and cultural divisions it articulates. By engaging with the history of slavery, Wicomb's novel invites us to consider the ways in which the social geographies that preceded apartheid might also coexist with and inform those of contemporary South Africa. Indeed, although the novel is specifically concerned with the historical effects of the Group Areas Act, it is arguably equally attentive to the arrangement of domestic space, which, under apartheid, remained the province of a master-servant relationship initially established under slavery.¹⁴ *Playing in the Light*, then, points to the ways in which attention to the politics of space can disrupt the apparently natural relationship between the material conditions of an individual or

social group and his/her social “place” that has facilitated the survival of racial and class hierarchies after the abolition of apartheid.

If Mbeki’s “two nations” thesis demands recognition for the multiple “places” of South African society, Wicomb’s engagement with the politics of space also asks us to consider the multiple and conflicting histories such “places” can be home to. Once she has delegated responsibility for the dead bird, Marion decides to visit her father, John, in Observatory. John spends most of his time reminiscing about his rural youth and his marriage to Helen so that his house—Marion’s childhood home—is set up in the novel as a site of memory, a place where the past is tangibly present. The contrast between John’s somewhat dilapidated suburban house and Marion’s luxury seaside apartment reflects the different histories associated with each place. For instance, in Marion’s home, the narrow streets of her childhood have been replaced by “the classic view of Table Mountain on the left, and Robben Island on the right” (2). Since the end of apartheid, Robben Island has become a celebrated heritage site and Wicomb’s association of her protagonist with it aligns the latter with the prevailing official narrative of the apartheid past. In *History After Apartheid* (2003), Annie Coombes discusses the ways in which art and visual culture—including heritage sites such as Robben Island and District Six—supplement the grand narratives of the TRC with attention to the quotidian experiences of life under apartheid. For Coombes, “all memory is unavoidably borne out of both individual subjective experience and shaped by collective consciousness and shared social processes so that any understanding of the representation of remembrances and of the past more generally must necessarily take into account both contexts” (8).

In *Playing in the Light*, the convergence of public and private memory is suggested by an exchange between John and Marion, in which he recalls taking “up

arms for a decent life, for a country of which we can be proud” (13). At first, Marion expresses bewilderment, reminding her father that he “never supported the liberation movement” (14), but he replies that he was “not talking about that lot, about terrorists” (14), but instead about his time as a reservist with the South African Defence Forces.¹⁵ Here, John appropriates the narrative of struggle to legitimise his role in maintaining apartheid and its values, while members of the anti-apartheid movement are made “terrorists”. Significantly, however, John has “somehow collaged the rehabilitated image of Nelson Mandela into that past” (15). In this way, the novel points to the malleability of history and the possibility of building multiple and conflicting meanings into one story. John’s incorporation of Mandela into his story also suggests his ambivalent position in relation to the apartheid state: despite his professed support for apartheid, he appears to remain attached in some inexpressible way to the “coloured” past he has disavowed, as he has clearly been moved by Mandela’s own history of struggle and the values he has come to represent.

Unlike John, Marion adheres to a much more conventional post-apartheid narrative of South African history, a narrative of black struggle and liberation symbolised by Robben Island. As Coombes notes, Robben Island has become, internationally, “the foundational cornerstone of the new national image of South Africa” (55). The island is visible from Marion’s apartment and, given her occupation as a travel agent, it seems particularly fitting that Wicomb should associate her with it. It is worth noting, however, that the island’s legacy is contested: according to Coombes, tension has been caused by what some former prisoners perceive as the economically motivated “prioritizing of international over local interests in relation to Robben Island” (64). Similarly, critics of the new regime have feared that the international interest in and visibility of Nelson Mandela will limit the recent history of the island to the story of the ANC, excluding the valuable contributions of the PAC and the UDF to the struggle

while also obscuring the roles of women in the fight against apartheid and their experiences of incarceration.¹⁶ Indeed, the almost exclusive focus on the island's recent past obscures its longer history as a site of colonial discipline and punishment that includes its nineteenth-century function as a place for the incarceration of slaves.¹⁷

Thus, Marion's association with Robben Island—one of the “landmarks that constitute her world” (177)—connects her to the officially sanctioned version of history, which disavows continuity between colonial, apartheid and post-apartheid society and, in doing so threatens to erase the relevance of the history of slavery to contemporary South Africa. Indeed, it is only when Marion has uncovered her own family history that the history of the country slides “from the textbook into the very streets of the city” (177) so that Robben Island and Table Mountain “are no longer the bright images of the tourist brochure” (177); it is only through the recovery of her family history—a history of racial passing, of miscegenation and of slavery—that Marion can identify in a meaningful way with the history of her country.

While the novel's depiction of both Marion's and John's homes offer insight into official forms of memory and history in post-apartheid South Africa, the representation of Marion's offices suggest that the recent apartheid past is something that is negotiated on a daily basis. Initially, the offices of MC Travel constitute a conservative space where the traumatic past is suppressed, or at least ignored. This situation changes, however, when Marion hires Brenda McKay, a young “coloured” woman with “an ironic edge to her voice that is unnerving” (17), following the retirement of another employee. While the hire of a young “coloured” woman at first seems to signify political change, Marion's rationale for employing her is that “things [are] tight” (17). That “coloured” people continue to receive lower wages than white people points to a disjuncture between political and material progress. Indeed, it is Brenda herself who most often points to the discrepancy between the celebratory

rhetoric of the post-apartheid regime and contemporary social conditions. While Brenda's employment at MC Travel suggests the increased opportunities available to "coloured" people, her friendship with Tiena, the teagirl, crosses class boundaries that once reinforced racial categories and provides a source of irritation to Marion.¹⁸

Brenda's refusal to stay in her "place" troubles the complacency of her white colleagues.

On her first day at work, Brenda's new colleague, Boetie—an Afrikaner man only somewhat older than she is—introduces himself as Mr van Graan, following which she insists on using his full name when addressing him, despite the fact that "Boetie is a youthful twenty-eight-year-old" (20). Brenda's ironic use of Boetie's formal title suggests her refusal of his effort to pull rank. We later learn that she has an Honours degree from the University of Cape Town and aspires to be a writer. She is keenly attentive to other people's use of language; for example, at one point, following an argument with Boetie about politics, Brenda becomes exasperated and regrets that it is not yet "possible for people from the different worlds of this country to talk to each other" (38). Here, her reference to the multiple "worlds" of South Africa arguably echoes Thabo Mbeki's description of South Africa as "two nations" (quoted in Ansell 2004 4). Indeed, the way in which social privilege continues to coincide with access to specific spaces is further suggested by Brenda's later comment to Marion, when the two women go for dinner, that "there are so many parts of [Cape Town] that she doesn't know at all" (78).

While Brenda's comment describes a practical consequence of the apartheid state's organisation of space, Marion's attempt to control her business environment provides an interesting comment on the persistent relevance of apartheid era geographies to contemporary politics. She breaks up the argument between Brenda and

Boetie by reminding them that “politics is not allowed in this office” (37), a command that fails or refuses to recognise the ways in which politics already exists within that space. Even the fact that Tiena “disappears over the lunch period to wherever cleaners and tea ladies go” (34) in search of a space to eat, or that she is not allowed to sit with the others at lunch time, demonstrates how the organisation of space contributes to the delineation and maintenance of hierarchies. The space available to “cleaners and tea ladies” (34) is limited and must be earned through “banter” (34), a currency Tiena has in short supply.¹⁹ However, language is not the only means of monitoring and controlling space, as Marion’s business attests: her justification for banning political discussion from the office is that their customers are “trying to get away from precisely this kind of tedious nonsense” (39). Her comment suggests that the fantasy of an apolitical space is a privilege. Ironically, Marion acknowledges that such an apolitical space is necessarily imaginary rather than real when she adds, to herself, that her clients are “kidding themselves that it is possible to get away” (39).

Passing for Democracy: Anachronism, Affiliation and Cosmopolitanism:

Throughout the novel, Brenda’s interactions with her white colleagues draw attention to the power relations implicit in the language they use. Indeed, Marion wonders how she “manage[s] to tread so delicate a boundary between mockery and respect” (20). Here, Marion’s use of the word “boundary” represents Brenda’s speech acts as acts of spatial transgression, suggesting the limitations of the new social mobility afforded to her; even in a democratic South Africa, she must toe a line. In an incident that appears to typify her relationship with Boetie, Brenda challenges his use of politicised language in a non-political context. Describing an argument he had with his wife about her inability to choose a favourite musician, he proclaims that “everybody

must choose. It's a question of commitment; you have to take a stand" (21). But Brenda responds, "You mean, if you sit on the fence then you shouldn't be surprised to be shot dead by a passing Casspir" (21). By linking the word "commitment" with the recent history of the anti-apartheid struggle—symbolised here by the Casspir, a military vehicle used by apartheid forces—Brenda asserts that the struggle for change is ongoing in post-apartheid South Africa. However, for Boetie, Brenda's response epitomises the difference between white people and black and "coloured" people in post-apartheid South Africa: "That's now the trouble with *you people* [...] always wanting to drag in the politics of the past [emphasis added]" (21). Here, even as he implicitly invokes older forms of differentiation with the phrase "you people", Boetie refuses to acknowledge the persistence of the past in the present. The consequences of this refusal are made evident in the repeated assertions by white characters that the country is "going to the dogs" (104), a state of affairs which, for them, given the theoretical break between the old apartheid state and the new democratic regime, can have nothing to do with apartheid; rather, they claim, "this is what democracy has brought us" (36). Furthermore, such assertions render those black and "coloured" South Africans who, like Brenda, challenge the narrative of post-apartheid progress, anachronistic, attached to the "politics of the past" (21). To claim that apartheid has passed enables white South Africans to deny complicity—active or otherwise—with it and, therefore, avoid any responsibility for its legacies. Yet the exchange between Brenda and Boetie discussed above suggests that apartheid itself is merely "passing" for democracy. Wicomb thus suggests that the repression of the apartheid past is a strategy of white power, an attempt to cover over the continuities between apartheid and democracy and the continued social privileges enjoyed by white South Africans.

The close association between racial "passing" and "coloured" identity in the novel also raises questions about culpability and guilt for apartheid-era atrocities and

legacies. For example, Brenda despairs at the fact that it is “impossible to find a person in this country who voted for the Nationalist Party” (36). It appears, she suggests, that “apartheid somehow just gave birth to itself, just popped like an uninvited guest into the constitution” (37). This last comment interestingly associates childbirth with hospitality and, for this reason, I would argue, it initiates the novel’s exploration of the links between motherhood and cosmopolitanism. While the suggestion that apartheid was born, rather than constructed, reinstates the patriarchal and bioracial discourses that underpinned white supremacy in South Africa, the subsequent description of apartheid as “an uninvited guest” subtly disrupts the politics of blood associated with the familial rhetoric of the nation-state. Furthermore, by associating the absence of a mother—apartheid “gave birth to itself”—with the rejection of shame attached to apartheid, Brenda implicitly identifies the figure of the (absent) mother as shameful. As I will show in the following pages, the idea that the mother is the source of shame is particularly relevant to the novel’s engagement with “coloured” identity, given that, as Wicomb (1998b) has noted elsewhere, under apartheid, the blame or responsibility for miscegenation was placed upon “coloured” women. Indeed, much of the novel is concerned with Marion’s investigation into her maternal history and the identity of her own mother, Helen.

Interestingly, such a politics recalls Edward Said’s formulation of filiative and affiliative orders and the relationship between them. In *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1991), Said describes affiliation as an attempt to “create bonds between each other that would substitute for those ties that connect members of the same family across generations” (17). At the same time, he notes that affiliation “more or less directly reproduce[s] the skeleton of family authority” (22). In *Playing in the Light*, Wicomb similarly acknowledges the cultural authority attached to the family while

exposing its elective nature through the metaphor of hospitality. For Gideon Baker (2009), hospitality offers the most useful model for a cosmopolitan politics.

The *productive* tension between identity and difference at the heart of cosmopolitan ethics is captured by the ethics of hospitality, where our awareness of the identity of the stranger as a fellow human being seeking refuge is opposed by the irreducible difference of the stranger as Other—someone who, as a guest in a home not his own, suffers the violence of assimilation [emphasis in original]. (109)

Echoing the current emphasis on cosmopolitanism as a process rather than a solution, Baker's use of hospitality as a framework for negotiating identity in a multi-cultural context acknowledges the validity of both the host's identity and that of the guest or stranger. Hospitality or cosmopolitanism, then, enables forms of relation not predicated on kinship or the genealogical fantasy of the nation-state and thus offers the possibility of reimagining nationhood.

In "Zoë Wicomb and the Cape Cosmopolitan" (2011), Dorothy Driver notes that contemporary theorists of cosmopolitanism are careful to "balance the universalising propensity of the term by critical attention to the time and place of its production" (93). She finds a similarly critical consciousness at work in Wicomb's engagement with that discourse in *Playing in the Light*. For Driver, the value of cosmopolitanism in Wicomb's work is that it "retains [...] the relational terms, nationalism and cosmopolitanism, but at the same time negates the opposition that has often been felt to lie at the heart of the relation" (103). Similarly, in "The Urge to Nowhere" (2011), Abdulrazak Gurnah identifies a tension in Wicomb's work "between the value of travel and the value of rootedness" (261); according to Gurnah, she refuses to prioritize either the local or the global but attends, instead, to the relative value of each. For both Driver

and Gurnah, Wicomb prioritises the transnational and/or translocal in order to disrupt the opposition between “national” and “global” identities. As Pamela Scully (2011) notes, however, Wicomb also “questions the comforting telos of cosmopolitanism: that more talk will result in greater truths, or at least a consensus around some truths” (306); her work is less interested in providing a complete solution to, than in proffering strategies for negotiating, the messy problems of identity.

Playing in the Light's focus on motherhood asks us to reconsider identity itself; by aligning motherhood and hospitality Wicomb's novel requires us to question what is considered the most “natural” of all relationships, the bond of a mother with her child. In doing so, she disrupts the trend, identified by Kerry Bystrom (2009), towards “genealogical fictions” in the post-apartheid era.

[These are narratives which] return to central tropes of nineteenth- and early twentieth century social organisation—tropes such as the ‘bloodline’, that link family, science and nation—and pose traditional genealogy as a language for working through the material, emotional and political dislocations created by the democratic transition. (227)

In *Playing in the Light*, Helen and John break ties with their families of origin in order to claim white identities. Their passing disrupts the filiative order and demands new forms of *af*-filiation. Yet, when Marion investigates her family's history, she is not attempting to mend the genealogical break caused by her parents' passing, but rather to find her place in the distinctly affiliative order of post-apartheid South Africa. For, while she longs to find a mother, or mother-figure, her search is not motivated by a desire to uncover an authentic origin, an African progenitress who would legitimate her presence or affirm her place in South Africa. In other words, she eschews the post-apartheid attempts by those whom Brenda describes as “Afrikaners of the more-

indigenous-than-thou brigade” (102) to reclaim historical women, such as Krotoä-Eva and Sarah Bartmann, as mothers of the nation.²⁰ Echoing the work of feminist scholars such as Christina Sharpe (2010) and Meg Samuelson (2007), Wicomb’s novel thus suggests that Afrikaner attempts to claim an indigenous status for themselves requires the appropriation of “coloured” women’s bodies in order to assert their “mixed race” heritage.

Matrilineal History, Mermaids and Disavowal:

As noted earlier, Marion is presented to us as someone who is unsympathetic towards the transition and her dismissal of those “who choose not to forget, who harp on about the past and so fail to move forward and look to the future” (48) evinces her limited interest in the “tired old politics of this country” (48). Indeed, Marion suggests that the retrospection which characterised South Africa in the transition era—epitomised by the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission—constitutes a form of weakness, a “failure” to move on. She considers this attitude a result of her Afrikaner stoicism, which distinguishes her from “indulgent, effete English types, who do not know how to roll up their sleeves and get on with things” (3). This latter comment is made in relation to psychoanalytic therapy in particular, a process with which Marion has “no truck” (3), despite her increasingly frequent anxiety attacks and strange dreams. Significantly, she predicts that the therapeutic process would conclude that “her mother, like all mothers, was responsible for her insecurity” (3); by identifying Helen as the cause of her anxiety, Marion reinforces the novel’s concern with specifically matrilineal histories and the figure of the mother as one of blame or shame.

That therapy is a narrative process is also significant, considering that the novel establishes Marion as someone who does not read, and, at times, cannot read; as

Andrew van der Vlies (2010) notes, Marion is presented as “a singularly unqualified and inept reader” (593).²¹ Although it is through the development of a tentative friendship with Brenda—who is a writer as well as a reader—that Marion begins to read literature, the first instance of her engagement with narrative is not at Brenda’s instigation but rather a matter of chance. While declaring that she “doesn’t usually bother with newspapers” (48), Marion steals Brenda’s copy of the *Cape Times* from the lunch room, so captivated is she by the image of Patricia Williams which accompanies the report of the latter’s testimony to the TRC about her torture at the hands of the Security Police. Marion’s subsequent hallucinations of Williams provide the motive for her investigations into her family history.

When Marion first notices it, the “newspaper is folded into a quarter, framing a face: the photograph of the woman fills the entire space” (49). This description echoes that of the photograph accompanying one of Antje Krog’s reports on the TRC proceedings, which was printed in the British newspaper *The Guardian* and which Wicomb discusses in “Five Afrikaner Texts and the Rehabilitation of Whiteness” (1998a). The photograph in *The Guardian* of an anonymous black woman was the only image accompanying a written report on the testimonies of four people at the TRC hearings and, like the one represented in the novel, took up “more than a quarter of the page” (1998a 363). Among the four people testifying at the hearings, there was at least one black woman and an Afrikaner man identified as Mr Van Eck, who described himself as a “poor white” (364). For Wicomb, Van Eck’s assertion of “poor white” status “amounts to an effacement of whiteness with its dominant meaning of privilege” (364). She claims that this strategy is reinforced by the link made in the newspaper article between his story and blackness through the accompanying photograph of an anonymous black woman. She further argues that this is representative of a “new practice of conjugating a New Afrikaner ethnicity with the ready-made category of

black-as-other” (381), a reconfiguration of Afrikaner identity as alterior rather than dominant. For Wicomb, this constitutes an attempt to claim legitimacy within the rubric of the “rainbow” nation, where all minority ethnicities find acceptance. In this way, I would suggest, Wicomb identifies possible problems with the affiliative order described by Said since it might serve to mask and perpetuate, rather than undo or disrupt, existing relations of power. Just as Rayda Jacobs’s *The Slave Book* (1998) attempts to render “coloured” identity politically legitimate in the wake of the re-election of the National Party in the Western Cape, Wicomb argues that Afrikaner writers such as Antjie Krog and Chris Barnard attempted to occlude white privilege through attention to the specificity of Afrikaner ethnicity.²² *Playing in the Light*, on the other hand, ironically juxtaposes Marion’s rejection of the TRC—a rejection she justifies through her assertion of Afrikaner “stoicism”—with the narrative of her discovery of her African heritage.

On the evening she takes this newspaper, Marion lays it out on her bed, where she contemplates the image of Williams’s face; “[s]he cannot bring herself to read the article [...because] these stories are *all the same* [emphasis added]” (54). It is Patricia Williams’s face, not her story that haunts Marion and sparks the memory of another, that is, of Tokkie, a beloved family servant. When Marion steps onto her balcony to compose herself after a panic attack, she is horrified to see “an enlarged face floating on the water, a disfigured face on the undulating waves, swollen with water” (55). Surprisingly, however, it is not Williams’s face, but Tokkie’s that Marion recognises there. Through the image of these two “coloured” women, the novel establishes a metonymic relationship between “coloured” identity and the sea. In “Oceanic Histories and Protean Poetics” (2010), Meg Samuelson argues that the sea in Wicomb’s work operates as a “fluid archive” (543), whose “ebbs and flows unsettle [...] linear temporalities” (543) and “provide [...] a historical perspective from which to counter,

simultaneously, imperialist and nativist histories” (544). According to Samuelson, Wicomb’s attention to the sea opens up “the space of the bounded nation” (557), enabling an engagement with histories of movement into and out of South Africa that are not inscribed by the history of colonial settlement. This, in turn, highlights the status of national space as imagined and its reliance on the exclusion of certain histories “which the sea [in Wicomb’s fiction] is now returning to land” (552). Thus, attention to the oceanic dimension of Cape slavery allows for a reconsideration of South African history from a cosmopolitan, rather than a nationalist, perspective.

The association of Patricia Williams and Tokkie with the sea evokes the repressed history of slavery in South Africa, even as it marks that history as feminine. Thus, Marion’s hallucinations suggest the eruption of a specifically matrilineal history that threatens to disturb official narratives of the past, epitomised by the work of the TRC. As Meg Samuelson (2010) notes, the discovery that Tokkie is her grandmother is “a reversal of the trite statement—‘she’s one of the family’—with which so many white South Africans have dismissed the violence of their domestic relations” (552). Marion’s recognition of Tokkie’s face on the water foreshadows her discovery of their biological relationship which, in turn, disrupts the narrative of master-servant relations that served to disavow any other, more intimate, relationship between white and “coloured” South Africans.

Overwhelmed by the image of Williams, which she imagines hissing “a command to remember, remember, remember” (54), Marion has a panic attack in which “she feels the room shrink around her [...] *trapped* in endless folds of muslin; the bed grows into the room, fills it, grows large as a *ship* in which she, *bound* in meters of muslin, flounders [emphasis added]” (54). Here, the image of the ship arguably recalls the oceanic slave trade and suggests the possibility that Marion has slave heritage.

According to Shell, “[from] 1652 to 1808, approximately 63,000 slaves were imported to the Cape” (40) from diverse locations, including Malaysia, Madagascar, Indonesia, India and East Africa. However, slaves at the Cape also “included persons of [...] Abyssinian, Arabian, Bengali, Borneose, Brazilian, Burmese, Chinese, Iranian, Japanese, and Sri Lankan origin” (42). This range of ethnic groups suggests at least occasional intersections between the Indian Ocean and Atlantic slave trades as well as highlighting the oceanic character of the trade at the Cape. In Wicomb’s passage, the evocation of the history of slavery through the image of the ship is further elaborated with the language of bondage: Marion is “trapped” and “bound”, unable to escape the impending confrontation with the hidden details of her parents’ lives and of her familial inheritance. Once the attack has subsided, she “skims” (54) the newspaper story and finds that Williams had been the victim of physical torture, having had “her jaw and nose [...] broken” (54) and “that she had been sexually abused in unspeakable ways” (54); indeed, “the marks of a fist lie as a trace just below the healed features” (55). Here the body of a “coloured” woman carries a history of violence, discernible just beneath the surface. And while, in Williams’s case, the physical and sexual violence she suffered was carried out by agents of the apartheid state, the references to ships and to bondage in the description of Marion’s attack perhaps metonymically invoke a longer history of violence against “coloured” women reaching back to the era of slavery.

Following her panic attack, Marion rings her father to ask him about Tokkie. John tells her that he cannot recall Tokkie’s surname, but Marion “has no doubt he is lying” (56) and becomes convinced, with “uncanny certainty” (62), that her hallucinations have something to do with “her own birth” (62). When she confides in Geoff, the two agree that the most obvious explanation for her mysterious origin is that Marion is, in fact, adopted. This fantasy of adoption serves to further distance her from the matrilineal history of slavery, particularly since her ambivalent feelings towards her

mother are compounded by her increasingly close relationship with John, who, since Helen's death, "has become her dear Pappa" (4). Her closeness to her father is even emphasised by the description of her smile.

[T]he right corner of her mouth lifts ever so slightly, like that of her father and of his father before him, and so on, generations of Campbells [...] going back to the old snowbound days in the Scottish Highlands, passing on the involuntary muscle movement to all the *men* in the family [emphasis added] (26).

Here, Marion is filiated with a specifically male line of descent that can be traced back to Scotland, thereby associating a patrilineal inheritance with colonial authority; John's family history provides support for the Campbell's claims to whiteness. Conversely, it is through Tokkie and, therefore, her maternal family, that Marion discovers her "coloured" heritage, compounding the novel's association of "coloured" identity and motherhood. Ironically, however, it is John who values "coloured" identity and provides Marion with a clue to her heritage when, throughout her childhood and into her adult life, he calls her his little mermaid.

As a little girl, inspired by her father's tales of mermaids, Marion would bind her legs together with bandages to create a fish tail and remembers feeling "[f]ree, without awkward genitals" (47). John's re-imagining of Marion as a mermaid recalls the structure of disavowal discussed by Freud in his essay, "Fetishism" (1927), in which he argues that the fetish object simultaneously hides and acknowledges the fact of sexual difference. With her genitalia hidden, Marion is freed from the burden of sexual disgrace and shame borne by "coloured" women. But her fish-tail also acknowledges her hybrid identity—the mermaid is half-woman and half-fish. The connection between the figure of the mermaid and "coloured" or "mixed-race" identity is confirmed by Helen's derisive reaction to the sight of Marion with her legs bound: "No good being

half woman and half fish, half this and half that; you have to be fully one thing or another, otherwise you're lost" (47).²³ Thus, the fantasy of the mermaid both acknowledges and disguises the mixed racial heritage that John and Helen repress by "playing white". Indeed, while Samuelson (2010) notes that the figure of the mermaid points to "the ways daughters find themselves entrapped, fixed or rendered immobile in the prophetic visions of fathers" (554), in this instance her father's vision is perhaps equally tied up with Helen's ambition to achieve a white identity for her family. At the same time, the claustrophobic metonymy between the bandages Marion uses to construct her mermaid's tail and bondage (once again evoking slavery), suggested when Marion imagines herself "bound in meters of muslin" (54) during her panic attack, is reasserted when Marion grows frustrated with John's evasions on the subject of Tokkie. Confused by his reluctance to talk about Tokkie, she finds his "swaddling endearments grow tight as *bandages* [emphasis added]" (58). In this instance, the word "bandages" suggests that John is still trying to protect Marion from the trauma of her parents' "coloured" past.²⁴

Reconceiving the Nation: Narrative and the TRC:

While she believes herself to be adopted, Marion is motivated by her persistent hallucinations of Patricia Williams's face to watch the TRC proceedings in secret.

While doing so she finds that "[s]omehow, she bears the shame of the perpetrators; somehow she, who has never had anything to do with politics, has been branded by this business; somehow her *parentlessness* has bonded her with the brigadiers" (75). Here, the novel once again makes use of genealogical metaphors to comment on the politics of transition-era South Africa. In Marion's fantasy of adoption, she is an orphan, taken in by Helen and John; however, her increasing distrust of her "adoptive" parents and her

own past renders her “parentless” once again. Her sense of being parentless acts to rationalise her alienation from post-apartheid society and, by characterising the brigadiers—those who worked to protect the apartheid state—as similarly parentless, she recognises the need for a new model of intramural relations through which they too could belong to the new nation. However, Marion’s description of the perpetrators of apartheid-era violence as parentless also works to betray her sympathy for those white South Africans who supported apartheid in a way that threatens to erase their guilt and their responsibility to the process of democratic transition.

Watching the TRC hearings, Marion “finds herself a reluctant traveller who has landed in a foreign country without so much as a phrase book” (74), embroiled in a process she insists has no relevance to her. Here, Wicomb highlights the relationship between language and space, or narrative and nation, which was central to the work of the TRC. Despite the sense of alienation provoked by the hearings, Marion perseveres, determined to understand why “[Williams’s] eyes point at the connectedness of this country to her old familiar world” (74). Yvette Christiansë’s (2003) discussion of racial passing in South Africa helps to shed light on the relations, established here and elsewhere in the novel, between racial passing, travel and the TRC process. For Christiansë, the TRC was an instrument of transition, through which South Africans could “*move* from the status of victims to that of speaking subjects [emphasis added]” (372). Yet, as noted earlier, the Commission’s failure to dismantle the fiction of race meant it could not accommodate the history of passing, which destabilises the colonial account of race as biological fact. In her discussion of a personal friend, Poppie, who lived as a “play-white”, Christiansë describes the ways in which passing, with its promise of social mobility, actually severely limited Poppie’s life: “Poppie’s passing had become a life’s work: an end in itself. As such, it had to be racially, physically

circumscribed and local, for it would risk exposing itself if it went *travelling* [emphasis added]” (381).

Similarly, in Wicomb’s novel, Marion’s reluctant venture into the “foreign country” (74) created by the TRC necessitates unravelling the fiction of her life as a white woman and, as such, presents a significant challenge to her sense of self. Thus the journeys Marion takes throughout the course of the narrative are part of her attempt to find a way to belong, to make post-apartheid South Africa her home. Marion’s fantasy of adoption invokes the genealogical fiction that underwrites the nation and connects that fiction to the work of the TRC. Her sense of herself as an orphan and a foreigner points to the multiple ways in which the “stranger” of cosmopolitan discourse might be relevant to post-apartheid society, to the difficulties entailed in both offering and receiving hospitality, and to the potential rewards of re-making “a foreign country” (74) “familiar” (74).

In search of a Mother:

While the memory of Tokkie is prompted by her panic attack, Marion does not immediately discover her biological relationship to the woman she continues to think of as an old family servant. As noted earlier, she reacts to John’s stubborn silence about the past by concluding that she is adopted, a fantasy which incorporates Tokkie as agent of the adoption, a go-between for her adoptive and biological parents. In an attempt to trace the biological family she has imagined for herself, Marion decides to try to find out more about Tokkie and, having enlisted Brenda’s help, she travels to Wuppertal to meet Mrs Murray, an old friend of Tokkie’s, or Mrs Karelse, which she later learns is Tokkie’s real name. Mrs Murray’s account of Mrs Karelse as a respectable widow with two children, “not the sort who went into service for Boers” (95), but who was instead a

housekeeper for “posh people” (95), leads Marion to believe that she is “[n]ot their Tokkie” (95). However, before she can leave Mrs Murray’s home, Marion’s foot begins to swell painfully, “taut as dough risen in the confines of its pan, the strap of her sandal parting it into two uneven loaves” (96). When Mrs Murray bends to tend to her foot, she glances up at Marion and, with a gasp, declares her to be “the spitting image of Mrs Karelse” (97). Meg Samuelson (2010) notes that the image of Marion’s foot “parting” (96) recalls the splitting of the “mermaid’s tail into two human legs, enabling her to ‘pass’ in the human world” (554-5); Marion’s swollen foot marks the failure of the protective fantasy of the mermaid and forces a confrontation with the painful truth of her relationship to Tokkie.

Mrs Murray tries to brush off her recognition, asserting that Mrs Karelse’s “shadow” (97) fell over Marion’s face, but when Marion tries to nod her head in agreement, she finds that “she has no control over [her head], that in fact it is not her own” (97). The trauma of Marion’s forced encounter with “the fact that [...] Tokkie, [her] own grandmother, sat in the backyard drinking coffee from a servant’s mug” (103), is articulated as dissociation from her own body. Once in the car with Brenda, she “does not recognise the linen-clad legs on which her eyes have come to rest” (99); Marion must confront the body she now inhabits and the shame of having believed her grandmother was her servant. Her “left hand moves up and down her left leg, up and down” (99) as if to familiarise herself with this new limb. Marion’s leg—and her body more generally—have been transformed by the revelation of her “coloured” heritage into something strange, something “other”.

After their return from Wuppertal, Brenda stays at Marion’s apartment and is woken during the night by the “eerie cries” (99) of her friend in the midst of a nightmare. Unable to wake her, Brenda lies beside Marion and “hold[s] her tightly”

(100) until “[h]elpless as a baby, her arms [...] tightly around Brenda; her head rests on Brenda’s breast” (100). Once her identity as a “white” woman has been stripped away, Marion regresses to an infantile state and must begin to re-evaluate and reconstruct her identity. It is significant that, in this scene, Brenda, a “coloured” woman, is positioned as Marion’s mother, cradling her infant at her breast, in stark contrast to the coldness and distance that Marion associates with her “white” mother, Helen, who was callous enough to “put that [servant’s] mug in her [own mother’s] hands” (103). Indeed, thanks to Marion’s fantasy of her adoption, her quest to learn more about Tokkie is intimately tied to her search for her (biological) mother. On meeting Tokkie’s friend Mrs Murray for the first time, Marion is “disappointed” (93), having expected “someone motherly, perhaps” (93); both Marion’s desire for a mother figure and her failure to find one suggests Wicomb’s refusal to allow the figure of the mother to be used as a simple and symbolic means to claim belonging.

Marion’s search for a mother figure results in her discovery of her parents’ “coloured” identity, which, as discussed earlier, is figured in the novel by the mermaid. At a later point in the novel, returning home after another visit to Brenda’s house, Marion watches from her balcony as “the waves throw up broken images” (185). At first, she fears that these might be yet another vision of Patricia Williams but on closer inspection “it seems to be a mermaid, holding like any mother a baby to her breast” (186). As she considers the image brought to mind by the waves, Marion imagines that it is the dugong, a “sea mammal who suckles her young, [...] whom sailors thought to be a mermaid” (186). But she concludes that “the Cape is too far south for that” (186). In her analysis of this moment in the text, Samuelson (2010) identifies it as crucial, “enabling Marion to shift identification from the figure of the mermaid to that of the dugong” (553), a figure, she claims, which offers “a historical understanding of identity” (555) as opposed to a racial one. In particular, this historical dimension is

evident when Marion explains how sailors, catching sight of the dugong “suckl[ing] her young” (186), created the myth of the mermaid. Marion’s knowledge of the creature then is the result of a cosmopolitan history of migration and slavery in the Indian Ocean region which allowed for the transfer or influx of knowledge into South Africa.

The figure of the dugong also evokes the history of slavery and once again suggests the existence of alternative narratives of identity made possible by that history. According to R.V. Nair (1975), the “name dugong is derived from the Malayan name *duyong*” (1) which suggests the cultural influence of the slaves imported to South Africa, a high proportion of whom were taken from Indonesia.²⁵ Vair also notes that “Comorra fishermen attribute human origin to dugong [...and b]efore selling the meat of dugong the Mohorrai fishermen of Madagascar take an oath swearing there is no unnatural relationship between them and their captive” (Appendix II 44). The possibility of sexual relations between the dugong and human sailor, suggested by Vair’s account of folk-beliefs, renders the dugong a figure of miscegenation and its disavowal. The resemblances between these beliefs about the dugong and the figure of the mermaid itself is suggestive of a regional, Indian Ocean, rather than a European basis for the story of the mermaid related to Marion by her father. This alternative origin for the story reinforces the role of the mermaid as a figure for “coloured” identity, which is itself the product of cultural exchange enabled by slavery at the Cape.

Marion’s substitution of the dugong for the mermaid can thus be read as a step towards accepting the reality of her “coloured” heritage while also acknowledging the cosmopolitan dimension of “coloured” identity. For Samuelson (2010), the image of the suckling dugong in Wicomb’s novel serves to displace the “womb”—so often appropriated by patriarchal institutions (556)—as the primary symbol of motherhood, replacing it with an image of nurture. The novel thus acknowledges that motherhood exceeds the fact of biological reproduction by emphasising affection and care as key

aspects of mothering, reiterating its challenge to the biological discourses that underpin the familial rhetoric of the nation state.

Helen's Story: Complicity, Coercion and Narrative:

The history of slavery is also suggested in the novel's account of Marion's mother, Helen, who is the driving force behind the Campbells' decision to "play white". The relationship between the history of slavery, "coloured" identity and Helen's desire to pass for white is most evident when she considers the relationship of the possessive suffix *-se* in Afrikaans to the history of slavery; this suffix renders the meaning of her surname, Karelse, "the slave of someone called Karel" (128). While her decision to anglicise her name—becoming Helen Charles—as part of the process of passing might be understood as another way of hiding her identity and repressing her past, Helen herself describes it as "a way of claiming her liberty" (128).²⁶ This initial step towards white identity highlights the role of language in the constitution of identity. However, changing her name is not enough and Helen is forced to take more drastic measures to achieve whiteness.

Helen makes an arrangement with a local government official, Councillor Carter, to exchange sexual favours in return for a signed affidavit stating that she and John are white. This scene raises complex questions of complicity, coercion and agency, as Carter uses his knowledge of Helen's racial identity to sexually exploit her, an act in which Helen herself is complicit. Helen is thus caught in a double bind. On one hand, she is conscious of the social ideas of feminine propriety and charity that underpin the white identity to which she aspires—expressed in her assertion that "virtue was the special responsibility of woman" (142). On the other, the only possibility of achieving

that identity is through the exchange of sexual favours. Ironically, Helen achieves white status by capitulating to the stereotype of the promiscuous “coloured” woman.

During Helen’s first meeting with Councillor Carter, he imagines her nipples as blackberries; just before unbuttoning her shirt he says, “*as if he had already seen them, Such luscious blackberry nipples [emphasis added]*” (143). Here, the temporal reversal between seeing and describing suggests the prior availability of “coloured” women’s bodies to the white male gaze.²⁷ When we consider that Helen’s arrangement with Carter recalls the way in which slave women traded access to their bodies through marriage in exchange for manumission, it becomes clear that the social position of “coloured” women as objects of exchange anachronistically persists after the abolition of slavery.²⁸ Although Helen approached Counsellor Carter for assistance in procuring white identity cards for herself and John, she “had not imagined that the plan would include humiliation of this kind” (140). She becomes further distressed when she realises “that she would not get away with being simply the object of his attentions, that the price was to show willing, that she would have to cooperate” (143). Carter’s demand that Helen consent to her own exploitation further echoes the position of slave women, whose own consent to or refusal of sex could not be articulated under the conditions of slavery. In this way, the novel complicates the issue of “coloured” complicity even as it renders political complicity with apartheid in terms of sexual exchange, illustrating the relation of sexual politics to the politics of race and nation.

Significantly, however, the more confident Helen becomes in her whiteness, the more that Carter’s memory of their meetings fades. When they meet in church several years later, she speaks to him “with such civility, such ease, that he could not but bury the memory, which is to say that he never again allowed his eyes to stray below her chin” (145). Here the novel suggests that for Carter—and white men more generally—

white women's bodies were not available for consumption, whether imagined or actual, in the same way that "coloured" women's were. The novel thus confirms the social construction and contingent nature of race; Helen becomes a white woman because she is socially recognised as such.

Helen's own repression of the memory of this incident—while understandable in psychological terms—also suggests that she, like Carter, considers the sexual exploitation of a white woman unthinkable. If, for Helen, whiteness and sexual exploitation are incommensurate, then passing provides a means to escape the shame socially assigned to the "coloured" woman's body. Of course, in reality, white women were also historically subject to sexual violence and coercion. However, as Pamela Scully argues in *Liberating the Family* (1997), the "men to whom they were most vulnerable regarding rape, such as their husbands and other male relatives and peers, were protected by their positions in society" (165). The socially enforced silence about the sexual assault of white women served to further displace the burden of corporeality—what Rohy (2000) describes as the symbolic "weight of materiality" (98)—onto black and "coloured" women. This, in turn, allows white women to cooperate with patriarchy and racism by disavowing the body and its vulnerabilities and desires; as Kopano Ratele (2009) observes, apartheid's "immorality laws created a racial, antagonistic, and sexually conflicted, masculine whiteness and a soft, subordinate, and supposedly *asexual* feminine whiteness [emphasis added]" (172). To be a white woman, then, required the repression of sexual desire. Thus, for Helen, the acquisition of white identity holds out the possibility of lifting the symbolic burden of corporeality from her shoulders and, in doing so, of escaping the derogatory stereotypes attached to the "coloured" woman's body.

Whiteness does not come without a price, however, and once she has received the affidavit from Carter, Helen starts to withdraw from her husband. Her fear of bearing a child too dark to “play white” and her continued loathing for her own body lead her to avoid both physical and emotional intimacy with him. Helen’s withdrawal from John is accelerated by her unwanted pregnancy, which “unleashed a hatred [for him] she found impossible to hide” (124). Her fears that the child will be too dark are exacerbated by what she considers to be John’s “thoughtlessness” (124) so that “by the time the child arrived [...] she was too addicted to anxiety to be relieved” (125) and will not contemplate another pregnancy. At the same time, she reiterates the tension between biological and cultural discourses suggested earlier by Brenda when she describes her own unborn child (Marion) as “an uninvited guest” (134). This description also reconceives a biological relationship that is usually considered to be inherent, natural and inevitable as a hospitable one that is voluntary, contingent and social. In doing so, Helen acknowledges the distinct subjectivities of both mother and child.

Despite the fact that Marion is fair enough to pass for white, Helen continues to avoid intimacy with John, even going so far as to turn “gingerly [in bed at night], careful to avoid [John], who in his sleep tried to trap her feet between his own” (125), thus eschewing even the most casual physical contact between them. However, Helen’s feet become the last site of (potential) intimacy and pleasure between them in the novel.²⁹

Indeed the one intimate act that Helen allows John to perform after she has “passed” is to pedicure her feet, which she calls her “bête noir” (147), a telling phrase that suggests the ways in which her relationship to her body has been affected by racial stereotypes. For Helen, the thick skin that grows on her feet “like a [...] weed” (148) as a result of a childhood spent barefoot attests to the “astonishing memory of skin” (148); her body continues to remember her life as a “coloured” person even as she tries to forget.³⁰

Significantly, it is only through the part of her body that she associates with her

“coloured” past that Helen can experience intimacy with John. Otherwise, Helen rejects physical intimacy and pleasure. Instead, the story of how she achieved whiteness becomes a substitute for her sexualised body and she is careful to look for gaps, “holes that could be plugged by such and such a word” (149-50). In this sense, her autobiographical narrative acts as a fetish object that serves to disavow her body even as it acknowledges her desire for emotional—and potentially sexual—intimacy. Her desire to plug the “holes” in her narrative suggests a desire to be impenetrable, inviolable, even as it inscribes the possibility of both penetration and violation that makes clear the sexual nature of Helen’s anxieties.

Helen’s comments also recall those of Magda, the protagonist of J.M. Coetzee’s *In the Heart of the Country* (1977)—a novel Marion will later read on her travels—who describes herself as a “hole with a body draped around it” (44). However, unlike Magda, who is viciously aware of the violence and emptiness of her purely discursive existence, Helen persists in trying to plug the holes in her story, in an attempt to achieve the imaginary (w)holeness or coherence of white identity. In this respect, it is significant that Magda also describes herself as “a *zero*, null, a vacuum [emphasis added]” (2), which could refer to the apartheid system of representing racial categories by number. According to Yvette Christiansë, under this system, whiteness was represented by two zeros—“00”—which she describes as a “doubled invisibility” (374), a purity denoted by absence that “appears to be the origin of all race” (374). Other racial categories were represented by a combination of zero and another number—for example, “Cape Coloured” is signified by “01” (374). Under apartheid, then, whiteness operated as an overdetermined absence represented by the double zero, while it also functioned as the constitutive lack of all other racial categories. Thus, when Coetzee describes Magda as signified by zero, he acknowledges the discursive—as opposed to the biological—reality of whiteness. Coetzee also employs a similar tactic in his later work, such as

Times of Michael K (1983) and *Foe* (1986), where the figure of zero, or the figure ‘o’, functions as the opposite of the phallic ‘I’, the quintessential subject of Western autobiography.

The “holes” (149) that make Helen’s story unstable are created by the repression of her “coloured” identity and make the success of her passing tenuous. When, for example, she overhears the snide comments of a white customer, Helen discovers that the fake flowers with which she decorates her home are considered “vulgar” (6) by whites and immediately “called the company to have them removed” (6). This precipitates a crisis and, as the narrator reports, until they are taken away, her head nods “like a mechanical toy; she said over and over that it had been a mistake, only a mistake” (6). Here, the word “mistake” marks a site of potential trauma. In

Psychoanalysis and Black Novels (1998), Claudia Tate argues that “repetitions locate sites of [surplus] meaning” (137) which, in turn, can suggest unconscious desire. In this light, Helen’s “mistake” might go beyond her faux pas with interior decorating and refer instead to her decision to “play white”. Anticipating the possibility of being revealed as a “play white”, Helen’s repeated assertion that “it had been a mistake” is both a defence against the accusation that she has passed and a confession that she is a “play white”.

Once Helen and John have passed for white they are stuck; having “primed the white canvas that is their life [...] they do not know where to start, how to make a mark” (152). The pressure to maintain the facade of white identity requires the Campbells’ continual vigilance and prohibits change. Despite, or perhaps because of, her continuous process of revision and repetition, Helen’s narrative represents a kind of stasis—both temporal and spatial; just as Helen constantly returns to the past, so she and John never “moved out of that part of Observatory” (150). The Campbells’ immobility recalls Yvette Christiansë’s (2002) description of racial passing as “physically

circumscribed and *local* [emphasis added]" (381), suggesting their remoteness from issues of national significance. Furthermore, as Stéphanie Robolin (2011) notes, Observatory, while ostensibly a white area, "was historically nonetheless a place where passing for white was common" (362) and not, as its name would suggest, "the site of scrutinized racial observation" (362), rather the social order was maintained by the rigorous self-scrutiny of people like Helen and John. Observatory, like the Campbells themselves, both is and isn't "white".

Frankenstein and Writing the Monstrous:

In her desire to find out the truth about her parents and her own identity, Marion consistently pesters her father for information. But John fears "his daughter's "cold anger" (117) as she questions him about his past and the decision to "play white". In spite of her insistence that he tell her everything, John finds it difficult to recall the past, "[s]o thoroughly had their lives moulded into the *fiction* [emphasis added]" (117) of white identity. Marion's determination to discover the truth about the past suggests her sense of entitlement to that knowledge and disregards both the complexity of Helen and John's decision to "play white" and the way that decision continues to affect her father, who remains—at this point in the novel—estranged from his "coloured" family. For, in order to make their new white identity official, John had been forced to sign an oath "that he would relinquish all contact he might have with coloureds" (157), effectively renouncing his family. He describes it as "the very worst thing, a shooting pain through his heart and nothing short of a sin" (158).³¹ John recalls the time as a confusing one in which "coloured" people's rights were increasingly under threat³² and people were "left waiting to find their lawful places, or just any place at all that could be made lawful" (157). He describes Marion's version of his story as a "broadsheet" (117), emphasising

her interest in the facts of the story, rather than in its affective dimension. However, John “has no time for newspapers [and] does not find such things easy to read” (117); he only agrees to tell Marion what he knows in order to “clear up this whole business and forget about the past” (155). Here, the novel connects the revelation of the past with its disavowal, recalling fears that the TRC would enable a kind of national amnesia.³³

John’s reluctance to speak to Marion in the face of her insistent questioning can be contrasted with his relationship to Brenda, who helps to care for him in Marion’s absence. During her visits to him, Brenda later tells Marion, John “just couldn’t stop talking. About the farm, his childhood, meeting your mummy and all that, it all came pouring out” (217); in response she is inspired to write “his story” (217). While Marion’s version of her parents’ history is “like a broadsheet” (117), Brenda’s “story” can accommodate the complexity of the Campbells’ decision to “play white” and their subsequent, contradictory relationship to both whiteness and “colouredness”—suggested earlier in John’s respect for Nelson Mandela. The novel thus distinguishes between the journalism of a “broadsheet” and Brenda’s desire to write fiction, not only in terms of truth and falsehood, but also in terms of John’s relationship to each type of narrative. Wicomb’s interest in the power of narrative and the difficulty of negotiating “truth” in narrative is further evinced by the novel’s engagement with two intertexts—Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Olaudah Equiano’s autobiography—as well as with the politics of autobiography more generally.

According to John, the story that Marion creates about her parents makes them out to be “monsters” (117), an insight that resonates with the novel’s invocation of Mary Shelley’s novel, *Frankenstein*. When she discovers the truth about her parents’ lives, Marion must come to terms with her parents’ choices and try to re-acquaint herself with her mother—a woman whom, it turns out, she did not really know.

However, she can find no insight into her mother's character or choices in the "meagre remains of Helen's possessions" (116).

[Marion finds herself] exhausted by the idea of Helen, by the bits and pieces she has had to put together, by the construction of a sci-fi monster of moulded steel plates, ill-fitting bolts and scraps of corrugated iron, like the sculptures made by township artists; she has seen a programme on television about such stuff, called transitional art. Her mother has been bolted together and then undone as new information comes to light, but what else could one who hedged her bets expect? The self-made woman, unmade and several times over reassembled. Marion will have to start again, work harder at garnering information from her father. (175)

Here, it is implied that Marion's interrogation of her father results from her desire to know or understand her mother. Significantly, Brenda responds to Marion's frustration by asking: "Have you read *Frankenstein*?" (175).

Brenda's question creates a complex nexus of allusions to modes of reading and writing that resonates with Marion's reference to "transitional art". In "Culture Beyond Color?" (1993), Wicomb discusses the ways in which the transitional art of township artists such as Derek Nxumalo, Chickenman Mkhize and Tito Zungu, "invite us to make meaning at the intersection of image and text" (30) and, therefore, demands new forms of reading and interpretation. While Nxumalo's work uses a combination of "linguistic and visual information" (29) to represent the spaces occupied by black working class people, Mkhize and Zungu, whom Wicomb notes are illiterate, articulate concerns about "literacy and the symbolic power of language" (30) in ways that are accessible to people who are similarly excluded from written discourses. Marion's comparison of her mother to the work of these three artists suggests that a new language must be found if Helen's

story is to be told. However, Brenda's allusion to *Frankenstein* in this passage also suggests the possible dangers involved in re-constructing Helen and her experiences.

The monstrous creature Victor Frankenstein creates has become, in Western popular culture, conflated with Frankenstein himself in a way that reinforces Frankenstein's position as the true monster of the text. Furthermore, as a number of critics have noted,³⁴ Mary Shelley's novel is itself fundamentally concerned with writing and narrative, consisting as it does of three narratives, nested within each other: first, there is the narrative of Frankenstein; second, that of his creature; and thirdly that of Robert Walton, who makes the other two narratives available to the reader through his letters to his sister. The novel's interest in language and narrative form is also signalled by the creature's fascination with "the science of words and letters" (105).

Indeed, the narrative explores his struggle to acquire language and literacy in great detail; much like in the North American slave narrative, which will be discussed in more detail later, his journey towards literacy forms part of his project to be recognised as human.³⁵ Furthermore, the narrator describes Frankenstein not only as his creature's creator, but also several times as his *author*: he is "the author at once of [the creature's] existence and of its unspeakable torments" (212).

In *Playing in the Light*, Marion is, figuratively, Helen's author and creator, insofar as the novel's account of Helen's life emerges from Marion's investigations. As a result, Helen is a "monster" only to the degree that Marion constructs her as one: "[h]er mother has been bolted together and then undone as new information has come to light" (175). Marion re-creates Helen through a retrospective collage of various parts that echoes the temporal reversals of *Frankenstein*. In Shelley's novel, Frankenstein is "confined [...] for several months" (59) *after* the birth of his creation. Similarly, Marion's invention or imagining of her mother's life appears to be an inversion of the

natural order whereby the child creates the parent, rather than the other way around. To some degree, then, the novel positions Marion, like Frankenstein, as the monster of text. Indeed, by raising the issue of the monstrous, Wicomb's novel reflects on the desire to identify people who colluded with apartheid systems as monsters—as culpable of the callousness and hatred associated with apartheid's worst atrocities—a desire in which the reader is implicated. But, as I will argue, just as her allusion to Equiano's text raises the question of the contingent nature of truth in a racialised society, Wicomb's engagement with *Frankenstein* complicates the availability of truth and, thus, the assignment of blame.³⁶ Brenda's invocation of *Frankenstein*, then, reminds us of both the dangers and responsibilities attendant on the role of the author and the “unspeakable torments” authors can cause.

There has been some critical debate about the status of those passages in *Playing in the Light* which detail the experiences of Helen and John “playing white”. In “The Archive, the Spectral, and Narrative Responsibility in Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light*” (2010), Andrew van der Vlies argues that these short chapters “are in retrospect, open to being read as having been constructed by Brenda after extensive discussions with John Campbell and his sister, Elsie” (594). Yet, as M.J. Daymond (2011) notes, “there are [...] matters, particularly in Helen's story, that are positioned outside Brenda's ken” (158); that is, there are elements of the narrative that Brenda has no way of knowing. For van der Vlies, however, understanding Brenda as the author of Helen's story within the novel resonates with Wicomb's preoccupation with narrative ethics; he argues that a central concern of the novel is testing “the limits of its own hospitality, or the ability of any narrative to host the otherness of others' narratives without doing them harm” (587). Thus, while Daymond is right to conclude that it would have been impossible for Brenda to have had access to all of the information about Helen and Councillor Carter—given that Helen never spoke of the matter to John—it is

nonetheless not impossible to imagine her constructing a story of this kind. By using multiple narrative voices, Wicomb draws attention to the invented nature of her text and requires us to consider the difficulties of representing other people's stories. To understand Brenda as the author of the scenes between Helen and Carter, as van der Vlies suggests, "serves [...] to undermine the veracity of any project pretending to truth, an insight contributing to a reassessment of narratives of nation (and of ethnicity, of ethnic purity)" (596). By making the act of writing conspicuous to the reader, Wicomb invites us to consider the ethics of both writing and reading respectively; her attention to the politics of both representation and reception is particularly evident in the novel's critique of autobiography which is related, through an intertextual reference, to Olaudah Equiano in particular and to the tradition of the slave narrative in general.

(Self-)Representation and the Slave Narrative:

Playing in the Light's concern with ethics and responsibility, evinced in its discourse of affiliative cosmopolitanism, continues with the novel's allusion to Olaudah Equiano's autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano: Or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (1789). Equiano was an eighteenth-century entrepreneur, abolitionist and former slave, whose autobiography went through nine editions in his lifetime (Carretta xii). His work is concerned with the politics of writing and the role of the author in ways that resemble Wicomb's concerns with genealogy and affiliation (van der Vlies 2011). In "Setting, Intertextuality and the Resurrection of the Postcolonial Author" (2005), Wicomb argues that the foregrounding of the author in recent postcolonial fiction points to a concern with "asserting an ethics of authorial responsibility" (150), that is, with acknowledging the act of representation as a political one.³⁷ As I will show in more detail later on, Wicomb's engagement with the ethical

dimension of authorship in her representation of Brenda as a writer-figure and her critique of autobiography, implicates the reader—as much as the writer—in the politics of representation. Similarly, for Equiano, a former slave, the act of writing offered the possibility of claiming authority over his own identity and maintaining his freedom and resonates with Wicomb’s concerns about complicity and guilt that become prominent when Marion turns her attention to her dead mother, Helen. Marion’s description of Helen as a “self-made woman” (175) can be read as a reference to the figure of Equiano, who was described by his biographer Vincent Carretta (2005) as a “self-made man” (xi).

Significantly, Carretta’s assertion that “[n]o one has a greater claim to being called a self-made man than the writer now best known as Olaudah Equiano” (xi), refers not only to Equiano’s journey from slavery to freedom but also to his creation of a narrative self in his autobiography. As Carretta notes, Equiano claimed to have been born in West Africa, but the recent discovery of baptismal and naval records have shown that he was born in South Carolina and have thrown the credibility of Equiano’s narrative into question.³⁸ The questions raised by Carretta about Equiano’s identity and place of birth—and, therefore, about the truth value of his narrative—echo those posed more generally about the truthfulness of African-American slave narratives. The imperative to tell the truth about slavery proved particularly difficult for black writers whose readership was primarily white; readers had to be convinced of both the horrors of slavery and of the truthfulness of the narrator. However, for many literary critics, the question of a slave narrative’s accuracy is less interesting than the literary and rhetorical strategies slave narrators used to circumvent the scepticism of their audience. As William Andrews notes in *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760-1865* (1986), for example, “blacks set about writing life stories that would somehow prove that they qualified as the moral, spiritual, or intellectual

peers of whites” (2). At the same time, they were forced to rely on the testimony of white sponsors to assure their audiences of the veracity of their narratives. The imperative to tell the truth meant that the most successful slave narrator was one “who effaced himself behind the universally applicable facts of slavery” (6), even when some of those facts—such as the sexual abuse suffered by slave women—“could not be reported explicitly” (10). The tension between telling the truth of slavery and telling a story that would be *received* as true by white audiences required the development of sophisticated rhetorical techniques and metaphors on the part of black autobiographers.

At the same time, Andrews argues that slave autobiography does not merely tell the story of how a slave became free but, as the tradition developed, writing itself became a means of claiming freedom: “Autobiography became a very public way of declaring oneself free, of redefining freedom and then assigning it to oneself in defiance of one’s bonds to the past or the social, political and sometimes even the moral exigencies of the present” (xi). Andrews thus suggests that social change can be facilitated to an extent through narrative, which does not necessarily rely on existing notions of truth. Wicomb’s concern with issues of truth and her attempts to make conspicuous the fictional nature of her work raises interesting questions about her own decision to write fiction, rather than autobiography. In a 2002 interview with Stephen Meyer and Thomas Olver, Wicomb admits that in her first book, *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987), she “flirted with autobiography because that is what black women write, in a sense claiming the pejorative label for myself. That a work in which a character is dead and then reappears many years later could be called autobiography nevertheless came as a shock” (185). Here, Wicomb demonstrates her awareness of the expectations placed on writers of colour and particularly black women, who are expected to write autobiography; in effect, to write the “truth”. Yet Wicomb’s work

blurs the lines between autobiography and fiction and, as a result, calls the very possibility of a “true story” into question.

In *Playing in the Light*, following her meetings with Carter, Helen is determined to forget what she has done in order to become white and “takes refuge in the idea of obliteration” (142). Just as, for the slave, manumission represents the death of the enslaved self, here, “obliteration” suggests the death of Helen’s former “coloured” self in the acquisition of whiteness.³⁹ In the years after her daughter Marion leaves home for university, Helen also begins to talk to herself. She becomes obsessed with her own story, the story of “playing white”, muttering—first to herself and later to an imaginary “lady friend” (149)—about “her achievements, the decisions, processes, petitions to various offices in town, but she did not remember the visits to Councillor Carter” (149). This garrulousness stands in contrast to the “oppressive” (6) silence that characterises both Marion’s and John’s memories of her, suggesting that Helen speaks only to and for her imaginary “lady friend”.

Helen’s identity as a white person under apartheid demanded that her personal history remain a secret while she was alive. Wicomb’s novel further suggests the difficulty of its recovery in the post-apartheid era, in which the demand for truth and reconciliation threatens to make monstrous the decisions that ordinary people made to survive. Interestingly, the imaginative reconstruction of Helen’s experiences includes the arrangement with Councillor Carter she excised from her own account of her life, suggesting the potential for narrative to undermine the agency of even this “self-made” woman. Wicomb’s critique of the politics of autobiography similarly suggests the degree to which the reception of black and “coloured” women’s writing challenges or curtails the narrative agency of those women writers.

“Write your own fucking story”: The Critique of Autobiography:

In “Autobiography Written by Black South African Women: The Question of Identity” (1992), Dorothy Driver discusses the South African literary renaissance of the 1970s and 1980s, emphasising both the autobiographical nature of the texts produced by black South African women and the key role played by Black Consciousness in the production of those texts. Driver argues that prior to the Black Consciousness Movement, the black autobiographical subject [had been], by and large, constructed in terms of what were then conceptualised as ‘white’ values—constructed by the white ‘other’ who functions as the ‘you’ of the text” (116).⁴⁰ The advent of Black Consciousness, however, enabled a change from a “confessional mode” (119) of autobiographical writing that relied on ‘white’ values for validation to a mode of writing in which “self definition for black South Africans [was] sought for within the black, no longer within the white, community” (116).⁴¹

While Driver’s observations point to the positive effect that the Black Consciousness Movement had on black and “coloured” writing, Desiree Lewis (1999) notes that political imperatives might also limit the degree to which black and “coloured” women were able to “speak” freely about their respective communities.⁴² Lewis further attributes the fact that “South African autobiographers have been relatively reticent in dealing with private life and interpersonal relationships” (42) to “a tacit acceptance of the need to confirm an organic national or racial solidarity in the face of white racism” (42). This promotion of the community over the individual and the rejection of “white” values also led to the occlusion of the act of writing within the texts themselves; “writing is often associated with being white, as if the natural position of ‘blackness’ is a speaking position, where the self simply speaks itself in order to be authentic, speaking ‘from the heart’” (Driver 115). Here, Driver argues that within these

autobiographical texts, writing is understood as a means of speaking on behalf of, or representing, the black or “coloured” community. However, this understanding of autobiography is often recapitulated by the critical establishment, which perceives the author as representative of the community.

In *Postcolonial Contraventions* (2003), Laura Chrisman suggests that, in Britain during the apartheid era, the publishing industry marketed black and “coloured” South African women’s texts as testament to their suffering, rather than as an act of political agency. She further argues that “[w]hite women [became] the bearers of dynamic political authority” (111), whereas “black women [were] made the representatives of a passive and unchanging racial community” (111). Similarly, while critics like Desiree Lewis and Dorothy Driver have been sensitive to the nuances and literary dimensions of black and “coloured” women’s autobiography in South Africa, others reinforce the testimonial imperative imposed on black and “coloured” women by categorising all of their writing as autobiographical. For example, Gina Wisker (2000) describes South African women’s writing as “rang[ing] along the full continuum, from highly factual, documentary autobiographical record, through the semi-fictionalised autobiography, to fiction informed by personal experience” (6). Here, Wisker subordinates the aesthetic dimension of all kinds of black and “coloured” women’s writing to their potentially documentary character and, in this way, she occludes the imaginative capacity of black and “coloured” women writers.

In her discussion of the state of feminism in South Africa in the early 1990s, Desiree Lewis (1993) claims that the critical propensity to read black writing as testimony works to reinforce racial distinctions and stereotypes.

There is something deeply disturbing about the autobiographical impulse behind much of the teaching, criticism, publishing, and editing of expressions of ‘black

experience'[....] The result of rigid distinctions between interpretation and expression and the discrediting of black *interpretation* of experience on the one hand and the cultivation of black *expression* of experience on the other is an entrenchment of standard racist oppositions: blacks 'express', feel, and respond; whites observe, explain, and consolidate their normativeness [emphasis in original] (540).

If autobiography is the literary "place" assigned to black and "coloured" women writers by the critical establishment and the publishing industry, then Lewis's comments highlight the potential for postcolonial studies to collude with structures of domination and discrimination. To read black and "coloured" women's autobiography as testimony positions them anachronistically in terms of their histories and in the history of the nation. Indeed, the characterisation of these autobiographical texts as "simple, uncrafted, and generally the product of the communal mind" (Julien 12), echoes that of oral literature, as opposed to the literary novel, which is considered "complex [and] deliberate" (Julien 12). As Eileen Julien (1992) has argued, an evolutionary logic underpins this opposition between orality and writing, so that they are "seen not only as exclusive domains but as successive moments" (21) in literary history. While, as noted earlier, the "oral" nature of black and "coloured" women's autobiographies was often a deliberate attempt to celebrate what was perceived as a specifically Black culture (Driver 1992), it also served to reinforce the anachronistic nature of these texts—and their authors—within the literary critical establishment. Thus, while the significance of women's autobiography cannot and should not be dismissed, the critical tendency to read all black women's writing as a form of autobiography can be reductive: not only does it fail to acknowledge both the literary skill of the author and the power dynamics at play in the narrative and its reception, but it also perpetuates an evolutionary logic that positions those texts and their authors as anachronistic.

For Driver, attention to the figurative dimension of an autobiographical text disrupts its status as a simple representation of a life lived and allows “the writer [to] speak [...] out of an unconscious at odds with the dictates of official ideologues, however necessary these ideologies might have been for the original permission to articulate one’s position as black, as woman”(126). In a 2005 interview with Ewald Mengel, Wicomb expressed her belief that “one of the keys to a civilized, democratic society is the ability to read, write and interpret, and the freedoms as well as the perils linked to that” (23). Thus, to write is to participate in the discursive construction of one’s society, rather than merely record the experience of living within it. The effectiveness of black and “coloured” women’s contribution to such discursive construction is challenged, however, by the perception of their writing as autobiographical, as a record of what has passed rather than an insight into the present or imagining of the future.

In the novel, Marion comes to suspect the potentially conservative nature of autobiography and its social function. Travelling to Glasgow after her stay in London, Marion befriends a local man, Dougie, who delights in showing her the sights, including the paving stones inscribed with autobiographical anecdotes from local people. While she initially finds them charming, Marion comes to wonder about the reasons for the public display of these stories, as well as how to decide which anecdote could “bear the weight of presenting her to the world” (204). Here, the inscription of people’s stories on paving stones serve a territorial as well as a commemorative purpose, reinforcing the relationship between identity and place; these autobiographical texts are part of the material, as well as discursive, fabric that constitutes Glasgow. Marion’s ruminations on the politics of representation—limited though they may be—lead her to conclude that “the stone tablet cannot be for the ephemeral lives of people; it is for gods, with their messages or commandments” (204). Here, Marion rejects the idea that autobiography is

solely a means for people to “*share* your life with others [emphasis in original]” (204); rather it serves a purpose similar to “gods” or religion; it provides a point around which a community can cohere and be made distinct. Indeed, Elleke Boehmer (2005) notes the significant role that autobiography plays in post-colonial nationalism, wherein the autobiographies of male independence leaders “operate as inaugural symbolic texts shaping and justifying configurations of status and power in the postcolonial nation (-to -be), including the interconnection of nationalist ideology and gender politics” (66). In particular, Boehmer suggests that the elaboration of a “patrilineal genealogy” (80) in these autobiographical texts serves to validate and normalise male political power.

Thus, Wicomb’s attention in *Playing in the Light* to both the politics of women’s autobiography and to matrilineal histories suggests the significance of gender politics to the development of alternative forms of political organisation.

Despite Marion’s increasing perceptiveness, the novel’s final scene demonstrates her continued investment in social hierarchies. Shortly after her return to South Africa, Brenda tells her that she has started to write, and that she has chosen to write John’s story. Marion is incensed and accuses Brenda of taking advantage of her father. She asks Brenda, “[w]hy don’t you write your own fucking story?” (217).

However, Brenda is determined to avoid the expectations of autobiography, which, she argues, “is what someone like me is supposed to do, what we all do, *they say, whether we know it or not*, but Christ, what story do I have to tell? [emphasis added]” (217). Here, Brenda’s comment suggests her awareness of the critical tendency to categorise all black and “coloured” women’s writing as autobiography. She further notes that the impulse to “invent something around such tedious lives” (217-218) is a didactic one, “[s]o that tedium can be converted into something improving” (218). But improving for whom? According to Brenda, the “people in Mr Mahmoud’s shop will skip the pages [of a story] in the hope of something beyond poverty and television and coloured

people's obsession with food, something at least to laugh about" (218). The implication here is that autobiography can only perform an edifying and educational function for those who are not already familiar with the details of black and "coloured" women's lives and, furthermore, can serve to reinforce racial stereotypes such as "coloured people's obsession with food". Thus, the critical emphasis on the autobiographical dimension of black and "coloured" women's writing serves to reinforce the distinction Lewis (1993) observes between black "experience" and white "analysis" and to maintain rather than challenge existing hierarchies.

When Brenda taunts Marion by describing John's "pale skin, ripe for investment" (218), she both acknowledges the way in which narrative can reflect and reproduce relations of power and suggests the commodification of certain kinds of narrative in post-apartheid South Africa. Brenda's suggestion that contemporary South African literature is invested in "skin" points to the transformation, rather than the eradication, of racial identities. Thus, when Brenda refutes Marion's claim that she "know[s her...] father's fucking story" (218), she takes control away from Marion—a representative of the former status quo—who, in throwing Brenda out of her car, symbolically closes the door on their friendship and the possibility of reconciliation it signified. While Marion's anger is expressed in terms of concern about her father, it is possible that she is equally concerned about how she will be represented by Brenda. For Brenda, writing John's story rather than her own represents her rejection of the expectations placed on black and "coloured" women's writing, even as it potentially capitalises on South African society's continued interest in questions of race and identity. In this light, even this single narrative act becomes a site of conflict in which Brenda's assertion of authority challenges Marion's right to determine her own identity. Throughout the novel, Marion rejects the label "play-white", stating "[m]y parents were the play-whites; *they* crossed over. I was white" (106-7). Significantly, her reaction

reproduces the colonial- and apartheid-era denial by Afrikaners of their genealogical links to the “coloured” population while, by placing blame on her parents’ shoulders—“*they* crossed over”—Marion once again positions “coloured” identity as culpable or guilty.

Marion and Brenda’s friendship was enabled by acts of hospitality that granted each of them access to spaces previously closed to them; as Brenda notes, she depends on Marion to drive her to and from Bonteheuwel. Disappointingly, in throwing Brenda out of her car, Marion attempts to restore her to “her place”, spatially and symbolically; she now denies Brenda access to the spaces previously opened up by their friendship and also attempts to put constraints upon the kind of story Brenda can tell. By refusing to endorse Brenda’s narrative of her father’s life, Marion attempts to close down the history of racial passing that Wicomb’s novel opens up and which, in turn, raises questions about “coloured” identity and the “place” of “coloured” people in post-apartheid South Africa. Furthermore, by engaging with the history of slavery, *Playing in the Light* highlights the ways in which “coloured” women’s relationships to motherhood and to sexual desire continue to be affected by that history even as it explores how matrilineal histories might enable the re-conception of nationhood. While Marion ultimately seems to choose the comfort of fixed identities over the “unremitting crossings” (107) of a life uncategorised, the ambivalence of the novel’s final scene refuses to offer the reader hope about South Africa’s future which, Wicomb suggests, will continue to grapple with the legacies of colonialism, slavery and apartheid. At the same time, as she makes clear through Brenda’s character, those legacies will not go unchallenged. By having Brenda assume authority over her work—the right to author John’s story—Wicomb guarantees that she will write her own story, even as she challenges what it means to do so.

Notes

Introduction:

1. His address was later published in *TDR* (1991).
2. During the negotiations that ratified the interim constitution Sachs proposed that the difficult question of amnesty for the agents of the apartheid state be dealt with by the truth commission that was to address human rights abuses by both the apartheid state and the ANC. For Sachs's account of this process, see "Truth and Reconciliation." *SMU Law Review* 52 (1999): 1563-1578.
3. For more on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, see Mahmood Mamdani (2002), "Amnesty of Impunity?"; Fiona Ross (2003), *Bearing Witness*; Antjie Krog (1998) *Country of My Skull*; Mark Sanders (2007), *Ambiguities of Witnessing*; Molly Andrews (2003), "Grand National Narratives and the Project of Truth Commissions: a Comparative Analysis."; Alex Boraine (2000), *A Country Unmasked*; Dorothy Driver (2005), "Truth, Reconciliation, Gender: the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Black Women's Intellectual History."; Beth Goldblatt and Sheila Meintjes (1997), "Dealing with the Aftermath: Sexual Violence and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission."; Shane Graham (2003), "The Truth Commission and Post-Apartheid Literature in South Africa."; Anthony Holiday (2002), "Forgiving and forgetting: the Truth and Reconciliation Commission."
4. Mark Sanders (2000) points out that, because the Commission was dealing with four different notions of truth—"factual or forensic truth; personal or narrative truth; social or "dialogue" truth and healing and restorative truth" (17)—it could not help but take a narrative approach to synthesising its findings in order to produce reconciliation.
5. According to Southey, the influential amateur historian G.M. Theal, writing in the early twentieth-century, characterised Cape slavery as "mild" and dismissed the

institution as irrelevant to South Africa's history. Southey argues that Theal's dismissal of the significance of slavery was subsequently endorsed and reproduced by historians of South Africa until 1973, when an American scholar, L.J. Greenstein challenged the "mildness" of Cape slavery and made comparisons between the institution in South Africa and in the Americas.

6. See, for example: Dooling, *Slavery, Emancipation and Colonial Rule in South Africa* (2007); Mason, *Social Death and Resurrection* (2003); Shell, *Children of Bondage* (2001); Scully, *Liberating the Family* (1997); Eldredge and Morton eds., *Slavery in South Africa* (1994), Worden and Crais eds., *Breaking the Chains* (1994). Popular historical accounts include Jackie Loos's *Echoes of Slavery* (2004) and R. E. van der Ross's *Up From Slavery* (2005). Other, literary representations of slavery are also increasing, see: Yvette Christiansë's *Unconfessed* (2006); Botlhale Tema's *The People of Welgeval* (2006); Russel Brownlee's *The Garden of the Plagues* (2005); André Brink's *The Rights of Desire* (2001) and *Philida* (2013) and Therese Benadé's *Kites of Good Fortune* (2004).

7. Coquery-Vidrovitch (1988) further notes that the Atlantic slave trade was at its height from 1740-1830, which corresponds with the "maximum expansion of the sugarcane industry" (21), highlighting the connection between slavery and the expansion of global capitalism.

8. Armstrong and Worden (1979) note that the Dutch experience in the East Indies "meant that slavery came to the Cape fully developed (110).

9. For more information on the geographical origins of South African slaves see Shell (2001), especially Chapter Two.

10. It had been made officially illegal to enslave the indigenous Khoisan from the beginning of the Dutch colonial settlement at the Cape, see Elphick and Malherbe (1979), page 10.

11. While John Edwin Mason (2003) argues that indentured Khoisan labourers should not be regarded as slaves because they did not suffer the same degree of natal alienation as imported slaves did, Susan Newton King (1994) points out that “the very existence of the inboekseling [apprenticeship] system presupposed an assumption on the part of the masters that their ‘Hottentot’ servants had lost their independent social existence and with it their capacity to assert their claim upon their kin” (240).

12. For more on this see essays by Boeyens in Eldredge and Morton (1994) and Worden and Newton-King in Worden and Crais (1994).

13. See Elizabeth Eldredge, “Slave Raiding Across the Cape Frontier” and Barry Morton, “Servitude, Slave Trading, and Slavery in the Kalahari” in Eldredge and Morton (1994).

14. While slavery was legally abolished in 1834, former slaves were subject to a period of “apprenticeship” for four years, meaning they were not really free until 1838. The use of the term “apprentices” to describe both former slaves, Prize Negroes and indentured labourers further blurred the lines between different forms of bonded labour in the colony in the mid-nineteenth century. For more on the apprenticeship period see Worden (1994).

15. See Thiven Reddy (2001), “The Politics of Naming”, for more on the ideological work performed by the category “coloured” under apartheid.

16. Adrian Guelke (2005), offers as an example a member of the Coloured House of Representatives, who explained to the House that “while he was classified as Malay, two of his brothers were classified as Cape Coloured, a third as white. At the same time, two of his sisters were classified as Cape Coloured, a third as Indian” (25-6).

17. Adhikari (2005) notes three broad trends in writing on “coloured” identity: the essentialist school—which can be further broken down into traditional, liberal and progressionist varieties—conceives of “coloured” identity as racial, rather than social or

cultural; instrumentalist scholars “regarded Coloured identity as an artificial concept imposed by the white supremacist state” (34); while, social constructionists—such as Adhikari himself—attempt to “demonstrate the complexity of Coloured identity and, most important, to stress the agency of Coloured people in the making of their own identity” (36).

18. For more information and analysis of this issue, see *Now That We Are Free: Coloured Communities in a Democratic South Africa* (1996) edited by James, Calguire and Cullinan. The so-called “coloured vote” will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

19. Adhikari (2005) suggests that “coloured” people’s disavowal of their Khoisan heritage was motivated by an attempt to reject the negative characteristics attributed to the Khoisan—such as laziness, savagery and dirtiness—that were subsequently projected onto “coloured” people (27-28).

20. Claims to Khoisan identity are also tied to the process of land reclamation in South Africa; see Gqola (2010), Besten (2009) and Robins (1998). Interestingly, Botlhale Tema’s novel, *The People of Welgeval* (2005), is similarly engaged in discourses of land ownership. The novel was inspired by research Tema conducted as part of the UNESCO Slave Route project and traces her ancestors—children of the Moletse Kwena abducted by an Afrikaner raid and forced into slavery—as they escape slavery and, with the aid of a Swiss missionary, help to establish the mission station of Welgeval and a distinct community for themselves. As well as demonstrating the incorporation of African peoples into South Africa’s slave economy, Tema’s research also contributed to an appeal for restitution—which was eventually successful—to the Lands Claims Court by the people of Welgeval, who, like so many others had been forcefully removed from their land during apartheid. See Fred Morton (2010) for a historical appraisal of the novel.

21. See, for instance, Wicomb's critique of Afrikaner "ethnicity" in "Five Afrikaner Texts" (1998).

22. See, for example, Hermann Giliomee (2003) "The Making of the Apartheid Plan, 1929-1948".

23. Mason notes that "[i]n modern Afrikaans, "Coloured" is *Kleurling*" (321).

Chapter One:

1. This interim report consisted of five volumes and was followed, in 2003, by a shorter, final report.

2. However, in *State of Peril* (2012), Lucy Graham argues that there is no statistical evidence to suggest an increase in instances of rape since 1994 and further suggests "that discourse on rape—rather than rape *per se*—has proliferated in the post-apartheid context and this may be read not only as a result of greater awareness of gender issues, but also as an expression of complex anxieties about the new nation" (4).

3. According to Meintjes and Goldberg (1997), the position of women as "ideological objects" (9) made sexual violence an effective method of political warfare, while Fiona Ross (2003) notes that, "in Durban, young women testified about sexual violations committed by neighbours with opposing political views" (53-8).

4. See, for example, Ross (2003), Russell (2008), and Motsemme (2004). Mark Sanders's (2007) observation that there were no applications for amnesty for the crime of rape (82) also suggests that sexual violence was not recognised as a human rights violation.

5. See, for example, Ronit Frenkel (2008), "Performing Race, Reconsidering History: Achmat Dangor's Recent Fiction"; Helene Strauss (2008), "Listening Otherwise"; Ana Miller (2008), "The Past in the Present: Personal and Collective

Trauma in Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*". Dangor's representations of Muslim identity in South Africa have also been considered alongside the work of writers such as Aziz Hassim and Rayda Jacobs—whose work is the subject of Chapter Three: see Jack Kearney (2006), "Representations of Islamic Belief and Practices in a South African Context: Reflections on the Fictional Work of Ahmed Essop, Aziz Hassim, Achmat Dangor and Rayda Jacobs" and Henriette Roos (2005), "Torn between Islam and the other: South African novelists on cross-cultural relationships".

6. See <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/>.

7. See, for example, Goldblatt and Meintjes "Dealing with the Aftermath" (1997) and essays by Holiday, De Kok, and Robins in Nuttall and Coetzee eds. *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa* (2002).

8. "Hottentot" was a derogatory term for the Khoikhoi people of Southern Africa, who came to represent the lowest point on the evolutionary scale. The "Hottentot Venus", used as an example by Gilman, is now commonly referred to as Sarah Bartmann, a Khoisan woman who was exhibited in Europe to display her physiognomy: the focus for many spectators was her steatopygia, or protruding buttocks (Gilman 232), emphasising the sexualised attention paid to the black female body.

9. This is also the case in Freudian theory: if blackness is the marker of phylogenetic anachronism, then homosexuality is its ontogenetic counterpart, signifying a failure of development into the genital stage of sexuality.

10. The novel thus refuses to associate sexual violence exclusively with the apartheid state and its supporters.

11. Vinu's father Johan describes their sexual relationship as abuse during counselling (209).

12. Mamdani (2002) also refers to the history of apartheid, as represented by the TRC, as a "drama" (56).

13. It is important to acknowledge that Archbishop Desmond Tutu, chair of the TRC, recognised that the TRC report was just ““a perspective on the truth about the past...It is not and cannot be the whole story”” (quoted in Posel 2008 132). However, this does not alter the role the TRC played in producing an official narrative of the apartheid past.

14. For more on this relationship see Frederic Jameson (1986) "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism."

15. Silas's use of the term “bastard” (258) to describe himself simultaneously points to the apartheid state's refusal to recognise polygamous Islamic marriages and to the illegitimacy popularly attributed to “coloured” identity. For more on the legal status of Islamic marriages in South Africa see Christa Rautenbach (2003), "Islamic Marriages in South Africa: Quo vadimus?".

16. For Meg Samuelson (2004 13), Lydia's decision to raise Mikey, the son of her rapist, connotes the political complicity with apartheid often attributed to “coloured” people.

17. See Freud “Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through” (1914).

18. Barbara Russell (2008) notes that the TRC's women's hearings “retrospectively [...inserted] women into an already established framework” (50) and that the “annotation [...] added on to the statement protocols which reminded women not to ‘forget to tell us what happened to you yourself if you were the victim of gross human rights abuse’, place[d] responsibility for any silences onto the shoulders of women” (50). See Motsemme (2004) for the ways in which women's silences in the TRC process might be fruitfully interpreted.

19. Commentators also note the relative silence on the issue of sexual abuse of men, which further emphasised sexual violence as happening only to women. See Ross (2003) and Russell (2008).

20. In *Bitter Fruit* the TRC is closely associated with the ideology of confession. For more on the relationship between the TRC and confession, see Deborah Posel (2008), “History as Confession”.

21. Similarly, Lucy Graham (2012) notes that “although the description of Lydia’s diary account begins in the first person with Lydia’s voice, ‘Three nights ago I was raped’, the narrative slips into a third-person summary, narrated by Mikey, when the rape is described” (159)

22. While this discussion focuses on women’s experience of rape it is important to acknowledge that men can also be, and are, the victims of rape. This is suggested in *Bitter Fruit* by Silas’s discussion of tauza, a practice in apartheid prisons whereby male prisoners were force to squat and then “frog-jump [...] so that anything they had hidden in their anuses would drop out or hurt them enough to make them scream out loud” (15). This brief reference to tauza challenges the patriarchal characterisation of the male body as inviolable and thus inscribes the potential for men to be the victims of rape, even as it depicts anal penetration as self-inflicted and associated with political resistance.

23. See for example Mamdani (2002) “Amnesty or Impunity”. In “Silence in my Father’s House” (2002), Steven Robins discusses Khoisan challenges to this temporal framework.

24. Eldredge and Morton’s volume *Slavery in South Africa: Captive Labor on the Dutch Frontier* (1994) makes a convincing argument for a broader understanding of slavery and its effects in South Africa, one which would include the types of labour Khoisan people were subject to along the moving Dutch frontier. This chapter, however, will focus mainly on the slave trade at the Cape and its contribution to the formation of “coloured” identity.

25. At the same time, Ali Ali's journey to South Africa alludes to the historical importation of slaves from India and to the later importation of indentured servants. For more information on this history see Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed eds. *Inside Indian Indenture* (2010).

26. Shell, while acknowledging the element of coercion that existed in such 'manumission marriages', also notes that this provided the best chance for female slaves' manumission and incorporation into settler society. See *Children of Bondage: A Social History of Slave Society at the Cape of Good Hope, 1652-1838*, especially Chapter Ten.

27. See Jane Gallop, Chapter Three "Where To Begin? ('The Mirror Stage')" in *Reading Lacan* (1985).

28. This definition is taken from the 1950 Population Registration Act, which "allowed the state to classify every person along the lines of colour, 'race' and ethnicity" (Reddy 74).

29. While Wicomb uses "Saartje Baartmann", one of a number of alternative spellings of Sarah Bartmann, I follow Gqola (2010) in using the spelling found on her baptismal certificate. For more detailed discussions of Bartmann see Crais and Scully (2009), Sander L. Gilman (1985) and Christina Sharpe (2010).

30. Lydia is not aware of Vinu's incestuous relationship with her father.

31. Spillers' characterisation of the slave as "vestibular" ("Interstices" 155), or adjacent, to human culture, suggests the animalistic or "bestial" ("Interstices" 155) status she occupies in society. *Bitter Fruit* evinces a similar social logic through representations of Lydia as animalistic, which reinforce her figurative connection to the slave past. When she cuts her feet, Lydia lets out a "low, animal moan" (21); once in traction in hospital, she is described as "a captive" (22) and Mikey thinks of her as having "the loveliness of a trapped animal" (28). Elsewhere in the novel, Vinu, another

“coloured” woman, is also described as an animal: “squirming like an animal adept at freeing itself from traps” (206). Here, too, there is an association between the animal and captivity that recalls the non-human status of the enslaved, and the dehumanising effect of slavery.

32. Another instance in which Lydia exhibits hysteric tendencies is when, resolving to confess her homosexual desires to a monk who is visiting the Catholic school she attends, she finds “herself unable to speak” (116). Instead she begins to laugh “a frail girlish laughter that grew into a man’s baritone” (117), behaviour that is interpreted by the monk as demonic possession. This incident reinforces the association between hetero-patriarchy and the repression of female voice in the novel.

33. See Jane Gallop, Chapter Nine “Keys to Dora”, in *The Daughter’s Seduction* (1982).

34. This phrase recalls Orlando Patterson’s (1982) characterisation of the slave as “socially dead”.

35. Interestingly, Martin reads the figure of the “coon” as a symbol of a modernity: “Identifying with the American stage minstrel, then with the cinema ‘jazz singer’, and framing new fashions in popular music within the carnival was definitely a way to signify one’s modernity—and a modernity that did not conform to ruling South African canons: a mestiza modernity” (373). In this way, Martin suggests, the New Year festivals simultaneously acknowledged “coloured” slave heritage and challenged “coloured” identity’s perceived “dependence on what was presented as a ‘white superior culture’” (379) by creating connections to other black and “creole” cultures.

36. The use of “soil” here to suggest contamination plays on the association between personal and national honour and the metonymic relationship between the female body and national territory. This use is repeated when Silas remembers how he used to “think of women who were no longer virgins as soiled” (94).

37. This might relate, not only to the fantasy of race in general, but also to its instantiation in the system of racial classification under apartheid.

38. Lydia describes her sexuality as a “subterranean river still unsullied by the memory of being raped” (119). Thus, repression was necessary to maintain the distinction between her sexuality and her unwanted identity as a rape victim.

39. As suggested earlier, this might be understood as a repetition of the power dynamic of Du Boise’s act of rape, in which he asserted control over Lydia’s physical body; in making her story public against her will, he asserts a form of discursive control which will name her as a victim despite her attempts to reject that identity.

40. This comparison is not, however, an equation of the two events, rather, I mean to suggest that there is a similar power dynamic at play in both incidents.

41. Lydia is unaware that both her husband and her son are watching when she makes love to João. Interestingly, Silas is glad “she had chosen a black man” (272), an attitude which surprises him but which serves to reinforce the interconnection of race and sexuality highlighted in the novel.

42. Significantly, Elleke Boehmer (2005) identifies national daughters with the act of writing: “Writing becomes their vehicle of agency. By *writing themselves* as children and citizens of the nation, they rework by virtue of who they are the confining structures of the national family to encompass alternative gender identities” 108). As I have argued in this chapter, Lydia’s diary challenges the national narrative of the TRC and her refusal to bear more children is also a refusal to accept her assigned place in the national family.

43. According to Whiteside and Sutner (2000), the “greater risk of transmission in the later stages of pregnancy and during delivery” (147) means that short courses of antiretroviral drugs remain an efficient way of preventing Mother-to-Child-Transmission (MTCT). Yet, as Hoad (2006) notes, in 2001 “the South African

government flew in the face of conventional medical and scientific wisdom by refusing to supply pregnant women with nevirapene, a drug endorsed by the World Health Organization (WHO) that limits mother-to-child transmission” (91).

44. For a useful account of nineteenth-century scientific racism, see Sander L. Gilman (1985), “Black Bodies, White Bodies”.

45. According to Whiteside and Sutner, “one astonishing fact that emerged from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was the use of HIV as a weapon. According to submissions made by two apartheid-era security officers, Willie Nortje and Andries van Heerden, at the TRC in 1999, askaris (former ANC operatives who had gone over to work for the apartheid state security forces) were used to spread the disease. Ones known to be HIV positive were employed at two Hillbrow hotels, the Chelsea and Little Rose, in 1990, with the explicit instruction to infect sex workers” (65).

46. Samuelson (2004) notes that Lydia, in having sex with a Mozambican man and travelling to Cape Town from Johannesburg, unwittingly retraces Ali Ali’s journey through South Africa from Mozambique, suggesting that she is, as such, “enmeshed in notions of roots that do discursive violence to the violated female body” (4).

Chapter Two:

1. Sarah Abrevaya Stein (2008) notes that the British government in South Africa had encouraged ostrich farming in the Oudtshoorn district from the 1860s: “State sponsorship coupled with soaring demand ultimately resulted in feathers being ranked fourth in value among commodities exported from the Union of South Africa, following gold, diamonds, and wool, and secured the Cape’s status as the world’s principal ostrich feather supplier” (2).

2. While Nomsa is primarily identified as Xhosa, Connie suspects that “her father was a Bushman because she had such a small face” (23), thus suggesting that Nomsa has Khoisan heritage and associating her with “coloured” identity. This brief reference to Nomsa’s heritage is also suggestive of the claim made by Eldredge and Morton’s edited collection, *Slavery in South Africa* (1994), that both Khoisan and Bantu-speaking peoples were incorporated into the colonial slave economy.

3. While J.M. Coetzee declared that Landsman’s novel was the first to depict South Africa through a magical realist lens (Dust jacket notes), this claim is refuted by André Brink in a review of the novel entitled “A Real and Magical Devil” (1997). Brink situates Landsman’s work within an older canon of South African magical realist texts by authors such as Bessie Head and Coetzee himself, as well work by more contemporary writers like Zakes Mda, Etienne van Heerden and Mike Nicol. Michael Green (2012), in turn, places Brink’s identification of such a magical realist canon—which Brink claims draws on both indigenous and Afrikaner oral storytelling traditions—within broader debates about South African experimental fiction.

4. For more information on the *plaasroman* and farm novel tradition in South Africa see: J.M. Coetzee (1988), *White Writing*; Nicole Devarenne (2009), “Nationalism and the Farm Novel in South Africa, 1883-2004”; Jennifer Wenzel (2000), “The Pastoral Promise and the Political Imperative: The Plaasroman Tradition in an Era of Land Reform”; Rita Barnard (2007), *Apartheid and Beyond*.

5. For more on “black peril” in both literature and history see: Lucy Graham (2012), *State of Peril*; Charles van Onselen (1982), “Witches of Suburbia”; Gareth Cornwell (1996), “George Webb Hardy’s *The Black Peril* and the Social Meaning of ‘Black Peril’ in Early Twentieth-Century South Africa”.

6. Steyn categorises these narratives as “Still Colonial after All these Years”—which “assumes a basically unchanged power relationship between ‘whites’ and

‘nonwhites’” (58); “This Shouldn’t Happen to a White”—which expresses a sense that white people are being victimised under the new dispensation; “Don’t Think White, It’s All Right” is a narrative of acceptance and “trying to find practical and even creative ways to remain white in the New South Africa” (58); “A Whiter Shade of White” tells the tale of those “who feel they did not internalise the enculturation of racialized South African society” (58); while “Under African Skies, Or White But Not Quite” refers to those South Africans who are “moving away from their whiteness in different ways” (58).

7. However, as Nicole Devarenne notes, there exists a pastoral tradition that challenges rather than reinforces the justification of white land ownership: “[i]n Afrikaans, the farm narrative has not surprisingly become the lodestar for a leftist literary tradition that has interrogated, since at least the 1960s, the mythical underpinnings of a white supremacist definition of Afrikaner identity” (634). She gives, as examples of this tradition, the work of Breyten Breytenbach, André Brink and Adam Small. Those engaged in a similar project in English would be writers such as J.M. Coetzee and Nadine Gordimer.

8. When Nomsa takes Precious from the Congo Caves she intends to leave her in the care of her *ouma*; Connie tells us that “[t]here was a farm between this farm and the Meirings River, and her people were there” (271), suggesting that the black people’s claim to land in South Africa was mediated through their employment on white farms.

9. The novel also alludes to the Battle of Blood River, another significant event in Afrikaner history which, Melissa Steyn notes, confirmed Afrikaners’ “sense of having a special destiny as a chosen people in the land they were opening up for white settlement” (33).

10. For more on the Great Trek see Giliomee (2009), especially 144-149.

11. Interestingly, Louise Vincent (2000) notes that in response to increasing social disapproval of their lifestyles, white working-class women drew on “the ideological armoury of the *volksmoeder* to establish their credentials as members of the white Afrikaner *volk*. In doing so they embarked on a project which dove-tailed neatly with the populist ambitions of Afrikaner nationalism” (74).

12. “Bushman” is a derogatory term for the San people of Southern Africa; its continued use throughout this novel reflects Connie’s unchanging attitudes towards race.

13. The emptiness of the Karoo is also challenged in the novel when Henry is rescued by a group of “coloured” people who look “like sticks covered with rags” (29) and who suggest the continued presence of indigenous Khoisan peoples in that space.

14. As Robert C.H. Shell (2001) notes, from the establishment of the Cape Colony it was made illegal to enslave Khoisan but this did not stop settlers from enslaving them. Khoisan labour was indentured through a system known as *inboekstelsel*. Children born to indentured workers were, like the children of slaves, also indentured and many Khoisan women remained on farms after the end of their own period of indenture to care for their children. Serfdom tied the Khoisan to their place of work and the informal inclusion of their labour in the sale of property became an important custom (17), suggesting an immobility that also resonates with the description of the tableau.

15. Thomas performs a similar reading of the sexual encounter between Beatrice, Nomsa and September which overlooks the power-dynamics at work between the participants and thus obscures the coercive nature of the scene.

16. The Khoisan tales of the ostrich September relates to Beatrice in the novel allude to such traditional orature.

17. Connie herself continues to think of herself as a young woman, despite the elderly face and white hair that she sees in the mirror (21; 75).

18. Connie briefly wonders if Beatrice ever met Langenhoven but concludes that he “probably crossed to the other side of the street if she was in town” (81).

19. Pascale Casanova’s (2004) discussion of world literary space highlights the close association between language and literature, while also characterising that space as one of competition between languages and nations. Using France as an example, she describes how the fight to establish French as superior to Latin in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries allowed European literature to escape the influence of the Roman Catholic Church and, eventually, allowed writers to dissociate themselves from the nation altogether (69).

20. In the eighteenth-century, Johann von Herder, a German poet and philosopher, challenged the distinction between literature and politics made possible by the institution of French as a literary language. Herder used developmental rhetoric to explain Germany’s lack of what Casanova calls “literary capital”, suggesting that nations need “time to develop their own peculiar ‘genius’” (Casanova 76). Associating literature more closely with politics allowed Herder to challenge the basis of French literary superiority.

21. Hofmeyr (1987) gives some examples of these: “‘hotnotstaal’ (Hottentot language), ‘griekwataal’ (Griqua language), ‘kombuistaal’ (kitchen language), ‘plattaal’ (vulgar language) and ‘brabbeltaal’ (patois/lingo)” (97). Achmat Davids gives a more detailed account of these associations in “The Coloured Image of Afrikaans in Nineteenth Century Cape Town” (1990).

22. Shell (2001) estimates that more “than 1,000 women of slave and native descent married free persons of European descent and thereby passed into the ‘master class’” (329).

23. For Irele, oral literature connects rather than divides voice and body: “[i]n production, realization, and transmission, the text inheres in the physiology of the human frame and is *expressed* as voice, in gestures, and in immediate performance [emphasis in original]” (10).

24. Hofmeyr (1996) argues that the association between women and story-telling is relatively recent and the result of apartheid strategies of spatial control which denied African men access to the spaces in which they traditionally told stories. See “Not the Magic Talisman: Rethinking Oral Literature in South Africa”.

25. Hofmeyr (1996) suggests that the missionaries were influenced by both the “colonial belief in the childlike nature of African societies” (91) and contemporary European ideas about literature that was just for children. Interestingly, she also notes that the “process of writing down oral traditions in some parts of Europe happened at much the same time as in Africa, where missionaries with a similar agenda and influenced by these ideas of appropriate reading and schoolbooks for children undertook the same task”. This undermines the association of Europe with writing and highlights the constructed nature of the category of orality and its association with the past.

26. Significantly, this literature focused particularly on the Great Trek; see Hofmeyr (1987) 109-110.

27. Graham (2012) further argues that the contemporary “propagation of rape stories in the media and in the literary texts of the post-apartheid transition also evokes [...] the spectre of the ‘black peril’ scares that possessed South Africa at an earlier moment of nation-making, that is, at the time of national unification around 1910” (133).

28. Graham also notes the role “black peril” narratives played and continue to play in “the making and marketing of a distinctly South African literature” (49), giving J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace* (1999) as a contemporary example.

29. In fact, Graham (2012) notes that Langenhoven actually encouraged George Heaton Nicholls to publish his “black peril” novel, *Bayete!* (1923), in order to “awaken the Whites [...to the need for] white superiority” (61).

30. As Elizabeth Eldredge notes, the increased surveillance that domestic slaves (usually women) were subject to made them “ever vulnerable to physical abuse” (99).

31. The caves are compared to a stomach and a vagina on various occasions throughout the novel and there is also reference to the “caveness of the body” (82).

32. Significantly, at a later point in the novel Connie confuses Pauline with Precious, suggesting that Pauline “was Precious, the child raised by *Ouma* on the farm in Meiringspoort” (274). In doing so, she reinforces the connection between Pauline and miscegenation while simultaneously marking “coloured” women as anonymous, interchangeable and anachronous.

33. These quotations are not attributed to particular women.

34. State regulation of the feather trade required buyers to obtain licenses, a move that limited the possibilities for Khoisan, “coloured” and black people to enter the trade. See Stein (46).

35. The association between race and class is also suggested when Beatrice thanks Mr Jacobs for his help “the way you thank a servant” (38).

36. Conversely, Jacklyn Cock notes that mobility can also be a means of resistance, with domestic workers who are dissatisfied with their working conditions choosing to “vote with [their] feet” (66) and withdraw their labour.

37. The possibility of “eating from any tree” suggests the biblical tale of Eden here.

38. According to Connie, Beatrice was not scared of snakes, even though “[e]veryone, since the Bible, hates snakes” (20). This comment not only suggests

Beatrice's courage, but also her particular disregard for male authority, a suggestion borne out by her behaviour in the rest of the novel.

39. Deckard relates the development of this ideology to fifteenth-century European colonialism in the Americas and the Caribbean, where it "legitimated European domination of the Amerindians" (8).

40. This attempt once again includes a literal form of trespass as well as a symbolic one: in order to learn about the feather trade, Beatrice begins frequenting the hotel bar, usually the reserve of men.

41. Scully notes that former slaveholders attempted to secure the continued labour of black women within their households and when "farmers hired a male worker they expected to be able to have access to the labor of his wife and family when needed" (82).

42. The humiliation associated with the figure of the maid is alluded to again when Connie recalls Jack doing housework and says "it was terrible to see him like that" (252).

43. This, in turn, provides an interesting perspective on the charges of complicity often levelled against "coloured" people. As mentioned above, Connie suggests that Nomsa may have "Bushman" (23) or Khoisan heritage and it is also implied that her *ouma* is "coloured" (271); it is clear, however, that Nomsa does not intend to collaborate with state racism but rather seeks to protect Precious.

44. This image resonates with the trope of containment in Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*, which I discussed in Chapter One.

45. Official Truth and Reconciliation Commission website, <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc>.

46. These were "factual or forensic truth; personal or narrative truth; social or "dialogue" truth and healing and restorative truth" (Sanders 2000 17).

47. Significantly, the symbolism of the rainbow nation reinscribes “racial” identities as separate and distinct, even as, collectively, they form a larger nation. In this scheme, “coloured” identity, which can be crudely described as “mixed-race”, challenges the national imaginary by evincing the interconnections of different “racial” groups. For more see Herwitz (2003) and Irlam (2004).

48. See for example, Fiona Ross (2003) and Goldblatt and Meintjes (1997). For a thorough and incisive account of how the ideology of motherhood has been deployed in post-apartheid literature see Samuelson (2007).

49. According to the novel’s glossary, *Roinekke* translates as red necks, a derogatory slang term for English people in South Africa (279).

50. See also Giliomee (2011) *The Afrikaners* (109-110) and Robert C.H. Shell (2001) *Children of Bondage* (54).

51. Ashlee Lenta has noted that the TRC reports “reflect a simultaneous granting and denial of oral auto/biographical space” (191) to people. Such a space was granted in that testifiers were asked to speak their stories to the nation, and yet that space was denied to them in the sense that those oral acts were then subsumed into an official document that subordinated oral narrative to written “truth”. Gerda turns to a newspaper article in order to make use of the TRC framework to attempt reconciliation with her sister. Connie, however, whose access to the TRC has up until this point been through television or radio reports, rejects this turn towards written narrative, reinforcing the novel’s association of orality with the subversion of official narratives.

Chapter Three:

1. According to Maria Olausen (2011), “the connection to specific historical material and to the author’s personal history made *The Slave Book* ground-breaking” (35).

2. Emancipation legislation came into effect in December 1834 but former slaves had to remain in the service of their masters for a further four years, a period known as apprenticeship. Given that a system of apprenticeship, or *inboekstelsel*, was already in place in South Africa as a means of coercing the labour of Khoisan and Bantu peoples, the slaves’ apprenticeship suggests the perpetuation, rather than the end of their servitude.

3. For more on this see De Waal, Judge and Manion eds., *To Have and to Hold: The Making of Same-Sex Marriage in South Africa* (2009).

4. For more on this incident see Hoad (2006) and Dunton and Palmberg (1996).

5. Gilman’s “Black Bodies, White Bodies” discusses the construction of the black body as “perverse” in nineteenth-century art and science; see also Neville Hoad (2007), Chapter Five, for a discussion of Thabo Mbeki’s engagement with this history in relation to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

6. See, for example, Murray and Roscoe’s collection *Boy-Wives and Female Husbands* (1998).

7. Significantly, in *The Rights of Desire* (2001), another post-apartheid novel concerned with the legacies of slavery, André Brink considers the incommensurability of rights and desire. He writes: “If I claim desire as my right and its nature lies in motion, its motion towards the other, does not my right to desire invoke the right of the other to refuse me? And does that not make a mockery of ‘right’, as much as of ‘desire’? [...] If there are rights, yes, then I suppose desire has a right to be. But that does not give me the right to demand rights for desire” (154). Here, Brink points not

only to the ways in which desire might exceed the utilitarian framework of human rights, but also to the issue of reciprocity, which might be read as relating the antagonism between rights and desire to the relationship between society and the individual.

8. For more on this issue see the Action Aid report, *Hate Crimes: The rise of 'corrective' rape in South Africa* (2009).

9. It is significant in this respect that *The Slave Book* was published in 1998, the same year that homosexuality was decriminalised in South Africa.

10. The significance of the election results in relation to the work of nation building is indicated by the presence of the recently elected President, Nelson Mandela, at the conference, where he gave the opening address. The proceedings of this conference were published as *Now That We Are Free: Coloured Communities in a Democratic South Africa* (1996), edited by James, Calguire and Cullinan.

11. Jeremy Seekings notes that while “coloured” voters make up only 9% of the national electorate, they constitute between 55-58% of the electorate of the Western Cape, hence the attribution of the National Party’s victory in the region to the “coloured vote”. As Yunus Carrim points out in the same volume, however, the Western Cape does not constitute the totality of the “coloured” population (50).

12. Some of the conclusions drawn are that the disbanding of the UDF raised suspicions about the ANC’s commitment to non-racialism (James 40) and that the ANC failed to recognize and address the particular concerns of “coloured” voters in the Western Cape, especially those of the working class (Seekings 35).

13. This might explain why, in his address to the conference, Nelson Mandela asserted the long history of “coloured” participation in the liberation struggle. See “Citizens of a Single Rainbow Nation”, pp 6-8 in James, Calguire and Cullinan (1996).

14. The National Party was also re-elected in the Western Cape in the second democratic elections in 1999. In KwaZulu-Natal, the Inkatha Freedom Party won out over the ANC in both the 1994 and 1999 elections.

15. Robert Ross (1983) notes that “[w]hereas for the USA there exist a good eighty slave autobiographies, of greater or lesser reliability, and the texts of two thousand interviews with ex-slaves, for the Cape there are probably no more than twenty analogous pages, relating to two successful runaways. Even plantation records are absent” (6).

16. Douglass’s autobiography (1845) is quoted as the epigraph to the first chapter of *The Slave Book*; however, the similarity between Andries deVilliers’s attempted molestation of Somiela and Mary Prince’s account of being forced to bathe her master in *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave*, suggests a wider awareness of North-American and Caribbean slave narratives on Jacobs’s part.

17. One of the most famous neo-slave narratives is Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1988), for other examples see Dubey (2010).

18. Worden identifies *The Slave Book* as one of a number of books “aimed at a general readership” (33) suggesting an increasing interest in the history of slavery in South Africa.

19. Other critics, such as Meg Samuelson (2012) and Maria Olausson (2011), have fruitfully positioned *The Slave Book* in an Indian Ocean, rather than Atlantic context.

20. That is, the first scene after Sangora’s brief prologue.

21. Rohy addresses Douglass’s 1845 autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*; Harriet Jacobs’s autobiography is entitled *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.

22. This is reinforced by the coincidence of Douglass's marriage and his assumption of the name Douglass, to replace the name Bailey by which he had been known as a slave. Thus the free man Douglass comes into being at the same moment as he is married, as Rohy describes it, Douglass's "public, symbolically coherent, heterosexual masculinity does not precede, but is born out of, the formula 'man and wife'" (36).

23. Linda Brent is the pen name Harriet Jacobs used in her autobiography.

24. See Robert Ross (1983) *Cape of Torments* for more information about maroon communities at the Cape.

25. Jacobs's rejection of polygamy also makes clear that the depiction of Islam in the novel is one that does not represent the variety of religious and cultural traditions practiced by Muslims in South Africa.

26. Natal was incorporated into the Union of South Africa in 1910.

27. As David Chambers (2000) explains, this law necessarily negotiated the tension between people's constitutional right to "participate in the cultural life of their choice" (South African Constitution, quoted in Chambers 110) and the subordination of such customary laws to national legislature while also taking into consideration the constitution's protection of gender equality (110). Chambers argues that there are three dominant themes to the act's provisions: first, marriage must be based on consent; second, it declares "women and men formal equals within the marriage relationship" (108); and thirdly, it brings customary marriages under the remit of state bureaucracy (108).

28. According to Rautenbach this also affects Muslim immigrants to South Africa, because the "impediment against Islamic marriages does not only affect Islamic marriages contracted in South Africa, but also those contracted abroad" (124).

29. This comparison between Roeloff and Harman also suggests a similarity between Zokho and Somiela that is not confined to their “racial” identity but also encompasses their social status and, as such, makes clear that the status of Khoisan labourers was equivalent to that of slaves.

30. Scully (1997) writes: “[i]n 1830 for example, a slave woman called Sarah went to the protector in order to try and gain recognition of her relationship with a fellow slave who now lived six hours away from her. Sarah’s owner had made her part from her husband as the owner wanted exclusive sexual access to her” (30).

31. According to Robert Shell (1994), “[m]any slave women who were manumitted were marriage-bound” (321).

32. By free women I refer to those who were never enslaved—typically European settlers in this instance—whereas I use freed to refer to those who were formerly enslaved. Such terms soon came to be replaced by racial signifiers.

33. While *The Slave Book* focuses on the positive dimension of Somiela’s marriage, Jacobs’s awareness of this double bind is evinced in her later novel, *Sachs Street* (2001), wherein the protagonist, Khadidja’s journey of self-discovery begins when she divorces her husband.

34. This relationship is first mentioned in *Eyes of the Sky*.

35. Once married to Harman, Somiela will be related to Elspeth de Villiers, who is married to Harman’s brother, Martinus.

36. For Gqola this final exit is symbolized by his conversion to Islam. However, given that Harman converts in order to marry Somiela, I read the two events as interchangeable.

37. While Noria and Sangora’s son was born out of a love marriage, the text makes clear that, having been sold into slavery by her own mother, Noria was subject to sexual violence at the hands of numerous men, one of whom was Somiela’s father.

38. Harman's use of the term "baster" (142) is also significant in terms of the novel's attention to "coloured" identity. According to Leonard Geulke (1988), "children of white-Khoikhoi informal marriages came to occupy an intermediate position between the orthodox settler community and the Khoikhoi people in the frontier social order" (100). Furthermore, as Martin Legassick (1988) argues, the term "baster", or Bastaard, "denoted an economic category as much as a social status of illegitimacy or colour" (370). As such, the term points to the intersection of economic and racial factors in the production of colonial identities. Harman's cognizance of what it means to be a "baster" is evinced in his description of himself as "[n]ot one, not the other. *In the middle* somewhere [emphasis added]" (142). Here, "coloured" identity remains tied to a problematic politics of blood in which "coloured" people are understood to occupy an intermediate—or middle—position between black and white in South Africa's racial hierarchy. This position is reflected in the title of Jacobs's first published collection of short stories, *The Middle Children* (1994).

39. Wicomb has in mind movements such as "the 'Coloured Liberation Movement for the Advancement of Brown People', launched at the beginning of March 1995" and "the Kleurling Weerstand Beweging [Coloured Resistance Movement], with its unseemly echo of the Afrikaner right wing" (97). Gqola notes a similar conservatism in the politics of those who claim indigeneity through the assertion of Khoisan heritage, see Chapter One of *What is Slavery to Me?* (2010).

40. Adhikari (2005) notes a similar logic at work in stereotypes of "coloured" identity, for example: "Coloured people are [supposedly] morally weak, confused and vacillating by nature because their white 'blood' pulls them in one direction and their black 'blood' pulls them in another" (25).

41. At the same time, the possibility of Si'am's passing once again points to the imaginary dimension of racial identity. This, in turn, suggests that the diegetic recapitulation of a politics of "blood" is an effect of the novel's historical realist style.

42. This theory is explicated in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004).

43. The relevance of such associations to the South African context is evinced by the following opinion, reported in the *Sowetan* newspaper in 2004: "first it was the abortion law, now same-sex couples can marry [...] we're heading for disaster" (Joanna Bonoko quoted in Vasu Reddy 352). The relationship established here between abortion and same-sex marriage suggests that any family structure or sexual practice that is not reproductive constitutes a "disaster".

44. Gqola capitalises "Black" here to indicate a politically inclusive meaning of the term, rather than a "racial" one, which extends her critique to include the depiction of the Khoisan in *The Slave Book* and, I would argue, in *Eyes of the Sky*, where they are consistently represented as childlike.

45. For instance, in the early nineteenth-century, the government "required their [Prize Negroes'] children to stay in the service of their masters until the age of eighteen" (Harries 33). For more information see Harries, 32-39.

46. Significantly, the importation of Indian indentured labour to the colony began in 1860, and can thus be read as yet another means of enabling continuity between forms of slavery and unfree labour and a supposedly free labour economy. For more see Desai and Vahed (2010).

47. Rohy draws on Freud's use of the recapitulation hypothesis which emerged from nineteenth-century scientific racism and posited that phylogeny—the development of the species—was recapitulated, or repeated, in ontogeny—an individual's development. In these terms, both blackness and homosexuality were considered

“primitive”; black Africans represented the prehistory of mankind while homosexuality was, at the time, understood as a failure of development. Thus homosexuality was understood to be the ontological recapitulation of the kind of “primitive” sexuality represented, phylogenetically, by black Africans.

48. This is further supported by Cameron and Gevisser’s claim, in the introduction to their collection *Defiant Desire* (1994), that Western Cape “coloured” communities, “by nature fluid, hybrid and permeable, contain the oldest, most developed and least-explored gay South African subculture; nowhere else in this country have homosexuals been so integral to a culture”(7). Without disregarding the significance of the subculture they identify, I would take issue with the language used to describe “coloured” communities: both Zoë Wicomb (1998) and Zimitri Erasmus (2001)—who makes use of the concept of creolization first elaborated in a Caribbean context to think about “coloured” identity—emphasise the degree to which sexuality is policed within “coloured” communities, which serves to dispute the “natural” openness, or permeability that Cameron and Gevisser suggest.

49. The discursive construction of homosexuality discussed by Macharia is also alluded to in Achmat Dangor’s *Bitter Fruit* (2001), when Silas recollects his experience of tauza while in prison. Prisoners were forced to frog jump on their haunches in order to dislodge any contraband hidden in their anuses. Lydia’s response to Silas’s memory immediately positions it within a discourse of political rape that points to the silence around the rape of men that simultaneously marks sexual violence as an exclusively female experience and reinforces homosexual desire as perverse and punitive. Dangor’s contemporary participation in this discourse—however critical—supports Macharia’s argument about the continental circulation of homophobic sentiment through literature.

50. See Robert Shell, *Children of Bondage* (2001).

51. Both Robert Ross (1979) and Susan Newton-King (2007) note that the term sodomy in the Cape colony referred to acts of both homosexuality and bestiality, and “those convicted of homosexuality or bestiality were drowned, generally tied to their co-respondent” (Ross 1980 13).

52. This type of bias can also be found in academic research on mine marriages, same-sex relationships formed between miners working on Witwatersrand. For a useful introduction to this body of work that illuminates such bias see William J. Spurlin’s *Imperialism Within the Margins*, Chapter Four. Interestingly, in his comparison of experiences of homosexuality and homosexual practices in South African prisons and mine compounds, Isak Niehaus—whose conclusions reinforce Macharia’s—notes that “Mozambicans, who had a reputation for being tough underground workers, were deemed to be particularly fond of having sex with men” (94).

53. As Neville Hoad argues in *African Intimacies*, such homophobia can be read as an anti-colonial response to colonial representations of African sexuality as perverse and corrupting. See especially Chapter Four.

54. This rejection of homosexuality is mitigated to an extent by its somewhat more favourable treatment in Jacobs’s third novel, *Sachs Street*. In that text, one of the protagonist’s childhood friends is a gay man who emigrated to Canada; there he is free to express his sexuality but at home in South Africa he remains closeted. This suggests the diegetic reproduction of contemporary attitudes to homosexuality, even as such attitudes resonate with post-apartheid debates on sexual rights.

Chapter Four:

1. Wicomb has also published two collections of interrelated short stories: *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987) and *The One That Got Away* (2008).

2. For an insightful reading of *David's Story* that explores these issues see Meg Samuelson's *Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women?* (2007).

3. For more on the origins of slaves imported to the Cape see Robert C.H. Shell (2001), especially Chapter Two.

4. See, for example, the special issue of *Safundi* (2011), vol. 12, nos.3-4, on "Zoë Wicomb, the Cape and the Cosmopolitan" edited by Kai Easton and Andrew van der Vlies, especially Pamela Scully, "Zoë Wicomb, Cosmopolitanism, and the Making and Unmaking of History" and Abdulrazak Gurnah, "The Urge to Nowhere: Wicomb and Cosmopolitanism". *Current Writing* (2011) vol. 23 no. 2 also carries a number of articles on Wicomb's writing and cosmopolitanism, including Dorothy Driver's "Zoë Wicomb and the Cape Cosmopolitan".

5. Guelke also notes that members of the same family could be classified differently: a member of the Coloured House of Representatives explained that "while he was classified as Malay, two of his brothers were classified as Cape Coloured, a third as white. At the same time, two of his sisters were classified as Cape Coloured, a third as Indian" (25-6). This man's experience demonstrates the absurdity of apartheid law, and, given that a person's classification had material effects, the difficult realities that law produced.

6. State control of public spaces was later extended by the 1953 Separate Amenities Act.

7. Interestingly, Deborah Posel (2001b) notes that those officials charged with classifying people under the Population Registration Act (1950) "typically fired off a battery of questions to establish a spatial sense of people's race: where they were born, where they had gone to school, where they lived, where they had grown up, where their friends lived, where their children were schooled, where and with whom their children played" (60). As Posel points out, this line of questioning implied that race had a spatial

dimension prior to the enforcement of racial segregation under the Group Areas Act (1950).

8. Of course the separate spaces into which each “race” was organised were far from equal. Michael Robertson (1990) observes that the Group Areas Act sought “to differentiate between people who [we]re perceived somehow to manifest variances of humanity. These [we]re deemed to be sufficiently significant to warrant the provision of separate—and unequal—living spaces” (124). Robertson’s explanation of the underlying logic of the Group Areas Act points to the ways in which black and “coloured” people were positioned on the margins of humanity, which, under apartheid, was equated with whiteness.

9. Similarly, Nadia Davids (2013) suggests that the strategies of spatial control deployed by the apartheid state can be understood as part of longer history of restricting the social mobility of slaves and their descendants, beginning with the Tulbagh Code of 1753. She further argues that the Cape Town Carnival can be read as a challenge to such restrictions and an attempt by “coloured” people to claim access to and authority over the urban space of Cape Town. For more on the history of segregation in Cape Town prior to apartheid, see Alan Mabin (1992) and Vivian Bickford-Smith (1989).

10. Significantly, towards the end of the novel, Wicomb attempts to subvert this stereotype by revealing that Vumi, a Zulu man with whom Marion is briefly acquainted, and his family “passed” for “coloured” during apartheid. Unlike Marion, however, whose identity is fundamentally shaken by the discovery that her parents are “play whites”, Vumi and his family can revert to the security of an “authentic” Zulu identity, of which there is no equivalent for Marion.

11. Robert Shell (2001) notes that “The Cape system was always based on uterine descent [...] because Roman law, not English common law, was practiced there”

(295). Furthermore, “the condition of slavery remained based on uterine descent at the Cape through the Dutch, British and Batavian occupations (298).

12. Sarah Bartmann was a Khoisan woman who was exhibited as the “Hottentot Venus” in London and Paris between 1810 and 1815 and was subsequently made into a figure of racial and sexual difference in nineteenth-century discourses of science and art. As Zine Magubane (2001) notes, subsequent critical attention has reiterated this focus on Bartmann’s body and has obscured her significance as a figure in discourse of slavery and abolition. For what is probably the most detailed account of Sarah Bartmann’s history, see Crais and Scully (2009). A vast literature exists on Sarah Bartmann and the “Hottentot Venus”: see for example, Meg Samuelson (2007) *Remembering the Nation Dismembering Women?*; Christina Sharpe (2010) *Monstrous Intimacies*; Zine Magubane (2001) “Which Bodies Matter?”; Sadiya Qureshi (2004), “Displaying Sara Baartman, The ‘Hottentot Venus’”; Simone Kerseboom (2011) “Grandmother-martyr-heroine: Placing Sara Baartman in South African post-apartheid foundational mythology”; Rosemary Wiss (1994), “Lipreading: Remembering Saartjie Baartman”; Sander L. Gilman (1985), “Black Bodies, White Bodies”; Rachel Holmes (2007) *The Hottentot Venus*.

13. Amy Ansell (2004) in “Two Nations of Discourse” notes that white people’s willingness to acknowledge the injustices of the past is often accompanied by a denial of continuing socio-economic inequality; thus the rhetoric of non-racialism is deployed in post-apartheid South Africa as a means of denying “the cumulative benefits of being white” (10).

14. Jacklyn Cock’s (1989) and Shireen Ally’s (2009) work on domestic labour in the apartheid and post-apartheid eras, respectively, illustrates the largely unchanged social position of the domestic worker. Indeed they both interviewed domestic labourers who used the rhetoric of slavery to describe their positions: “I have been a slave all my

life' [...] 'We are slaves in our own country'" (anonymous, quoted in Cock 1); "Inside white people's houses it is still apartheid law [...] we are still slaves. Nothing has changed" (Joyce Nhlapo, quoted in Ally 80).

15. Significantly, Marion herself continues to refer to ANC activists as terrorists throughout the novel.

16. For a more detailed discussion of these debates see Coombes (2003), Chapter Two.

17. Yvette Christiansë's novel, *Unconfessed* (2006), provides a moving insight into a female slave's experience of incarceration on Robben Island that draws on a historical court case.

18. Deborah Posel (2001a) notes that the "close, 'commonsense' association of racial hierarchies" (96) existed in South Africa even prior to apartheid, where "[r]acial hierarchies ratified and legitimized the social and economic inequalities that were in turn held up as evidence of racial differences" (95).

19. In a recent interview (2010), and in her article "Culture Beyond Color?" (1993), Wicomb has made reference to the low levels of literacy in South Africa, suggesting awareness on her part of the ways in which language use can be affected by socio-economic factors which, in South Africa, are necessarily entangled with racial identity. Wicomb (2010) attributes, in part, her fascination with writer-characters to this awareness (23).

20. For more on this trend and its influence on post-apartheid literature, see Meg Samuelson's *Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women?* (2007).

21. One instance that makes this clear is the encounter Marion has with a woman on the train from London to Glasgow in the latter part of the novel; Marion, despite her recent foray into literature, "doesn't know the signs" (199), and cannot respond appropriately to the woman's chatter. Reading, in this sense, is a faculty that enables

communication and relation, reinforcing the link between narrative and the TRC's objective of national reconciliation.

22. Wicomb also notes, however, that Marlene van Niekerk's work disrupts hegemonic myths of Afrikaner identity, reconfiguring Afrikaners' relationship to the land by representing them in urban settings and, unlike some other contemporary writers, her "representation of Afrikaners disrupts the white/black:self/other homology" ("Five Afrikaner Texts" 376). Similarly, I have argued in this dissertation that Anne Landsman's attention to Afrikaner identity in *The Devil's Chimney* works to deconstruct white privilege.

23. Helen's subsequent remarks further highlight the shame attached to hybridity: "Ashamed, said her mother, as they should be, of being neither one thing nor another. No one likes creatures that are so different, so mixed up" (47).

24. At this point Marion still does not know the particulars of her parents' history and so her identity as a white woman has not been challenged.

25. For more on the geographical origins of South African slaves see Robert C. H. Shell *Children of Bondage* (2001), especially Chapter Two.

26. As Wicomb has suggested elsewhere (1998), the rehabilitation of whiteness in post-apartheid South Africa is being articulated through the language of ethnicity, that is, by reconfiguring Afrikaner identity as an ethnic minority rather than a politically dominant class, some Afrikaners hope to justify their belonging in the "rainbow" nation. Helen's brief meditation on the power dynamics perpetuated by the Afrikaans language ironically reflects on this trend, given that, under apartheid, Afrikaner identity, expressed through the Afrikaans language, was structured around the denial of liberty and political belonging to those classified as black or "coloured".

27. Carter's use of fruit imagery here also recalls association made between fruit, slavery and Marion's grandmothers: Tokkie and Ma Campbell. For example,

when Tokkie's face appears on the sea outside Marion's window, the image is accompanied by the "smell of orange, the zest of freshly peeled orange skin" (55), which Marion remembers from her childhood and which helps her to identify Tokkie's face. Less recognisable to Marion is the figure of a woman in a dream she related earlier to her employees who is, at first, little more than a "palpable absence" (30), but who gradually materialises "sitting on a low stool [.....] surrounded by a *sea of peaches* [emphasis added]" (31). Thanks to John's recollections of his parents, the reader comes to understand that this woman is his mother, a woman Marion met only once and whom she does not consciously remember. Both of these women are, in Marion's dreams and in her hallucinations, associated with the sea and with fruit. As suggested earlier, the sea in the novel functions to invoke the repressed history of slavery, a history of violent commodification and exchange. Thus the association of Marion's grandmothers with fruit serves to emphasise their historical relationship to slavery and invites us to consider the ways in which female slaves—and their descendants—were, and potentially continue to be, exchanged for economic and sexual reasons. This point is supported by the historical connection between the food and slave trades in the Indian Ocean area. In *East Africa and the Indian Ocean* (2009), Edward Alpers notes that slaves were often exchanged for food cargo: in 1804 "a Frenchman at Mozambique noted that Arab traders sometimes carried slaves from Mozambique to Bombetoka and returned with cargoes of rice" (28). Imraan Coovadia's novel, *The Wedding* (2002), also suggestively juxtaposes the fruit trade with the exchange of women through marriage, while his depiction of the Indian diaspora in South Africa touches upon another history of coerced labour.

28. See Robert Shell (2001) for more on the relationship between manumission and marriage.

29. While Meg Samuelson argues that “[p]ainful feet become an overdetermined textual motif” (554) in the novel, their potential as a site of intimacy is suggested by the brief section that describes Helen’s mother Tokkie, or Thomasina, and her relationship with her husband, Flip, both of whom worked in the shoe factory in Wuppertal. Every Friday Flip “massaged cooking oil into her feet until they were a lustrous black, were two live black starlings throbbing in his lap” (137). This act of intimacy disrupts the stereotypical association of “coloured” women with sex and labour (in this case, ironically, making shoes); instead the image of the birds suggests that such intimacy offers a kind of freedom from those very stereotypes. Significantly, the description of Tokkie’s feet as “starlings throbbing” (137) will later be echoed in Carter’s description of Helen’s breasts as “throbbing [...] like frightened doves” (139). Here, the use of the word “frightened” qualifies the potential for the doves to symbolise freedom, suggesting perhaps that whiteness can only offer Helen a compromised form of freedom. These images of birds and the ritual foot-grooming that Tokkie and Helen share with their husbands connect them metonymically in the novel in a way that exceeds and decentres their biological relationship and suggests the possibility of forms of intimacy that are not compromised by or reducible to the patriarchal exchange of women. Significantly, Marion’s fantasy of the mermaid excludes her from such the possibility of such intimacy, given that her feet are figuratively replaced by a fish tail.

30. Helen’s sense of shame about her body is passed on to her daughter, Marion, who once witnessed her father in the act of grooming Helen’s feet—“doing the weird things that grown-ups do behind closed doors” (42)—and had rushed out of the room in disgust at the sight of “a heap of crumbly greyish yellow” skin (42). This memory is the cause of Marion’s aversion to parmesan.

31. Interestingly, John refuses to ever wear the suit he wore when he signed the oath again; in much the same way that Helen shreds the yellow blouse she wore on her

visit to Councillor Carter, suggesting that passing for white involved the painful shedding of their skins for both of them.

32. “Coloured” people were removed from the common voters roll in 1956 after a lengthy campaign by the National Party.

33. See, for instance, Michael Humphrey, “From Terror to Trauma” (2000).

34. See, for example “Horror’s Twin: Mary Shelley’s Monstrous Eve” in Gilbert and Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) and Barbara Johnson (1982), “My Monster/My Self”.

35. Significantly, in “‘This Thing of Darkness’: Racial Discourse in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*” (2004), Allan Lloyd Smith draws an association between *Frankenstein* and Olaudah Equiano’s autobiography, which provides another intertext for Wicomb’s novel. His discussion of Shelley’s novel also notes that *Frankenstein*’s creature is “composed of a promiscuous intermixture of Bavarian human and animal body parts” (211), making the novel a particularly apt intertext for Wicomb, invoking as it does discourses of hybridity and miscegenation.

36. As Elissa Marder (1989) notes, one dimension of *Frankenstein* that is often overlooked—and indeed is obscured within the text itself—is the fact that the novel is “written in translation” (72). While *Frankenstein* relates his tale to Walton in English “tinged with a ‘foreign accent’” (72), the creature’s education—obtained through his observation of the de Lacey family—is in French, and presumably it was in French that he addressed his creator. While *Frankenstein*’s translation goes unregistered in the text, it serves to emphasise his role in mediating access to the creature’s story and also calls into question the truthfulness of the tale.

37. Wicomb uses Ivan Vladislavic’s short story “Kidnapped” (1996) and Toni Morrison’s novel *Jazz* (1992) as examples.

38. Carretta believes the “[b]aptismal and naval records [that] say he was born in South Carolina” (xiv), and that “the accounts of Africa and the Middle Passage in *The Interesting Narrative* were constructed” (xiv) by Equiano. For an account that argues in favour of reading Equiano’s work as truthful, see Paul E. Lovejoy’s “Autobiography and Memory: Gustavus Vassa, alias Olaudah Equiano, the African” (2006).

39. Orlando Patterson (1982) characterises slavery as the condition of being “socially dead” and extends this metaphor to the process of manumission, which he describes as a “double negation [...] the death of the social death of the slave” (215).

40. This is a similar dynamic to that identified by William Andrews in relation to early Afro-American autobiography.

41. Driver notes that a similar movement also occurred in African-American autobiography: “under Black Consciousness, black South African autobiography makes the turn away from the personal confessional mode which has been remarked in black American autobiography as well” (119). Furthermore, Mbulelo Vizikhungo Mzamane distinguishes between protest literature and the literature produced by the Black Consciousness movement: “Protest literature is writing by the underprivileged or exploited which is primarily addressed to those who wield political and economic power [...] in an attempt to elicit their sympathy and support against discriminatory laws and practices” (183); Black Consciousness literature, on the other hand, was “addressed directly and primarily to the downtrodden and oppressed” (183).

42. Wicomb herself has described the influence that Black Consciousness had on her, even as she notes that it was constantly in tension with her engagement with feminism: “I don’t imagine that I would have been able to speak and write if there hadn’t been black consciousness” (quoted in Dorothy Driver’s afterword to *David’s Story* (2001) 238-9). See also, “To Hear the Variety of Discourses” (1990).

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