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Child and youth protagonists in Habila's *Measuring Time* and Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*

Helon Habila's *Measuring Time* (2007) and Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* (2001) deploy child and youth protagonists to offer nuanced and revealing perspectives on contemporary nationhood in Nigeria and South Africa respectively. By these means, these two important novels displace the adult—and mostly male—viewpoints that have dominated novelistic portrayals of postcolonial nationhood for decades. Using notions of the literary symbolism of childhood and the biological family as points of departure, this article analyses the portrayal of these protagonists in terms of their allegorical and metonymic representation of the nation as a social unit. This article explores the ways in which the subjectivities of the protagonists may reflect national anxieties in general and the problems of contemporary socio-political transition in particular. It highlights how the different pathways followed by Habila's and Dangor's characters may represent simultaneously dystopian and auspicious futures for Nigeria and South Africa while also bringing recent writing from two of Africa's eminent literary sites into a rare conversation that helps to extend our understanding of the continent's contemporary realities. **Keywords:** children, dystopia, family, nation, transition, youth.

Although Helon Habila's *Measuring Time* (2007) and Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* (2001) are not necessarily nationalist in outlook, they present marginal and nuanced perspectives on recent socio-political transitions in Nigeria and South Africa respectively by focusing on child and youth protagonists. They displace the adult—and mostly male—viewpoints that have dominated novelistic portrayals of postcolonial nationhood (see Hron 27–48). Told against historical and socio-political settings that are unambiguously national, and through allegorical and metonymic depictions of the family, each narrative maps the spaces, subjectivities, and temporalities of the nation in symbolic ways. The ubiquity of the trope of the biological family in national narratives and discourses across different regions and literary traditions is well documented (see Brennan; Bhabha; Boehmer). As Anne McClintock (63) demonstrates,

> [n]ations are frequently figured through the iconography of familial and domestic space. The term "nation" derives from "nation": to be born. We speak of nations as "motherlands" and "fatherlands". Foreigners "adopt" countries that are not their native homes, and are "naturalized" into the national family. We talk of the Family of Nations, of "homelands" and "native" lands. In Britain, immigration matters are dealt with at the Home Office; in the United States, the President and his wife are called the

> First Family. […] In this way, nations are symbolically figured as *domestic genealogies*. (original emphasis)

With regard to the early novels of Achebe for example, Elleke Boehmer (187) has shown that nationalist awareness is dramatized through his narrativization of "family and compound life". While Habila's and Dangor's narratives and their intellectual orientations are clearly different from Achebe's, in their representation of Lamang's family (in *Measuring Time*) and Silas's family (in *Bitter Fruit*), the signifying links—in terms of the multidirectional synecdoche— between family and nation are powerfully evoked. The connection between the public sphere of the nation and the domestic relations of the respective families are highlighted by the specific history and politics within which their individual filial interactions are framed. This provides scope for exploring the ways in which the portrayal of the Lamang and Ali families may reflect national anxieties in general, and the problems of socio-political transition in particular. It also highlights how the breakdown of these families (and other families in each novel), as well as the different pathways undertaken by members of these families, represent simultaneously dystopian and auspicious possibilities for Nigeria and South Africa.[1] I analyse the representation of these families and their individual members beginning with the ways in which the subjectivities of the major child and youth protagonists are delineated, and how their perspectives on the principal themes of the novels are articulated.[2]

This article expands scholarship on Habila's acclaimed, yet underexplored novel while providing a new reading of Dangor's novel that brings it into relationship, both narratologically and thematically, with the growing literature on Nigeria's transition. This is quite important as each text was released during periods of significant socio-political transition in the respective countries—one after the end of Nelson Mandela's presidency and the public hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the other after Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999. In this sense, the texts comment on how these two important postcolonial African societies deal with contemporary social change in cultural ways. Both countries have frequently been described as African literary giants (see Fasselt 23) for at least two ostensible reasons. First, both have thriving local literary industries that are larger than those of other African countries. Secondly, writers from these two countries have tended to dominate news of African writing for several decades, most notably by winning numerous prestigious literary prizes both within and outside the continent. More important is the eminent place that Nigeria and South Africa occupy (individually and together) in the various ways in which Africa is imagined, both within and outside the continent. This means that the evolving cultural archives of both sites invariably reflect a domain populated by historiographical and representational resources and practices that resonate across both sites, and that together extend our understanding of contemporary African realities.

In addition, the discussion of *Measuring Time* contributes to our understanding of post-independence and post-dictatorship Nigeria in ways that counter predominantly dystopian representations of West Africa. In this regard, Hari Kunzru has noted that literary representations of West Africa since the early post-independence period has been marked by "a vein of pervasive hopelessness". And, according to Giulia D'Agostini (v), the region is often represented in literature as a zone of "perpetual emergency, where a progressively more vivid biopoliticisation of politics sanctions the reduction of the postcolonial (non-)citizen to what Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben has termed 'bare life'—a form of life that, exposed to sovereign violence, or caught in the sovereign ban, may be killed without committing homicide" .

Measuring Time is, in many ways, a family story. It is the story of Mamo Lamang and his twin brother, LaMamo; of their father, Musa Lamang; and of the people of Keti, a fictional village in north-eastern Nigeria. The novel is also a story of life in Nigeria under various military dictatorships and civilian regimes, and of civil war and socio-political chaos in several post-independence West African nation-states during the 1980s and 1990s. At the surface level, the novel is the story of Mamo and LaMamo's growth from when they are born just after the end of the Nigeria Civil War of 1967–70. In this way, it can be understood as an account of their intellectual coming-of-age during a period of momentous social, economic, cultural, and political upheavals.

As all these stories are rendered predominantly through, and held together by Mamo, the novel is also, essentially, Mamo's personal life story. It is the story of his childhood struggle with sickle-cell anaemia, a debilitating congenital disease that afflicts hundreds of thousands of young people especially in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean (see Caroline). *Measuring Time* also tells the story of the sharp contrasts between the lives of the twin brothers, Mamo and LaMamo.[3] The former is an invalid, acutely despondent, despised by their father, and lacks a sense of purpose as a child, while the latter is healthy, good-looking, and is preferred by the father. Their different lives highlight the significance of individual choices and pathways in shaping personal and public destiny. In this regard, Toni Kan (n. p.) has linked Habila's choice of twins with the novel's historiographical and allegorical project as an invocation of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, arguing that it is "in many ways, Helon's own *Parallel Lives*: Mamo and LaMamo, Lamang and his brother Ilya, Zara and her sister Rhoda as well as Keti and Nigeria". For its part, *Bitter Fruit* tells the story of the gradual disintegration of the family of Silas Ali, a coloured former operative of the ANC's underground armed group, Umkhonto we Sizwe also known as MK. The narrative is set in 1998 during the final stages of the public hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). It begins when Silas, who works in the justice ministry as a liaison official to the TRC runs into François du Boise, a white former apartheid security police officer. Du Boise had raped Lydia, Silas's wife, almost two

decades previously because of Silas's political activism. Silas relays his encounter with Du Boise to Lydia, and by so doing reignites the traumatic effect of the rape.

The couple realize that they have been unable to come to terms with the incident and to deal with its memory. Towards the end of the story, the disintegration of their marriage and family becomes accelerated after Lydia has sex with a stranger at Silas's fiftieth birthday party. As the relationship between Silas and Lydia deteriorates, they become estranged from their teenage son, Mikey, who learns from Lydia's diary that he was conceived during her rape. Mikey, who now insists on being called his proper name, Michael, joins a radical Muslim group which includes members of his surrogate father's family in "search for his roots" (*Bitter Fruit* 170).[4] He then murders Du Boise in revenge for his mother's rape. He also kills Johan Viljoen, the white father of his coloured teenage friend, Vinu, because Viljoen has been sexually abusing Vinu. At the end of the story, Mikey is planning to escape from South Africa to India.

For *Measuring Time*, the characters under consideration in this discussion are Mamo and LaMamo, as well as the two other prominent youthful characters—Asabar, a cousin of the twins, and Zara, Mamo's lover. These four characters are examined for the ways in which they may typify the lived experiences and points of view of children and youths in relation to the changing social, cultural and political landscape of Nigeria during the 1980s and 1990s. Their perceptions are also a valuable reflection on the post-1999 period during which the country returned to democracy after almost two decades of military dictatorship. Most importantly, their different life pathways serve as a trope for national transition in the post-independence and post-dictatorship periods. In regard to *Bitter Fruit*, the focus of this discussion is Mikey (who becomes Michael). I argue that his youthful and self-assured character is deployed as a symbolic alternative to the older generation of South Africans whose role in the country's transitional socio-political order is questioned in the novel.

Before turning to the texts proper, I begin with a summary of theoretical considerations on the narrative symbolism of childhood and youth and the evolving sub-genre of the postcolonial bildungsroman.[5] In this regard, I draw on Christopher Ouma's (48–59) study of childhood in the novels of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Ouma argues that current Nigerian writing "is actually informed by the idea of childhood […] as 'a set of ideas' that engages, through alternative memory and the father figure, with what can be described as postmodern identities" (48). Similarly, Madelaine Hron (28) has demonstrated that child and youth protagonists perform a "nuanced and complex role" in contemporary Nigerian literature. She argues further that such protagonists occupy "hybrid spaces" within postcolonial societies, a point that is important for this study's interest in liminal, in-between subjectivities such as those of adolescent protagonists who are in transition from childhood to adulthood. Such protagonists, Hron observes, are a "particularly apt vehicle" through which writers articulate novel perspectives on postcolonial nationhood in a variety of contexts

including "multiculturalism, globalization, and international human rights". For this reason, these characters are often used to question and deconstruct "overdetermined identity markers" (Krishnan 73). As Ogaga Okuyade (1) observes, the resurgence of the bildungsroman genre is not limited to third generation Nigerian writing alone, but is also a key feature of contemporary African fiction. He proposes a version of the genre, namely the postcolonial African bildungsroman to characterize the growing trend in contemporary African literature. Jack Kearney also provides a succinct and insightful account of postcolonial/African variants of the traditional bildungsroman.

Importantly also, it is these kinds of protagonists and contexts of literary production that are most suited to the bildungsroman form adopted in the two novels under consideration and by an increasing number of recent Nigerian texts. As Apollo Amoko (200) observes, the postcolonial African bildungsroman emerged, like its European predecessor, during times of "radical transformation and social upheaval when, in the wake of colonialism, the traditional ways of being were seriously undermined, if not forever transformed". Such was the condition of Nigeria and indeed West Africa in the 1980s and 1990s. In Nigeria, three brutal military regimes held sway from 1983 to 1998 while civil wars raged in Liberia (1989–96 and 1999–2003) and Sierra Leone (1991–2002). These scenarios form the sub-regional historical and political backdrop to *Measuring Time*, and represent what the story's young beleaguered protagonists have to contend with. The material conditions in South Africa during the late 1990s and the turn of the 21st century were markedly different. Yet, Dangor's novel was also produced during and set within a period of heightened socio-political tension and controversy as the dramatic TRC hearings were about to close and Nelson Mandela's presidency was ending. It is in this context that the transformation of Michael, the main child and youth protagonist in *Bitter Fruit* is explored.

Returning to Ouma's (48) point about childhood as "a set of ideas" that grapples with the role of fathers, it is instructive that *Measuring Time* is also a story of Musa Lamang, the father of the twin protagonists, Mamo and LaMamo. Similarly, *Bitter Fruit* is also a story about Michael's father, Silas Ali. While providing an account of the development of their major child and youth protagonists, the novels simultaneously represent an unmistakable critique of the generation of Nigerians and South Africans typified by the characters of Lamang and Silas respectively. Members of this generation are directly or indirectly linked to the societal problems that are thematized in each novel (see Kunzru in regard to *Measuring Time*). This is important for understanding the novels as examples of the bildungsroman genre, which, as Amoko (200) has argued, "marks the death of the father as a symbol of stable, unquestioned, traditional authority".

Similarly, José S. F. Vásquez (87) notes that in the traditional bildungsroman, "the protagonist exhibits a profound disagreement with his family or society" that is often resolved at the end of the story. But this is often not the case in the African

situation as Vásquez demonstrates in his study of Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1992). In Vásquez's reading of that novel, the protagonist, Azaro is trapped between two seemingly contradictory cultures such that Azaro's disagreement with his indigenous paternalistic culture remains unresolved at the end of the story. There is a significant link here to the synecdochic reading of nation and family offered in this article. In the traditional bildungsroman, this disagreement often triggers a journey away from home (often to other countries). Yet, it ends with the return to the home country, re-integration into the family and nation. Even though the narratives in *Measuring Time* and *Bitter Fruit* provide ample opportunities for transnational allegiances, the nation seems to be confirmed as primary locus in the protagonists' final re-construction of subjectivity.

While the protagonists of *Measuring Time* and *Bitter Fruit* do not demonstrate the kind of indecision and contradictory socio-cultural affiliation felt by Okri's Azaro, their differences with the older generation remain unresolved. In the case of *Measuring Time*, the young protagonists reject the paternalistic and gerontocratic structures of their community and the twins remain deeply resentful of their negligent father. Similarly, but for different reasons, their cousin, Asabar rebels against his father, refuses to go to school, and ends up as a drug addict and thug. For her part, Zara resists pressure from her family to remain submissive to her abusive and philandering husband and divorces him. In *Bitter Fruit*, the child and youth perspective is rendered almost entirely through Michael who is highly indignant about the facetiousness of almost all the adults in his life: his parents, his lecturer, his rapist biological father, his father's colleagues, and the incestuous father of his friend, Vinu. This leads him to despise Silas and to murder both Du Boise and Vinu's father. In these ways, the protagonists dramatize some of the key features of postcolonial African versions of the traditional bildungsroman.

Importantly also, both novels adopt specific methods of character delineation that are well-suited to their ostensible narrative missions. They can be considered, in narratological terms, among novels narrated in what Franz K. Stanzel calls the "figural" style. Manfred Jahn (96) explains what this means: "Because it focuses on a reflector's mind, the figural style tends to avoid exposition of background information, it may restrict itself to recording a reflector's stream of associative consciousness, and often it moves toward an interior moment of 'epiphany' (revelation or recognition) rather than reaching a suspense-filled climax."

Habila's and Dangor's narratives focus on the consciousness—perceptions, thoughts, emotions, beliefs—of Mamo and Michael respectively thus facilitates the overall representation of the transformation of these protagonists.

I now turn to a detailed close reading of *Measuring Time* to analyse the delineation of Mamo and LaMamo, as well as the two other major youthful characters, Asabar and Zara. The discussion focuses on the ways in which character development in

this novel is used to explore contemporary socio-political changes in Nigeria. The way these characters develop from childhood to adulthood functions as the most powerful and evocative trope of transition in the story. On the one hand, their individual and collective metamorphoses can be read for their symbolic commentary on the changes in Keti. On the other, their development is read as representative of transformations in the wider national and sub-regional spheres for which the community of Keti serves as synecdoche. I suggest that the different trajectories of these characters' lives represent different possibilities for the community and the nation. Through each of them, Habila highlights the ways in which public concerns are invariably inscribed in the private lives of postcolonial citizens. The analysis will focus in greater detail on the main protagonist Mamo than on the other characters due to the evident superiority of his role in the narrative.

According to Anindyo Roy (5), the aforementioned link between the public and personal is at the heart of the constant recourse to history, not only in earlier Nigerian writing but also in current literatures from the country. He argues that in *Measuring Time*, Habila recognizes "the multiplicity of histories" (5) and adopts an innovative form of realism in which (auto)biography is linked with history in ways that enable "writing the self into history" (23). With regard to the main characters of the novel, Habila's idiosyncratic historiography (which relies on the biographical history of ordinary individuals) allows readers to contemplate the intersections between private lives and communal and by extension national life in terms of the extent to which the one may be imbricated in the other. In other words, the trajectory and fate of each character may be understood in the context of the tensions between individual choices versus the predetermining and circumscribing conditions associated with the history and destiny of the community at large. It has been argued in this regard that Achebe, for example, espouses the view that the fates of ordinary Africans are determined less by their individual circumstances and choices and more by the predetermining legacies of colonization (see Irele; Opata). This view is supported by the preponderance of tragic figures in Achebe's novels, and is reinforced by the following lines from *Anthills of the Savanna:*

> "What must a people do to appease an embittered history?" […] The explanation of the tragedy of Chris and Ikem in terms of petty human calculation or personal accident had begun to give way in her throbbing mind to an altogether more plausible theory of premeditation. Were they not in fact trailed travellers whose journeys from start to finish had been carefully programmed in advance by an alienated history? (Achebe 220)

Mamo and LaMamo become separated early in the story. Each takes a different life route even though they maintain a strong filial and psychological bond throughout the narrative. This separation can be understood as a particularly significant narrative strategy that enables Habila to decentre the point of view offered by the novel along

two main narrative strands. The first is that of Mamo. The reader follows his experiences and perspectives on life in rural Keti where he remains (visiting the capital city occasionally) throughout the story. The other major perspective is offered through LaMamo. In contrast to Mamo, LaMamo's experiences and views are rendered predominantly in the form of four letters addressed to his brother and written from the places where he wanders throughout the larger part of his life. He travels across West and North Africa—Chad, Libya, Mali, Liberia and Guinea—where he fights, first as a child soldier and later as an itinerant mercenary. Thus, while the view of one protagonist is articulated from a position that is relatively fixed (in geographical terms), that of the other assumes a more mobile and transnational character. Each narrative strand, therefore, offers unique portrayals of a range of private, social, political, and cultural phenomena that help to enrich the reader's understanding of the period and the region which the novel textualizes.

Mamo, the older twin, is far more important to the story than his brother since it is through his consciousness that the overwhelming bulk of the narrative is focalized. The novel's dominant themes are explored through the ways in which he "makes sense of the world" (Tenshak 55). Mamo is diagnosed with sickle-cell anaemia when he is only four years old and suffers constant spells of illness and despair throughout his childhood. Despised by his father, Mamo only survives by listening to stories told by his aunt and foster mother. He plans to run away from home with LaMamo and their cousin Asabar, but is prevented by ill-health. However, things improve as he grows older and as his intellect develops. At fourteen, he begins to write. And after dropping out of university—again due to ill-health—he becomes a history teacher and later, secretary to the traditional ruler. This is when he begins to write a biography of the ruler and the history of the community. It is from this book that most of the stories in the novel are excerpted.

Through Mamo's psychosocial metamorphosis, the significance of the "perspective, and *agency* of the child-hero" (Hron 27, emphasis added) becomes foregrounded. He transforms from a sickly reclusive child, despised by his father and despairing for life, to a young adult who is a passionate lover, respected community figure, and enthusiastic intellectual. According to Ken J. Lipenga (176), Mamo's transformation is connected to his role in the novel's historiographical project:

> Mamo's re-storying of history can be read as an individually and socially enabling form of agency in *Measuring Time*. The constant reference to the appearance of [Mamo's] book in the future highlights a form of agency that Mamo discovers through writing. This agency is first and foremost something that helps him to assert his self-worth, in the face of criticism from his father, which is sometimes directed at his frail body.

This helps to demonstrate how Mamo's characterization functions in important narratological and discursive ways. According to Mamo, the stories Auntie Marina tells

him "far into the moonlit night" saved him "from early death, [and] taught [him] how to live with" his anaemic body (*Measuring Time* 22, 21). Ironically, it is this sickness that provides the circumstances in which his mental faculties of observation and articulation are sharpened. As with most bildungsroman heroes, his reflexive disposition and frequent solitude affords him an analytical distance from society which facilitates the development of his intellectual faculties (see Slaughter).

Mamo's congenital disease can thus be understood as doubly symbolic—and probably teleological—representing both possibility and liability. In the first place, by preventing him from running away from home at sixteen, the disease saves him from LaMamo's fate—the wandering, traumatic existence of a mercenary characterized by perpetual precarity (see Agamben; Butler). As an invalid, Mamo's inability to pursue fulfilment in life through the more usual and recognizable avenues—physical work and sports, for example—means he has to explore alternative means. In other words, he has to live his life innovatively, and to find possibilities in his disability by turning inwards and tapping into his keen intellectual faculties as he is advised by Uncle Iliya (*Measuring Time* 86). It is through this process that his character and role in the story develops.

The importance of Mamo's narrative role is foregrounded furthermore by the fact that he is especially discriminated against by his father due to his frail physical condition. This represents an important aspect of the social critique offered by the narrative as it draws attention to the ways in which disability functions as a trope for marginalization in post-dictatorship Nigerian society. It exemplifies Michael Oliver's (22) influential definition of disability as "the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes no or little account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities." Lamang's disregard for Mamo, especially his practice of ensuring that Mamo stays on the edges in their family photographs also reflect Nicole Quakenbush's (9) association of disability with "society's unwillingness to accept or accommodate bodily/mental difference". In *Measuring Time*, Lamang figures as an archetype of the patriarchal power structures that organize and reinforce social marginalization.

Opposition to the oppressive and discriminatory nature of this system, and the male figures at their centre, as Ouma (48–59) demonstrates, is a core aspect of the construction of childhood in several post-dictatorship Nigerian texts.[6] Ouma (48) notes that the majority of writers in the post-dictatorship era—including Habila—grew up under military dictatorships so that their memories of childhood reflect a distinct "post-military imagination". Focusing on Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), he goes on to argue that, in the works of these writers, "the representation of childhood becomes a process of delegitimation that multiplies margins (Appiah 1992) and decentralises paterfamilias authority. The decentralisation of the father figure

and the quest for a multiplicity of authorities and sources of identity makes this representation of childhood amenable to postmodern consciousness, to the spirit of anti-foundationalism" (49).

It is important to note, at this juncture, that, as a narrative subject, Mamo does not remain static throughout the story. Indeed, the child Mamo must be distinguished from the adult Mamo. While the former exists and operates from a distinctly marginal standpoint, the latter's position is more complicated and fluid. As one of Keti's elite, the adult Mamo is situated in the society's centre of power and enjoys the privileges that accompany his social status. Yet, as someone who opposes the corrupt practices of the community's principal political and traditional leaders, he operates on the margins of the centre (*Measuring Time* 275–6). He actually finds himself conflicted by the obligation to write what would amount to a hagiography of the corrupt ruling class:

> [H]e was brought face to face with the duplicity of his own position. His uncle had said to him, "I know they will feed you a bundle of lies. But I have no fear that you will write only the truth." He knew that, were he to be honest to his heart, he'd right now put down his pen and walk out and never again return. But what of fame, he reminded himself, what of immortality? (275–6)

In terms of his status as narrative subject, Mamo thus moves from outsider as a child, to insider as an adult, and then to an in-between position as a dissenting community leader whose moral judgements are compromised by personal ambition. These shifts in position invest his point of view with an important mobile quality that is similar, but not identical to LaMamo's. They also highlight the profoundly disjunctive nature of postcolonial transitions and the kaleidoscopic processes of subject formation in contemporary Africa. The fluidity of Mamo's psychological orientation serve to further decentre and pluralize the novel's overall perspective, dramatizing Michael Schatzberg's (9) observation that identity construction and social affiliation remain "protean, contextual and intermittent phenomen[a]". This process of transformation becomes the tonic that invigorates his frail body and reverses the melancholy of his childhood:

> Suddenly he was no longer the awkward, bumbling idiot his father had so mercilessly derided. He felt strong and unafraid, he had somehow outwitted his sickle-cell anaemia, it had been over a year since he'd last fallen sick, and his odds of staying alive could only improve with each passing year. He felt like screaming out aloud, *I am alive and I am useful and everything will work out fine!* (*Measuring Time* 196, original emphasis)

It is very instructive that in this critical moment of self-realization, Mamo recalls the psychological violence he had suffered at the hands of his father as a child, and expresses his newly found sense of worth *in opposition to* his father's earlier abuse. This illustrates Ouma's (48) argument regarding the ways in which post-dictatorship

childhood operates to "delimit and transcend the symbolic boundaries carved out by identification with the father figure" in the process of asserting personal agency and charting possibility.

In an allegorical sense, Mamo's congenital disease and the neglect of his irresponsible father represent the extremely difficult circumstances in which most West Africans lived in the 1980s and 1990s. These conditions, which Lipenga (16) describes as "disabling factors", are understood to be a combination of the deep structural legacies of colonialism combined with the excesses of oppressive and inept political leaders such as Liberia's late Samuel Doe and Nigeria's Sani Abacha. Some of these dictators led their respective countries into protracted civil wars which resulted in millions of deaths, the spread of disease, widespread destruction of public infrastructure and institutions, abject poverty, high unemployment, and general socio-political dysfunction. Furthermore, large numbers of child soldiers were involved in the many civil wars that raged in the sub-region from the late 1980s until 2007.[7]

It was under these circumstances that many West African youths grew up during the mid to late 2000s when *Measuring Time* was first published.[8] And although the Nigerian civil war was fought earlier, the situation under military dictatorships between 1984 and 1999 was similarly dire. Mamo's later metamorphosis and success is therefore symbolic and represents possibility in the face of disability, as well as hope in spite of legacies of social, economic, and political dysfunction. His transformation can also be understood as a form of prospective socio-political commitment that emphasizes the value of self-reflexion as well as human and cultural capital to Africa's future development. But, as noted earlier, Mamo represents only one of the several alternatives offered by the narrative. These are represented by the other youthful protagonists, notably LaMamo, who, in the words of Kunzru (n. p.) represents "the possibilities of the road not taken, the path of action instead of contemplation".

During his time abroad as an itinerant soldier, LaMamo sends four letters to Mamo, each from a different country. These are strategically spread across the novel in order to blend Mamo's epistolary accounts with Mamo's more conventional narratives. This results in what Manfred Jahn (98) calls "collective focalisation," a narratological strategy by which layers of consciousness of complementary ideas and imaginaries are blended together. In this way, diverse perspectives become subtextually "*combine[d]* to form a structured artistic system, and are *subordinated* to the higher stylistic unity of the work as a whole" (Bakhtin 261, 262; emphases added). As Bakhtin explains eloquently, the novel, as an artistic and discursive form, is a unified composite of a "diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organised" (262). This blending of perspectives, in turn, enhances the overall polyvocality of *Measuring Time*, a key feature that supports Habila's multifaceted thematic project. LaMamo's first-hand reports of the tragedy and trauma of civil war in three West African countries supplements Mamo's local

experiences of socio-political dysfunction in the region during the 1980s and 1990s.

The letters also map LaMamo's psychological and intellectual maturation in a way that fits neatly into the novel's wider plot and thematic mission. Very importantly also, it is through his story and letters (together with the flashback and relayed narrations provided by Uncle Iliya and Toma who fought in the Nigerian Civil War) that Habila depicts the tragic child soldier character that has become a recurring dystopian feature of recent African narratives (see Kearney). In *Measuring Time*, this is highlighted by the tragic death of LaMamo and also of Haruna who is the twins's uncle. Haruna had fought in the Nigerian Civil War as a teenager and is presumed dead when he does not return home after several years. He, however, resurfaces in Keti as a destitute man who has lost his mind and commits suicide six months later. The misfortunes of Zara and Asabar also contribute to the dystopian possibilities suggested by the narrative. Zara loses her mind after several failed relationships while Asabar becomes paralysed after many years as an alcoholic, drug-addict and political thug.

Together, these three reflect another set of possibilities different from the promise represented by Mamo. The fact that only Mamo appears to have made a success out of life intensifies the dystopian orientation of the text. Moreover, it is instructive that the individual and collective misfortunes of these characters are linked via synecdoche to an oppressive and dysfunctional socio-political order. This is illustrated in the description of the "mass of angry-looking youths" who LaMamo leads in protest against the traditional ruler towards the end of the story: "Most of them didn't know why they followed the one-eyed leader, but their minds were still fresh with images of yesterday's police brutality; there was also the drought and the imminent famine, which added fuel to their anger, and they felt that anything was better than the frustration and the hopelessness of their existence" (*Measuring Time* 347). The experiences of these characters constitute a youthful perspective on contemporary Nigerian nationalism that is largely, although not entirely, dystopian. Through Mamo in particular, the narrative expresses the hope that an alternative and auspicious post-dictatorship Nigerian future is possible. An analogous reading of *Bitter Fruit* produces similar insight. The transformation of the main protagonist, Mikey who becomes Michael, symbolizes South Africa's post-TRC possibilities. In particular, his self-assurance and agency can be understood as a symbolic alternative to the relative stasis and anxiousness demonstrated by Silas who sometimes typifies the country's older generation.

There is a sense in which *Bitter Fruit* can be read as a bildungsroman in regard to the delineation of the character of Michael. Though the story begins when Michael is already a teenager, the text uses extensive flashbacks to narrate his childhood. This enables the reader to follow his metamorphosis. As his parents' marriage unravels, he gradually becomes estranged from them. Learning the true circumstances of his

birth seems to mark the beginning of his transformation as it is after this event that he insists on being called by his proper name Michael rather than the childhood alias. Michael then embarks on a search for his "true" identity among the Muslim family of Silas, and refuses to identify himself with his biological rapist father. Yet, he does not fully embrace his foster father, Silas, but is indignant of Silas's tendency towards psychological disorientation. After Michael kills Du Boise, he prepares to escape to India where he plans to learn more about, and possibly convert to, Islam.

Michael's metamorphosis involves his transition from a child on the margins of the domestic world of his family to a young adult with agency; one who decides to use his initiative and to take action to shape his destiny. This is enabled by his intellect and powers of observation, as well as the turn of events that leads him to discover the violent circumstances of his birth. As an adult, Michael decides to retrace his identity and to avenge his mother's rape and Vinu's abuse. Towards these ends, he successfully deploys his sexual prowess in manipulative and instrumentalist ways, and later flirts with religion and the routes it might open to him. He is thus portrayed in stark contrast to his father Silas who can be understood as a possible archetype of South Africa's older generation of the post-TRC period. In contrast to Michael's self-assured character, Silas is portrayed as someone "whose whole sense of the future [is] made up of a series of anxieties" (*Bitter Fruit* 179):

> Michael observes Silas at his familiar post by the kitchen sink, drinking glass after glass of water, and staring myopically into the darkness. What does he see in that mirror of his own eyes? A life lived as best he can, and therefore wasted, by definition. Michael resists the surge of sympathy he feels for Silas, his father in name, his keeper, mentor of sorts. Every now and then, Silas gets this wild look in his eyes, a redeeming sense of yearning, a desire for something more than mere existence. (200)

There is a strong sense in which Michael's transformation (beginning from the moment he learns that he is a child of rape) is held up as an alternative to Silas's condition of "*fragile* stasis" (Mafe 117, emphasis added), after Silas's encounter with Du Boise and the distressing memory of his wife's rape and his own humiliation. This is not to suggest, however, that Michael's violent actions are to be read as a prescribed course of social action. Rather, they can be understood, together with the trajectories of other characters, in terms of plural and open-ended socio-political possibilities. It is significant that Michael's coming of age—he is nineteen years old when the story begins—occurs during a period that is roughly coterminous with the twilight years of the Mandela presidency and the end of the TRC proceedings. There is therefore a strong sense in which his personal metamorphosis can be understood as an allegory of the country's transition in the post-TRC dispensation. According to Diana Mafe (113–4), Michael is actually at the centre of the story as "the figurative 'bitter fruit' and the character that upsets the carefully preserved yet artificial balance" of the

still morphing and uncertain post-TRC socio-political order. The transformation of Michael is therefore another important layer of the palimpsest of coeval representations, allegories, tropes, and chronotopes by which *Bitter Fruit* dramatizes South Africa's post-TRC condition.

In similar ways, Habila's four young characters, taken together, can be understood as a powerful figure of (West) African nations caught in the throes of post-independence transition. Mamo's inherited anaemia can thus be read as a figure for the legacies of colonialism in postcolonial African nation-states. As Mamo was expected to die young, so too have the prospects of Nigeria's continued existence as a unified nation been bleak since the Biafran war that broke out only seven years after independence.[9] In spite of these themes of disillusionment however, *Measuring Time*, like *Bitter Fruit*, resists a dystopian ending through the promise represented by the unexpected and hard-fought survival of the main protagonist.[10]

It is important to note that the adolescent and youthful subjectivities of these characters are constructed within the frame of fractured sensitivities. These signify the psychological and socio-political turbulences that confront postmodern subjects within a specific postcolonial context. It is significant, furthermore, that Habila marginalizes more familiar categories of group identification (ethnicity and religion in particular) in order to focus on what it means to be a young person at a specific historical moment and within a specific social space. To do this, the narrator follows each protagonist from childhood to adulthood, paying painstaking attention to their thoughts, perceptions, aspirations, and frustrations. *Bitter Fruit* similarly focuses on Michael's inner consciousness while also exploring an eclectic range of themes (notably gender, sexuality and race) in mapping Michael's psychosocial development. In these ways, the character development of the child and youth protagonists in both texts is given central narrative and discursive importance. And through these particular narratological processes, childhood and youth identities become cast, not merely as tropes of transition, but also in ontological terms as distinct modes of being. This therefore forces us also to re-consider socio-political transition in ways that may be significantly similar in spite of the evidently dissimilar historical trajectories of Nigeria and South Africa. Furthermore, the foregoing analysis extends our understanding of contemporary African fiction by shedding light on the range of intertextual narrative resources and practices that resonate across two of the continent's preeminent literary sites.

Notes

1. I use dystopia in the sense expounded by Gregory Claeys (109) in reference to "feasible negative visions of social and political development, cast principally in fictional form". In this connection, M. Kieth Booker (72) identified a "dystopian turn" in African fiction from the mid-1980s onward which he associated—in terms of narrative technique and form—with western literary influences on postcolonial writing. Many texts produced from this period famously reflect the disillusionment

with nation-building in many parts of the continent marked by the rise of totalitarian regimes, the proliferation of civil strife, and other forms of socio-political dysfunction that have apparently endured, albeit in different ways, to the present time.

2. It is important to emphasize that it is not the article's aim to compare between socio-political transition in Nigeria and South Africa but to explore the ways in which the child and youth protagonists are delineated and deployed in the respective texts.
3. A detailed exploration of the significance of twins is outside the scope of this article. See Phillip M. Peek's edited volume, *Twins in African and Diaspora Cultures* for an investigation of the significance of twins in divination, performance, artistic representation, religion and popular culture.
4. The aftermath of 9/11 affected the initial reception of the novel in the West (see Capur). It was only in 2005 that an American edition was published.
5. Detailed definitions of "childhood" and "youth", which are related and distinct terms, are outside the remit of this article. I use them to refer to the fluid and overlapping categories of age that are generally conceived in opposition to adulthood (see Georgieva). This is in line with the critical practice whereby the two terms are used side by side in the exploration of related sets of identities, experiences, behaviours, representations and/or realities (see Hron). This practice is reinforced by such periodicals as the influential *Journal of African Children's and Youth Literature* as well as by similar indexing categorisations adopted by several libraries and databases.
6. The major examples include Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl* (2005), Chris Abani's *Graceland* (2004) and *Becoming Abigail* (2006), Dulue Mbachu's *War Games* (2005), Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* (2005), Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2007).
7. The list of civil wars in the region during this period include: Liberia (1989–96; 1999–2003); Mali (1990–95); Sierra Leone (1991–2002); and Côte d'Ivoire (2002–2007).
8. Most of the leading post-dictatorship writers were born in the period between 1967 (when Habila was born) to the early 1980s (see Adesanmi and Dunton vii–xii).
9. Long before independence, there were serious misgivings about the political viability of a united Nigeria. In February 1966, a small militia made a failed bid to establish a breakaway Niger Delta Republic. Then came the civil war in 1967. More recently, there have been rumours of a prediction from American security experts that the country would implode in 2015. Even though this did not happen, political and security tensions abound, and some commentators still express the view that the country may still break up in the future (see Nwamu).
10. In this sense, the novels recall the rhetoric of pessimism that characterized leading novels of the early post-independence period as noted previously.

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Belonging in *Thuis* and *7de Laan*: a critical whiteness studies perspective

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Belonging in *Thuis* and *7de Laan*: a critical whiteness studies perspective

Within both the South African and Belgian contexts whiteness manifests as one aspect of national identity and remains (to differing degrees) a normative construction. This article presents the findings of a controlled case comparison of a sample from two community soap operas, *7de Laan* and *Thuis*, broadcast by the South African (SABC) and Flemish (VRT) Public Service Broadcasters respectively, from the perspective of critical whiteness studies. I contend that whiteness functions as an organising principle in the narratives of both soap operas. The goal of this comparative analysis was an investigation into the ways in which whiteness is constructed and positioned in these texts and the implications this has for the politics of belonging. Despite several similarities between the two contexts, they differ significantly, and this created an opportunity to highlight both the consistencies and particularities in the ideological patterning of representations of whiteness, across seemingly unrelated domains, to illustrate its pervasiveness. Notwithstanding their disparate origins, the analysis revealed three rhetorical devices which function to maintain whiteness as hegemonic ideology in both texts. **Keywords:** *7de Laan*, critical whiteness studies, community soap opera. controlled case comparison, politics of belonging, *Thuis*, whiteness.

Introduction

In the context of the post-apartheid landscape, where all South Africans are muddling their way into a "complex, nuanced, inherently different future" (Everatt 6–8), Ndebele (46–7) writes that the quest for a new white humanity will only begin to "emerge from a voluntary engagement by those caught in the culture of whiteness of their own making". This article presents one such attempt at voluntary engagement.

There are various ways in which to engage the everyday spaces of the culture of whiteness. Hall (293), for example, posits that one can learn about a specific culture by analysing the stories told by and about this culture since identities are contained in stories told about nations. One possible way of investigating discursive strategies that position and produce whiteness may, therefore, be to look at media narratives and the ways in which whiteness, and belonging, are constructed in these stories. milton ("The televised public sphere: Afrikaans television's role in identity formation" 5–6) writes that in a society as driven towards change as South Africa, it is important that the media be analysed as institutions that could contribute to "national (and transnational) processes of political liberalization and democratization, as potential

agents of national solidarity, cultural convergence, and social transformation". It is my contention that media narratives could, therefore, also be analysed fruitfully with the goal of engaging whiteness.

In the popular media there is a plethora of available stories one could analyse to this end. For the purposes of this article, I chose to look at soap operas as a source of the stories to which Hall (293) refers. Soap operas often form a substantial part of local productions in a specific country and, as such, become possible contributors to identity formation and perpetuation of dominant ideologies.

This article unfolds as follows: I start out by briefly unpacking the theoretical framework within which the research is situated. This is followed by a substantiation of the choice to focus on two texts in particular and my methodological approach. Finally, I present a textual-visual analysis and comparison of *7de Laan* and *Thuis* and a discussion of the three rhetorical devices perpetuating whiteness which emerged from the analysis.

Within the larger theoretical framework of cultural studies, my specific theoretical approach was critical whiteness studies, a discipline working to "destabilize the assumptions behind whiteness as a cultural norm" (Foster 1). Matthews (9), among others, refers to critical whiteness studies as a possible tool in changing the subjectivities which lie at the heart of white ignorance, an ignorance defined by Steyn ("The ignorance contract: recollections of apartheid childhoods and the construction of epistemologies of ignorance" 13) as "learning what not to know" and "what not to notice". According to her, "[f]or dominant groups especially, it is not as much about accuracy as about how they would like the world to be, and having the power and resources to impose their desires, drives and will upon the social field and to effect social control, that is, to institute an ignorance contract" (Steyn, "Ignorance" 21).

Scholarship in the field of critical whiteness studies provides a site for the radical critique of the racial order and specifically the social positioning of whites as relative to its Others (Steyn, "Postcolonial moment" 420). Alley-Young (309) contends that the goals of this theoretical approach "range from disowning or rejecting whiteness to making it visible in everyday life so that privilege can be catalogued, undone, unlearned, and/or stopped" and this is also the goal of my analysis. According to De Kock (18), critical whiteness studies in South Africa conveys a "sense of urgency of bringing 'whiteness' into visibility as an unreconstructed zone in post-anti-apartheid South Africa".[1]

Three general "waves" of critical whiteness studies can be identified, the most recent of which analyses "diverse cultural sites, including newspapers, autobiographical writings, music, public policy debates, social relationships", etc. (Twine and Gallagher 15) with the goal of exposing whiteness and "decolonising the imagination of both the oppressed and the oppressors" (Steyn, "Postcolonial moment" 421). The topic of this article falls into this category because it interrogates the representation

of whiteness as the norm in a sample from mainstream public media.

Focusing on soap operas, with specific reference to their ideological and political power, is a contested point of departure. Some critics argue that serious television, such as news and documentaries, is more politicised. However, the critical approach advocated by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham implies that popular texts, such as soap operas, still yield political power. In line with this approach, Barnard (39) argues that "popular culture, alongside political and social institutions […] chronicle[s] the transformation of the country as well as imaginatively/materially creating a new South Africa". In the same vein, milton ("Local is lekker': nation, narration and the SABC's Afrikaans programmes" 255) contends that popular media provides "privileged access to the social realities of their era" and can thus be read to gain insight into what is actually going on in a society at a given moment. Franco (450), moreover, writes: "Soap opera, the world's most popular form of television drama, has revealed itself to be a productive area of study for cultural significance due to the genre's unique potential to combine local appeal and universal characteristics, exemplified by serial narrative structure, with cultural specificity".

Even though soap operas are often described as "exaggerated, far-fetched, stretching things, over the top, overboard, extreme, even ridiculous or surreal" (Lamuedra and O'Donnell 63) there is widespread agreement that some soap operas are realistic in other respects, such as the way in which they work social issues into narratives. This can be related to La Pastina and Straubhaar's (274) notion of "cultural proximity"—soap operas incorporate elements that are familiar to its viewers, and in this way, are perceived as "realistic". Beck (152), moreover, argues that viewers of soap opera are exceptionally vested in the genre and that this leads to "complex, co-constructed narrative intersections that contribute to powerful and multi-layered experiences".

These characteristics of the soap opera thus create rich texts for a study on how whiteness is presented in mass media narratives. The world presented in the soap opera functions as a parallel universe and can be seen as a source of vicarious experiences. Gledhill (360) claims that soap operas are popular due to their "verisimilitude" which she defines as referring "not to what may or may not actually be the case but rather to what the dominant culture believes to be the case, to what is generally accepted as credible, suitable, proper".

Community soap operas, in particular, lend themselves ideally to an analysis of imagined communities within a given context. Due to the local storylines, instances of cultural proximity and presence of "banal nationalism" (Billig), representations in these soap operas can be taken as revealing something about the societies that produce them, while simultaneously providing these societies with ideas on social life and the terms that govern it (Pitout 175). My focus is thus on local soap operas and how these soap operas perpetuate ideologies of whiteness.

The particular characteristic of South African whiteness as having one foot in

Africa and the other in Europe, moreover, guided me in my decision to do a comparative analysis of a South African and a European, specifically Flemish, soap opera. In relation to power and belonging, this article posits that whiteness functions as an organising principle in the narratives and nature of the imagined communities constructed in two soap operas, *7de Laan* (broadcast by the South African Public Service Broadcaster, the SABC) and *Thuis* (from the Belgian PSB, VRT) and sought to look at how and why this might be the case.

Despite the disparate origin of the two soap operas there were a number of reasons for the choice to compare them.

Most importantly, considering the purpose of this article, whiteness manifests in both the South African and Flemish contexts as one aspect of national identity, and remains (to differing degrees) a normative construction. In post-apartheid South Africa, for example, identities are destabilised and white South Africans, like the rest, have to reconceptualise how they fit into the broader South African community. Due to apartheid, whiteness and the connotations inherent to the construct remain contentious issues and race discourses are pertinent to the politics of belonging.[2] In Flanders, discourses of whiteness are less explicit and—like much of Europe—it has no explicit "race" discourse (Costera Meijer and De Bruin 696). Whiteness remains implicitly prevalent, however, especially in the "us" versus "them" dichotomy created by the tension between what Vanhaesebrouck (466) calls a "pristine Flemish cultural identity" and the inherent diversity of the Flemish nation. The "allochton"/"autochton" distinction, moreover, uses language to create binary oppositions which are, to a certain extent, fuelled by latent racism resulting in a "white" versus "other" dichotomy.[3] Hence this discourse, in all but name, remains a racial one.

Secondly, only soap operas created and distributed for and by the public broadcaster of each particular region were included. Challenges in dealing with diversity have, in both the South African and Flemish contexts, led to a restructuring of PSB mandates on representation and diversity policies. In both cases, the resultant production policies put pressure on texts produced for Public Service Television to be more representative of diversity. In South Africa, for example, the Broadcasting Act of 2002 explicitly outlines its nation building project and the VRT has similar policies meant to guide the representation of the nation on Flemish television (Marx Knoetze and Dhoest 275).[4] Specifically in relation to soap operas, Franco (452) argues that it seems as though the public service has discovered the potential of soap opera in terms of nation and image building. The fact that PSB programmes in both contexts are mandated to reflect the societies in which they are produced, and the fact that both soap operas claim to do so, made both texts relevant for my analysis.[5] Due to these mandates it is pertinent to interrogate these soap operas' constructions of the nation, also as it pertains to whiteness.

Another contributing factor was language. *7de Laan*'s predominant use of Afri-

kaans is significant since Afrikaans as a language is intimately connected to whiteness. Even though white South Africans are not the only mother-tongue speakers of Afrikaans, in the early 1900s it was re-conceptualised as a "white man's language".[6] The language is, furthermore, politically and ideologically connected to whiteness owing to apartheid and its concomitant language policies—hence the reference to Afrikaans as the "language of the oppressor". Moreover, since the Afrikaans debate is often driven by white Afrikaner cultural organisations, there is a tendency to confuse Afrikaans as "belonging to" white Afrikaners.[7] Considering the goal of this article, the Afrikaans soap opera was the obvious choice. Moreover, the palpable link between Afrikaans and Flemish situates the two soap operas favourably in terms of comparison.[8]

In addition to the similarities mentioned above, both soap operas can be classified as community soap operas (as defined by Liebes and Livingstone 153). Finally, both texts can be classified as successful since they have been on the air for more than a decade and consistently score some of the highest audience ratings in their particular contexts.[9]

The methodological paradigm applicable to this project is qualitative and the method is a textual-visual, controlled case comparison of purposive samples from *7de Laan* and *Thuis*. A comparative analysis provides the opportunity to look beyond the usual national framework applied to context-specific research. It denaturalises the media and reduces the risk of assuming certain aspects of media representations to be "natural" (Hallin and Mancini 2). I conducted a comparison of how the settings and communities, language use and representation of diversity in the two soap operas construct the imagined communities of each context by analysing six months' worth of episodes from season 17 of *Thuis* (broadcast from January to May 2012), and a similar sample of *7de Laan* episodes (broadcast from January to May 2013). Comparing a soap opera from an established media economy to one from an emerging media economy afforded me an opportunity to highlight the consistencies in the ideological patterning of representations of whiteness, across seemingly unrelated domains, to illustrate its pervasiveness.

Imagined/image communities: *7de Laan* and *Thuis*

At the time of writing, *7de Laan,* aired on SABC 2, was the most popular South African, Afrikaans, soap opera (SAARF2014).[10] *Thuis*, a Flemish soap opera that is broadcast daily on the Flemish public service television channel Eén (*One*), is the longest-running television programme on Flemish television.

The imagined communities depicted in these popular soap operas are close-knit and consist of ordinary characters from different generations living together in harmonious neighbourhoods. Although *7de Laan*'s setting is more urban (owing to its connotations with Johannesburg), both *Hillside* and the fictional village in which

Thuis is set connote small town living, neighbourliness and a focus on the everyday.[11] These connotations to home and the familiar are supported by the titles of the soap operas, with *Thuis* literally referring to the home and *7de Laan* connoting familiarity because almost every South African town has a 7th Avenue. All of the above, in conjunction with the fictional, yet familiar, nature of both settings as represented through recognisable activities and personae, make it possible for viewers to identify with the inherent "Flemishness" of *Thuis* or a utopian version of the South African rainbow nation ideal in *7de Laan*.

All the action is centralised in these unified, closed communities and all the characters are depicted as sharing similar ideals related to conservative middle-class values and the nuclear family. Characters participate in the same cultural practices and rarely venture outside the closed space of the community. Examples of these cultural practices in the available sample include Bingo and wine tasting in *7de Laan* and searching for hidden coins in the "Driekoningen taart" (Three kings' tart) in *Thuis*. Cultural practices perceived as being outside of the homogeneous culture are marked as different. In *7de Laan*, Hilda's "Ikebana" classes are a case in point. Oubaas describes the practice of Ikebana as "volksvreemd" (foreign), thus explicitly rejecting a practice he perceives to be foreign to his "volk" (people).

While closed settings are congenital to soap operas, in this case these settings are used as rhetorical devices which create a visual metaphor for the normative behaviour outlined above. These normative constructions can be read as presenting a specific take on the politics of belonging within the represented South African and Flemish communities. Hence belonging to the imagined community of *7de Laan* or *Thuis* requires the practice of normative behaviour, represented as the utopian ideal for the societies these soaps depict.

Favell defines the politics of belonging as the "dirty work of boundary maintenance" (Yuval-Davis 3), and Chidester (163) refers to representations such as the above as a "boundary under patrol". In both cases the invisible boundary of the utopian soap opera setting protects insiders against any perceived threats to their physical solidarity and cultural unity. These closed settings create a sense of purity and internal homogeneity which is cosseted against outsiders by regulating contact with anyone perceived as Other, thus affording insiders the opportunity to deflect any guilt about societal wrongs.

An example of the patrolled boundaries in these texts is the conversion of public spaces to private ones. *Oppikoffie* (a local coffee shop featured in *7de Laan*) or the *Zus and Zo* (a restaurant and guesthouse in *Thuis*), for example, are both public places, which also function as settings in which the private lives of the characters play out and within which mainly characters from the casts interact. These public, yet private, spaces contribute to the creation of a boundary between the soap opera world and the world "out there", minimising the danger of interaction with the Other, even in public spaces.

When it is not possible to deflect guilt or difference on to an outsider, Otherness is created internally in the form of the "bad white body" (Foster 137). The eternal "super-bitch" is one such example. Gita McGregor, in *7de Laan,* is an example *par excellence* of the evil female protagonist. She is the bad character against which all other characters' goodness can be opposed.[12] Nancy in *Thuis*, is another example of how *not* to behave. Her vulgar and inappropriate behaviour constructs her as marginal "white trash" and functions as confirmation of the centrality of "normal whiteness". Neither character, however, is depicted as absolutely bad. Both are represented as three-dimensional characters where their good characteristics are also highlighted, ensuring their access to the in-group. The possibility of reform and re-integration into the utopian ideal is always imminent, and the homogeneous equilibrium is therefore constantly restored.

This homogeneous construction of both imagined communities displays the characteristics which Foster (30) links to whiteness as a location of structural advantage. Foster (23) identifies heteroperformativity, homogeneity, bravery, the nuclear family, rationality, class and civilisation as characteristics or discourses of whiteness. By this logic, both communities are depicted as essentially "white". Moreover, seen against the background of what Steyn ("Ignorance") calls the "ignorance contract", it seems that both soap operas present a homogeneous "feel good" community, which enables viewers to continue believing in the viability of such an amended reality and, in so doing, perpetuates ignorance.[13] Despite the entertainment purposes of these texts, the specific viewpoint from which the imagined communities are constructed allows for a kind of "protective pillow" (DiAngelo 55) insulating whites from facing their position of privilege.

These tendencies are also identifiable in the application of language in the chosen texts. Both Afrikaans and Dutch are particularly salient as markers of identity in their respective contexts.[14] Consequently, the use and application of both languages in these texts construct the politics of belonging in a specific way.

In *Thuis*, Flemish Dutch is the uncontested primary language.[15] *7de Laan* is multilingual and includes English subtitles, but is broadcast predominantly in Afrikaans. Despite its multilingualism, all the characters in *7de Laan* ostensibly accept Afrikaans to be the primary language. While there are some characters, such as Marco and Aggie, who speak English and other African languages, it happens infrequently, and everybody switches to Afrikaans seamlessly and without hesitation when an Afrikaans-speaking person enters the conversation. In conjunction with the construction of the community outlined above, language thus functions as a unifying factor in both texts and contributes to the creation of a homogeneous in-group.

Not only the choice of languages, but also their applications are significant to the politics of belonging and the negotiation of power. Even though both soaps use a standardised version of their primary language, *Thuis* incorporates different dialects

as an indication of the class differences of the characters. In *7de Laan*, however, the sole use of standard Afrikaans is classified by milton ("Local" 268) as "deterritorialisation" and the lack of intralinguistic diversity ultimately contributes to a homogeneous construction of Afrikaans-speaking South Africans, which is contrary to the actual diversity of its speakers.

The fact that the casts of both soap operas share a primary language might be read, on the one hand, as language fulfilling a transformative and unifying role. Moreover, hosting Afrikaans and Flemish programmes are in line with the language policies of both PSBs. On the other hand, however, particularly in the South African case, it could also be read as a sort of escapism, where one particular language is used free from the guilt of excluding or dominating other languages.[16]

The language choice in the two texts also differs in that, in *Thuis*, the primary language, Flemish Dutch, is linked to the construction of a subnational identity, while the Afrikaans used in *7de Laan* is specific to only two language communities in the country. Although it is not my intention to read prejudice into a text that is specifically created (until recently at least) in Afrikaans, for a predominantly Afrikaans audience, the fact remains that Afrikaans is an ideologically loaded language.[17] Moreover, concerning the intended target audience of *7de Laan*, producer Danie Odendaal claims that, while the primary language of the soap opera is Afrikaans, it was never intended to be a "white soapie" (Van Zyl and Venter). Odendaal's comments are an indication of *7de Laan*'s ideological positioning. The connection he makes between Afrikaans and whiteness is telling, since brown people are the predominant speakers of the Afrikaans language in South Africa.[18] The producer's ideological linking of Afrikaans to whiteness can be read as part of the underlying assumptions governing its production. Read in the context of Odendaal's comments, Afrikaans' history as the "language of the oppressor" and the use of English as the second most prominent language in *7de Laan*, one cannot help but notice the underlying white ideology of the text. Thus, the construction of an almost completely Afrikaans community as representative of South Africa remains problematic.

Regarding *Thuis*, even though the use of Flemish Dutch is in line with the public broadcaster's primary audience, and some degree of regional variation is included, its sole use is indicative of the homogeneous construction of the Flemish nation and the stringent integration policies which oppose the diversity the public broadcaster aims to represent. In both cases, language is used to patrol the boundaries of the closed communities and belonging is constructed linguistically.

In contrast to the above, both soap operas attempt—at first glance—to represent diversity in terms of class, gender and race (or ethnicity). Viewers are presented with a utopian ideal of everyone living together in one community without fear of victimisation, discrimination or prejudice. The South African society is represented as a non-racialised rainbow community and the Flemish society as a homogeneous

community into which ethnic minorities are successfully integrated. Both soap operas present heteronormative gender and sexual roles as the standard and class differences, although present, are depicted as easily bridged. In line with the characteristics of the genre, both texts present liberating, strong female roles as well as giving the males feminine traits (such as a predilection for talk and emotion).

Characters representative of different social strata are part of each of the communities. Both soap operas are, however, aspirational in the sense that class differences are not presented as problematic to upward mobility. A case in point would be Errol in *7de Laan*, a brown orphan, who went from being homeless to becoming an award-winning journalist. Class-related problems are resolved quite effortlessly, perpetuating the homogeneous nature of the community. Despite the relative ease with which class differences can be overcome, as well as the fact that it is never referred to as a race issue, however, it is telling that in *7de Laan*, all the whites are upper or middle class, and only black or brown characters are depicted as coming from a lower class.

Linked to this, during the period of analysis attempts were made in *7de Laan* to depict interracial relationships, but only between brown and white characters (such as Felicity and Herman), never between white and black or brown and black characters. Concerning class, it was mainly brown characters that were presented as upwardly mobile. As far as representing racially specific cultural practices, one traditional black wedding was featured in *7de Laan* a number of years ago. However, when issues such as these were screened, it was always in the form of a "themed" issue, specifically dealing with race matters, and not depicted as part of the everyday life of the community. It is arguable that such "themed" issues emphasise these practices, giving them more prominence, but at the same time these are constructed in such a way that they fall outside of the daily lives of the main characters—a "cultural experience" as it were. During season 17, no such representations were featured in the narratives of *Thuis*.

Race and matters relating to race or ethnicity fall mostly outside the purview of both soap operas. Even though both soap operas, but *7de Laan* in particular, include characters from various races or ethnicities, the behaviour of these characters is rarely marked as race specific and, consequently, they all display normative behaviour, perpetuating white ideology as "no-Culture" (Frankenberg 204). It is arguable that these homogeneous presentations are created in order to provide an ideal for a self-evidently diverse society, but, in contrast to such an argument, the fact remains that presence is not enough to begin to reflect the actual racial diversity of both societies.

The verbal silence on race-related issues, furthermore, contributes to the construction of internal homogeneity. In *Thuis* in particular, despite the integration of some ethnic-cultural diversity (for example Lynn, a Moroccan law student with white adoptive parents), race remains largely invisible and definitively unspoken. This

could be read as a reaction against the critique that ethnic-cultural minorities are mostly represented as tied to their cultural background and the problems associated with it (in, for example, the news). However, as a consequence, cultural diversity is effaced, and the problems related to the co-existence of people with different cultural backgrounds are side-stepped. Even though both texts avoid any explicit claims to race or the centrality of a particular race, their perpetual silence creates fertile ground for whiteness to thrive uncontested as dominant ideology.

A significant difference between the two texts is their levels of engagement with issues of gender diversity. Gender diversity and sexual identities are depicted in more depth in *Thuis*, as evidenced in, for example, the gay and lesbian couples and their prominent roles in the narrative. This situation mirrors tendencies in society at large since it is arguable that, in Belgium, homosexuality has been incorporated into the norm and LGBT rights have become part of the "national" imagined community.[19] The level of critical engagement with gender issues is evidenced in the representation of different opinions about Frankie and Tibo's same-sex marriage and the consequent questioning of heterosexual marriage as the norm. In contrast, in *7de Laan*, the only reference within the scope of the analysed period was a stereotypical camp performance (when Diederik was hypnotised and ordered to "act"gay) with the purpose of comic relief, or arguably, ridicule.[20] In this instance, entertainment was clearly the main goal. While entertainment remains the primary purpose of both texts, the reluctance to address gender-related issues in *7de Laan* is also indicative of the more conservative nature of South African society and, to some extent, this is reminiscent of patriarchal, apartheid society where certain issues were taboo. Croucher (316) writes in this regard that "[s]ame-sex sexualities are foreign to, and inconsistent with, true Afrikaner identity". "Afrikaner" identity, in turn, is linked explicitly to whiteness, and in this way, *7de Laan* enforces heteronormative behaviour as linked to whiteness.

Stokes (191) views heterosexuality and whiteness as normative co-partners in the construction of power. Linked to this, and central to both soap operas, is the prominence of the nuclear family (even as a myth). Despite the crumbling of the family structure in various narratives, the myth of the nuclear family is still propagated as the ideal in both soap operas. Heteronormative performances of marriage and parenthood are also considered to be well-performed whiteness. In both soap operas, such performances are presented as well-performed citizenship and considered the behaviour accepted and promoted by the in-group.

Because difference cannot be completely avoided, some less extreme performances of differences are appropriated into the dominant group. Examples of these appropriations are "acceptable" performances of homosexuality and class or racial difference. Maikey (126) refers to this as "homonationalism", which is defined as "the normalization and integration of certain 'more acceptable' queers into the nationalist

ideal", a strategy which is relevant in *Thuis,* but still falls outside the purview of the analysed representations in *7de Laan*. Visual racial diversity in *7de Laan*, and to a lesser extent in *Thuis*, is similarly assimilated into the norm. The same applies to class. Class difference is not presented as an enduring threat but rather glossed over or used for comic relief, and consequently tolerated or absorbed into the homogeneous in-group.

Through homogenisation both cases, to a certain extent, mirror national patterns of lack of dealing with issues of difference. While *Thuis* deals with issues of gender and sexual diversity in a more nuanced way than *7de Laan*, the narratives of both soap operas support the construction and maintenance of white hegemony. It is arguable that *7de Laan* represents "pro new South Africa" discourses, but these instances offer little more than superficial support and exert no tangible influence on the status quo. Similarly, despite being awarded the "integration prize", the relatively homogeneous nature of the *Thuis* cast mirrors the general reluctance towards integration in Flanders. Furthermore, the presence of difference alone does not guarantee nuanced depictions, and even the depiction of same-sex relationships in *Thuis* still runs the risk of reiterating heteronormative values due to their focus on the nuclear family (Dhaenens 443).

The characteristics identified by Foster (23) as linked to whiteness also intersects with other discourses of privilege (such as patriarchy) and these discourses thus mutually reinforce each other. However, whiteness is also known for its constant mutation and evolution. As such, both texts manage to incorporate characters representative of different ethnicities, classes and genders, while still foregrounding homogeneous normative performances portrayed as the ideal behaviour in the soap communities. Thus, whiteness, as a construct, becomes an umbrella term encompassing a range of hegemonic ideologies. Normative representations of sexuality, gender and class all work together to create a homogeneous representation of a closed community epitomising behaviour associated with whiteness.

A wolf in sheep's clothing: homogeneity tinted white?

This comparative analysis indicates that, despite pressures to be representative, both texts resist or negate these pressures to some extent. Three rhetorical devices emerge from the analysis as central to the maintenance of whiteness as hegemonic ideology. These are: the presence of absence, the boundary under patrol and the construction of the audience as part of the "inner circle".

According to Nakayama and Krizek (in Alley-Young 312) one performative action which functions to hide whiteness and white skin privilege is to speak of whiteness in the negative, or as an absence of race or ethnicity. Chidester's (160) theorisation of the "presence of absence" can be related to this performative action. The absences in the soap operas are as important as the presences, and these absences, or silences, function as vital rhetorical devices in both texts. According to Chidester (160) some

silences become an intention. In other words, silence becomes rhetorical when it is a conscious choice. If there is an insistence on presence as a carrier of meaning, it follows logically that absence similarly constructs meaning.

Riessman (540) argues that one should take into account any gaps or inconsistencies in a specific narrative which might suggest preferred, alternative or counter-narratives. Silence on matters of race and, to some extent, class and gender issues are gaps that contribute to establishing whiteness as a system of dominance in the soap operas under discussion. My argument for the centrality of whiteness in these texts does not rely on essentialist notions of race, but on how other cultural normativities, such as heteronormativity, for example, work together to maintain privilege.

Both texts display absences in terms of the representation of diversity as well as an absence of overt discourses on difference. In *Thuis*, ethnic minorities, particularly during the analysed period, are not really present on screen, while in *7de Laan* the more representative cast does little to address the absence of any real discourse on difference. Giving more prominence to such issues might reveal the inherent whiteness of the text and bring the ideologies and practices presented as normative into visibility. Thus, although different approaches are taken, both result, once more, in the perpetuation of white normativity. Screen presence, in both cases, does not solve the problem of racial and ethnic representativeness. These absences make it possible for one of whiteness's most enduring characteristics, namely ignorance, to thrive, since it merely functions as the uncontested norm. Whiteness is thus not maintained by any overt rhetoric, but rather by its everydayness (Shome 366).

In addition to the rhetorical silence on racial issues, the analysis also brought to light that both texts present a closed setting, which enforces the idea of insiders being insulated against "the world out there" and thus also against heterogeneous outsiders. This is in line with Foster's (23) argument that whiteness and related dominant performances provide a centre against which anybody not belonging to the group can be classified as Other and marginal. Owing to the fact that whiteness's existence is dependent upon its binary opposite, it is fuelled by a fear of hybridity and dependent upon a rejection of such hybridity and an elimination of internal difference. Sleeter (261) suggests that these images of homogeneous in-group bonding, and the metaphor of the closed setting "have the purpose of affirming a common stance on race-related issues, legitimating particular interpretations of oppressed groups, and re-drawing we-they boundaries".

In *7de Laan,* the construction of a homogenous inner circle underpins the ideal of the existence of a society without any significant challenges to the status quo, while *Thuis* represents an inner circle in which the practices and culture of the majority are taken to be the uncontested norm and which, as elsewhere in Europe, are predominantly, and self-evidently, white. In *Thuis*, like in Flanders, the imagined community emphasises the integration of ethnic minorities, rather than questioning the

normative functioning of whiteness. Race or ethnicity is not explicitly referenced, and belonging is constructed along the lines of what is considered to be Western and non-Western. Nakayama and Krizek (293) refer to this communicative strategy as "claiming European origins to avoid claiming whiteness".

However, even though the community is constructed as internally homogeneous, McKee (13–4) rightly states that there is a wide range of images of whiteness as evidenced by the incorporation of accepted gender and class differences in these communities. This multiplicity of articulations of whiteness make it possible for whites to identify, albeit internally, as diverse.

Against the backdrop of this internal homogeneity, "bad" characters are introduced as outsiders and interlopers rarely pose a permanent threat. Such interlopers are usually only present until the denouement of a particular narrative thread and are almost always brought to task, in effect serving the purpose of confirming the efficacy of the moral high ground occupied by the insiders and re-establishing equilibrium.

Even though explicit binaries, such as whiteness versus blackness, are not evoked in the texts, whiteness as the norm defines itself as *not* bad, evil, irrational or uncivilised. The in-group is defined against the perceived evil of the unseen out-group, and all complicity in discrimination or the perpetuation of difference is located externally. Hence all the homogeneous practices associated with whiteness are depicted as the characteristics of the homogeneous soap opera society, and any deviant behaviour is situated outside of this closed circle. In this way, visual and performed whiteness can function in the closed settings of both soap operas without any significant racial threat, confirming DiAngelo's (55) notion of the protective pillow and Steyn's "ignorance contract" ("Ignorance").

The third rhetorical device that emerged from the analysis is the way in which the audience is constructed as part of the in-group in the soap opera, making it possible for them to also deny any complicity in the perpetuation of discrimination like the characters on screen. Both soap operas create a feeling of verisimilitude and literally function as a setting or background extending from the living rooms of its viewers. Always viewed from the same, familiar vantage points, these sets and characters invite viewers to belong to the *7de Laan* community, or to feel "at home" in *Thuis,* and to identify with the social roles of the characters (Pitout 168). Viewers are able to shift accountability and guilt regarding discriminatory practices existing in society elsewhere in the same way in which their favourite characters project these on to the evil outsider. Even though both texts are presented as colourless or non-racial, both, at least to some extent, perpetuate whiteness. The impact of these normative constructions, absences and boundaries is particularly salient when understood by audiences as a choice, and the fact that these soap operas serve to "reinforce perceptions of whiteness's centrality as a racial subjectivity among some viewers" (Chidester 170) has implications.

Viewers are not encouraged to see *7de Laan* or *Thuis* as an unrealistic picture

of contemporary race relations, but rather as "an idyllic setting free of any explicit discourse on race or accusations of racial domination, a safe haven for those viewers most heavily invested in preserving a sense of whiteness as an unspoken marker of privilege" (Chidester 168). Consequently, it is possible for viewers to see both soap operas' homogeneous communities as reflective of their own segregated material experiences as well as of television's highly segregated landscape (Chidester 169).

White, hegemonic, normative perspectives are continuously presented as the logical point of view, negating difference and hybridity, a fear of which lies at the heart of whiteness. As such, both soap operas contribute to "the overall visual/cultural web that continues to enable whiteness' mute, pervasive privilege" (Chidester 170) in both of these societies.

Moreover, both soap operas remain unequivocally popular, which leads me to believe that the popularity and value of these programmes do not only lie in entertainment but, at least in part, in their defence of a certain hegemonic privilege with which the audience associates.

If popular cultural texts provide a symbolic construction based on which viewers can construct their collective identities, the homogeneous treatment of the image/imagined communities in both soap operas is problematic. The three rhetorical devices identified here illustrate a tendency for these texts to construct a particular view of society where the nature of the closed society with all the "absences" and all that is left unsaid make it possible for whiteness to thrive, but also to adjust fluidly to changing circumstances without any immediate threats. Whiteness is presented in these texts as something "that is invisible, working in the background as a standard, not of one particular way of being in the world, but as normalcy, as universalizability, of just 'being the way things are'" (Vice 324), a sort of banal perpetuation of the dominant ideology. Despite the fact that both texts attempt to represent a version of diversity, they both perpetuate its opposite, namely sameness, presenting the viewer with homogeneity tinted white.

Conclusion

This controlled case comparison sheds some light on the way in which whiteness functions as a hegemonic ideology in a sample of mass media products, even across diverse settings.

Owing to its elusive nature, I cannot claim the absolute dominance of whiteness in the soap operas I analysed. Essed and Trienekens (54), however, remind us that the "critical studies of whiteness are more about cultural normativities, political appropriations and social-economic practices, privileging whites compared to other populations". Thus, exactly because whiteness is not about essentialist notions and its maintenance is a process involving various material and social practices, I argue that, when viewed as a whole, the practices, spaces and identity constructions in

both texts are perpetuating whiteness and the ideologies associated with it.

These homogenous imagined communities are problematic, because the creation of such unity and homogeneity always implies the exclusion of difference and as such have important implications for the politics of belonging as they play out in these texts. The result is a type of forced homogeneity which glosses over the underlying differences in both nations and reinforces dominant ideologies of whiteness.

The number of similarities and overlaps between the way whiteness is perpetuated in the South African and Flemish context is important precisely because of the way in which the contexts differ. The similarities between the two case studies seem to indicate that the normative representation of whiteness is not something that is exclusive to popular culture in either the global South or the global North. These similar manifestations speak to whiteness's power of endurance, but also point to its constant evolution, to the nature of whiteness as a process, rather than an absolute entity. According to Bailey (40), white people can only develop anti-racist identities if they "get out of those locations and texts where they feel at home […] [and] put [their] privileged identities at risk by travelling to worlds where [they] often feel ill at ease and off-center (sic)". Risking these privileged identities is an opportunity sadly not presented by either of these texts.

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Notes

1. Even though there are individual researchers referring or contributing to critical whiteness studies, there is no identifiable body of work which may constitute Belgian/Dutch whiteness studies as a theoretical field.
2. Yuval-Davis (5) writes that the "politics of belonging comprise of specific political projects aimed at constructing belonging to particular collectivities which are themselves being constructed in these projects in very specific ways and in very specific boundaries".
3. Central to the discourse on Flemish identity is the struggle to accurately name non-EU migrants. From the 1990s, the term *allochtoon* (literally translated as "from another country"), as taken from the Netherlands, came into use to describe second- and third-generation ethnic minorities (Marx Knoetze & Dhoest 272). *Allochtoon* is opposed to *autochtoon* (Belgian). These descriptive concepts "set apart 'US' from 'THEM'; the real Dutch (*autochtoon*) from the not-quite-Dutch (*allochtoon*)" (Essed and Trienekens 57).
4. The scope of this article does not allow for in depth attention to the respective contexts and histories of each country. For a detailed comparison please refer to Marx Knoetze and Dhoest ("Negotiating national unity and diversity in public broadcasting: A comparative study on South Africa and Flanders.").
5. In contrast to this, texts created for the pay-to-view or commercial channels in South Africa and Flanders are not required to adhere to the same stringent specifications which make it more challenging to pinpoint their stances on the representation of diversity.

6. In 1905, for example, journalist Gustav Preller "set about reinventing Afrikaans as a 'white man's language'". He aimed to eradicate the stigma of its "coloured ties by substituting Dutch words for those with non-European origins" (Anon.).
7. When speaking of the "Afrikaans debate" I am referring to the debate about Afrikaans on South African television.
8. Afrikaans is a daughter language of Dutch and an estimated 90% of its vocabulary has a Dutch origin. It originated around 1685 and was colloquially referred to as "Kitchen Dutch". There is a large degree of mutual intelligibility between Dutch and Afrikaans, particularly in the written form.
9. *Thuis* was launched on 23 December 1995. It is aired on weekdays and continues to be one of the most popular local television programmes in Flanders. Similarly, *7de Laan* aired its first episode in April 2000 and it remains one of South Africa's most popular locally produced soap operas.
10. The fact that *7de Laan* is broadcast on SABC 2, with its tagline, *You belong,* implies that it caters for an audience primarily falling into the LSM group 5–7 and mostly speakers of Sotho, Afrikaans, Venda, Tsonga and English. Although *7de Laan* is an Afrikaans soap opera and was commissioned for the upper-income category, it has a much wider audience base (Van der Merwe 36). The audience demographics of the soap opera seem to be spread almost equally between white (33%), brown (35%) and black (31%) viewers; the remaining 1% constitutes Indian viewers.
11. As South Africa's largest city, Johannesburg, also colloquially referred to as "Jozi" or "eGoli" (City of Gold) is the epitome of South African corporate success and urban living, often described as "Africa's economic power house". It is home to a vibrant and diverse community of South Africans, but is also considered to be one of the most dangerous cities in the world.
12. Gita is also one of the only English-speaking characters in *7de Laan*, which adds another dimension to her "bad whiteness" and distances her from the Afrikaans-speaking "good whites".
13. Steyn ("Ignorance" 22) contends that at the heart of societies structured in racial hierarchies (such as South Africa and, to some extent, Flanders), lies an "ignorance contract" described as a "tacit agreement to entertain ignorance". It is her contention that the process of ignorance-making which was prevalent during apartheid continues in post-apartheid South Africa.
14. In the South African context, Afrikaans is the mother tongue of two distinct language communities, namely the white, Afrikaans-speaking community, on the one hand, and a large, brown, Afrikaans-speaking community, on the other. Its main connotations, however, are of being the language of apartheid and the (white) oppressor. When taking into consideration its negative connections to Afrikaner nationalism, as well as the highly polarised nature of South African society, it is clear that Afrikaans plays an ambivalent, but important, role in the South African nation-building project. In the Flemish context, Belgian Dutch is a vital indicator of belonging to Flemish society, in particular, in distinguishing Flemings from the broader Belgian society and Wallonia, the French-speaking part of Belgium. Moreover, Belgian Dutch is one of the seminal requirements for integration into the Flemish community, a marker for the degree to which ethnic minorities are integrated into "Flemishness".
15. According to Geeraerts (2), Belgian and Netherlandic Dutch are examples of what is referred to in contemporary linguistics as "national varieties of a given language". For the purposes of this article, the language spoken in Flanders will be referred to as Belgian Dutch/Flemish Dutch" (Franco 455).
16. These problems, specifically with regard to *7de Laan*'s application of language, are reflected in the fact that it has come under the scrutiny of the public broadcaster. This resulted in a change in the soap opera's language policy, slightly reducing the use of Afrikaans in the spoken dialogue.
17. As part of the larger project to give the soap opera "new life", at the time of writing this article, the SABC mandated that the text of *7de Laan* be written in English and then translated into Afrikaans (Swanepoel 35).
18. For the purposes of this article I use the term "brown" when referring to that part of the population classified by the apartheid government (but still applied as a classification system today) as "coloured".
19. This could, however, also be viewed as homonationalism at work.
20. It should be noted here that in March of 2017 *7de Laan* aired its first gay kiss (albeit as part of a sub-plot). This might be viewed as progress, but it is also arguable that it is very little, very late considering that other major soap operas such as *Isidingo*, *Rhythm City* and *Generations* have long ago started portraying gender diversity.

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Experimenting with a new tragic model: Elechi Amadi's *Isiburu*

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Experimenting with a new tragic model: Elechi Amadi's *Isiburu*

Aristotle's *Poetics* has been an important resource for literary critics and theorists over the centuries from antiquity to contemporary times. However, despite its lofty status and acclaim the classical source material has also faced serious criticism especially concerning certain unrealistic and vague postulations made in it about tragedy. The most challenged postulations are those relating to the status of the tragic hero, his flaw, the emotions of pity and fear, and catharsis. Some of these "problematic" areas constitute the crux of Elechi Amadi's concern in "Gods and Tragic Heroes," an essay on which this article hinges. Re-examining some existing conversations on the subject and Amadi's charges against Aristotle, the essay affirms that tragedy is a flexible literary form and that Amadi, amidst his evaluation of Aristotle's enduring aesthetics, proposes a novel model in which *hamartia* and the emotional impact of the hero's fall on the audience are a function of an overarching supernatural activity in the tragic plot. Furthermore, the essay appraises the play *Isiburu* (1973) as Amadi's practical example of the proposed model. **Keywords**: Elechi Amadi, experimentation, form, poetics, tragic aesthetics.

Introduction

In an essay entitled "Gods and Tragic Heroes" published in 2003 in a volume entitled, *Speaking and Singing: Essays and Poems*, the renowned Nigerian writer, Elechi Amadi, takes Aristotle to task not just on some of the latter's postulations on tragedy, but also on his ironic misapplication of some of his own precepts concerning the same subject. Concluding the essay, Amadi proposes a novel critical model for tragedy—especially African tragedy—while admitting, however, that the Aristotelian canon, irrespective of its shortcomings, still stands the test of time. Hinged on insight from existing timeless conversations on the development and disparate functionality of the highly flexible literary form, this article seeks to re-examine Amadi's essay with a view to highlighting the deficiencies identified by him in Aristotle's timeless aesthetics and to establish through close textual evidence that his play *Isiburu* (originally performed and published three decades earlier, in 1973) is Amadi's experimentation with the new tragic model, which he proposes for the African tragedian.

Critical responses to Aristotelian tragic aesthetics

Tragedy and the aesthetics for its criticism are some of the major preoccupations of

Aristotle's *Poetics*, the first book of literary theory and criticism (dated c. 335 B. C.). In fact, Aristotle's definition of drama derives from his discussion of tragedy, the drama type that is perhaps the philosopher's most revered and beloved. Tragedy, according to him, "is an imitation of an action that is admirable, complete and possesses magnitude; in language made pleasurable, each of its species separated in different parts; performed by actors, not through narration; effecting through pity and fear the purification of such emotions" (10). While the above definition encapsulates some of the basic characteristics of tragedy, the rest, as outlined in the *Poetics*, could be summed up as follows: a tragedy must dramatize a series of serious and important events in the life of a protagonist designated as the tragic hero; it has to be written in an elevated style marked by colourful language abounding in "rhythm and melody" (10); the hero must be a man of noble birth, or a man above the average and must represent virtue by being neither too good nor too bad; his actions must be characterized by an error of judgment called a tragic flaw or *hamartia* in Greek, which does not represent any form of depravity; this flaw characterized by free choice of action is what leads to his downfall and this misfortune is, according to Aristotle, not wholly deserved; before his fall comes a sudden revelation (*anagnorisis*) of certain aspects of his person of which he had been ignorant; the revelation brings about a reversal of his fortune (*peripeteia*); when he eventually falls, members of the audience who had been his admirers and followers are apprehended by the twin emotions of pity and fear; at the end, however, they experience catharsis which means a purgation (or purification) of the said emotions.

Although these prescriptions in the *Poetics* have, over the centuries, remained invaluable critical reference points to scholars engaged in the study of tragedy, concerns have arisen over the plausibility of some of them and their suitability to circumstances and milieus other than those of ancient Greece and the wider Europe. Consequently, "[t]here have been many attempts to adjust Aristotle's words to common [and practical] sense" (Muir 363). Sir Phillip Sidney, writing in 1595, argues that the emotional impact of tragedy on the audience does not wane with the ensuing catharsis as Aristotle suggests, but rather impresses on them serious morals relevant for societal development like making kings fear to be tyrants (45). Georg Hegel's 1835 theory of tragedy, rather than being based on the Aristotelian ideas of pity and fear and their purgation, is based on the dialectical notion that tragic conflict produces reconciliation and harmony irrespective of what befalls the protagonist (qtd. in Muir 366). In the twentieth century, the American playwright Arthur Miller describes the Aristotelian concept of the tragic hero as "archaic" and insists that "the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in the highest sense as kings were" (744). His *Death of a Salesman* is a practical demonstration of his departure from the traditional Aristotelian norm. Kenneth Muir, whose general posture is defensive of Aristotle has had to remark that "One is tempted to suggest that the effect […] of tragedy is to increase,

not diminish our pity and terror—the compassion which is essential to the survival of humanity, and the terror that is akin to awe" (367). He thus questions Aristotle's idea of catharsis as the eradication of the tragic emotions from the audience. Elechi Amadi's journey on these paths is significant because of its newness and because of its focus on an aspect of the tragic enterprise that is not just different from those of other critics', but which seems to have been overlooked by Aristotle himself—that is, the presence and role of the supernatural in a tragic plot.

It is widely acknowledged that tragedy, just as the rest of the other major dramatic forms, has its roots in ritual; and because ritual is entwined with religion, it becomes obvious that the Aristotelian tragic canon, some of whose tenets scholars have challenged, is a product of the European cultural and religious world view just as it is certain that Amadi's proposed model for the African tragedian derives conversely from the African religio-cultural world view. It is, therefore, imperative at this point to examine the divergences in these opposing world views as a means of appreciating the different tragic aesthetics developed by the two scholars and of situating the different canons within historical and ontological contexts.

Tragedy as a ritual-based form

There is an obvious difference in the religio-cultural world views of Europe and Africa, and this has some implications for the kind of ritual-based drama that is and should be produced in these milieus. While different scholars have commented on the phenomenon of the African world view, Wole Soyinka is perhaps the one who has best conceptualized the dichotomy between the African and European world views. He, in the first chapter of *Myth, Literature and the African World*, makes a comparison between ancient Greek and Yoruba approaches to oracles and divine intervention to analyse African literary works that are inspired by ritual. Greece and the Yoruba kingdom become representative of Europe and Africa. Soyinka speaks of cosmic unity as the mainstay of the African world view, and this, by his assessment, refers to the primordial close and harmonious relationship that exists among all creatures in the cosmos, including mortals and such other immortal and higher beings as the gods, spirits and ancestors generally referred to as the supernatural (2–3). Corroborating this view, Obi Maduakor notes that the African world view thrives in "the union of divine and human essences in man and god, the replenishment and continuance of which guarantees the unity of being in both" (305). This union is made possible because of what Zulu Sofola observes as the belief in Africa that "all creatures, all things, including humans, are endowed with the same Supreme Energy, all creatures are essentially one and the same" (qtd. in Reiss 507).

Conversely, the European world view, Soyinka avows, is that in which the bond between the mortal and the immortal and indeed forces within the universe has been severed. He notes that in the western world as opposed to the African, certain

extraneous practices and belief systems—like the Platonic-Christian culture and Buddhism—which crept into the primordial religio-cultural consciousness of the people very early in their history have pushed the gods away from the earth, thus making them recede far beyond territories where humans can venture (3). Thus, while in Africa humans interact closely with their gods and can engage the gods in mystical negotiations over concerns like predestination and divine service, such mutual interaction is entirely absent in the European world where the decision of the gods concerning mortals is entirely non-negotiable. Kennedy Chinyowa puts the harmonious African situation succinctly when he asserts that in most African traditions, people "believe that they can plead, question and dialogue with the forces that govern and control their lives" (qtd. in Reiss 521). The point being made here is not that African gods are incapable of upsetting mankind and thus undermining their well-being, but that African gods are amenable to propitiation. The Greek/European gods, by Soyinka's assessment, lack this ethical obligation (14).

Timothy J. Reiss presents what is perhaps a more detailed description of the European world view which, wittingly or unwittingly, influences its writers' tragic vision. In an essay entitled "Using Tragedy Against Its Makers: Some African and Caribbean Instances", Reiss underlines some of the high points which have been encapsulated as follows: One, the European culture forces an impossible division between humans and the divine, other human groups, each other, and the material world; and this division is erroneously regarded by Europeans as universal (506). Two, this division causes the European man not to assume responsibility for his own actions and their consequences, but to blame the gods for his woes—this is why Oedipus in *Oedipus Rex* is quick to blame Apollo for his agonies (506). Three, the Western sense of "self" is an individual facing a greater divine, social, or political whole; a man in an anguished conflict with the divine, etc. Reiss argues that Western tragedy offers this separated (scythed) sense of human life (506).

The European situation is obviously why neither Oedipus' parents nor the priest, Tiresias (or even the hero as a young man) could negotiate his fate with the gods, leading therefore to the fulfilment of his destined doom. It is, therefore, clear that this perceived gulf between humans and the gods is responsible for the exclusion of the latter in European tragic aesthetics like Aristotle's *Poetics* although the immediate targets of the philosopher were tragedies predicated on predestination like the famous *Oedipus Rex*. Given the role of the supernatural in matters of predestination and indeed in most classic European tragedies, one would have expected that the gods would feature in the aesthetics of that drama type, especially in relation to the principle of *hamartia*. But, this, unfortunately, is not so. Interestingly, this lacuna is part of the concerns of Amadi in the essay on which this article partly hinges.

Europe, especially Greece, is believed, as already noted, to be the ancestral home of tragedy. Therefore, tragedy is one of her exports to the wider world. In this section,

I attempt to examine the differences between the conception and role of tragedy in Europe and in cultures other than Europe, especially Africa, using Reiss's already cited essay as a guide. The main concern of Reiss in the essay is to explore the implications of the intricate journey of tragedy from its European provenance to Africa and the Caribbean. According to him, the European makers of tragedy had the following imperialist views and conceptions about the drama type: the first is that tragedy (as conceptualized by Aristotle and Nietzsche) was a westernized concept/practice which was a mark of sophistication (508); the second is that non-Europeans did not have tragedy because of their lack of sophistication (508); and the third is the Aristotelian belief that the performance of tragedy by non-Europeans was a corrupt performance handled by amateurs (508). Consequently, Reiss argues that the Western culture uses tragedy to grasp and control other cultures, but that the Caribbean dramatist Walcott urges the use of tragedy to *turn* that grasp (510).

The implication and consequence of Walcott's position is that non-European cultures have developed a different conception of tragedy, which Reiss believes consists, among other things, in using tragedy against its makers. One of the key means of doing this, in Reiss' assessment, is by the adaptation of European tragedies into African or Caribbean contexts, domesticating and manipulating them to serve the purposes of these Europe's "others"—purposes grounded in their belief system, culture and tradition. The scholar observes that Soyinka has done this with the *Bacchae of Euripides*, Ola Rotimi with *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, Efua Sutherland with *Edufa*, 'Zulu Sofola with *Wedlock of the Gods*, Ama Ata Aidoo with *Anowa*, etc. (Reiss 510–26). Another means is by creating tragedies which are truly African (or Caribbean as the case may be) in conception by which is meant tragedies that dramatize the contemporary socio-political and economic realities of these societies. Personalizing the thrust of the second method, Aimé Césaire asserts as follows in 1966: "my theatre is above all a political theatre because the major problems of Africa are political problems" (qtd. in Brichaux-Houyiux 12). This harks back to the idea of commitment in literature, which is necessary for the growth of the so-called developing nations that cannot afford such a western luxury as individualism in dramatic conception. Consequently, the African/Caribbean tragedy is, according to Reiss, a new idea of tragedy rooted in socio-political realities and attitudes towards them as shaped by cultural contexts (507).

Some of the tragic socio-political and economic realities of Africa dramatized in their plays could be summed up under colonization and its horrors, conflicts that weakened African cultures before colonialism, struggles of cultural values often involving failures of combative will or action, neo-colonialism characterized by crimes and corruptions of the African elite, etc. These are realities which Reiss observes as having formed narrative patterns in the African tragic scene (514). But, whether in the adaptation of a European prototype or in creating an independent tragedy, the

African tragedian always tries to tailor his work towards a heroism that rather than serve the hero's personal interest as in the European examples already mentioned, serves the interest of his society. This, according to Reiss, is why unlike Sophocles who presents an Oedipus that had a lone defeat of a predatory Sphinx, Rotimi in his adaptation of the play presents an Odewale who is on a mission to defend his people (519). Still according to Reiss, Michael Etherton notes that Rotimi considers Odewale's mission as a divine one, but one in which the hero had a choice and as such bargained with the gods on the focus of his mission (518–9). This privilege of negotiating with the gods at the point of deciding a hero's divine earthly mission is part of what Chinyowa means by African tragic heroes being able to "plead, question and dialogue with the forces that govern and control their lives." Odewale is thus believed to have made, in the land of spirits, the choice of defending his people in the human world. This accounts, therefore, for the title which clearly absolves the gods of the agonies that Odewale goes through in the course of the play's tragic plot development.

Amadi's prescriptions for the African tragedian

As has been mentioned, Amadi admits in his essay that Aristotle's postulations in the *Poetics* concerning tragedy remain valid reference points to date to creators and critics of that drama type. However, Amadi's contention is with some of the most important and basic prescriptions, which he finds erroneous as their application in the analysis of *Oedipus Rex* by Aristotle entails contradictions. These are prescriptions involving the tragic hero's flaw and the twin emotions of pity and fear. Amadi observes that Aristotle insists on the following: the tragic hero's fall from glory to misery should be due "not to depravity but to some great error" in him that makes his exercise of his freedom of choice culminate in a tragic fatality; this fall should elicit in the audience pity and fear—pity because the hero should ideally be "better than the average" and as such undeserving of a misfortune, and fear because he is someone like us. Questioning the validity of the above postulations, Amadi re-examines *Oedipus Rex* and some of the major tragedies of Shakespeare like *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet* and observes, contrary to the critics of these plays including Aristotle himself on *Oedipus Rex*, that the plays do not adhere strictly to the Aristotelian prescriptions. Amadi notices, for instance, that the heroes of the above prototype plays lack a tragic flaw in the sense that Aristotle delineates it. The heroes in these works, rather than being the architects of their own actions, are controlled by higher beings and so cannot be held responsible for their own downfall. Each of the heroes—Oedipus, Macbeth, Hamlet, and Romeo—is, according to Amadi ("Gods and Tragic Heroes" 64), propelled by some supernatural force(s) like the gods in *Oedipus Rex*, the witches in *Macbeth,* the ghost in *Hamlet* and fate in *Romeo and Juliet*, rather than by an Aristotelean "tragic flaw" of character.

Concerning pity, Amadi's contrary response is that the fall of any human, whether highly or lowly placed, elicits pity because of the empathy that exists among humans; and regarding fear, he insists that the emotion cannot be evoked in the audience if the cause of the hero's fall is simply an error of character, which is as explicable as it is predictable given the audience's pre-knowledge of such faults in the hero; moreover, the audience are unlikely candidates for such a disaster since they may not possess such traits. Hence, Amadi insists that fear can only be aroused in the audience if the hero falls by some strange and mysterious circumstances attributable to powers stronger than them and obviously capable of harming them (Amadi, "Gods" 68–9). Consequently, he proposes a novel but hybrid tragic aesthetic especially for the African tragedian in which the two points of interest—the flaw of the tragic hero and the emotions of pity and fear—are entwined. This is a proposal that does not attempt to jettison the canonical aesthetics of Aristotle, but which tries to build on its perceived deficiencies to formulate a model that is at once universal and African in conception. It is a proposal that insists on relinking tragedy with its ritual roots, dramatizing terror-evoking struggles between the mortal hero and immortal beings.

Therefore, in his proposed model, Amadi places the supernatural very close to the centre of tragedy, second in importance only to the tragic hero himself, but without whom the hero's role as the tragic protagonist cannot be fully realized. The implication here is that the supernatural element becomes a real and major character whose role is intertwined with that of the hero to mastermind his fall. Amadi's proposal is therefore captured in the following statements, which while forming the summation of his arguments in the essay, represent his novel aesthetics for tragedy:

> Firstly, while the misfortune of a hero can evoke pity, it generates fear usually if it is inexplicable, mysterious or associated with the supernatural, be it fate, spirits or gods. Secondly, the human instinct for the supernatural is powerful and ever present and is therefore a necessary ingredient in the full realization of tragedy.
>
> Thirdly, for legal and penal purposes we have to assume that we act out of our own volition all the time; but in practical living, in drama and in fiction, we must allow that now and then events move beyond our control and freedom of action appears illusory. What are the implications for African literature? In Africa, religion, both native and imported, and the supernatural form very important aspects of our lives. So while the Aristotelian model of the tragic hero remains a classical reference point, *we should consider other models and pay some attention to our interactions with "a greater power than we can contradict."* (68–9, my emphasis)

Implied in the above is Amadi's abhorrence of a tragedy that is flagrantly built around un-terrific and less mysterious social, political or economic conflicts of mere mortals. This explains why of all his plays, *Isiburu* is the only one he considers a tragedy. The rest, by his reckoning, are not fit as tragic plots as they are purely social in con-

ception and devoid of conflicts involving a human hero and a supernatural force.

Isiburu as a tragedy

The primordial African world of cosmic totality predominates Amadi's early works including *Isiburu*. This is a world of free association between natural and supernatural beings. In this world, the gods live among men as it were, and both interact based on such mutual respect that thrives between a conscientious master and a dutiful servant. While stressing this point about the world of Amadi's early works, the Nigerian scholar-cum-politician, Obi Wali, draws something of an analogy between the traditional European and African societies regarding the gods and their relationship with humans. According to him:

> "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods, they kill us for their sport," so exclaims Gloucester, in Shakespeare's *King Lear*. This portrays a rather frivolous relationship between the gods and human beings. Elechi Amadi's concept of this relationship is a far more serious one. In the society with which he pre-occupies himself in his works, there is strictly no demarcating line between the two worlds. (29)

Of course, in the world of Amadi's art, the gods exert enormous influence on their mortal protégés who are ever willing to live by the gods' precepts which are often geared towards the latter's advantage in terms of guidance, protection, procreation, a bountiful harvest, etc.

Needless to say, despite this seeming harmony, there could arise moments of friction that may result in expiable and inexpiable consequences like affliction and death. In all, the privilege which the African enjoys of pleading, questioning and dialoguing with his guardian supernatural forces remains intact, but this is not to be taken for granted neither does it in any way place humans on the same pedestal with the supernatural forces. Final decision on any subject, irrespective of the interactive procedures that may be initiated by humans, remains the prerogative of the gods. Therefore, in the world presented by Amadi in his tragic works (prose and drama alike), man remains "the biggest joke in the galaxy," because "like laboratory rats in a huge cage, we react just the way the Master Scientist wants us to react" (qtd. in Osofisa 33); or as Femi Osofisan puts it in a tribute to Amadi at age 55:

> In all his works, his novels and plays, you close the book literally covered in cold sweat, terrified by the immense and inexorable power of the gods. Man is pitifully diminished. Whatever he tries, he fails, for all his effort at freedom turns out in the end, like in Greek Mythology, to be only a further step towards entrenching himself in the tedious web woven by the unseen gods. Life is cruel, to be a man is to be victim. (33)

Suggested in the above is that Amadi, despite this inequality between humans and the supernatural, gives his protagonists the opportunity to struggle against the

forces over that which they believe in. "Their very struggle" writes Eko, "is thus a confirmation that man has and can exercise his will power. It is a protest against the forces, a refusal to surrender until absolutely crushed" (3).

European gods do not share with their human protégées the kind of relationship that their African counterparts share. In the African world, man can negotiate the decision of the gods concerning himself, and he may succeed or fail in causing the gods to change or adjust such decisions. Just as the format for the negotiations differs, the response of the affected human to certain unfavourable decisions of the gods also differs. When man succumbs to these unfavourable divine decisions of the gods there is peace, but when he challenges them conflict ensues, and, of course, the end is disastrous for him because he is a mismatch in a fight against the immortals.

As already noted, Amadi has no problem with the rest of the Aristotelian codes on tragedy except those that relate to *hamartia* and the twin emotions of pity and fear. This section, therefore, tries to show how *Isiburu* adheres to the unquestioned Aristotelian principles. *Isiburu*'s plot is serious and important. Its seriousness rests firstly on the conflict of interests between the god, Amadioha, and the mortal, Isiburu. The protagonist challenges the decision of Amadioha, a highly dreaded and revered god among the Ikwerre of the Niger Delta, by refusing to immediately assume the role of chief priest to the god, even though the god has ordained him to that role through an oracle. The choice of a new chief priest to Amadioha is a serious matter and the chosen one's refusal to take immediate responsibility is a dangerous issue. The gods do not condone such impudence from mere mortals. The seriousness of the matter is heightened by the traditional Ikwerre society's perception of humans' relationship with their gods and particularly by their knowledge of the fierceness of the god in question. In Ikwerre land, just as in many other traditional African societies, the lives of human citizens are intertwined with those of their gods and the resultant relationship is that of the keeper and the kept. The gods are believed to control and oversee the affairs of men and disloyalty to them is considered a serious offence punishable even by death. The characters in *Isiburu* are aware of the grave danger hanging around the errant hero's neck, hence Isiburu as well as the incumbent chief priest, Agbarakwe, is troubled, for, according to the latter, Amadioha's "choice is so definite and irrevocable" (*Isiburu* 7).

The entire process involved in the hero's preparation for the seventh battle accounts partly for the seriousness of the plot. It involves the procurement of the most potent wrestling charm needing human sacrifice at far away Eluanyim, the dwelling place of the most powerful of *dibias* who drink through their noses and imbibe snuff through their eyes (*Isiburu* 10). Enmeshed in these events is the ironic contest between Uzo (a former prince but now a slave to Isiburu) and his master, Isiburu, for the love of Mgbeke (a slave woman betrothed to Uzo and who alone knows the way to Uzo's homeland and on whom he depends both for marriage and for going

home upon manumission) which is heightened by Uzo's secret and fierce plot to kill Isiburu. While, for example, Isiburu is away on the fortification mission in company of Mgbeke, Uzo, according to a stage direction, "pauses and thinks, and the expression on his face changes from one of sorrow and doubt to one of anger and resolution"; and then his resolution is: "Blood for blood, I say! / It is the way of the gods; / He who creates a corpse / Shall himself become a corpse" (*Isiburu* 19).

The plot's seriousness climaxes in the hero's sudden realization, upon his triumphant return, that he has spiritually been killed by Uzo who had smashed his Pot of Life—a sacred vessel that holds the secret of Isiburu's success in wrestling bouts and the very essence of his life as a traditional man. The fatality inherent in the smashing of the pot is eloquently captured by the sudden fear that grips the hero upon noticing the broken pot and by his consequent words laden with regret, anguish and a tone of finality:

> ISIBURU: [*Turns round and sees Uzo and the broken Pot of Life. He gasps with fear and approaches the wreckage slowly, then he laughs hysterically.*]
>
> "The crab swam through mighty oceans
> But succumbed to woman's pot of soup"
> A wag once said so and I laughed
> Drowning my doubts in a keg of wine,
> But how true! (*Isiburu* 22)

While the above revelation marks the play's climax and the beginning of the reversal of the hero's fortunes, it squirms with the irony of human life. Man is often not destroyed by the greatest of his challenges, but by the very insignificant ones. As the greatest wrestler in Ikwerre land and beyond, Isiburu had defeated many strong oppositions, but an ordinary slave takes his life by a seemingly simple act of smashing a pot, and right at the hero's shrine at home.

Concerning language, Amadi's psychological indebtedness to the old canon of Aristotle and indeed Shakespeare is apparent. *Isiburu* is written in language depicting distinct and varying beauties, qualities which, according to Aristotle, represent "rhythm and melody" (10). Like the classical and Renaissance tragedians, Amadi seems to believe in the option of poetry as vehicle of tragic action. Therefore, *Isiburu* is written in verse.

In status, the eponymous hero, Isiburu, matches the classical prototype by being a wrestling champion and, as such, a man above the average. He possesses traits requisite of a hero, one of which is nobility. In her summation of the personality of Isiburu, Eko identifies the following heroic qualities of his: discipline, courage, fairness, desire for excellence and compassion (156). While the rest of the qualities are expected of every hero, that of fairness relates to the specific prescription by Aristotle which says that the hero must be neither too good nor too bad, hence he must be

a man of virtue. As a revered wrestling champion who has held sway in that position for six good years, Isiburu is larger-than-life and so ranks among such classic examples as Oedipus, Macbeth and Hamlet. Like them, Isiburu is a rallying point for his people who adore him and identify with his progress; in fact, he is to his people

> Isiburu Ekperi!
> Tough Grass of the Great Ponds!
> Azo Dimgba!
> He who carried high his opponents
> And flung them at the onlookers
>
> […]
>
> The cat whose back disdained the ground,
> He who killed and called for vengeance. (*Isiburu* 28)

Isiburu has flaws in the true Aristotelian sense. One of his flaws is excessive kindness, which many characters agree is the remote cause of his death. One of the village elders, Wegwu, is categorical about this when he laments over the hero's corpse thus: "As too much kindness / Has ruined you in this trip, / In the next you will be wiser" (*Isiburu* 30).

The hero's kindness manifests itself at different occasions in the plot and the account of this is given by different characters: by Mgbeke when Isiburu seeks to take her in: "[…] Your kindness too has gone beyond / What men are wont to offer their slaves" (*Isiburu* 13), and by the village elder, Wegwu, while making the already cited lamentation over Isiburu's corpse. Isiburu's kindness is a defect because it is excessive; he extends it beyond proportion, thus leaving room for its coming back to haunt him. It is on record that Isiburu had saved the life of Uzo four times (*Isiburu* 15) when the latter could have been used to bury the corpses of chiefs or any such personality as tradition demands (ironically, it is the same character that eventually kills him); and that of Mgbeke two times, the second being when he refused to sacrifice her as a prerequisite for obtaining a potent charm for the seventh championship.

The hero's second and third flaws are those of vaulting ambition and stubbornness both manifesting themselves in his refusal to take immediate responsibility at the shrine of Amadioha as Chief Priest, a responsibility that could have averted his eventual death. Like most classic tragic heroes, Isiburu is ignorant of certain life-threatening situations around and about him. He is unaware of Uzo's plot to kill him and like other tragic heroes the revelation comes very late, when he is on the brink of death.

As a departure from Aristotle, Amadi proposes the introduction of a supernatural character in the plot of a tragic play, who should mastermind the tragic hero's fall to

make it mysterious and capable of evoking pity and fear in the audience. It is clear why this must be: tragedy is a ritual drama, and ritual drama is the drama of the gods. It usually projects man's conflict with forces that challenge his efforts to harmonise with his environment (Soyinka 1). Amadioha is that supernatural character or force in *Isiburu*, and because of the high importance that the playwright proposes for the supernatural personage in a tragic plot, he accords Amadioha a very large and overwhelming presence in the play. "Amadioha overshadows this verse drama" (155) writes Ebele Eko in confirmation of the god's awe-inspiring status. Amadioha's pervasive presence in the plot of the play could also be attributed to the author's original intention for the text that eventually became the play. According to Eko, "*Isiburu* was first conceived as an invocation to Amadioha, the most powerful god in Ikwerre land and as dear to Amadi's heart as Ogun is to Soyinka. According to Amadi, after the invocation was written, he created backwards, adding characters and details until what started as an invocation blossomed into a full verse drama, celebrating an Ikwerre wrestling hero" (155–6).

Before Amadioha's choice of him as successor to Agbarakwe, Isiburu was simply a free and pleasant character loved by all and one who enjoyed his prowess in traditional wrestling and desired to achieve the highest honour in the sport. The god's incursion into this life truncates its inherent peace and refuses to let go until the hero is finally destroyed. Thus, unlike the case of Odewale in which the gods are not to blame, Amadioha is largely to blame for Isiburu's death. Like Macbeth, Isiburu falls on the step of vaulting ambition; but unlike Macbeth's straightforward ambition, Isiburu's is ambition laced with blind and catastrophic stubbornness. True to the privilege open to an African character of negotiating the decision of the gods concerning him, Isiburu does try, at some point, to negotiate with Amadioha, but fails to win the god's approval, and the reason for the disapproval may not be farfetched: his initial approach destroys everything as it is damning. It takes the form of defiance instead of plea, and as is well known to all, the gods do not condone such impudence from mere mortals. "I tell you the time is now," announces the incumbent priest, and in response, Isiburu declares:

ISIBURU: I shall serve Amadioha Ozuzu,
But let me take this championship this year,
In the next I shall be with you
Shall man toil for six years,
And in the seventh, the harvest year,
Stay at home and fold his hands?
No, I will get the championship,
And if you cannot wait another year,
Then choose another successor. (*Isiburu* 6, my emphasis)

The gods, they say, are wise. Amadioha is wise: he recognizes that Isiburu in the above statements is referring to him and not to Agbarakwe as the mortal pretends to do. "It is clear to four-eyed dibias / And to ordinary people as well" (7) that the choice of his priest is Amadioha's and not Agbarakwe's. Thus, when Isiburu says "No, I will get the championship / And if you cannot wait another year / Then choose another successor", he is obviously referring to the god and not the man.

This utter recklessness and blatant insubordination sets in motion the god's anger against the hero thus making him turn deaf ears to the hero's later adjustments toward civility, for soon after his rebellion against the god, Isiburu switches to pleading and something in the mould of a bait on the god:

ISIBURU: [*Kneeling and looking up.*]
Then king of thunder and of the skies
Forgive me and have patience
While I seek the championship
For which you have given me strength,
I rebel not—
No one can against you
I seek to lift your name

[…]

ISIBURU: [*Solemnly and still kneeling*]
It is said that among the gods
You excel in feats of strength,
You must understand therefore how I feel;
Give me one year, just one year,
And you will have the services of a champion. (*Isiburu* 7–8)

It is possible that the god could have overlooked Isiburu's insubordination had he gone ahead to do the divine bidding after failing to get the god's approval for a shift in take-off date. Isiburu's resolve to carry on with his plans despite the god's silent disapproval of it, helps to embolden the already drawn battle line between the errant hero and the fierce god. The entire scenario is, of course, Amadi's making. Isiburu's rebellion is geared towards generating the kind of conflict that will climax in a fall of the hero that is capable of leaving the audience gripped with terror arising from the inexorable power of the gods, and pity out of their love for the fallen hero, their hero.

Significant also is the god's refusal to inflict immediate punishment on the offender. He waits for the one year demanded by the hero and after he has actualized the same ambition that triggered the conflict in the first place. A less discerning reader could interpret this one-year silence by the god as a sign that he fell for the

hero's bait. Consequently, the hero's temporary death becomes a means by which the god saves himself possible disloyalty from human loyalists who could have concluded that he has grown weak. While this point of view may be valid in some right, it is, however, more accurate and rewarding to adjudge that Amadioha never succumbed to the hero's bait. Killing the hero at his point of glory is the best way to show the extent of the god's anger against the offender and that the god cannot be enticed with vain mortal glory. Besides, most offended gods relish punishing human offenders when they are most gullible—at the point when they are enjoying the fruits of their labour. This is one attitude that has earned the gods among the Igbo of eastern Nigeria and their neighbours the popular metaphor *Ogbu onye mgbe ndu na-ato ya*, "He that kills one at the point when one relishes living" (Kamalu and Ngwoke 10). Indeed, Amadioha is *ogbu onye mgbe ndu na-ato ya*. He kills Isiburu at the very point when life and living are to become most enjoyable to him. This is the period immediately following Isiburu's success at the seventh year championship when, according to the enraged Uzo:

> His heart will rest now.
> He has crowned his seven-year scheme
> With the eagle feathers of success.
> The village will build him a house
> Out of communal sweat;
> The best maiden, plump and sweet,
> Protected for months in the confinement room,
> Cared for by proud anxious parents,
> Will now be his
> For nothing. (*Isiburu* 19)

The death of such a people's hero at the very peak of his success naturally elicits the audience's pity whether the death be considered deserved or not; but the pity increases when the hero's death is undeserved. Isiburu's death is somewhat undeserved because he neither doubted Amadioha's choice of him as priest nor declined service to the god, but simply demanded a deferment.

By killing Isiburu, Amadioha proves that the gods cannot fall for mere human baits, and that their choice of a votary is neither a sentimental nor political affair, but a purely divine procedure; that the choice of Isiburu by Amadioha had nothing to do with his earthly achievements, but with those qualities of his "dearest to the heart of Amadi[oha]" (Eko 156). Of course, the friction between Isiburu and Amadioha is the kind of scenario that Amadi considers suitable for a tragic plot and which he prescribes for tragedians. It would also be recalled that Amadi, among his prescriptions cited earlier, states that "[…] in practical living, in drama and fiction, we must allow that now and then events move beyond our control and freedom of action

appears illusory" (69). Consequently, Isiburu's insistence on getting the championship instead of immediately taking up the divine role is a clear indication of one of those times when events moved beyond his control.

While Amadi may have successfully dramatized in this tragic play his prescription on the supernatural, the unresolved issue becomes whether the hero's fall in the play is inexplicable, mysterious or associated with the supernatural, and whether these have imbued the play's denouement with the requisite fear-inducing atmosphere. The answer to this is not far-fetched: Isiburu's fall is inexplicable and mysterious; it is associated with the supernatural, Amadioha. Accounting for the inexplicability and mysteriousness of Isiburu's death is its occurrence in his tightly fortified shrine through the smashing of his highly protected Pot of Life by a mere slave boy. The scene is quite revealing of the mystery and the role of Amadioha in it:

ISIBURU: Uzo, come here!
[*Uzo tries but cannot*]
Oh, I forgot the invisible barrier,
Erected when the Pot was hung up.
How did you get in?
[*Uzo opens his mouth but cannot talk*]
That barrier was proof against any man
But a mere slave has broken through.
[*Laughs hysterically then stares intently at the sky*]
Amadioha king of thunder and of skies
Your hand is in this.
I have striven to bring you victory,
But you have cursed my efforts.
Worse, you have taken my life.
It is well. (*Isiburu* 22)

To a great extent, therefore, Uzo, like Isiburu, is not acting entirely out of his own volition. At the instance of his seeming loss of Mgbeke to Isiburu, Uzo's becomes a mercenary in Amadioha's army against their common enemy. Hence, his role in killing Isiburu is at once a mark of divine punishment and of vengeance because Uzo thought Isiburu had sacrificed Mgbeke at Eluanyim. Amadioha simply cashed in on Uzo's jealousy, and his own role was to imbue the embattled fellow with the requisite strange powers to overcome the obstacles *en route* the Pot of Life. There could, therefore, be no controversy as to the possibility of the above kind of death eliciting fear in the audience because it is strange, shrouded in spirituality and charms, and connected with such a dreaded god as Amadioha Ozuzu.

Isiburu's mysterious death marks the play's tragic end. His resurrection, on the other hand, re-enforces Amadi's belief in the power and influence of the supernatural

over man. The author's high perception and, in fact, reverence and admiration for supernatural forces has already been emphasized, and in this last scene of the play he celebrates it through the elaborate and dramatic invocation of Amadioha staged by Agbarakwe flanked by some elders. The play, we have been told, was originally meant as an invocation to the god, but when turning the invocation into a play, Amadi simply assigns the religio-cultural activity a dramatic role that enables him to emphasize his long held opinion concerning the relationship between gods and humans, and his proposal to tragedians concerning paying attention in their works to our interactions with a greater power than we can contradict.

Another possible significance of the hero's resurrection is that the playwright uses it to demonstrate the already noted African gods' benevolence to their human protégées; their willingness to dialogue with their human subjects; and their openness to amendments and reparation—the qualities supposedly lacking in European gods. The process for the actualization of these obviously must be initiated by the mortals who are usually at the receiving end of the gods' decisions and actions including wrath; and the method is of course a plea, for no man can challenge his *chi* (god) to a battle. Here then lies the significance of the elaborate invocation whose response incidentally benefits both the people and the god. The people benefit from the return of their beloved hero who was suddenly cut down in his prime under mysterious and supposedly undeserved circumstances; the god benefits, firstly, in the form of continual reverence from his mortal protégées as the hero's revival helps to re-enforce the belief that Amadioha's "choice is so definite and irrevocable" (*Isiburu* 7) and, secondly, in the prospect of enjoying the services of a champion.

Conclusion

This article has, among other things, tried to handle two important issues concerning the dynamism of the literary enterprise with specific reference to tragedy and tragic aesthetics as well as their implications for the African milieu and the persuasions of one of Africa's leading writers, Elechi Amadi. First, the article has re-examined Amadi's fresh critique of Aristotle's ancient aesthetics on tragedy; and second, it has appraised the writer-critic's only tragic play based on a blend of his emergent divergent views and the rest of the Aristotelian precepts. The aspects of the Aristotelean tragic aesthetics that Amadi called into question are those that relate to a tragic hero's flaw and the expected emotional effects of the hero's tragic fall on the audience. Amadi's problem with Aristotle has been the philosopher's association of the tragic hero's fall with an error of character and his insistence that the fall of the hero based on this flaw is likely to elicit pity and fear in the audience. Part of what this article has done is to showcase Amadi's interrogation of Aristotle in this regard especially his insistence, contrary to the philosopher, that while a fall that is based on a mere flaw of character may elicit pity in the audience, it definitely will not incite

fear in them since that fall was imminent and predictable rather than mysterious or associated with a supernatural power.

The article has thus established that Amadi, in a bid to demonstrate his deviation from Aristotle and proposal to tragedians, created in *Isiburu* an all-important, powerful and dreaded supernatural character whose role is interlaced with that of the hero to the extent that the supernatural became a mastermind of the hero's actions, which included the exercise of his flaw, and of course his fall. The involvement of the supernatural element in the hero's fall, true to Amadi's proposal, makes it mysterious, and this would instill the requisite fear in the audience. Furthermore, there is the dramatization of the playwright's admiration of the unmatchable power of the gods and a demonstration of his age-long philosophy of man's powerlessness in the face of superior supernatural might and the idea that man has neither the freedom of choice nor of action.

The article concludes that Amadi has demonstrated in the essay and play examined here that there is no body of literary aesthetics that is set in stone, just as it is absurd to consider any pool of aesthetic principles as universally applicable. Every set of criteria for literary creation and criticism should rather be considered as a foundation upon which novel and perhaps even more exciting ideas could be built either because of natural human advancements or of the exigencies of cultures and traditions other than that which gave it birth.

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"We are his children": de Landmanfamilie als erfgenaam van Adamastor

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"We are his children": the Landman family as Adamastor's heir

In *Die eerste lewe van Adamastor* (The first life of Adamastor, 1988) André Brink reinvented the giant Adamastor, introduced in 1572 with the publication of *Os Lusíadas*, the Portuguese epic by Luis de Camões. So fascinated was Brink by the Southern African monster, that he wanted to write more novels containing new personifications of Adamastor. *An Act of Terror* (1992) can be seen as his most prominent Adamastor novel. An addendum entitled "The Chronicle of the Landman Family: As told by Thomas Landman" was included in this novel. In this article, I focus on this chronicle and unravel the way in which Adamastor manifests himself in every character, because each figure bears some resemblances to the Adamastor that Brink recreated in T'kama, the protagonist in *Die eerste lewe van Adamastor* (1988). All the characters in the Landman family fight against a dominant entity, but they do it on their own terms. This article shows that Brink uses the Adamastor figure as a metaphor for conflict, but also for reconciliation and protection. Against the background of these characteristics, Adamastor also appears to be a personification of different ideological constructs and of the continent of Africa. Furthermore, Adamastor's appearance is a key feature to understanding how ideology transforms the representation of historical knowledge in Brink's novel. **Keywords:** Adamastor, André Brink, comparative studies, historical novels, ideological criticism.

Inleiding

In *Die eerste lewe van Adamastor* (1988) maakt de lezer kennis met T'kama, Brinks eerste herinterpretatie van het wezen Adamastor. Dit boek bracht echter geen nieuwe reeks romans, maar wel een bijlage in *An Act of Terror*, "The Chronicle of the Landman Family", waarin hij verschillende personages etaleert die allemaal op een bepaalde manier in de voetsporen van Adamastor treden. Deze kroniek is volgens Brink het finale product van zijn Adamastor-project ("Reimagining the past. André Brink in conversation with Reingart Nethersole" 50). Brink beweert dat hij in zijn verhalen een Adamastor zou willen verwerken die zich in verschillende menselijke gedaantes tussen de bevolking manifesteert. Zo kan Adamastor zijn beschermende werk uitvoeren en tegelijkertijd een metafoor worden die identificatie met het continent mogelijk maakt.

> My idea, as it was, suggested that Adamastor was the guardian spirit of the Cape, looming over its southernmost tip. In each generation since the exposure of Africa to European eyes the Cape and its spirit would have appeared differently, and *Adamastor would have chosen different guises in which to announce himself to the inhabitants. He*

> *would have assumed other shapes in order to do his protective work and accelerate the process of identification with the continent*. […] How to link the different appearances so that they fall together is a problem I am still trying to solve. What I did instead was to write *An Act of Terror* and thirteen chapters in the history of the Landman family. That was the shape in which my Adamastor project was finally cast and in which it was published […] (Brink, "Reimagining" 50, cursivering toegevoegd)

De vraag dringt zich op naar de verschillende manieren waarop het wezen incarneert in deze kroniek. Brink richt hierin zijn aandacht ook op de valkuilen van "geschiedschrijving", waarbij hij waarschuwt dat geschiedenis een ideologische constructie is die eenvoudig kan worden vervormd om bepaalde belangen te verdedigen. De figuur Adamastor heeft doorheen de tijd diverse interpretaties, en verscheidene ideologische connotaties gekregen. Hierdoor gebruikt Brink hem om te duiden hoe eenvoudig informatie te manipuleren is.

Na een introductie op Adamastors historische ontwikkeling, wordt een selectie gemaakt uit verschillende theorieën waarop de creatie van Adamastor zou zijn gebaseerd. Deze invalshoeken bieden interessante uitgangspunten voor een verdere interpretatie. Vervolgens wordt dieper ingegaan op Brinks zienswijze op het verband tussen literatuur en geschiedenis. Daarnaast wordt aangetoond op welke manier Adamastor verder leeft in Brinks narratieve universum: de personificaties van het wezen in "The Chronicle of the Landman Family" zullen worden vergeleken met T'kama in *Die eerste lewe van Adamastor*. Als leidraad dient mijn masterscriptie, "'Vele lewens van Adamastor': De Mythische Figuur Adamastor (Os Lusíadas) in drie Zuid-Afrikaanse Romans", waarin ik demonstreerde hoe de Adamastorplotruimte in contemporaine Zuid-Afrikaanse romans gedomineerd wordt door conflict. Mijn analyse zal deze hypothese verder onderbouwen.

Adamastor: monster van de Stormkaap

In het epos *Os Lusiadas* (Camões) doet Adamastor zijn intrede in "Canto V". Wanneer Da Gama met zijn vloot de baai van Zuid-Afrika wil binnenvaren, doemt er tijdens het stormweer uit de kolkende mist een dreigend een afgrijselijk monster op "de gedaante / Van een enorme, machtige gigant / Rees uit het duister op voor onze ogen […]" (Camões 121). Met een bulderende stem begint het wezen de noodlottige toekomst van de Portugese vloot te voorspellen (Camões 123–4). Wanneer Da Gama op respectloze wijze aan het monster vraagt om zijn identiteit te onthullen, vertelt Adamastor zijn tragische liefdesverhaal waarin hij een rebellie leidde tegen de goden om het hart van Thetis te winnen. Als straf voor zijn overmoed, veranderen Doris en Zeus hem in een rotsformatie: de Stormkaap (Kaap de Goede Hoop). Hierdoor is hij gedoemd tot eeuwige kwelling in eenzaamheid (Camões 126). Met een hartverscheurende kreet verdwijnt Adamastor en kunnen de Portugezen hun tocht naar Indië verderzetten.

Camões zou de Adamastormythe bewust hebben gecreëerd en hem hebben gebaseerd op oudere voorstellingen van soortgelijke monsters. De naam "Adamasto" duikt reeds op in de *Gigantomachia* van Claudianus, de *Carmina* van Apollinarus Sidonius, de *Officina* van Ravisius-Texor en in Rabelais' *Gargantua* (Ferreira 15). Daarnaast vertoont de tragische plot in Adamastors levensverhaal ook gelijkenissen met verhalen uit de Griekse mythologie. Door zijn menselijke emoties en de menselijke fouten die hij maakt, wordt hij door de goden gestraft—net zoals de titaan Prometheus die het heilige vuur van de goden stal en aan de mensen gaf, zodat zij zichzelf konden ontwikkelen. Als straf voor zijn hoogmoed, wordt hij vastgeketend aan een rots waar een adelaar elke dag opnieuw zijn lever komt verorberen. Camões' Adamastormythe heeft dus een narratieve basis.

De creatie van Adamastor is niet onschuldig. Mythes hebben altijd een verband met de buitentalige werkelijkheid en geven zin aan een nieuw (maatschappelijk) fenomeen (Ferreira 11–3). Voor Gray (15) is Adamastor een "consciously-created myth". Da Gama en zijn bemanning waren de eersten om rond Zuid-Afrika te varen. De "ontdekking" van het continent zorgde voor nieuwe indrukken en een ingrijpende totaalervaring waar Camões de juiste woorden voor moest vinden: "He has to invite suspension of disbelief in order that new realities, rather than old fantasies, enter his account" (Gray 18). Volgens Ferreira (47–8) en Van Wyk Smith (12) hebben ook geografische en klimatologische feiten meegespeeld in de totstandkoming van het wezen, waaronder de rots waaraan Adamastor is vastgeketend, de Tafelberg, en het stormachtige weer in die omgeving. Adamastor zou de belichaming van een negatieve "Afrika-ervaring" zijn (Ferreira 42). Westerse reizigers hadden namelijk allerlei vooroordelen over Afrika, die ze bevestigd zagen eenmaal op "het zwarte continent". Aansluitend wordt beweerd Gray (15) en Ferreira (47–8) dat Adamastor een bundeling van alle angsten en onzekerheden is die de Europeanen parten speelden ten aanzien van het onbekende continent. Hierdoor vormt het wezen de basis van een racistische mythologie. Dit wordt bevestigd aan het einde van *Os Lusiadas*, wanneer Thetis zichzelf aan Da Gama geeft. Met deze "daad" bewijzen de Portugezen hun raciale superioriteit (Gray 25–6). Camões kwam door de schepping van de reus tegemoet aan enkele "noden" van zijn tijdsperiode. Zo ontwierp hij volgens Brink ("Reimagining" 41–3) ook een duivel waarmee de Christelijke "kruisvaarders" konden concurreren. Adamastor als allegorie toont de overgang van geschiedenis naar mythologie, en hoe eenvoudig ideologieën en "mythologieën" geïmplementeerd kunnen worden in de geschiedenis. Brink rekent dit tot de "gevaren" van de geschiedschrijving. In het volgende deel van dit artikel wordt hier dieper op ingegaan.

Als mythisch wezen is Adamastor niet meer weg te denken uit het narratieve geheugen van Zuid-Afrika. Zijn narratieve flexibiliteit wordt door veel auteurs en lezers als zijn grootste literaire waarde gezien (Van Wyk Smith 18). Sinds hij ten tonele verscheen bij Camões, grepen auteurs in Zuid-Afrika vanaf de negentiende

eeuw naar het wezen terug om in hun gedichten over Zuid-Afrika te verwerken. Van Wyk Smiths boek *Shades of Adamastor: An Anthology of Poetry* heeft zoveel mogelijk van deze Adamastorgedichten verzameld en geduid. Samin (63) verwijst naar deze bloemlezing wanneer hij het heeft over hoe bepaalde dichters Adamastor implementeren. Naudé's gedicht "Cabo Tormentoso" uit 1953, bijvoorbeeld, thematiseert hoe de reus wordt "getemd" door de blanke samenleving. Toch wordt Adamastor niet enkel gebruikt om onderdrukking te legitimeren. Pringle drukt in zijn gedicht "Cape of Storms" (1834) door middel van het wezen zijn nostalgische emoties uit ten aanzien van Zuid-Afrika (Samin 63).

Adamastor spreekt nog steeds tot de verbeelding. Vanaf de twintigste eeuw zijn er Zuid-Afrikaanse auteurs die Adamastor gaan herinterpreteren en hem gaan toeeigenen. In mijn masterscriptie ("Vele lewens") analyseerde ik drie Zuid-Afrikaanse romans na 1980. Dat zijn *Die eerste lewe van Adamastor* van André Brink, *Children of Adamastor* van Anthony Fleischer en Francois Versters *Een teen Adamastor*. In deze verhalen wordt expliciet verwezen naar de reus in de titel, maar dat hoeft niet altijd. In *Apocalypse Now Now* van Charlie Human wordt het monster terloops in een opsomming genoemd (Human 282), wat de indruk geeft dat zijn naam slechts *een* naam is van het wezen dat de poort bewaakt naar andere tijdruimtelijke dimensies. Antjie Krog verwerkt in haar bundel *Jerusalemgangers* een gedicht met Adamastor in de hoofdrol. Volgens Viljoen (100–1) refereert zij naar het feit dat de blanken op onverzettelijkheid zullen stoten wanneer ze toenadering zullen zoeken naar de zwarte Zuid-Afrikanen die eeuwenlang vernederd zijn geweest. Op een meer allegorisch niveau incarneert Adamastor in het personage Petrus in Coetzees *Disgrace* (Samin 66–7). Het is op dit allegorische niveau dat Adamastor opnieuw verschijnt in Brinks roman *An Act of Terror.*

In mijn eerdere studie onderzocht ik met behulp van Jamesons theorie van het politieke onbewuste hoe elke roman twee verschillende niveaus heeft waarop het personage Adamastor verschijnt. Niet alleen getuigen de verhalen van een maatschappijkritische onderlaag dat de volledige verhaalruimte beslaat, maar ook de personages die de centrale Adamastorfiguren vormden, krijgen een belangrijke ideologische functie te vervullen. De plotruimte waarin deze figuren een centrale rol krijgen voor de verhaalontwikkeling is de Adamastorplotruimte. Dat is er een van (politiek) verzet, conflict en geweld, maar het impliceert tegelijkertijd ook verzoening en bescherming. Dat vind ik eveneens terug in "The Chronicle of the Landman Family". Adamastor, in de context van verzet en revolutie, werd reeds door Roy Campbell geëvoceerd (Samin 64): "But his feeling of revolt runs parallel to a traditional vision of Africa associating the continent with the forces of darkness". In "The Chronicle of the Landman Family" verwerkt Brink Adamastor op een andere manier dan in zijn boek *Die eerste lewe van Adamastor*. Het doel van dit artikel is te achterhalen hoe hij dat precies doet.

De geschiedenis herzien: *Die eerste lewe van Adamastor*

Die eerste lewe van Adamastor vertrekt van het uitgangspunt dat de geest van Adamastor steeds opnieuw reïncarneert. De lezer volgt zijn retrospectieve vertelling op zijn "eerste leven", namelijk de periode die aan zijn straf vooraf ging. T'kama, de naam van de "eerste bezieler" van Adamastor, vertelt over de eerste ontmoeting met de blanken, over zijn liefde voor de blanke Khois, haar ontvoering en over de trektocht die hij met zijn volk onderneemt om aan een destructief landschap te ontsnappen. Volgens de medicijnman keert het landschap zich tegen hen omdat T'kama verliefd is op een blanke vrouw. T'kama komt dus voor een hartverscheurende keuze te staan: kiest hij voor zijn stam of voor Khois? Daarnaast is het probleem dat zijn geslachtsdeel oncontroleerbaar blijft groeien sinds hij bij Khois is. Dit wordt pas opgelost wanneer een krokodil het geslachtsdeel afbijt en de medicijnman een fallus in klei modelleert. Jaren later, wanneer Khois en T'kama opnieuw in de samenleving zijn geïntegreerd, meert er een schip aan. De blanken komen Khois halen. Wanneer T'kama er alles aan probeert te doen om zijn geliefde bij zich te houden en met de blanken wil onderhandelen, verzinnen ze een list. Overeenkomstig met de list van Zeus en Doris in "Canto V", verraden ze T'kama door een vrouwelijk boegbeeld op het strand te plaatsen. In vreugde denkt hij dat het zijn Khois is, maar hij wordt door de blanken hardhandig aangepakt. Hij is op sterven na dood wanneer zij hem op een rots achterlaten.

Brink heeft in *Die eerste lewe van Adamastor* de gebeurtenissen die in "Canto V" zijn verwerkt, geherinterpreteerd. Voorbeelden waarin die perspectiefwisselingen duidelijk aan bod komen, zijn de eerste ontmoeting tussen blank en zwart, de conflicten en miscommunicatie, de voorspelling waarin de Portugese zeevaarders tegenspoed zouden meemaken en het verhandelen en ruilen van exotische objecten voor Europese wapens en bier (Engels 70–90). Brink ("Herontdekking van een continent" 197) ziet het verhaal als "een expliciete poging om van 'binnenuit' een tegenwicht te bieden aan twee dominante mythes in het heersende historische en etnografische discours over Afrika". Tot die mythes behoren de eerste ontmoeting en het conflict tussen de Europeanen met de lokale etnische groepen in Zuid-Afrika, en de "hardnekkige Europese mythe" over de onbedwingbare seksuele driften van de Afrikaanse man. Door de vermenging van Europese en Afrikaanse literaire tradities en door de introductie van een ironische vertelstrategie hoopte Brink dat *Die eerste lewe van Adamastor* een complexere vertelling zou worden dan slechts "een simpele verwerping van het heersende discours" ("Herontdekking" 197). Brink ziet een belangrijk verband tussen geschiedenis en literatuur.

Geschiedenis is volgens Brink ("Beschouwingen" 116) een "Babylonische spraakverwarring" die wordt geïnterpreteerd als "canon van algemene wijsheid". Literatuur kan volgens hem bijspringen in geschiedschrijving omdat feit en fictie onlosmakelijk met elkaar zijn verbonden. Mensen gaan hun ervaringen interpreteren met

behulp van taal en narratief: "Dit is het punt waar verhaal en geschiedenis elkaar raken en zich vermengen, waar de persoonlijke ervaring (in taal uitgedrukt) het publieke, het sociale of het politieke (ook in taal uitgedrukt) kruist" (Brink, "Beschouwingen" 121–2). Feit en fictie hoeven elkaar niet uit te sluiten. Geschiedenis wordt door dominante instanties geordend en neergeschreven. Zij hebben geen oog voor gebeurtenissen vanuit de invalshoek van de onderdrukte klassen. Volgens Brink ("Beschouwingen" 122) is dit het hoofdprobleem van de geschiedschrijving, er wordt namelijk aangenomen dat *geschiedenis* de "officiële, heersende interpretatie van de wereld" is. Pas wanneer er rekening wordt gehouden met de frustraties, de angsten en de zorgen van de sociale onderlaag, en als er moeite wordt gedaan om ook verschillende verslagen en documenten te lezen en te verwerken waarin zij aan het woord komen, dan pas wordt de "geschiedenis" realistischer en objectiever. Dat is wat Brink "verzet van binnenuit" noemt ("Beschouwingen" 122). Verhalen hebben volgens Brink ("Beschouwingen" 123) de oerfunctie zich tegen de stilte te verzetten, vandaar dat hun bijdrage tot geschiedschrijving niet te verloochenen valt.

"Canto V" en *Die eerste lewe van Adamastor* hebben met elkaar gemeen dat ze beide individuele, narratieve weergaven presenteren van bepaalde historische gebeurtenissen. Het epos doet dat vanuit het oogpunt van de "onderdrukker", Brink vanuit de invalshoek van T'kama, de "onderdrukte". Omdat elke vertelde geschiedenis een interpretatie is, worden de verhalen ideologische constructies waarin een objectieve weergave van de werkelijkheid onmogelijk is. In Brinks herschrijving van "Canto V" wordt er vanuit T'kama's oogpunt een nieuwe kijk gegeven op de gebeurtenissen. T'kama's verhaal illustreert volgens Brink ("Reimagining" 51) de voortdurende transgressie in de relatie tussen Europa en Afrika, tussen blank en zwart: "[…] one could summarise the whole enterprise of South African history as one of constant betrayal, from both sides of the historical divide". Adamastor biedt weerstand tegen geweld door in verschillende gedaantes zijn beschermende werk te doen en hierdoor de identificatie met het continent te versterken (Brink, "Reimagining" 50). In die *Eerste lewe van Adamastor* profileert T'kama-Adamastor zich als een rebel, een opstandeling die tegen de indringers van zijn bestaan en dat van de eigenheid van zijn stam vecht. Aan het einde van het verhaal legt hij zich niet neer bij het bedrog van de "Baardmanne", maar voorspelt dat zij hem niet klein zullen krijgen (*Adamastor* 78). Het kind van T'kama en Khois is het symbool van een vredevolle symbiose tussen twee culturen en hij zal verder blijven leven. Op metaforisch niveau kan T'kama als verpersoonlijking van Afrika worden geïnterpreteerd, die zal strijden tegen alles wat haar authenticiteit dreigt te vernietigen. Ook is T'kama de verliefde, naïeve man die zich aan het einde van het verhaal door zijn geliefde laat misleiden. Daarnaast verbeeldt hij ook een beschermheer en de wachter, die moeite heeft om te kiezen tussen zijn stam of zijn geliefde, maar toch het beste wil voor allebei. Hij probeert zo vredevol mogelijk problemen op te lossen en compromissen te sluiten (Engels 90–7).

Doordat auteurs zoals Brink, Krog, Fleischer, Verster, Moodie, enzovoorts zich Adamastor hebben toegeëigend, kunnen ze met zijn voorkomen en interpretatie spelen door hem bijvoorbeeld een nieuwe rol toe te kennen. De manier waarop Brink speelt met geschiedenis door het wezen te gebruiken, is een belangrijke aanloop naar de interpretatie van Adamastor in "The Chronicle of the Landman Family".

Adamastor in "The Chronicle of the Landman Family"

"The Chronicle of the Landman Family" is ingevoegd aan het einde van het boek *An Act of Terror*. Brinks lijvige thriller vertelt het verhaal van Thomas Landman, een jonge Afrikaner ten tijde van het apartheidsregime. Hij is lid van een geheime anti-apartheidsgroepering, "the Organization", die rond 1988 een politieke aanslag met een bomauto uitstippelt tegen de president van Zuid-Afrika. Het plan mislukt. De bom ontploft en verwondt enkele omstaanders. Thomas is genoodzaakt te vluchten en verschillende schuilnamen aan te nemen zodat zijn identiteit verborgen blijft. Als supplement heeft "The Chronicle of the Landman Family" een niet te miskennen functie. Via zijn persoonlijke reconstructie, waarbij de mythe van Adamastor de ruggengraat vormt, probeert Thomas zin te geven aan de gebeurtenissen waarin hij verzeild is geraakt. Daarnaast wil hij ook een andere blik op de genealogie werpen, omdat hij erachter is gekomen dat zijn grootvader bewust gebeurtenissen heeft vervormd of weggecijferd. Hij wil dus de geschiedenis herschrijven vanuit zíjn standpunt, net zoals T'kama. De manier waarop zowel T'kama als Thomas hun verleden (re)construeren, illustreert nauwgezet Brinks opvatting dat geschiedschrijving een bewust gecreëerd narratief is. Dit is zo in het geval van het verhaal dat wordt verteld door de Landmanfamilie. Hun geschiedenis is doorspekt met ideologie om zo bepaalde handelingen te kunnen motiveren. Het verhaalverloop wijst uiteindelijk uit dat bijna alles wat verteld wordt in het teken staat van de rechtvaardiging van het Afrikaner nationalistische gedachtengoed van Pieter Gerhardus Landman, Thomas' grootvader. "I believe his 'facts' were often informed by wishful thinking—but the impact was unforgettable", meent de verteller ("Chronicle" 797). Thomas Landman wil met zíjn versie van de genealogie deze hiaten opvullen en zo een andere zienswijze op de familiegeschiedenis presenteren, zodat hij zijn rebellie tegen de apartheidsregering historisch kan motiveren.

De vraag is natuurlijk waarom Adamastor naar voren komt in het verhaal. In het volgende citaat betrekt de verteller het mythische wezen in het verhaal:

> Ever since I first read Camoens, I have been seduced by the idea of interpreting my family history as a series of encounters with Adamastor, that dark, brooding Spirit of the Cape: how would my ancestors have shaped up, weighed in his great scales? *Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin?* But I am fascinated, too, by Nina's comment after we'd borrowed that musty little-read tome from the library: "We're not the victims of Adamastor, Thomas, we are his children." To see the successive generations of my family

> as avatars of Adamastor himself: his way of repeating and renewing, in each new age, the challenge against intruders and violators? No, that would be presumptuous!—why should he have chosen *us*? If he really were interested in selecting a family for his successive incarnations, they could not but have been black. […] And yet I continue to be haunted by Nina's remark. There can be no harm in playing the magic game of *if*: What *if* Adamastor had chosen the Landman family for his avatars down the centuries? How have we fared, what have we done to him? (Oh weep for Adamastor, he is dead.) ("Chronicle" 637–8)

Thomas bekent geobsedeerd te zijn door Adamastor, in die mate dat hij de familiegeschiedenis verbindt met het karakter van dit wezen. De zoektocht naar de diverse gedaantes van Adamastor begint bij een ontleding van zijn bovenstaande redenering. Interpreteert hij zijn familiegeschiedenis als een eeuwenlange conflictueuze confrontatie met het wezen, met negatieve gebeurtenissen? Of kiest hij ervoor om elk familielid te gaan beschouwen als een Adamastorfiguur, vechtend tegen kwalijke invloeden die hun leven uit balans brengt?

In het eerste gedeelte van het fragment komt Adamastor nog in zijn oorspronkelijke gestalte naar voren; als het duistere monster uit "Canto V" dat zich schuilhoudt in de Stormkaap. Aanvankelijk wilde Thomas Adamastor zo doen optreden, maar Nina maakte de volgende beslissende opmerking: "We're not the victims of Adamastor, Thomas, we are his children". De Landmanpersonages worden hierdoor avatars van Adamastor. De verteller weegt vervolgens interne dichotomieën af: Is het wel logisch dat Adamastor wil reïncarneren in blanke Afrikaners terwijl de indringers in "Canto V" blank waren? Daarnaast lijkt het alsof de verteller in "The Chronicle of the Landman Family" Adamastor ook als personificatie van Afrika naar voren laat treden: "What have we done to him?" vraagt hij zich af. Deze vraag kan op het gedrag van de familieleden worden geprojecteerd: Zijn zij een bedreiging voor Adamastor, voor Afrika? De geschiedenis van Afrika is een geschiedenis van "trial and error", beweert de verteller ("Chronicle" 638). Net zoals Brink in het interview reeds beweerde dat de geschiedenis tussen Afrika en Europa er één is vol met transgressies, vinden we dat terug in "The Chronicle of the Landman Family". Thomas' Afrikanervoorouders hebben altijd geprobeerd om een bepaalde relatie met het land en zijn bevolking op te bouwen, maar dat is nog niet echt succesvol geweest. Hebben ze ooit die connectie kunnen maken met Afrika? Vragen naar identificatie komen hier naar voren. Zou Adamastor zowel "wij" als "zij" kunnen zijn? Of zijn de Afrikaners eerder "de andere"? Is de poging tot het streven naar assimilatie en gelijkheid uiteindelijk het onuitgesproken onderliggende narratief in dit boek?

In het levensverhaal van elk personage uit de Landmanfamilie speelt de Adamastormythe een grote rol. Het onderwerp van verzet bij de Landman familie is echter moeilijker te verklaren in deze kroniek dan het was in *Die eerste lewe van Adamastor*.

Sommige familieleden richten zich tegen de San, anderen zijn dan weer vijandelijk tegen de Xhosa, de Engelsen of de Nederlanders. Zij verzetten zich tegen alles wat hun vertrouwde samenleving dreigt te versplinteren. Omdat zij zowel opvliegend en wreed als heldhaftig kunnen optreden ter verdediging van hun dierbaren, waarden en normen, doet de karakterisering van de Landmanfamilie soms meer denken aan de Adamastor die Camões heeft geïntroduceerd. In "Canto V" neemt hij eerder een beschermende positie in ten opzichte van Afrika. De uitspraak "we are his children" ("Chronicle" 637) is daarom een opmerking die zowel past bij T'kama als de Landmanfamilie omdat Adamastor generatie op generatie voortleeft. Agressie en verzet behoren tot wat Brink ("Reimagining" 51) de voortdurende "transgressie" heeft genoemd tussen de westerse indringers en de Afrikaanse bevolking.

In wat volgt, wordt nagegaan op welke manieren de personages weerstand bieden. Het zal duidelijk worden dat conflict, opstand en verzet ook hier nog steeds de centrale factoren zijn. Daardoor ligt dit onderzoek in de lijn van mijn vorige bijdrage. De verhalen die in mijn vorige onderzoek warden gebruikt, thematiseren allemaal een specifieke "clash of cultures" (Peirce 106). De verschillende manieren waarop de Adamastorincarnatie verzet pleegt in *An Act of Terror*, zijn hieronder thematisch ingedeeld.

Adamastor als opstandeling en dwarsligger

De primaire verschijning van Adamastor is die van het angstaanjagende en wraakzuchtige monster zoals Camões hem oorspronkelijk heeft weergegeven. Deze karakterkenmerken zijn dominant aanwezig in de personificaties in de Landmanfamilie. Zowel intern als extern geweld komt voor.

Op het gebied van intern geweld zijn Frans Jacobus Landman en Jan-Jonas Landman treffende voorbeelden. Zelfkastijding en -kwelling is hier de centrale overeenkomst tussen beide personages: "Deliberately seeking out punishment, and reveling in suffering, are experiences not unfamiliar to my tribe" ("Chronicle" 753). Net zoals de gekwelde Adamastor in "Canto V", zijn Frans Jacobus en Jan-Jonas rusteloze zielen. Bij Jan-Jonas leidt de rusteloosheid tot de opmerkelijke gewoonte om, gedurende zijn binnenlandse trektochten, muren te bouwen ("Chronicle" 697). Hij onderneemt deze repetitieve acties om de chaotische buitenwereld uit te sluiten. Het is het optreden van een getormenteerde figuur. Frans Jacobus Landman heeft een alcoholprobleem. Toen zijn vrouw Hendrina meeging met de traditionele Piet Retief-trek en hij weigerde om daaraan deel te nemen, is hij aan lager wal geraakt: "It seems possible that this was the time that Frans first turned to the bottle" ("Chronicle" 753). De vader van Thomas, Christiaan Beyers Landman, lijdt evenzeer aan een ondefinieerbare woede en frustratie die hij op een "onzichtbare" manier uitdrukt. Het verzet dat deze persoon pleegt, is individueel en op kleine schaal. "Behind the severely ordinary appearance, it is true, lurked unsuspected passions and rages that

expressed themselves in curious ways. […] He drove, not like a maniac, but like a calculating killer […]" ("Chronicle" 815).

Ook vormen van extern geweld zijn sterk aanwezig. Diederik Landmans bijnaam, "the Savage" ("Chronicle" 671), illustreert dit: "He lived, and died, in terms of brute, physical violence." Hij bewijst dat revolte ook in extreme gewelddadigheid kan resulteren. Zijn verzet is niet gericht tegen de staat, maar is veeleer geïnterioriseerd. Het onvermogen om te communiceren wordt gecompenseerd door brute agressie tegenover zijn zonen, maar voornamelijk tegen de San. Door zijn aangeboren racistische en superieure ingesteldheid, ziet hij de lokale bevolking aan voor barbaars. Het gedrag van zijn zoon Hans toont aan dat de ene Adamastorfiguur een ander Adamastorfiguur voortbrengt: weerstand roept weerstand op. Dit is een gelijkenis met "Canto V", want Camões vormde zijn Adamastor ook om tot een agressief wezen dat de Portugezen kwaadgezind was:

> Op deze plaats zal ik mij naar mijn plan
> Hardvochtig wreken op wie mij ontdekte.
> Maar denk niet dat die straf voldoende is
> Voor jullie arrogante koppigheid! (Camões 122)

Deze furieuze, ontembare demon nestelde zich in het hart van Diederik Landman die, net zoals Adamastor, verkeerd wordt begrepen.

Het geweldloos verzet is een karakterkenmerk van Adamastor dat reeds voorkwam in *Die eerste lewe van Adamastor*. Wanneer Khois weigert om nog deel te nemen aan de trektocht, kiest hij ervoor om bij haar te blijven en over haar te waken. In dit gebaar scheurt hij zich af van de verwachtingen van de stam. Dit is een geweldloos statement waarin T'kama liefdevolle toenadering zoekt tot haar (*Adamastor* 42–3). Een verpersoonlijking van conflict lokt dus ook de tegenovergestelde, pacifistische beweging uit. Er zijn een tweetal personages in de Landman familiegeschiedenis die in deze categorie kunnen worden ondergebracht: Carel Guillaume Landman en David Gideon Landman. Allebei verzetten ze zich passief tegen de regering door expliciet te weigeren met de machtsstructuren te collaboreren. David Gideon Landman sloeg meerdere malen de eis om belastingen te betalen op zijn huis af ("Chronicle" 740) en weigerde halsstarrig om mee te vechten in de oorlog: "Violence was not the way to do it, he said; there was another way" ("Chronicle" 742). Hij deelt allesbehalve het Afrikaner gedachtengoed en maakt deel uit van het geweldloos verzet tegen de beslissing van enkele Afrikaners dat de Khoi niet aanwezig mogen zijn in de kerk. Hierdoor beslist hij om samen met zijn gezin alleen nog aanwezig te zijn tijdens de gemengde kerkdiensten ("Chronicle" 730). Zijn geweldloos verzet is gericht tegen de dominante ideologie. Op een vergelijkbare manier wilde Carel Guillaume Landman geen verdragen signeren omdat hij vond dat hij daar niets mee te maken had. Daarnaast werd hij moslim, de enige Landman die nadrukkelijk zijn rug toekeerde naar het dominante religieuze discours in zijn familie-

geschiedenis ("Chronicle" 665). Carel Guillaume en David Gideon Landman nemen een passieve houding aan gedurende turbulente historische gebeurtenissen, waardoor ze zich volledig distantiëren van de sociale hiërarchie en de status van de blanke Afrikaner. Eenzelfde afwijzing van de sociale hiërarchie tonen Jan-Jonas Landman en Hendrick Willemszoon Landman door hun liefdesaffaires met een gekleurde vrouw. Hendrick Willemszoon Landman wilde zich evenmin aan de eisen van de samenleving conformeren door niet in de buurt van de "Free Burghers" te wonen. Voor deze daad wordt hij keer op keer door "the commander" op het matje geroepen. Zonder resultaat. Hij blijft zijn eigen zin doen ("Chronicle" 642).

Benjamin Landman wordt gedurende zijn verblijf aan de Kaap geconfronteerd met "confused notions about liberty, equality and fraternity" ("Chronicle" 704). Aangestoken door deze revolutionaire ideeën ontstond in 1795 een patriottenbeweging die weigerde nog langer onder heerschappij van de Engelsen te staan. Benjamin sluit zich aan bij de rebellengroeperingen ("Chronicle" 716). Zijn trauma over de afwijzing door zijn vader is weerspiegeld in zijn rebellie tegen de staat ("Chronicle" 720). Hij legt dan ook spontaan de wapens neer wanneer hij ontdekt dat zijn vader aan dezelfde kant strijdt. Frans Jacobus Landman gaat tijdens de oorlogen in Xhosagebied wonen waar hij de kost verdient als wapenhandelaar: "He'd had enough of British rule. […] It seems to me a calculated act of defiance to His Majesty's government […]. He certainly became a much sought-after character, and at one stage there was a price of five hundred cattle on his head" ("Chronicle" 751). De daden van Gabriël Landman worden door de verteller vergeleken met het meest essentiële kenmerk van Adamastor, "to rid the land of those who merely come to rob or rule; to preserve an angry freedom […] which is as ancient and inalienable as the cry of a hadeda or the arc described by the horns of an oryx defending its calf against a predator" ("Chronicle" 775). Aan het begin van de Anglo-Boerenoorlog twijfelt Frans nog over zijn deelname, maar nadat zijn gezin naar de concentratiekampen is gebracht, verandert de overlevingsdrang van Frans in een persoonlijke wraakactie. Hij blijft zelfs bij de laatste fractie van de rebellerende beweging die na de overgave van Pretoria in 1900, ondanks alle bedreigingen, bleef vechten ("Chronicle" 782–3). De beweegredenen van Thomas Landman, die deelnam aan de aanslag tegen de apartheidsregering, zijn echter anders dan die van zijn voorouders. Een altruïstische invalshoek is bij hem van primair belang. Daarnaast profileert hij zich met zijn antiapartheidsdaden als de tegenpool van zijn voorouders. Zij redeneerden vanuit hun eigen blanke, Afrikaanse standpunt, maar Thomas neemt het op voor de onderdrukten. Hij zet de eerder racistische invalshoek van zijn familiegeschiedenis op zijn kop.

Adamastor als beschermheer

Wanneer Nina tegen Thomas zegt dat zij de kinderen van Adamastor zijn, insinueert ze dat zij onlosmakelijk deel zijn van Afrika en dat zij het moeten opnemen voor

het continent ("Chronicle" 637). Dit beeld op Adamastor sluit aan bij de idee dat de motivatie voor agressie kan liggen in het beschermen van wat eigen is. T'kama wordt in *Die eerste lewe van Adamastor* een beschermheer, zowel van Khois als van zijn stam. In "Canto V" toont een ommekeer van perspectief aan hoe Adamastor in plaats van een gevaarlijk en op wraak belust wezen, een bezorgde avatar kan zijn van het continent waarover hij waakt:

> Omdat u de verboden grenzen schendt
> En zich waagt op mijn wijde, door geen vreemd
> Of eigen hout doorploegde oceanen,
> Waarover ik al vele eeuwen waak […] (Camões 122)

Wanneer hij alle gruwelijkheden voorziet die zijn volk ten deel zullen vallen, wil hij de invloed van de Portugezen (en bij uitbreiding de blanken) zo ver mogelijk van het vasteland houden. Adamastor waarschuwt hier voor de latere exploitaties van het continent.

In "The Chronicle of the Landman Family" vinden we onder de Adamastorincarnaties personen terug die op de een of andere manier bescherming bieden. Dit begint bij de eerste voorouder uit de familie Landman. Hendrick Willemszoon Landman trouwde met het slavenmeisje Cathrijn om haar te doen ontkomen aan de gruwelijke straffen die zijn opgelegd aan slaven die probeerden weg te lopen: "I am convinced that this was all Hendrick had been concerned about: to save a child from cruel punishment […]" ("Chronicle" 647). Hans Landman, de zoon van Diederik Landman, is eveneens een beschermende figuur. Hij bevrijdde de gevangengenomen San van het juk van zijn vader door hun boeien open te breken en hen naar buiten te loodsen ("Chronicle" 680–1). Zo wil hij zijn vader duidelijk maken dat wat hij doet in de "naam van God" allesbehalve goede daden zijn. Aan het einde van het verhaal sterft Hans als martelaar en vrijbuiter, zijn dood is het resultaat van de gruwelijkheden die Diederik aanrichtte ("Chronicle" 683). Thomas Landman is de laatste beschermheer in het rijtje. De Adamastor die zich in hem verschuilt, is het kwade monster dat op zoek gaat naar gerechtigheid voor wat de bevolking is overkomen. De acties die hij heeft ondernomen tegen het apartheidsbewind benadrukken dit. Zij die de functie van beschermheer aannemen, kijken over sociale, politieke en religieuze grenzen heen en doorbreken die. Er is geen sprake van een sociale hiërarchie of ongelijkheid in hun denkbeeld. Daarentegen omarmen zij diversiteit en willen niet dat dit in het gedrang komt.

Andere gelijkenissen met Adamastor

Er zijn bepaalde soorten verzet in de kroniek die niet in een thematische categorie kunnen worden ingedeeld. Natuurlijk vinden ze plaats binnen een specifiek soort conflict, maar de vormen die ze aannemen zijn minder vanzelfsprekend als de

deelname aan rebellengroeperingen of de weigering tot het ondertekenen van een manifest.

Brink lijkt in *Die eerste lewe van Adamastor* nog niet te zijn ingegaan op de profetische gaven van Adamastor in "Canto V". Hij maakt daarentegen gebruik van een retrospectieve vertelinstantie. Enkel wanneer T'kama op sterven ligt, maakt T'kama een voorspelling: "Julle sal my nie doodkry nie. Môre sal julle van nuuts af aan moet kom probeer. En elke nuwe dag as die son uitkom. Vrek sal ek nie vrek nie. Nie vir julle nie" (*Adamastor* 79). De auteur zinspeelt op de volgende incarnaties van het wezen die zijn beschermende werk verder zullen zetten. Ik verwees reeds naar de personificatie van het hele continent in Adamastor. Niet alleen staat Adamastor voor de complete "Afrika-ervaring", maar T'kama illustreert ook de weerstand van het continent tegenover haar indringers. Dit is ook iets waar Viljoen (100–1) op wees in de interpretatie van Adamastor in het gedicht van Antjie Krog. De profetische gave van Adamastor keert terug in Petrus Landman. Petrus voorspelt de toekomst met behulp van de geornamenteerde familiespiegel. Interessant in deze redenering is het volgende: "It was even rumoured in later years that he'd 'seen' the gold of the Witwatersrand long before it was mined; but that no one had paid attention" ("Chronicle" 766). Hierin doelt de verteller ook op de grotere, maatschappelijke functie van Petrus Landman. Adamastor wordt alweer niet gehoord, terwijl hij toch duidelijk de toekomstige sociale en economische vooruitgang, maar ook de daarbij horende exploitatie had kunnen bijsturen. De mensen wilden niet luisteren naar de voorspelling van het "monster".

Vergelijkbaar is het verzet van Fransoois Landmans. Hij bouwde een grote ark in de woestijn waarin hij zijn gezin zou kunnen huisvesten tijdens de hemelse zondvloed ("Chronicle" 657). Hij was een man "who stares right through others, as if they do not exist, seeing only the horizon, the invisible, terrifying, unspeakable truths inside the stones and earth and the hard light of Africa" ("Chronicle" 656). In "Canto V" voorziet Adamastor de rampzalige toekomst van zowel de Portugezen als de Afrikanen. Fransoois maakt een ark, een veilige nederzetting, om diegenen die hij liefheeft te kunnen herbergen.

In *Die eerste lewe van Adamastor* treedt T'kama naar voren als verzoener. Van de taalles die hij aan Khois geeft, gaat een universele liefde uit wanneer twee mensen, ongeacht de biologische verschillen, de intentie hebben om elkaar te leren verstaan (*Adamastor* 43). Dit ogenblik van toenadering tot Khois behoort ook tot het geweldloze verzet. In "The Chronicle of the Landman Family" is deze "verzoenende" stijl minder opvallend aanwezig. De verzoening zit bijvoorbeeld in de assimilatie met de lokale bevolking. Fransoois Lodewickus Landman en zijn vrouw Manon trekken samen rond zoals de Khoi, adapteren hun zeden en gewoonten en spreken hun taal ("Chronicle" 655). De identificatie met de Khoi is een reactie tegen eender welke maatschappelijke hiërarchie en sociale verwachtingen. De interraciale relaties van

Jan-Jonas en Hendrick Willemszoon kunnen daarnaast eveneens geïnterpreteerd worden als een manier om toenadering te zoeken.

Conflict, verzet en verzoening zijn de kernelementen in Adamastors reïncarnaties en in Brinks oeuvre. Er kan naar het wezen worden gezocht in de meeste romans van de auteur. *Kennis van die aand* (1973) bijvoorbeeld, vertoont verschillende gelijkenissen met zowel "Canto V" als met "The chronicle of the Landman family". *Kennis van die aand* brengt een personage tot leven die zich volledig overgeeft aan de liefde, en daardoor zowel zijn eigen leven al dat van zijn geliefde in gevaar brengt. Naast een tragisch liefdesverhaal, is *Kennis van die aand* ook een voorbeeld van "zuivere" rebellie. Jozef, als jonge kleurling, breekt zichzelf uit de determinerende context van segregatie en mag verder studeren. Zijn voorkeur gaat uit naar theater. Tijdens apartheid zal hij theaterstukken herschrijven en daar een sterke politieke een maatschappijkritische invalshoek aan toevoegen. Zijn opvoeringen in Zuid-Afrika zijn een succes, maar hij wordt voortdurend geboycot door de regering. De liefde tussen een zwarte man en een blanke vrouw en het verzet van Jozef tegen de staat met behulp van theater, zijn dus thematische kenmerken die behoren tot elementen die in dit artikel verbonden zijn aan de mythe van Adamastor.

Conclusie

André Brink behoudt in zijn kroniek bepaalde overeenkomsten met het basisverhaal in *Os Lusiadas*, "Canto V", en zijn roman *Die eerste lewe van Adamastor*. Verschillende overlappende verhaalelementen zijn in deze bijdrage met elkaar verbonden, zoals het thema van verzet. Adamastor wordt in deze kroniek door Brink niet langer als een personage gebruikt, maar als een metafoor. In de verpersoonlijking van Adamastor in elke Landman speelt Brink met de oneindige interpretatiemogelijkheden van Adamastor—gaande van een goed, heldhaftig of rebellerend wezen tot een lafhartig, gevaarlijk en racistisch monster. Hiermee tast de auteur een continuüm van verbeeldingsaspecten af, waarin hij verschillende mogelijkheden met elkaar vergelijkt. Een geschiedkundige constellatie, hier het Afrikanernationalisme, wordt de grondslag waarop de transformatie van het monster is geijkt. Doordat Thomas Landman, de verteller, het geïdealiseerde verhaal van de familiegeschiedenis heeft weerlegd in zijn kroniek, verwijst hij naar het grootste probleem van geschiedschrijving: de ideologische vervorming. De voorouders van de Landmanfamilie hebben helemaal geen zuiver Afrikanerbloed. Hun familiestamboom bestaat daarentegen uit een amalgaam van verschillende achtergronden, culturen en religies. Net zoals de demografie van Zuid-Afrika zijn zij multi-etnisch en kosmopolitisch. Thomas ontmaskert het "regte Afrikanerskap" door de elementen uit de familiegeschiedenis te onthullen die zijn vader en grootvader angstvallig voor hem verborgen hielden.

Het opvallende verschil tussen deze familiekroniek en *Die eerste lewe van Adamastor* is dat T'kama-Adamastor een fysieke aanwezigheid is. Het personage waarbij de

oorspronkelijke Adamastor het meest aanleunt, is Thomas. Hij heeft zich als activist geëngageerd om de apartheid aan te klagen met als doel Zuid-Afrika wakker te schudden en leefbaarder te maken voor de onderdrukte bevolking. De drijfveren van de Adamastorincarnaties zijn verzet, rebellie, een doorgezette vechtlust tegen een duidelijk geïdentificeerde partij: de lokale bevolking of de Britten. Indien er "neen" werd gezegd tegen de regering, dan was dat vaak uit persoonlijke overwegingen en niet vanuit een altruïstische ingesteldheid.

Pieter Gerhardus Landman en Thomas Landman zijn uitzonderingen op deze regel. De motieven van Thomas Landman zijn "zuiverder" omdat hij met zijn aanslag mensen wilde aanzetten tot reflectie. Net zoals Adamastor zich van zijn onzichtbare ketens wil bevrijden, probeert elke Landman zich los te breken uit de klauwen van een onzichtbare automatiserende en determinerende kracht. Daarnaast gebruikt Brink Adamastor ook op een meer allegorisch niveau nog steeds als de verpersoonlijking van het continent. Dit omdat het gerichte geweld door de Afrikaners, hier enkele Landmanzonen, tegenover de lokale bevolking alludeert op de eeuwenlange transgressie tussen Europa en Afrika en de moeilijke relatie tussen verschillende samenlevingsgroepen. Tegelijkertijd ademen de verzoenende daden van bepaalde leden de hoop tot een vredevolle symbiose uit. Dit verlangen accumuleert paradoxaal in de aanslag op de regering. Thomas is verbonden met de planning van deze aanslag. Hiermee nuanceert hij deze hoop en toont hij aan dat zo'n symbiose nog veel tijd en inspanning zal vergen.

Door het voorbeeld van *Kennis van die aand* kan er beweerd worden dat Adamastorincarnaties reeds embryonaal aanwezig waren in het vroegere werk van Brink. Zou hij er dan toch meer hebben gecreëerd dan hij dacht? Zijn oeuvre bevat opstandige personages van elk mogelijk gender, leeftijd en ras. Hierboven werd benadrukt dat Adamastor op een metaforisch niveau de verscheidenheid van Afrika representeert. Dit kan eveneens beweerd worden van ander personages in Brinks romans, omdat ook zij getuigen van de grote diversiteit in Zuid-Afrika en omdat zij elk op hun eigen manier vechten voor rechtvaardigheid. Zij blijven de eeuwenoude "clash of cultures" verbeelden.

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Redreaming ways of seeing: Ben Okri's intuitive creativity

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Redreaming ways of seeing: Ben Okri's intuitive creativity

Drawing on *A Way of Being Free* (1997) and *A Time for New Dreams* (2011) among other Okrian texts, this article is a discussion of the notion of redreaming ways of seeing through intuitive creativity. The argument is divided into three parts: the role of intuitive creativity; redreaming ways of seeing in *The Landscapes Within* (1981); and intuition or "the landscapes within". The deployment of John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* and Roland Barthes's *Image, Music, Text* posits an Afro-Western worldview in which the title of Okri's second novel effectively becomes a simulacrum for the lead character's psyche that supplants character per se, so that the "landscapes within"—the psyche—becomes the eponymous hero of the tale. The contention is that the complex inner workings of the mind of the artist-protagonist, Omovo, is both the signifier and the signified. This is supported by analyses of an Okri poem and extracts from the novel. I argue that, in contrast to its inter-art variants, René Magritte's 1935 *Le faux miroir* and *La clef des songes*, the novel invokes a neo-Platonic/Coleridgean concept of the "enlightening" eye as a correlative of Okri's notion of the inward visionary quest of the dreaming "soul" "opening towards infinity". The article concludes by briefly justifying the article's claim that, in this novel, art deals with inner reality, with "the landscapes within". **Keywords:** dreaming soul, intuitive creativity, Ben Okri, psyche, *The Landscapes Within*.

Introduction: the role of intuitive creativity

That Ben Okri's *oeuvre* reveals a preoccupation with an interweaving of dream, creativity, ways of seeing and intuition is borne out by a seminal statement in "Plato's dream", a chapter in his *A Time for New Dreams*: "All our creativity, our innovations, our discoveries come from being able first to see what is there, and not there; to hear what is said and not said. Above all to think clearly; to be nourished by silence. And beyond that—the art of intuition" (*New Dreams* 27). This resonates with Carl Jung's adage: "Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakens" (Jung, "Letter to Fanny Bowditch" n. p.).

The narrative of Okri's novel, *In Arcadia* (2002), is interspersed with "Intuitions". A pertinent instance of "intuitive creativity" can be found in *A Way of Being Free*: "Stories are one of the highest and most invisible forms of human creativity" (120). To awaken "the art of intuition" is thus to invoke poetic insight or mystical serendipities through heightened consciousness or ontopoiesis.

Prominent phenomenologists, such as the late Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka ("Aes-

thetic expression of the moral sentiment" 11), hold that phenomenology or the ontopoiesis of life and contemporary scientific inquiry can meet "because the creative act of the human being offers royal access to the common enigmas of both".[1] "All great stories are enigmas," Okri avers in his aphorism no. 97 in *A Way of Being Free* (126). In *A Mystery Feast* (15), Okri asserts that civilisations are distinguished by their "imaginative dimension". Reflecting on evidence of imaginative productivity in ancient Greece and Egypt, he declares that it is the imagination that "dreams that which knowledge makes real" and he concludes that "imagination is the proto-reality" (*Being Free* 126), as intimated in Jung's adage and my opening quotation from *A Time for New Dreams*. Similarly, the basic tenet of George Rowley's thesis in his discussion on the principles of Chinese art is the close kinship between artist and mystic. Reinforcing the affinity between artist and mystic, Rowley argues that while the mystic seeks "life more abundant", the artist "becomes a creator" (3). This resounds with Okri's belief in the primacy of the imaginary: the creative discovering act in storytelling, in turn, defines the numinous notion of "intuitive creativity".

The intention of this article is to explore a tentative idea of the creative horizon of Okri's notion of redreaming ways of seeing. "One of our much-neglected qualities is the creative ability to reshape our world. Our planet is under threat. We need a new one-planet thinking," says Okri in *A Time for New Dreams* (145). The phrases "redreaming ways of seeing" and "intuitive creativity" are therefore invoked to show that Okri's continual play of referentiality between and within his multi-generic texts foregrounds the composite or holistic nature of an Afro-Western cultural and historical context and heritage. As a Nigerian-born Londoner, Okri's entrapment through nature and nurture is in pre-existing patterns of thought, motif and form that tell of an inner conviction of mysticism and the eternal presence of the ancestors. And, as Rowley attests, these spiritual roots "lie deeply buried in the early orientation of the different cultures. They are the intangibles which embody the hopes and longings of a people; they are the incommensurables which determine the answers to the three basic issues of experience, Nature, Man, and God" (Rowley 3).

The symbiosis of the role of the dreaming imagination and intuitive creativity in art can be illustrated in the opening stanza to Okri's poem, "The difficulty of seeing" in *Wild* that points to the enigma of experience:

> It feels odd to look long
> At a corpse or a leaf:
> It disturbs one's belief. (*Wild* 62)

This tercet alludes to the mystical conjunction between life (leaf) and death (corpse), and the way in which seeing impacts upon believing. Then, moving from a general observation to the inner affect, the poet is specific:

> I found it hard to see

My mother's face;
The more I looked,
The more her face eluded me.
I see her perfectly
In dreams, or when I don't try. (*Wild* 62)

The closing couplet to this insight into the elusive nature of visual recall or eidetic memory is movingly evocative. It reads:

Then long afterwards
I wonder why I suddenly cry. (*Wild* 62)

Here, a synaesthesia of the senses coalesces: a mirage becomes a fleeting illusion of reality, but only in dreams, while the elusion of perception evokes the heartfelt grief of bereavement as the poet attempts to re-imagine the beloved visage of his late mother. This poem at once echoes incidents in *The Landscapes Within* and reflects on the opening poem in *Wild* entitled, "My mother sleeps" (9–10). Both poems transpose into poetic form Okri's aphorism: "Love is the greatest creativity of them all, and the most blessed" (*Landscapes* 125).

Given that the basis for such creation or recreation is the imagination, but also involves the elixir of love plus such faculties as the senses, intuition and belief, the resultant artistic product must be both intuitively universal and culture-specific. The art work itself (be it performance, text, sculpture or painting) embodies and reveals the spirit of a people. As Rowley posits: "that spirit is so manifest that we seldom stop to ask why this pottery is Greek or that sculpture is Hindu, or why this figure must be Italian or that landscape English […] Each culture seems to have had a special bent" (3). Yet, as intimated in the opening stanza of "The difficulty of seeing", that spirit also transcends cultural borders.

Acclaimed South African sculptor and poet, Pitika Ntuli, notes that, "the concept of African art, has been, and continues to be much contested" (10). It is important, therefore, to expand upon how Ben Okri can be defined in the context of intuitive creativity. His extensive travels, catholic reading tastes, incisive mind and artistic temperament have inevitably impacted on his ideological frame of reference. *Anagnorisis* or discovery of the true nature of one's own situation, keen observation and the absorption of influences from other times and other spaces are natural correlatives. Not unnaturally, therefore, his worldview or *Weltanschauung* is one of interconnectedness, interrelationships and interdependence, on the one hand, and of cosmic relationships, on the other. His role as creative artist is not unlike that of a *sangoma*, such as Ntuli, or a high-ranking healer: a mystical thinker.

The introduction criss-crosses reference to several Okrian texts to illustrate my contention that for Okri—as for other African writers—the way of seeing is not pri-

marily through religion, philosophy or science but, as indicated in the amalgam of Okrian quotations above, is through art as the product of a grounded imagination. "When we see the unseen, hear the unspoken, that will be something amazing," says the intrusive authorial voice in Okri's latest novel, *The Age of Magic* (256). The plain prose meaning of this periphrasis is "redreaming ways of seeing".

In *The Landscapes Within,* Okri imagines ways in which to ameliorate multifaceted losses brought about by the bleak societal dysfunction in Nigeria. As he avers in *A Way of Being Free,* "Whatever resilience has kept wounded people and devastated continents here, alive, can be transfigured to make them strong, confident, and serene. They have to question everything, in order to rebuild the future. They have to *redream* the world" (132, emphasis added).

Redreaming ways of seeing in *The Landscapes Within*

Set in war-torn Nigeria in the aftermath of the Biafran War, the story of Omovo in *The Landscapes Within* "begins" *in medias res*, with the recollection of a recurring nightmare, indicative of the subconscious mind grappling with the trauma of having witnessed the brutality of civil war. So, not only does the dream-inspired discourse predate both diegetic time and time of narration, but the narrative is also situated within a collective African unconscious. The novel is prefaced by two nightmarish dreams recorded in a real/fictive notebook; dreams which, in turn, become embedded in the text as a dreamtime echo of the novel's first climatic point at the end of Part One of this four-part novel. The narrative incident as formulation of the dream is a night-time encounter by two lost youngsters, Omovo and his journalist buddy, Keme, with the mutilated body of a young girl child in a park, bordering the beach. The incident and its dream replay dismantle essentialist notions of Nigeria; they leave an indelible "stain" of "guilt" (*Landscapes* 67) on the mind of twenty-year-old Omovo. This is exacerbated by his fictive memory of having helplessly [eye]-witnessed, at the age of nine, the wanton brutality of government forces against the Igbos during the Nigerian civil war of 1967–70.

These "incidents" not only create a hybrid portrait of the atrocities of civil war—underlined by later reference to past atrocities, the slave trade and colonialism, as well as to the present tragedy of neo-colonialism—but they also suggest that the sharing of horrific sights can connect human beings in empathy with one another, as Sope Maithufi (86) notes with regard to Okri's novel *Dangerous Love* (1988). Through these exophoric dynamics, the reader is projected into the historic or profane, concomitant with the mythic or sacred within the fictional as I observed in my reading of Margaret Atwood (Gray, "Divinatory simulacra in the novels of Margaret Atwood" 854). What is important for the general reader is that dream and intuitive creativity supersede anthropological or ethnographical factors.

According to Jane Wilkinson (2), Okri claims to imagine "two kinds of realities" in

The Landscapes Within (in his aphorism no. 8). There is the tale of life in the slums of Lagos and the socio-political situation in post-civil war Nigeria; and then there is the tale of the inner workings of the mind of the young artist, Omovo, and the creative process in which he is intuitively involved. This section focuses on the trajectory of the latter which is towards "the moment" (*Landscapes* 272) when, in an epiphanic illumination or *axis mundi* (Gray, "When chaos is the god of an era: Rediscovering an *axis mundi* in Ben Okri's *Starbook*" 128–45) "the landscapes without synchronise with the landscapes within" (*Landscapes* 206). The synchronicity effectively illustrates intuitive creativity within a specifically African perception of proto-reality. Contrary to a reality that maintains "clear ontological boundaries between what […] is usually designated as observed and imagined experience, material and magical phenomena, and real and fictional worlds", for Okri, as Derek Wright observes, "different and disparate worlds appear to coexist; there is an indeterminacy with regard to where literal reality ends and metaphor begins, a habitual elision of figurative and narrative space" (140).

This early novel can thus be read as an inquiry into ways of seeing informed by the process of intuitive creativity, as seen through the eyes of a prescient young black artist. Here, words seem to cast off their usual idiomatic sense; expressions fall painfully apart as the artist's vision shifts between what is seen and not seen. Consider the scene when, embarrassed but creatively aroused by the reaction of two men for having chastised some youngsters for taunting a goat and having experienced a lengthy "dry season" (*Landscapes* 4), Omovo rushes home to his drawing. In a prime example of intuitive creativity, "He worked and reworked the tentative lines, curves and shadings a hundred times […] In the end he felt he had captured something more strange and real than the original sensation" (*Landscapes* 7). Of significance, here, is the conjoining of the sensual and the visual, as illustrated in Okri's poem about the difficulties of seeing, quoted in my introduction. This novelistic incident concludes with the forcefulness of the creative process, devoid of logic—a recreation of the seen that plunges the experience and the telling thereof into the surreal:

> Omovo experienced a pure strain of joy.
>
> He spoke quietly to the drawings: *I have never seen you before. But it is wonderful that you are here.*
>
> "Omovo-o! Wetin be that you draw?" asked one of the compound boys.
>
> "Why you draw the tree so?"
>
> "Who tell you say na tree, eh?"
>
> "If no be tree den wetin e be?"
>
> "Mushroom. It be 'like big mushroom'."
>
> "Na lie!" (*Landscapes* 7)

Here, the implied distillation of sense experience and perception, the "pure strain of joy" in the act of creation may have been fleeting—the reverie broken by mun-

dane reality—but it evokes the mystical. The young artist is at once surprised and enchanted by his own drawing thus created and is moved to address the anthropomorphised artefact directly in hushed tones, one suspects so as not to disrupt the mystical experience. Becoming conscious of the "trifling argument" the work was causing, and looking at "the many sweaty, intent, indifferent faces", "a certain panic rose inside him". "Look," he said aloud. "Why don't you people just go away and leave me alone?" (*Landscapes* 7) Then, refusing to respond to a stranger's offer to buy the painting for resale to "Europeans", Omovo signs his charcoal etching and entitles it "Related losses" (*Landscapes* 8). The appellation encapsulates the pivotal theme of loss in this novel, prefiguring the later filching of the etching as well as the theft of his final painting of a faceless dead girl from his dream, likewise entitled, "Related Losses". This recalls the opening stanza to Okri's poem, "The difficulty of seeing" (*Wild* 62), quoted in the introduction, although the poem was written much later than his second novel.

In a different but pertinent context, John Berger considers what may be gained or lost by the intuitive creativity at play here: "The painter's way of seeing is reconstituted by the marks he makes on the canvass or paper" (3). Berger then shifts to reception aesthetics saying, "Although every image embodies a way of seeing, our perception or appreciation of an image depends on our own way of seeing […] the more imaginative the work, the more profoundly it allows us to share the artist's experience of the visible" (Berger 3). Paradoxically, Omovo's fictional audience is either "indifferent" or lacking in artistic perception—unable to distinguish between tree and mushroom, causing a sense of "panic" in the young artist. Is the implication perhaps that civil war not only kills innocence, but also stultifies creative sensibility in ordinary citizens caught in the fray, so that loss of life and loss of spirit are two sides of the same coin in internecine strife? As noted in my earlier reading of the novel as an unfinished symphony, the pivotal trope (or figure of thought) in Okri's novel is the interweaving of an ever-shifting pattern of loss and revelation, experience and (artistic) formulation, dream and reality (Gray, "The Creative Imagination in Ben Okri's *The Landscapes Within* (1981)" 21–31).

Okri perceives of all art as storytelling, insisting in *The Mystery Feast* (15) that "[a] painting on a cave wall of a man pursuing a bison is a story. The frescoes of Giotto in Assise are distilled stories". It can be argued, therefore, that Omovo's titling of his paintings signifies the untold story(ies) of deprivation, trauma and longing embedded in the psyche of the emergent young artist who produces the art works, as well as in those of his fellow audience. Elaborating on the alchemy of artistic product—be it painting or story—in *A Way of Being Free* Okri muses: "It is easy to forget how mysterious and mighty stories are. They do their work in silence, invisibly. They work with all the internal materials of the mind and self. They become part of you while changing you" (120).

This fragment just quoted concludes with a sombre caution to both reader and teller that doubles as a comment on the reactions of Omovo and his onlookers to his mysterious mushroom/tree painting: "Beware of the stories you read or tell: subtly, at night, beneath the waters of consciousness, they are altering your world" (*Landscapes* 7). Suggestive of the enigmatic nature of story, Okri elucidates in *The Mystery Feast*: "when we tell stories the ages awaken, when we listen to stories our future takes clearer shape" (15).

Citing the opening incident of the artist's decision to shave his head, and soon thereafter standing in the rain savouring "the flesh of his head tingl[ing]" (*Landscapes* 6), Alain Severac notes that the "scene constitutes the luminary aesthetic statement" postulating "a flayed sensitivity as a prerequisite of artistic creation" (76). In the context of Okri's claim in *A Way of Being Free* for the imagination as "one of the highest gifts we have" (126), coupled with the meaning of the Benin name Omovo—a (male) child from above—the shaven head is a complex symbol: a local signifier of loss (Omovo had just lost his mother); but it is also a way of "feeling the body from within" (78) to use Eckhart Tolle's term, of self-awareness stimulating the imaginative faculty. The "child from above", an *abiku* or spirit child exists liminally "somewhere in the interspace between the spirit world and the Living," says Okri (Ross 337). He explains that the *abiku*, the central figure in his famed "famished road" trilogy, lives "simultaneously at different levels of consciousness and in different territories" (see Wilkinson 53). It can therefore be argued that the sensation of rain beating on Omovo's bald head allows Okri's desire for "a new one-planet thinking" or the joy of Being to flow into everything. Rain on the shaven head facilitates insight, enabling the young artist to be more alert, to *see* more clearly. In effect, it opens what Albert Camus calls "a whole proliferation of phenomena" (27) to intuition, to the heart. An awakened consciousness, or what Tymieniecka ("Phenomenology of Space and Time" 12) calls ontopoiesis, leads to what Okri repeatedly refers to as "The Moment" (*Landscapes* 206, 272, 286). This is metonymic for enlightenment or *satori*, a flash of insight.[2] The shaven head thus evokes "the transcendence of the egoic mind and the possibility of living in an entirely new state of consciousness, of 'learning all over again to *see*, to be attentive, to focus consciousness' […] turning every idea and every image […] into a privileged moment" (Camus 26). By contrast, Berger would perceive images—such as the shaven head or the mushroom tree—more objectively, as "a direct testimony about the world which surrounded other people at other times" (2–3). He imagines an unspoken dialogue with the visible world, "an attempt to explain how, either metaphorically or literally *you* see things, and an attempt to discover how '*he* sees things'" (Berger 3, emphasis added). Roland Barthes is more linguistically inclined, asserting that "there is no perception without immediate categorization" (28). In this context, both these images—the bald head and the mushroom-like tree—are devoid of denotation: they have their own "inner metalanguage". This is closer to both

Rowley's and my earlier argument about African ways of seeing. Barthes explains that this language is that of perceptive connotation embedded in "its very social existence" (29), likewise alluded to in the discussion on African epistemology. Barthes explains: "[T]he text constitutes a parasitic message designed to connote the image, to 'quicken' it with one or more second-order signifieds" (25). However, contrary to my reading, the shaven head signifier would, in these terms, seemingly remain a culturally deferred sign, rather than a more complex conflation of signifier and signified. Pondering the purpose of the signifier, Barthes muses, "its purpose is less the analysis of the sign than its dislocation" (166). As already intimated, in a Nigerian cultural context, shaving one's head is a customary sign of bereavement. In this poetic novel and in the context of redreaming ways of seeing, the experiential rests on the perceptual and sensory, giving rise to the cerebral and ultimately the spiritual. In this context, rain on the shaven head is symbolic: it signifies an awakening of a sleeping world, of making what is seen vivid to the mind, and perhaps even of seeing with the third eye (as suggested by the cover illustration to *The Landscapes Within* as well as a painting of an all-seeing eye by Omovo's mentor (discussed later), themselves a transliteration of René Magritte's *Le faux miroir* (False mirror)).

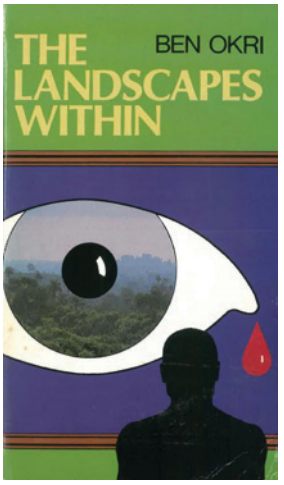

Figure 1: Front cover of *The Landscapes Within*

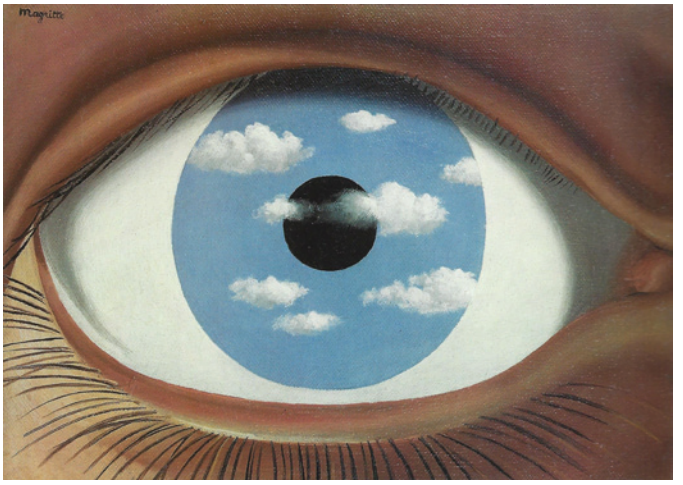

Figure 2: René Magritte, *Le faux miroir*

The similarity between Magritte's famed eye and Okri's cover illustration provides the lens through which the article views Okri's novel—as invoked by both Omovo's irritated response to the village youngster's well-meaning but naïve questions and the young artist's heightened consciousness.

Notions of coexistent proto-realities are explored and extended throughout this novel via the interplay between sharply etched reflection or daydreaming, on the one hand, and an imaginative recreation in Omovo's mind and, thence, onto his

canvass, on the other. Privileging the complexities and contradictions inherent in the process of self-awareness—made manifest in the bald head trope—sharpens the perception that this narrative, as an art form, is incapable of miming or mirror-reflecting a single perspective; it is non-mimetic and suggests that dreams create the kind of speculation that is most fruitful for artistic creation as in Magritte's *La clef des songes* (The key to dreams). And, as with the Magritte cameos of the interpretation of dreams, Okri tends to resist the idea that meaning is a given or can, indeed, be given in *The Landscapes Within.* This typifies the mode of the 19th century French symbolists, whose art of expressing ideas (and emotions) eschews direct description and even similes and metaphors. Okri follows their strategy: one of recreating the ideas/sense impressions in the mind of the reader using unexplained symbols (see Chadwick).

This then is the story of the operation of intuitive creativity in a developing artist in a Lagos ghetto. Intense visions suggest a desire to encapsulate the creative process within a chaotic slum milieu. Omovo consoles, suffers, dreams, etches, paints and has visions. Consider, for example, his eerie encounter with a huge painting of Christ on the cross which, coupled with witnessing a figure dying tortuously of stab wounds outside the church, culminates in momentary night blindness with his soul being "plunged in a soft hued area of nothingness" (*Landscapes* 221), precipitating a new knowledge of self. To see what is going on in the art of great writers or painters, one must first be established in "the art of oneself" says Okri in *A Time for New Dreams* (23). Seen through Omovo's eyes, the painting is described as an emanation of the *danse macabre*:

> The cross was done in thick black and was rather like a stake with jutting spiked ends, a thing of incarnate evil. Christ was depicted as a diminutive madman and the suffering rendered on his face, from which foam issued strangely, seemed so intense that it did not look like suffering or anguish. It looked like maniacal laughter. The blood that blurted from his impaled hands and feet was the colour of red wine streaked with violets and whites. It was a crude painting. (*Landscapes* 220)

Omovo's blinded perception of Christ's crucifixion is of the grotesque: blackness, evil, insanity, distortion and exaggeration, symbolic of the darkness of life. In a shocked *volte face*, the depiction transmutes into a metonym for the suffering of his own people as the artist is drawn to identify with the "diminutive madman" portrayed in his own likeness—as a tiny black-skinned figure rather than the customary white bearded shepherd of western iconography:

> The painting might not have been about Christ at all. Then he looked at the face again. A shock exploded inside him when he realised that the face had been done in black and his thoughts seized and his mind ran riot and he had no control over the pains and the pains threatened to drown his mind and he wanted to scream madly and he opened his mouth and the sounds and furies fought themselves […] (*Landscapes* 220)

The identification is enhanced by the choice of "seized", the onomatopoeia serving to endorse the resultant speechlessness; the "intense pain" that caused both mind and voice to "seize".

Barthes's claim in *Image, music, text* that "the image no longer *illustrates* the words; it is now the words which, structurally, are parasitic on the image" (28, original emphasis) seems to pertain to this excerpt. It is as if the mystery of art—and books dealing with artistic endeavour, such as *The Landscapes Within*—can only be confronted rather than interpreted. Art, like life, is here seen as a revelation of the horror of inhumanity posed against the mystery latent in all things. In sum, therefore, as Barthes states: "it is not the image which comes to elucidate or 'realize' the text, but the latter which comes to sublimate, patheticise or rationalise the image" (28).

Okri's view is therefore closer to that of Barthes than to Berger's as is also captured in his statement in *A Time for New Dreams* that, "To see the true art or the truth in a work requires solid foundation in self" (24). In his text, *African Art*, Ivan Bargna elucidates this Okrian aphorism, stating that, "African art can be considered a relational field in which the identity of everything that exists depends on the strength that is in everyone, which in turn depends on the position it occupies in the web which makes up the world and whose map is furnished by tradition" (Bargna 15).

So, whereas Berger points to the centrality of reception aesthetics, to the reciprocity between the art work and viewer response, Okri's canvas is more deeply personal and cultural. Like Bargna's it is also mystical, presupposing an engagement with the unknowable by the reader. "Otherwise," Okri explains in *A Time for New Dreams*, "like light passing through a transparent object the work of art passes straight through an unformed mind and heart" (24).

As I argued in my earlier reading of this seminal novel (Gray, "Creative imagination" 21–31), the initial, graphically rendered dream is of an endless trek through a "*terribly* dark forest" where trees became *coloured* mist then mutate into a vision of the faceless corpse. In the second interrelated nightmare, the artist's mind is confronted by a huge, "*terribly* blank canvass" (*Landscapes* 3 and 64, emphasis added). A kaleidoscopic milieu of "*coloured* mountains", "turbulent and calm seas" and "primeval forests", reminiscent of Magritte's "The key to dreams" mentioned earlier, form the backdrop for the appearance of the dead girl "seen" walking towards, but never quite reaching Omovo, before he again wakes in shock with a sense of unutterable loss and "a mad urge to capture" (*Landscapes* 64) the elusive vision on canvas, a feat that he manages only towards the end of the novel—tellingly a painting, like the dream and Okri's own haunting attempt to recapture his own dead mother's face, "without a face", and also entitled "Related losses" (*Landscapes* 281), as already noted. The loss echoes that of Omovo's stolen painting of emaciated children playing around a mushroom-like truncated tree (*Landscapes* 5), already discussed.

These dreams dictate the narrative thrust and tone of Okri's second novel becoming, in turn, simulacra for the mercurial nature of the creative process (of both painting and writing) reminiscent of Ted Hughes's poem, "The thought fox".[3] Okri's imaginative rendering of the workings of the subconscious mind penetrates deeply into the narrative thread and structure of *The Landscapes Within*, defining its section themes of "Loss", "Mazes", "Masks" and "Fragments", and culminating in the focal character's brief insight into the meaning of "The Moment" (286).[4] Ultimately, the novel offers an imaginary resolution to socio-political and personal conflicts: "It's about surviving," Omovo comes to understand, "but it's more about becoming a life artist" (286).

Okri repeatedly attributes the oneiric (dreamtime) records in *The Landscapes Within* to "painter boy" (4, 35 and 197), Omovo. The dreams of the mutilated body "haunt the novel and [are] returned to again and again" as noted by Adewole Maya-Pearce (92). This recurrence is integral to the author's way of seeing, coupled as it is with Omovo's obsessive recording and rereading of the dreams in a notebook, itself implying that self-reflection is an intuitive creative imperative. This is highlighted by an internal reflection on a drawing Omovo had done at the tender age of seven of "a series of squiggly lines that went round and round and formed different shapes", which his teacher and his father had eulogised as capturing "life" (*Landscapes* 95, 96), but which he was never again able to emulate. The intrusive authorial voice explains why: "The boy somehow understood that he had done it once but could not do it again till he really knew how" (*Landscapes* 96). The reminiscence is typically Okrian, typically oblique. Is the implication, to borrow loosely from Tymieniecka that, in the impoverished theatre of slum life, "all the forces and dynamisms of human existence stew" ("Aesthetic expression" 26)? And, owing to the freely inventive nature of a very young boy's creativity and his struggle to capture something of the essence of existence, the artistic enactment loses its foothold, becoming detached from any foothold. An additional implication is that art is not and cannot be complete; the artist continuously mediates life's predicaments, especially when these recur throughout history. I. A. Richards's insight, in his edition of Plato's *Republic*, into lines, circles, triangles, such as those in the child's painting, endorses this interpretation: "The lines of geometry belong to the world of Being; those the geometer may draw to the world of Becoming. He uses them to help him to *think* about Forms—in the world of Being. Forms themselves are not able to be seen or drawn, but they can be thought of" (7).

So, far from developing into a *Bildungsroman*, the novel remains–and this, paradoxically, is its brilliance—an unfinished *Kunstlerroman*, climaxing in the young geometer/artist's recognition of the elusive evanescence of insight/knowingness: "I'm still learning,", Omovo insightfully explains to Keme before reading him his elder brother, Okur's poem, which captures the same ephemeral nature of seeing: "Searching for bright pebbles / and strange corals" on the seashore as a small child, Omovo's brother

writes that the poetic persona sometimes *saw* them "hidden and clear", but found "other things too / like half-defaced sketches on the sand / pointing a way through the tormented seas" (*Landscapes* 286). Here, the "half-defaced sketches" encapsulate not only the mystery of how an empty sea shell can bring forth a musical echo of the sea—a melding of the concrete and the abstract, but also the illusory fleetingness of artistic insight: "The world of Becoming is indescribable—except through Forms (Ideas) of the world of Being" (Richards 7).

Earlier in the novel, Omovo shares a comparable moment of illumination/intuition with the young Ayo, son of the chief in the village near to the city of Lagos where Omovo has sought respite after the triple losses of an evanescent vision of his beloved dead mother (revisited in "The difficulty of seeing"); losing his job; then the loss of his lover, Ifeyinwa, who has been shot, a casualty of internecine strife, in the forest near her home while escaping from her abusive elderly husband. "I had an unconscious glimpse into profound and magical, solid and undefinable beauty; its strange and soundless music; its vanishing and unearthly lights", he tells Ayo. Attempting to recapture the "quintessential" and "beatific" vision, Omovo laments that he felt "desperate and empty […] seeking for so much as another glimpse through the tiniest crack of that door" (*Landscapes* 270). The triple losses shift the vision into a metaphysical dimension evocative of Coleridges's *Aids to Reflection* that reads: "Nothing is wanted but the eye, which is the light of this house, the light which is the eye of the soul" (70) (Here, the word "wanted" is, of course, used in its archaic sense of "lacking".) The eye, Coleridge continues is

> This *seeing* light, this *enlightening* eye, is Reflection. It is more […] it is what a *Christian* ought to mean by it and to know, too, whence it came […] of what light even this light is but a reflection. This too, is THOUGHT, and all thought is but unthinking that does not flow out of this, or tend towards it. (Coleridge 70)

Inner reality or "the landscapes within"

The catalytic dreams/nightmares, and their incorporation into the narrative, are thus methodological, defining not only ways of seeing in this novel, but also intuitive creativity. In *The Landscapes Within*, Omovo's paintings parallel his dreams as "a means to explore the deeper, more unconscious meanings and miasma of his life and the landscapes about him". His painting and, by extension, his dreams are "a part of his response to life: a personal prism" (*Landscapes* 85).[5]

The landscapes within thus become axiomatic to both the narrative point of view and the novel's symbolism, effectively supplanting Omovo as lead character, and making Omovo's creative imagination, his heightened consciousness, the eponymous hero of this early novel. The signifier and the signified conflate, becoming an awareness, a mode of perception: a presence rather than an agent. The spirit child's brief "moments" of insight evoke the Zen moment of no-mind and total presence,

incomprehensible to the intellect. Both Okri's title and the narrative itself tacitly refer to the "landscapes of the mind" (*Landscapes* 18).

After completing his second painting (of a scum pool) and before it is confiscated by the authorities as unpatriotic (as "caricaturing the nation's progress"), Omovo intuits "that the future was contained somewhere in his mind" (*Landscapes* 139). Mystified by the furore that the picture engenders, Omovo states: "I simply painted a scumscape as I *saw* it" (*Landscapes* 139, emphasis added). The recurrent scum motif is thus externalised in the painting that he calls *Drift*. As Magritte famously, or infamously, retorted when pressed for the meaning of an art work: "visible things always hide other visible things. But a visible *image* hides nothing" (Sylvester 318, original emphasis). This aligns itself with Barthes's insistence that every image is a complex text.

Omovo's mentor, Dr Okocha, had painted a single eye on his work shed door: "a brooding green eye, with a black pupil and a gathering red teardrop: which "stared all-seeingly at the teeming streets and back into its own darkness" (35). As stated, this painting features on the cover of *The Landscapes Within*, and it seems to be an analogue for a public prism, reminiscent of Magritte's *Le faux miroir.* The eye is a simulacrum for the mind's eye.

In *Plato's Republic*, Socrates provides a useful explanation of the conflation of the extrinsic and the intrinsic:

> [T]he natural power to learn lives in the soul and is like an *eye* which might not be turned from the dark without a turning around of the whole body. The instrument of knowledge has to be turned round, and with it the whole soul, from the things of becoming to the things of being, till the soul is able, by degrees, to support the light of true being and can look at the brightest." (Socrates qtd. in Richards 5, emphasis added)

In implied comment on its assumed inter-art variant, Magritte's 1935 *Le faux miroir*, suggestive of imperfect perception or mystical perception, this eye invokes the neo-Platonic/Coleridgean concept of the "*enlightening* eye", just mentioned and is reminiscent of Okri's notion of the creative process as the inward visionary quest of the dreaming "soul" opening "towards infinity" (Wilkinson 2), cited earlier.

This ontopoietic text concerns itself with "the imaginative realm, as opposed to the landscapes without, i.e. the physical world" as attested by Daria Tunca (96). Even the story within the story, an illicit love affair borne of innocence, is imbued with heightened consciousness. The brief union with Mr Takpo's young wife, Ifeyinwa, with whom Omovo shares a love of reading and art, is one of complementary spirits and yearnings (*caritas*) as opposed to carnality. "He became for her something of a spiritual husband, one that she only confronted fully in her dreams and fantasies" (103). Likewise a dreamer, Ife voices her grievance about her arranged marriage to an old and brutal man by saying to Omovo, "You have your art. I don't have any-

thing" (*Landscapes* 25), thus forging a link between the two narrative threads and the third person authorial voice, as I pointed out in my initial reading of this text. Nonetheless, it is as if, in her suffering, Ife stumbles upon the redemptive nature of artistic creation, enabling a more transcendent way of being even in the midst of abuse, poverty and deprivation.

More euphemistically but equally ephemerally, Okri writes of another pair of his lovers, Lao and Mistletoe in *The Age of Magic*: "If they knew how, they could have walked through the mirror of beauty into a shining world. In that moment, between strides, they could have seen that nothing was meant to be, but only what they made it. They could have rewritten their lives on the margins of the book of life" (*Magic* 228).

"The novelist," asserts Kundera pertinently in *The Art of the Novel* "makes no issue of his ideas" (144).

> He is an explorer feeling his way in an effort to reveal some unknown aspect of existence. He is fascinated not by his voice but by the form he is seeking, and only those forms that meet the demands of his dream become part of his work […] The writer inscribes himself on the spiritual map of his time, of his country, on the map of the history of ideas. (Kundera 144).

As already intimated, the title of Okri's novel is a poetic compression of an Afro-Western *Weltanschauung*. As Simon Schama asserts, "landscapes [for the African] are culture before they are nature"; they are "constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and water and rock" (61) and, by extension, paper.

For a writer such as Okri, existence in the modern world can best be understood through his literary representations of imaginary landscapes. The episode in which Omovo caricatures one of his work colleagues as the realisation of his own imminent dismissal, following the machination of this colleague, dawns upon him underlines my point. "Drawing made him reminisce; it could be so lonely. In his mind rose the fleeting, blurred images of some of the things he had drawn and painted passionately in the past […]" (*Landscapes* 199); a reminiscence that leads to a stream of consciousness recollection of the classic film, "The lost horizon", and its elusive catchy theme tune—a synthesis of the visual and the auditory.

Okri's early *oeuvre* is redolent of African influences yet, paradoxically perhaps, speaks to western sensibilities in a variety of intriguing conversations. As argued in my earlier article on the *The Landscapes Within* as an unfinished symphony, the novel epitomises the polyphonic mode, blending as it does dream/narrative/poetry and instinct/intuition/vision.[6] An analysis of any excerpt reveals comparable counterpointing. Consider, for example, the artistic braiding when Omovo tries to explain what he has learnt about the idea of the Moment to his journalist friend. As intimated, first, there is repartee as Keme presses Omovo to divulge what he had said about the Moment; then, Omovo has a vision and a revelation which coalesce in "I thought

I sensed a brilliant shadow of a god. I think I saw, instead, one of those rare faces horribly mirrored in us […] But I'm learning something also though" (*Landscapes* 286) leading to the bit about surviving and becoming a life artist, already quoted. All facets are bound by a common fugue-like theme: ways of seeing.

In *The Age of Magic*, Okri seems to corroborate this interpretation by having his lead character, Lao, discuss these abstractions and the attendant loss with his artist companion. The conversation goes as follows as Mistletoe continues to muse:

> "[…] There's much more to life than what we see."
> Lao retorts: "Believing only what we see enshrines only what can be seen."
> "And so we don't question what we don't see."
> "But often we are brought down by the unseen."
> "I know: Anxiety, neurosis, stress, cancer."
> "By the time we see what they are doing to us it's too late."
> "We treat the symptoms, and die."
> "But the causes are unseen."
> "And because they are unseen we don't believe they exist."
> "There's something primitive about the phrase 'Seeing is believing', don't you think?" said Mistletoe.
>
> […]
>
> "Truth seems upside down"
> "And inside out." (256–7)

The prevailing question in *The Landscapes Within* is couched in a novelistic essay on loss. The essay on loss incorporates a litany of losses: including loss of homeland; getting lost; loss of lives; wives; mothers and lovers; fathers and brothers; paintings; identity (the mutilated girl and Ife become faceless non-entities), fortunes; and loss of face; culminating in the piece of coral without its heart, which Omovo throws back into the sea at the close of the novel. The usage is, however, as much playfully connotative as it is denotative. The word "loss" is woven into a complex tapestry of symbols and signs.[7] This extracts its significance from its rational context and places it in a context accessible only through the interpretative imagination. Submerged by the indefinable, the metaphor of loss conceals more than it transmits, thus counterpointing the exploration of the other key abstract concepts: intuitive creativity, corruption, dream, integrity, perception and responsibility.[8]

Ultimately, this novel deals with ways of seeing, with subjects that can be thought about but cannot be known; with the fluidity of "the landscapes within". What this suggests is intuitive creativity, where "Creativity is," as Okri states in *A Way of Being Free* "a secular infinity" (125). The artist/novelist here, perhaps inadvertently, reveals

both the *inside* of life, and the *outside*. He is a Jungian dreamer who awakens. To quote Rowley (3), "This creation is the product of the imaginative 'wedding of spirit and matter […]'" (see Smith 4).

Conclusion

The argument of this article has been that the novel is predicated on the autonomy of art and the autonomy of the real. Kundera elucidates on the significance of the oneiric narrative, saying: "Imagination, freed from the control of reason and from concern for verisimilitude, ventures into landscapes inaccessible to rational thought" (78). *The Landscapes Within* is a compelling meditation on existence—ways of seeing and intuitive creativity—through the medium of imaginary internal and external landscapes, seamlessly connecting consciousness and unconsciousness. As Wright observes in a coincidental summing up of my argument about Okri's writing: "There is […] an inward movement away from protest and polemic and towards interior psychic healing; there is also a visionary introjection of the world into the artistic consciousness that places a tremendous emphasis on the redemptive energies of dream, myth and the imagination […] (159). In the context of semiotics and mythology, Barthes pertinently states: "[…] the new semiology—or the new mythology—can no longer, will no longer be able to, separate so easily the signifier from the signified, the ideological from the phraseological" (166). "It is not," he explains, "that the distinction is false or without its use but rather that it too has become in some sort mythical" (Barthes 166). This seems to suggest that ways of seeing have undergone an intuitive transformation. Wright points to the operation of intuitive creativity in a comparable mystical context: "For Okri, redemptive energy is finally not a political but a purely visionary, imaginative quality" (60). In *A Time for New Dreams*, Okri writes of another young artist, this time a Spaniard, and his first encounter with African masks, a life changing looking "inside" moment of the kind that Jung believes "awakens" and that serves to illustrate Okri's articulation of the visionary redemptive energy of the imaginary: "He had been touched into life by the ancient myth of the superman and by the brilliant angel of the beautiful darkness. A darkness that was, in truth, a new light" (66).

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Notes

1. Tymieniecka explains "It is only by isolating from the self-ordering of beingness, cosmic and living, the nature of beingness as such—its ontopoietic-ontic status—that is, by rooting ontopoietic ordering within its originary condition, thus entering into *linea entis*, that we may bring out the central conduit of existential becoming, the conduit of the logos of life that proceeds from the unfathomable part and leads towards an open-ended future and which situates and explains the essential status of concrete existence in the space of the present. This conduit of becoming I appropriately call the ontopoiesis of life" ("Aesthetic expression" 13).
2. Tolle states: "Zen masters use the word *satori* to describe a flash of insight, a moment of no-mind and total presence […] Presence is needed to become aware of the beauty, the majesty, the sacredness of nature" (79).
3. Ted Hughes's (3) poem reads: "I imagine this midnight moment's forest: / Something else is alive / Beside the clock's loneliness / And this blank page where my fingers move. // Through the window I see no star: / Something more near / Though deeper within darkness / Is entering the loneliness: // Cold, delicately as the dark snow/ A fox's nose touches twig, leaf; / Two eyes serve a movement, that now/ And again now, and now, and now // Sets neat prints into the snow / Between trees, and warily a lame / Shadow lags by stump and in hollow / Of a body that is bold to come // Across clearings, an eye, / A widening deepening greenness, / Brilliantly, concentratedly, / Coming about its own business // Till, with a sudden sharp hot stink of fox / It enters the dark hole of the head. / The window is starless still; the clock ticks, / The page is printed".
4. Elsewhere, Okri calls this "an Akashic Still Point" (see Gray, "Apologia pro Ben Okri's *In arcadia*: A neglected masterpiece?").
5. Omovo's painting and, by extension, his dreams we are told "was part of his personal prism" (*Landscapes* 85). Significantly, the phrase is altered in the "re-writing and expansion" (Jowitt 62–3) to "a personal and public prism" (*Dangerous Love* 69).
6. "Polyphony in music is the simultaneous presentation of two or more voices (melodic lines that are perfectly bound together but still keep their relative independence)" (Kundera 73–4).
7. In addition to multiple losses of life—the girl; Omovo's mother; Ife's brother drowns; she is shot, Keme's sister goes missing; Omovo's stepmother loses an unborn child; his dad kills Tuwo for cuckolding him—Okri includes loss of fathers: Ayo's and Omovo's imprisoned father loses himself, becoming "a shrivelled presence" (*Landscapes* 282); of jobs, fortunes, dignity, sanity, innocence, art works, and of country (Dele escapes to America, to freedom, but ironically, he runs, because he has impregnated his Nigerian girlfriend, and paradoxically, because he cannot wait to experience sex with a white woman).
8. A theme in the novel, which becomes more apparent in its rewriting as *Dangerous Love* is the artist's "responsibilities" (*Landscapes* 278).

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Negotiating womanhood: the bird metaphor in Southern African folklore and rites of passage

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Negotiating womanhood: the bird metaphor in Southern African folklore and rites of passage

In spite of its evident presence in Southern Africa's rich cultural heritage, the bird metaphor has received surprisingly little attention. The cultural materials analysed in this article include children's stories, songs, heroic poetry and ethnographic accounts of rites of passage. At first the data seems to suggest that bird symbolism could be interpreted in terms of a simple dual conception of gender identity. Some magical birds signify the prowess and authority of men. Others could be linked symbolically to the procreative powers of women. On further reflection, however, we identified a third category of more ambiguously gendered birds. It is contended that this additional bird type can be explained in terms of the female-male dialectic that shaped gender relations in small-scale societies. It is further proposed tentatively that the bird metaphor could have provided women with a symbolic means to negotiate their identity.
Keywords: animal symbolism, bird metaphor, folklore, gender constructs, rites of passage.

Background

This article explores the gendered meaning of the bird metaphor. The ideas that are suggested here derive partially from data collected previously, more particularly during two sessions of fieldwork in the Limpopo province. Research in 1995 and 1996 in the Vhembe district focused on initiation symbolism and involved Venda elders from both sexes (see Dederen, "A Dog with a Collar … Field notes on an 'indigenous wedding gown'"). In the second half of the nineties and again between 2001 and 2003 just over a hundred children's stories were recorded and debated with their female narrators. The oral literature project also produced songs, two of which are discussed in this article.

Approximately one out of five narratives included magical birds amongst its protagonists. Moreover, half of the avian beings expressed some form of affinity or association with either women or men. Inspired by these preliminary findings we decided to explore further the contribution of bird symbolism to the social construction of gender identity in folklore and in the closely related realm of rites of passage.

Our understanding of the data is shaped and driven by the disciplines in which

we have been trained (Anthropology and Archaeology), as well as by our interest in gender. In terms of methodology we made use of textual and socio-cultural analysis. The investigative process combined three perspectives. Bird symbolism was first scrutinised within the particular stories or rituals in which it functioned. It was then compared to data from other stories and rites, before being contextualised within the wider socio-cultural background from which it stemmed.

In our analytical efforts we have been inspired by the basic theoretical premise that gender conflict is as essential an aspect of the human condition as is balance (see Biesele 180–5; Turner 23; Guenther 148–59). Moreover, we understand gender essentially to be "a primary way of signifying relationships of power" (Scott 42).

In addition to the fieldwork data mentioned above, the cultural materials that are examined here originated from published folklore collections (Hertslet; Keyser; Lestrade; Stefaniszyn; Kunene; Jordan; Scheub; Corbeil; Hewitt; Makgalo, Mothuši and Makopo; Lemekoana and Masola; Biesele; Guenther; Bennun; Mashilo, Mashilo and Mampuru; Kruger and Le Roux) and from a number of ethnographic studies of rites of passage (Van Warmelo; Stayt; Krige and Krige; Richards; Turner; Silberbauer; Blacking; Corbeil; Davison; Keeney and Keeney).

The seven tales that provide the core of the discussion have been presented in an abridged format. Titles, it was generally agreed by the oldest narrators, are a modern introduction. Our sample of narratives has been sourced from different cultural areas: Venda (tale one), Zulu (tales two, three and six), Tsonga (tale four) and Xhosa (tale seven). The San narrative (tale five) may appear to be the odd man out. However, its symbolic references to the cosmological importance of water manifest a belief complex that has been shared by hunter-gatherers and farmers alike (Heintze; Hoff; Bernard; Guenther 128). The story belongs to a body of creation myths which are commonly referred to as the adventures of the Early Race (Bennun 15–54). Additional cultural materials that are examined here include stone and wooden sculpture, children's songs, hunting songs, heroic poetry and traditional medicine. They represent the cultural heritage of Shona, North and South Sotho and Ambo speaking peoples.

The ethnography of three female initiation schools has been particularly informative for the purpose of exploring the ritual function and meaning of the bird metaphor, namely the *Chisungu* of the Bemba (Richards; Corbeil); the Lovedu *Byali* (Krige and Krige); and the Venda *Domba* (Blacking). Their curriculum consisted of songs, sacred and secret formulae, dance and the acting out of symbolic performances (Blacking 149–77). The teaching socialised the young female novices into normative marital and sexual behaviour (Van Warmelo 52).

The article can be roughly divided into two parts. Firstly, we define the different types of magical birds that have emerged from the cultural materials under study. Some birds personify masculinity. Others align themselves with the social realm of women. A third category was found to be more ambiguous in nature and seems to

defy a simple binary classification. In the remaining section we revisit the ambiguous category in order to demonstrate that the bird metaphor can be explained, at least partially, in terms of the principles of reciprocity and tension that characterised the social interaction between women and men in small-scale traditional societies (Begler).

We would like to emphasize the tentative nature of our inquiry and its conclusions. Symbols are multi-vocal and therefore open to a variety of investigative angles (Turner 50). The analysis of oral literature and ritual pedagogy is an uncertain and challenging task on account of its fluid nature and its fragmentary data (Guenther 162, 165). Our interpretive efforts certainly do not exhaust the exegesis of the narratives and rites of passage that form the subject matter of this essay.

Birds and masculinity

Several of the magical birds that have been encountered in the stories, we would like to suggest, clearly signify the personality features that were traditionally associated with hunters and warriors. These violent metaphors of masculinity appeared even in stories that were designed for the smallest of listeners. In the first folktale the narrator recounts one of the many adventures of Tortoise.

> **Tale one: "Tortoise defeats Lightning Bird"** (Keyser 9–18)
> After Tortoise has crafted himself a reed flute at the river, Lightning Bird descends from the sky, his home, and asks Tortoise to be his music teacher. When he has finally mastered the instrument, he disappears with it into the sky. Whirlwind takes Spider high up into heaven so that he can spin a ladder for Tortoise to get back his flute. Lightning Bird destroys the ladder, but with the help of his friends Tortoise eventually, after some more ruses, manages to return to earth.

Tortoise portrays "the wisdom of the little ones", a standard theme in Southern African folklore (Junod 223). The two main protagonists try to outwit one another, as hunters and warriors do. They both personify masculinity. The powerful Lightning Bird represents the vigorous warrior and the dominant ruler. His little adversary exemplifies the prowess and stealth of the hunter. The two avian manifestations that appear in the Zulu narrative of "*uCilo*" act likewise (Krige 362). The plot revolves around a small bird who has challenged the great Eagle in a contest for the kingship. Again, the mighty ruler of the sky is outsmarted by a small hero, probably much to the satisfaction of the child audience for which this story has been crafted.

The portrayal of the Lightning Bird and Eagle, we presume, is inspired by the traditional beliefs in a Supreme Being, a powerful male deity who was believed to inhabit the sky. This sky being was said to have manifested himself in the form or in the company of a mythical bird-of-heaven or sky-bird (Eiselen 262–9; Berglund). Perhaps, the eight magnificent soapstone bird sculptures excavated at Great Zim-

babwe are manifestations too of the supreme sky being, or of its bird messenger. Significantly, some of the carvings display lips and toes instead of beaks and talons. Garlake was the first to notice and explore their anthropomorphic features.

In another tale, the prowess of the hunter-warrior, which constitutes the central theme, is befittingly expressed by references to the slaying of warriors; the tracking and hunting of mysterious animals; the hardships of an epic journey and the fight against a horde of cannibals.

Tale two: "Seven birds and seven boys" (Hertslet 18–30)

A king has lost seven of his boys in battle and it is the task of the only remaining son, Kulume, together with his companions, to track the seven magical birds that have been sent by the ancestors to replace and, eventually, bring back to life his brothers. In his search for the birds Kulume has to travel over distant mountains, cross hostile forests and rivers, employ stealth and display bravery when facing a horde of man-eaters.

Kulume must prove his tracking and fighting skills in order to capture the magical birds that will be transformed into his slain brothers-in-arms. After he has successfully completed his adventurous journey, Kulume is ready to join his older brothers—the magical birds—as a soldier on the battlefield.

The adventures of the young prince, we think, symbolise his rites of passage into manhood. The brotherhood of warriors could be a reference to the initiation schools which in real life prepared boys to become members of age regiments. Boys were socialised into the realm of hunting and fighting at a young age. They participated in stick fight competitions and trapped birds in the vicinity of their home, or ventured outside the village armed with their miniature bows and wood-tipped arrows. In the following two songs birds are mocking the youths who have failed to catch them:

We are nestlings
We stay in the nest
We are shy to fly
We are shy to fly

Shame on you boy!
You wanted to catch us
So that you can eat us with your meal
Today you will eat a meal without meat
Your mothers will be back soon
When they return they will scold you
Can you catch us? Purr! [sound of flying] shame on you! (Venda song, Tsianda, Limpopo)

And:

Boys of ga-Ramodumela, hea
As soon as they see me, hea
They made some sticks, hea
They threw them at me, hea
They threw them in the sand … (North Sotho song, Mohlabaneng, Limpopo)

The bird metaphor does not always depict the warrior or the hunter directly. At times birds are linked to the realm of men in a more discreet and indirect manner. Such is the case with the following two tales in which the narrator cautions young women not to defy or disobey their future spouses.

Tale three: "The woman and the mighty bird" (Jordan 226–35):
The story is set during a spell of extremely cold weather and the women of the village must spend long hours collecting firewood. Only the deepest and darkest section of the forest provides plenty of dry wood. Women have been forbidden by their spouses to enter the dark grove. A young and beautiful woman ignores the warning. Upon entering the forbidden section of the forest she is offered a bundle of wood by a giant bird. She agrees not to tell her husband. Every day she receives wood and lies, until her husband threatens to kill her. After the woman finally confesses, the tall trees from the grove surround the house and the mighty bird swallows the woman.

And:

Tale four: "The woman who stole the eagle" (Tsonga story, Malamulele, Limpopo)
A certain man goes on a hunting trip and shoots a big eagle. He instructs his wives to cook it. They are told not to eat the bird. After she has secretly eaten all the meat, the youngest wife puts the bones back into the pot. On his return the man questions his wives in vain. With the help of a diviner the culprit is identified and killed.

The woman who is punished for stealing the meat of her husband's quarry, the eagle, is the youngest of the co-wives. We suggest that on the one hand the eagle has been selected by the creator of this very popular story to define male identity in terms of the authority of the husband. On the other hand, the bird of prey also signifies virility through its behavioural affinity with the hunter.

Hunter-prey identification constituted a central theme in the hunting songs of the Ambo (Zambia). Avian predators appeared in these songs as images of the hunter, and the hunting grounds were often compared to a battlefield. The songs celebrated the psychological strength and physical energy of the hunter. They emphasized the hardships of life in the bush and were said to shape the identity of a true man (Stefaniszyn).

Likewise, in South Sotho heroic poetry (Kunene) birds of prey were used routinely to praise epic warriors. The poems detailed the qualities of carnivorous birds and

emphasised their association with death. A warrior slain on the battlefield was called an ox abandoned to the vultures and a dispute between men was said to be settled by the vultures. A number of birds were selected to signify virility: vultures, eagles, hawks, crows and yellow kites. Lightning, thunder, hurricanes and hailstorm—common metaphors for the sky deity—accompanied the valiant warriors in combat.

Bird metaphors were linked to masculinity in rites of passage as well. In the Bemba *Chisungu* initiation school instructors handled two particular types of didactic clay models (generally referred to as *Mbusa*) that symbolically represented husbands and warriors. These ritual clay objects (*mwansa cembe*, the white eagle, and *cembe*, the eagle) portrayed male feathered hats. In Bemba society, feathered hats once signalled the marital status of young husbands. Ceremonial hats also honoured the bravest on the battlefield (Corbeil 31, 36–7, 46 and Richards 104, 203). Five more virile avian creatures have been mentioned by Blacking in his comprehensive ethnography of the Venda *Domba* initiation. They will be briefly examined.

Birds and womanhood

In our understanding, the bird symbolism of indigenous storytelling betokens either female or male gender identities. Whilst masculine bird metaphors were readily identified and understood by us, the exact nature of the association between birds and the realm of women proved at first to be less discernible. A closer look at girls' rites of passage and indigenous world-views rendered its meaning more transparent.

First, initiation ceremonies customarily defined womanhood in terms of procreativity and motherhood and primarily aimed at guiding the young novices into sexual maturity, marriage and childbirth (Stayt 112; Turner 23). Mystical birds, we detected during the analysis of the data, mediated this journey of transition. In doing so, we would like to propose here, their symbolic presence fostered, confirmed, honoured and celebrated the young mothers-in-the-making. Secondly, the cosmologies of Southern Africa symbolically linked life-potency to a mystical pool (Heintze; Bernard). Creation mythology described how the first humans had emerged from it; rites of passage at times re-enacted the creation and its symbolism manifested how the fertility of the initiates was closely associated with it (Keeney and Keeney 66–7; Blacking 87–9, 160, 231). In the following two tales the affinity between water, the source of all life, and human procreativity constitutes a salient theme:

Tale five: "The Blue Crane and the waterhole" (Bennum 110–2)

Whilst searching for Frog, Blue Crane is killed by two lions. Her brother looks for her remains, but only recovers one small bone. He picks up the bone, drops it in the waterhole and leaves for his camp. Later he finds his sister splashing in the water. After seeing her he returns home. Days pass by. On his second visit to the fountain he looks at her basking in the sun and notices how she has grown. After he arrives back in the camp he makes new clothes for her. On his next visit he can see that she has

become a young woman. He does not want to startle her and leaves. Finally, he decides to fetch her. She does not recognise him at first. He offers her a new cap, a kaross and an apron and together they walk back to the camp.

The Blue Crane, one of the people of the First Race, was looking for her friend Frog who had left his house in a confused state of mind. She was determined to find and assist him. This narrative, it has been suggested but not explored further by Hewitt (169), symbolically describes the rites of passage of a young San woman. Like the Blue Crane, the female novice is temporarily removed and isolated from society. Like the mythical bird she metaphorically "dies" (ends her childhood) and "grows" into a young woman. She is "reborn" as a young adult when being released from initiation. The presentation of a cap, kaross and apron resemble the handing over of new clothing to a girl after the completion of her rites of passage. Throughout Southern Africa new garments were meant to publicly confirm a young woman's change in social status. They also expressed her readiness for marriage (see Blacking 99–100; Davison 159–60; Van Warmelo 76).

The Zulu tale of "*Sikhamba-ngenyanga*" revolves around the themes of female fecundity and motherhood.

Tale six: "*Sikhamba-ngenyanga*" (Jordan 236–44; Hertslet 66–7)

A wealthy man rejects his beautiful spouse after she fails to produce a child. One day, whilst she sits near the river, two doves arrive and instruct her to swallow magical pellets. Soon she gives birth to a girl. The birds request river pebbles as payment for their intervention. The child remains hidden until she reaches puberty. To protect her, it is decided to let her move about only by moonlight (hence the name "she-who-walks-by-moonlight"). The father of the girl decides to look for a husband from a wealthy family for his daughter. The in-laws are told that she should work only by moonlight. They ignore the warning and made her fetch water during the day. The girl is taken by the river. The two doves return and demand the sacrifice of an ox. Its carcass is thrown in the river. She is then released from the water again.

Two pigeons have come to the rescue of a barren woman on behalf of the spiritual forces of the river. The significance of the bird metaphor, we presume, is emphasized by its appearance at the beginning and the conclusion of the story. There is an additional reference to the procreative powers of water in this tale, namely the slaughter of an ox and the disposal of its remains in the river. This type of ritual was traditionally organised to safeguard or to restore the fertility of the land (see Krige 24–48). The narrator uses pebbles to link the doves, and their mediating role, to the image of the river. The image of the moon—once a symbol of procreative powers and a common honorific reference to the bride (Biesele 191; Hewitt 205)—reiterates the theme of womanhood.

Doves and other smaller bird types regularly appear in folklore as the allies of young women. In a charming Pedi story a dove saves two female siblings, Ping and Pinyana, from cannibals (Lemekoana and Masola 16–22). Doves do not only protect young women, they personify them, too. Amongst the Northern Sotho, wooden images of doves were traditionally used to mark sites for girls' puberty rites. The bird carvings that had been placed on top of the wooden enclosures around the initiation school were said to symbolize the novices (Witt 13).

The white egret of the *Chisungu* girls' rites of passage, we believe, served the same symbolic purpose as the Blue Crane and the magical birds in the story of *Sikhambangenyanga*. This particular water bird personified the female initiates, expressed the procreative powers of young mothers-in-the-making and mediated the mystical forces of the river pool (Richards 89–90; Corbeil 108–9).

We found additional support for the affinity between water birds and motherhood in the medicinal use of the stork amongst North Sotho speakers. We were told that after certain parts of the stork (*lentlopodi*) had been burnt, its ashes were mixed with an ointment and rubbed into small incisions on the baby's forehead and upper parts of the neck. According to M. M. M. at Ga-Ramokgopa, the mixture was said to facilitate the fusion of the cranial bones and to prevent *thema,* a dreaded disease that was believed to kill young infants. *Thema*, intriguingly, was described as a masculine bird of prey. Both cure and disease, in other words, were associated with gendered bird metaphors. We will return to the tension or the opposition that possibly existed between the water and sky birds in the final section of this article.

Fat from a python, another mystical water creature, was also customarily used for the protection of newborn babies. It constituted a main ingredient in rain making medicine. Python skin was wrapped around the waist of women who experienced problems in giving birth, according to A. M. Munyai.

Lastly, the stork's symbolic connection with female fecundity and motherhood, we argue, could have been inspired by its seasonal migration. Every year water birds returned to their habitat (pools, wetlands and rivers, i. e. places filled with life potency). Migration occurs during spring, which is the season of nature's rebirth, when rains rejuvenate the earth and plant life. Moreover, as confirmed by D. Engelbrecht from the University of Limpopo, water birds generally produce more eggs than other bird species. Perhaps, this behavioural anomaly could have been interpreted traditionally as evidence of the birds being "more fertile".

An ambiguous bird category

So far we have suggested that water birds can be distinguished from sky birds in terms of their gendered association. Our dual classification, we assume further, marked some of the main traditional concerns around which the social identities of women and men were being constructed, namely female procreativity or mother-

hood, and masculine prowess and authority. On closer scrutiny a third, more fluid gendered category emerged from the data. Intriguingly, in several folktales birds that ally themselves with the plight of women have been defined as large and terrifying, therefore as masculine sky beings.

Tale seven: "The girl who defeated the drought" (Scheub 406–11)

The heavens had dried up and as a result rivers and wells had disappeared. Man and beast suffered alike. One day a little girl ventures into the mountains in search of water. There she encounters a mighty bird. The bird gives her water and instructs her not to tell anybody. Back in the village she is asked whether she has found any water. She replies: "No!". Every day she gets water from the bird who cautioned her not to tell anybody. Every day she is asked whether she has received anything to drink. The men in the village get suspicious and call for a meeting. They scold her and force her to divulge the secret. She takes them to the mountain and they find the giant bird. They shoot the bird. Water appears from its body and the rivers and springs are filled.

We note in this Xhosa folktale the same kind of intimacy between birds, water and female fecundity that we have identified in "The Blue Crane and the waterhole" or "*Sikhamba-ngenyanga*". Only, by entrusting its secret to a young woman, this particular bird defies the council of men in the village. Why would a sky bird, deemed to be an image of masculinity, ally itself with the realm of women? Worse still, why would it betray men?

A similar kind of blurring of gender identity characterises *Khiudogane*, the sacred bird of the *Byali* girls' rites of passage amongst the Lovedu (Limpopo). On the one hand, this avian metaphor clearly forms part of a larger, more elaborate complex of symbols of water, life, rain and the mystic powers that were believed to control the survival of humans and nature (Krige and Krige 128, 132, 139). The dancing and other cult activities were organised for the benefit of the young female initiates. Its rites protected and honoured the institution of motherhood and women organised its pedagogic process. Also, metaphors indirectly or directly expressive of the bird cult were declared to have originated from a magical pool in the river. In fact, the terrifying bird itself was said to reside in the pool, together with all other mysteries or *digoma* of the school (Krige and Krige 135, 140). The crafting of the teaching aids and the costumes of the initiates, the building of the bird's residence, the production of the sacred flutes and the male dancing costumes required the use of bark, reeds, leaves and grass: materials that were procured from the river, the pool and its immediate surroundings (Davison 95). In short, the mighty *Khiudogane* evidently expressed, fostered and celebrated female fecundity.

On the other hand, one could just as easily link the symbolic discourse of the mysterious bird cult to the realm of men. The intricate costume of the bird creature and its enclosed living quarters were built by men. Only senior men were allowed

to stay with it. Further, the bird monster's ritual performance was acted out by men assisted by initiates of the male circumcision school. The whistle language of the cult, performed by men, resembled a similar mode of communication in the *gomana* cult, run by men. Lastly, the terms of reference to the bird clearly emphasized its masculine identity. No wonder that the bird has been referred to by the Kriges (130, 232, 140) as the mystery of the old men.

These instances of gender ambiguity raise the question as to how and why the same bird metaphor would serve the interests of both sexes. We discovered the answer in a more complex meaning of traditional avian symbolism and of the social processes of gender construction with which it was intertwined. Blacking's admirable ethnography of Venda girls' initiation provided the data that challenged our initial, dichotomous understanding.

Beyond dichotomy: birds and the gender dialectic

Blacking's (26, 77, 163, 221) survey of the *Domba* initiation includes five masculine sky birds. Two are straightforward images of male prowess: the kori bustard (*dandila*) and the vulture (*danga*). Meaningfully, the kori bustard was also referred to by the instructors as the puff-adder, which signified the male sexual organ. The remaining three (the martial eagle, the hammerhead and an unidentified species called *khuwadzi*) are ambiguous in that they were paired with the mysterious pool, the realm of female procreativity. They resembled the ambivalent avian creature in "The girl who defeated the rain", as well as *Khiudogane*, the great mystery in the *Byali* rites of passage.

All five masculine bird metaphors feature in an identical didactic context: lessons that were intended to emphasize the social and cosmological importance of procreativity, the central theme of girls' puberty rites (Blacking 216). In our understanding, the hammerhead, *khuwadzi* and the martial eagle were juxtaposed to the female pool image as companions or perhaps even as guardians in order to express the ideological construct of balance or complementarity between the sexes. The association between these three sky birds and the pool conveyed to the learners the notion that human procreation required the cooperative efforts of husbands and wives. We found numerous other symbolic pairs in the aphorisms, ritual songs and exercises of the *Domba* (see Blacking 80, 85, 101, 167, 173).

In contrast, the images of the kori bustard and the vulture defined men as sexual predators and signified sexual tension or opposition. *Domba* symbolism routinely defined men as scavengers and predators or depicted them as hunters who pursued women as their prey. Several ritual lessons defined the sexual union as an agonizing experience. Men, it was stated were ready "to crush the little bones" and "to stir the entrails" of the female novices. In other lessons the girls were told that men could "ram", "break", "pierce", "tear" and "rip apart" their sexual partners (Blacking 83, 84, 88, 91, 92).

Some of the stories, and the metaphors which they contain, articulate the very same principle of tension between the sexes that was expressed in the discourse of initiation. We should not be surprised by this didactic analogy or continuity between folklore and rites of passage. After all, both the narrators and the instructors of the initiation school endeavoured to propagate similar cultural values or social norms (Dederen, "Redemption, Resistance, Rebellion: the three R's of African Folklore" 265–6).

Regarding gender opposition, it has been suggested by Kruger and Le Roux that the folktales of Southern Africa often depict a universe controlled by the patriarchy, in which women are preyed upon. Women are described as "perpetual minors" and their relations with the opposite sex are said to be portrayed in terms of "violent, primordial images of male aggression". On the other hand, it has aptly been emphasized by the same authors that women resisted oppression and used storytelling to defy the patriarchy (Kruger and Le Roux 7, 13, 15). We concur that women, far from being passive spectators or consumers of male ideologies, employed some of their narratives as a symbolic means to expose and counter unfair treatment by men. However, we believe that the symbolic "resistance" or "rebellion" against the patriarchy was of a subtle and implicit nature (Dederen, "Dog with a Collar" 94–5).

"The woman who stole the eagle", it was mentioned earlier on, exposes the favouritism displayed by husbands towards the youngest of the co-wives. By the same token, young women are reminded that they too cannot escape the retaliation of their husband, "the lion in the house". Other tales like "*Sikhamba-ngenyanga*" criticize men for being selfish and insensitive to the needs of their wives.

In "The woman and the mighty bird", we believe, yet another form of women's opposition to men transpires. The terrible bird that hides in the darkest part of the forest first tricks a woman into disobeying her husband and subsequently kills her. In doing so the bird sanctions the authority of the men in the village. The moral of the story is that men are not to be trusted. The creator of this story deployed, if not appropriated, the masculine bird image in order to expose the unfairness of men.

The fluidity of the magical bird in "The girl who defeated the drought" can be explained in terms of the strategy of appropriation too. Its empathic disposition towards the young female hero could be read as a manifestation of the principle of gender complementarity. On the other hand, it is equally feasible to assume, as we do, that the creator of the story has taken on the opposite sex by taking over its image of the sky bird.

Finally, the gender ambivalence that characterises *Khiudogane* can be accounted for by the fact that women and men can deploy the same symbol in opposing ways in order to suit their particular interests (see Turner 55–6; Dederen, "Dog with a Collar" 93). In this case, men may have created the great bird of the *Byali* in order to acquire patronage over women's rites of passage. Women, in response, might have simply appropriated and interpreted the great magical bird as "theirs". In sum, rituals, like

stories, provided the battleground for the negotiation of gender construction. In traditional societies female and male comprised significant categories of symbolic classification, and gendering was used to make sense of the world. We propose that water and sky birds mirror the principles of gender opposition and balance in which the didactics of rites of passage and folklore was grounded.

Conclusion

The most surprising outcome of our engagement with the bird metaphor concerns the meaningful quality of ambiguity. Ambiguity is generally assumed to have been a distinctive feature of the symbolism of many a small-scale society. It has been accounted for in a variety of ways. Turner (43–4) believes it to result from the fact that symbols signified the complexity of the "human total." In San culture contradictions and ambivalence of meaning have been clarified with reference to the principles of shifting, renewal and transformation characteristic of ritual experience (Keeney and Keeney 65–6). Matthias Guenther (226–43) has proposed that vagueness and inchoateness of beliefs could be the result of tensions between social organisation and ideology. In this article ambivalent symbolism is explained in terms of the gender dialectic.

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Abjection in Dambudzo Marechera's *The House of Hunger*

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Abjection in Dambudzo Marechera's *The House of Hunger*

In a description of nationalist poems about "a golden age of black heroes; of myths and legends and sprites" (Marechera 74), the narrator of *The House of Hunger* (1978) observes that these themes are the "exposed veins dripping through the body of the poems." In this article we extend this observation to argue that, metaphorically on display in Marechera's novella itself, are the "exposed veins dripping through the body of the [text]" (74). The novella's themes include colonialism, social destitution, violence, state-sanctioned oppression, identity struggles, poverty, dislocation, disillusionment and anger, all of which are appropriately imaged in Marechera's visceral metaphor of the pain and violence implicit in the literary text. More specifically, corporeal imagery emphasises the unnamed narrator's troubled existence, suffusing *The House of Hunger* in a manner that elicits disgust and horror, thus encouraging the reader's affective response to the representation of the colonial condition. This article illuminates Marechera's seeming obsession with corporeality by providing a postcolonial and psychoanalytic reading, focussing in particular on Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection. Although critics have objected to reading African texts through the lens of psychoanalysis, the article sets out to address this concern, noting the importance of theorists like Frantz Fanon and Joshua D. Esty in justifying psychoanalytic readings of African literature, and drawing resonant parallels between Kristevan theory and Marechera's perspective on the colonial condition of Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) in the 1970s. **Keywords:** abjection, African literature, corporeality, postcolonialism, psychoanalysis.

Introduction

In the 1999 preface to *Emerging Perspectives on Dambudzo Marechera*, Dennis Brutus notes that Marechera, "as he often insisted", was "exposed to a wide range of literatures and ideas from many cultures and this gave his writing a freedom and a wide range of imagery that many found unfamiliar and even shocking" (Brutus ix). Perhaps because of his exposure to multinational, multicultural literature and his consequent literary range, Veit-Wild and Chennells (xi) observe that Marechera has "often been regarded as the 'man who betrayed Africa'"; that he "broke ranks with the sort of nationalism which gave a peculiar authority to pre-colonial African culture" and his "art refused to be rooted in an Africa which the political and cultural officialdom of the 1960s and 1970s imagined". Marechera's prodigious reading enabled him to "place Africa in a broader context than that provided by either indigenous cultures or by a simple opposition of European imperialism and African resistance" (Veit-Wild and

Chennells xi). Moreover, he "refused to claim peculiar merits for blackness" because he "hated racism and therefore rejected racial taxonomies" (Veit-Wild and Chennells ix) as a means to combat it. For Veit-Wild and Chennells (xi), the "enormous importance of Marechera is that while his compatriots were still fighting for national liberation, his endeavour was to dismantle the 'African image'" and he "recognized that 'culture' was being invoked to authorize and thus disguise the tyrannies of many of the regimes which came to power in the 1960s and 1970s".

In a discussion of postcolonial criticism and theory, Hans Bertens (194) argues that the "desire for cultural self-determination, that is for cultural independence, is one of the moving forces behind the literatures that in the 1960s and 1970s spring up in the former colonies". Yet Marechera's writing seems to indicate that cultural independence is not so easily achieved—that it might even be impossible—owing to the multicultural influences exerted on the former colonies largely as a consequence of colonisation. Intertextuality and global cultural references permeate *The House of Hunger* accordingly.

Indeed, Marechera refused to be categorised as an "African writer"—he objected to the notion that "any writer should be bound to further the interests of nation or race" (Veit-Wild and Chennells xii). Thus, for Helon Habila, Marechera is nothing like any African writer before him:

> Up until the time he appeared, the leading writers like Chinua Achebe, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Ayi Kwei Armah had written in an accessible, social realist mode, and most of the writers that came immediately after them adopted the same style, not only because of the earlier writers' influence, but also because of the effectiveness of this very accessible style in presenting the anti-colonial, nationalist themes that had become the predominant concern of early post-colonial African fiction. (Habila 256–7)

Discussing Marechera's refusal of nationalism, social realism and an anti-colonialism that simply reverses colonial binaries, Veit-Wild and Chennells (xiii) argue that the fundamental achievement of postcolonialism has in fact been "to show that as long as the colonial encounter is imagined in binarisms of coloniser and colonised, oppression and resistance, foreign and native, neither has an identity outside a paradigm of mutual dependence". A system of binarisms, like colonialism, employs oppositions "in the cultural construction of reality" (Ashcroft et al. 23). Consequently, much postcolonial theory is premised upon colonialism's construction of the "other". Famously, for example, Edward Said's *Orientalism* focuses on the way in which Western discourse seeks to "control, manipulate, even to incorporate" the Oriental "other" (Said 13); and Abdul JanMohamed, in *Manichean Aesthetics* and elsewhere, states clearly that the "dominant model of power-and-interest-relations in all colonial societies is the Manichean opposition between the putative superiority of the European and the supposed inferiority of the native" ("Economy" 63). The binary colonial system of "self" and "other" suppresses "ambiguous or interstitial spaces between the opposed categories, so that

any overlapping region […] becomes impossible according to binary logic, and a region of taboo in social experience" (Ashcroft et al. 23–24). Postcolonial theory thus operates to recuperate the "region of 'taboo'—the domain of overlap between these imperial binary oppositions, the area in which ambivalence, hybridity and complexity continually disrupt the certainties of imperial logic" (Ashcroft et al. 25–26). Homi Bhabha's notion of the "Third Space", for example—the interstitial, liminal space between colonising and colonised cultures, "where the negotiation of incommensurable difference creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences" (*The Location of Culture* 312)—is one way in which the political tension of a "region of taboo" is theorised.

Yet tropes in literature also reveal taboo and liminality. In his seminal article, "Excremental Postcolonialism", Joshua D. Esty notes the function of scatology as a governing trope in postcolonial African writing. Observing that psychoanalysis posits "shit [as] the first instancing of the other" (Esty 34) that is nonetheless deeply imbricated with the self, he reveals how the trope is particularly salient in African writing, and especially relevant to depicting the region of taboo created in the cultural contact zone where the notions of "self" and "other" occur so prominently: "If, in the colonial era, shit often functioned as a sign of the actively denigrated native it also comes to function, in the decolonisation era, as a sign of the actively repudiated ex-coloniser, the alien and unwanted residue of a sometimes violent political expulsion" (Esty 30). Indeed, just before the advent of Zimbabwean independence, Marechera foregrounds the region of taboo in social experience. *The House of Hunger* is permeated with imagery of corporeality—the abject (Kristeva's category of taboo and interstitiality)—in order to disrupt the certainties of imperialism as well as the logic of a cohesive sense of self, impossible under colonial conditions. This imagery reveals the uncertain, shifting dynamics between the notions of "self" and "other" that both support and undermine each other. In reading the novella against Kristeva's theory of abjection, the uncoupling of colonial and subjective (inside/outside) binaries will become apparent. This uncoupling is important: as Ashcroft et al. point out, the "danger for anti-colonial resistance comes when the binary opposition is simply reversed, so that 'black', for instance, or 'the colonized', become the dominant terms. This simply locks the project of resistance into the semiotic opposition set up by the imperial discourse" (Ashcroft et al. 26). Marechera, in exposing abject corporeality, and in applying the trope to both coloniser and colonised, refuses the reversal of binary oppositions and remains focused on the liminal region of taboo.

Indeed, *The House of Hunger* is saturated with abject images that do not reverse binaries but instead appear to dismantle them. As Kristeva shows, abjection dismantles the binarism of self/other, resulting in a loss of subjectivity that threatens the cultural construction of reality. Jane Bryce argues that in *The House of Hunger* the body is "smashed, dismembered, distorted, so that the imagination can attain heights of insight, revealed in the material form of writing itself" (Bryce 232). Especially in its use

of language and imagery, Marechera's text itself seems corporeal, a site of abjection in the material form of writing. This article explores this "body" of text.

Importantly, corporeality in Marechera is inextricably linked to the colonial context. Taitz (232) notes of *The House of Hunger* that the "fracturing violence of colonialism is exposed […] through violent events that leave behind scars and stains, that crush, dismember, and fracture". *The House of Hunger* exposes these scars and stains in its evocation of the abject, which also functions to question the stability of identity. Identity in the novella, as Taitz (24) observes, is "in essence unstable, ever-changing, and in need of constant redefinition". Abject imagery promotes this instability, emphasising identity as constantly challenged and under erasure. The narrator is in search of a sense of self, and "the family, the community, the nation, and the state" each ascribes to him a "particular definition" of who he is; however, "as he explores each different arena, he experiences a sense of disillusionment with their inadequacy to represent him" (Taitz 25). The narrator's anonymity—he remains unnamed throughout the text—emphasizes the loss of individuality and subjectivity that may be ascribed to nationalism and state oppression.

Taitz (36) argues that colonial intervention imposes a "new frame of reference" on the colonised subject, but that this frame of reference is constantly "undermined by the traces of an earlier frame of reference—subjectivity". This means that the subjectivity of the colonial subject contradicts colonial influence, leading to a "splitting of the self, a fragmentation, where 'othering' is concretised in a double consciousness and double-voicedness and in a condition of alienation" (Taitz 23). Through abjection, Marechera voices this conflict and expresses the fragmentation of subjectivity and the threat under which it constantly exists. As Esty (54) observes, stable identity is impossible under oppressive colonialism or nationalism and this uncertainty influences the literary text: "where the artist flies from the squalid constraints of history yet is impelled back to the question of nation, it is not surprising to find texts that are profoundly self-divided"; these texts are often suffused with "scatological self-doubt", themselves becoming "excrement, excess, superfluity".

Taitz (36) notes, moreover, how relationships in the novella are "fractured", including the relations between the coloniser and the colonised. *The House of Hunger* attempts to disrupt a "colonial narrative which seeks to impose a unified, monolithic, and homogenous identity upon the subjects of colonization" (Taitz 36). However, the novella not only endeavours to undermine this narrative of the coloniser, it also seeks to dismantle the "African image" of postcoloniality. As Veit-Wild and Chennels (ix) emphasize, Marechera's writing "refused to be rooted in an Africa which the political and cultural officialdom of the 1960s and 1970s imagined".

A psychoanalytic reading of postcolonial texts

Many critics have argued against reading postcolonial texts through the lens of

psychoanalysis. They maintain that doing so imposes on these texts a Western form of reading aligned to nineteenth-century colonialism. Consequently, taking a psychoanalytic approach to a postcolonial text is deemed counter-productive to the postcolonial agenda "to disestablish Eurocentric norms of literary and artistic values" (Abrams and Harpham 307). Yet inherent in Marechera's writing is a strong tension between postcolonialism and European influence, thus problematising an exclusively postcolonial focus on his writing, and opening up the potential for a psychoanalytic approach to his work.

Brendon Nicholls addresses the difficulties inherent in the psychoanalytic approach to reading postcolonial texts. He outlines some of the aforementioned critiques of psychoanalysis:

> There are considerable theoretical pitfalls in invoking a psychoanalytic framework in relation to postcolonial writing and subjectivity. Indeed, postcolonial theory has extensively critiqued the founding assumptions and the institutional complicities of psychoanalysis. In fact, it is possible to problematise psychoanalysis on historical, conceptual, diagnostic, institutional, and experiential grounds. (Nicholls 2)

Additionally, Nicholls (2) maintains that, "[d]iagnostically, a psychoanalytic approach to African literature risks instituting a universal explanatory category that elides political specificities". He observes that "psychoanalysis's key assumptions and practices—its embedded standards of normality and deviance, and the therapeutic rehabilitation of agitated states through self-disclosing utterances—cannot be completely separated from the utterly abnormal and aberrant effects of colonial surveillance, torture, and suppression" and that psychoanalysis is "inseparable from world-historical ambitions of nineteenth-century European imperialism" (Nicholls 3). He argues correctly that psychoanalytic readings of African literature therefore "need to acknowledge the interior lives of African subjects while avoiding the conceptual minefield of psychoanalysis in its normative or regulative dimension, as well as the political complicities of colonial psychiatry and ethnopsychiatry" (Nicholls 3).

Yet as Frantz Fanon's writing, combining psychoanalysis and political critique, reveals, psychoanalysis is not inimical to understanding the colonised subject's experience. As Fanon observes, "[t]he defensive positions born of [the] violent confrontation between the colonized and the colonial constitute a structure which […] reveals the colonized personality" (Fanon 182). Homi Bhabha observes, moreover, that "[i]t is Fanon's great contribution to our understanding of ethical judgment and political experience to insistently frame his reflections on violence, decolonization, national consciousness, and humanism in terms of the psycho-affective realm" ("Foreword" xix). This psycho-affectivity, he observes, may appear to imply a problematic cultural universality (or the "normative or regulative dimension" of psychoanalysis that Nicholls views as a by-product of European imperialism). However, Bhabha notes

its contextual dimension, and thus its social, political, and historical specificity: "it is only ever mobilized into social meaning and historical effect through an embodied and embedded action, an engagement with (or resistance to) a given reality, or a performance of agency in the present tense" ("Foreword" xix). Attention to the body and corporeality is thus fundamentally important to an analysis of postcolonial psycho-affectivity.

A psychoanalytic approach to Marechera is thus relevant for two reasons. First, Marechera's writing does not subscribe to an African ideology that separates itself from historical European influences by striving to return to a pre-colonial culture or a culture independent of colonial influence. Instead, it acknowledges that European influences cannot be dismissed. The psychoanalytic reading of Marechera's novella that we employ in this essay does not attempt to apply "standards of normality and deviance", nor does it seek to apply to the novella a "normative or regulative dimension", which is a constituent part of nineteenth-century psychoanalysis during the period of European imperialism. Nicholls (4) suggests that "when we encounter psychopathologies or perversities at work in African literary texts, we should at least consider the possibility that these features contain a political logic that emerges from the history of colonization or that these features amount to a tactical logic for working with colonialism's contemporary legacies". Fanon's approach to colonised subjectivity invokes this political logic, opening up our second justification for a psychoanalytic reading: Marechera, like Fanon, does not shy away from the possibility that an African text or the representation of African/colonised experience may contain "psychoanalytic" features relating to colonialism.

Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* elucidates the concepts of the "abject" and "abjection". The abject refers to aspects of the self that traverse the borders of the body, forming a part of it, but also existing outside of it as waste; for example, loathed foods, bodily products and, most emphatically, the corpse. The subject recoils in horror from the abject, which threatens its sense of itself as a discreet, "clean and proper" entity (*Powers of Horror* 8). Although the abject cannot be considered as such, it is a part of the self that must be perpetually rejected and othered in order for subjectivity to be bolstered. As Noëlle McAfee explains, abjection creates the "borders of an always tenuous 'I'" (McAfee 45); it is the "process that initiates and maintains the construction of subjectivity" (Grogan, "Abjection and Compassion: Affective Corporeality in Patrick White's Fiction" 95). It begins as a "phase of development in which the child acquires language and begins to take its place as a speaking subject within the symbolic order" (Grogan "Abjection" 95). An affective state "equivalent to horror", occurring in conjunction with the acquisition of language (which itself severs the child from the world through the substitution of representation), it protects the self from "those things […] relegated to the periphery or beyond the boundaries of civilized humanity" (Bryce 227). Marechera's abject

text thus threatens "orderly", "acceptable", and "social" identities—the "orderly" identities colonialism violently attempted to construct.

Encountering the abject, so carefully distanced from the notion of the "self" via psychoanalytic repudiation, thus equates to a "loss of meaning, a breakdown of the distinction between the subject and the object, a collapse of the symbolic order" (Mansfield qtd. in Rudge and Holmes 4). Additionally, "the abject challenges established 'systems of order, meaning, truth […] and laws that produce a controlled and manageable subject'" (Rudge and Holmes 4). The question arises whether the abject is "still part of me because it comes from me? Do I own it? Because of this uncertainty, the lines that differentiate the inside from the outside of the body shift and fluctuate, thus destabilizing the sense of subjectivity" (Rudge and Holmes 4). In this essay, we argue that *The House of Hunger* is saturated with images of abjection. While Bryce (227) maintains that Marechera's imagery of stains "bears witness to his conscious transgression of the boundaries" of what is social and therefore acceptable, we further postulate that Marechera represents the human body (the abject in particular), and the violence to which it is often subjected, in a way that reveals the destabilisation of subjectivity within the political and national climate of 1970s Zimbabwe (Rhodesia).

Abjection in *The House of Hunger*

The plot of *The House of Hunger* is not easy to establish or articulate because it is a novella of fragmentation: the timeframe is achronological, shifting between the narrator's memories and events in the present. Additionally, the identities of various characters are not immediately known nor elaborated upon. Habila, however, summarises the novella as follows:

> *The House of Hunger* is set in 1970s Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia), in the repressive years of Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) of the white minority government of Ian Smith. These were also the years of the war of independence. The story opens with the nameless narrator leaving "The House of Hunger"; on the way he stops at a bar where he runs into friends—first Harry, then Julia—the bar then becomes the immediate, concrete setting of the story, and from then on the narrative progresses in seemingly unconnected flashbacks and lengthy digressions. (Habila 257)

Bryan Mukandi, in a 2009 opinion piece for *Mail and Guardian* focusing on the African economic climate, refers to the novella's continuing relevance. He observes that it "spells out [Marechera's] suspicions of the liberation movement, its leaders, and the prospects for the future" (Mukandi). He argues, moreover, that it is an "impolite, almost crass work, [and] is a slap in the face that demands the reader ask difficult questions about the state of the world". He notes that although it is "a difficult book to make sense of […] a theme that emerges from its loosely connected series of stories is both frustration with the inequalities that were present at the time, as well

as a scepticism of the future". Pertaining to the novella's status as autobiographical, Bryce (226) comments that "[w]e know from biographical evidence contained in the Source Book that the description of childhood in 'House of Hunger' is drawn from the events of Marechera's own early life". Critics therefore suggest that *The House of Hunger* presents Marechera's personal struggle with his own subjectivity or identity growing up as a disillusioned youth in Rhodesia, a country vying for independence amid state-sanctioned oppression and violence.

Chris Power observes that "the majority of [Marechera's] works are written in a sometimes difficult stream-of-consciousness style" and his writing presents "deliberately confused timelines, disorienting shifts between external event and internal process, and the predilection for the grotesque" (Power). Marechera writes "in English, his second language (his first was Shona)" and his "prose exudes tension. He considered English a form of combat, a process of 'discarding grammar, throwing syntax out, subverting images from within, beating the drum and cymbals of rhythm, developing torture chambers of irony, sarcasm, gas ovens of limitless black resonance'". Power's description suggests the abject nature of Marechera's style itself, its predilection for what Kristeva has referred to as the "semiotic" dimension of language.

Marechera's characters are, moreover, "typically outsiders" (Power), much like Marechera himself, according to several African critics. Habila (257) notes that Marechera's main critics were "fellow Africans who saw his dalliance with European modernism as a betrayal of the anti-colonial struggle"; in a sense, one might argue that Marechera's interest in Europe, in modernism, ejected him from a community of African writers, rendering him abject, one might say. For Okonkwo, for example, his "excessive interest in sex activity, his tireless attempt to rake up filth, [was] alien to Africa—a continent of hope and realisable dreams" (qtd. in Power). Additionally, Okonkwo maintained that Marechera had "grafted a decadent avant-garde European attitude […] and style to experiences that emanate from Africa", a style of "distorted and self-destructive sophistication" that, according to her, Africa could ill afford (qtd. in Habila 257). Certainly, Marechera did not write to satisfy nationalist attitudes nor cultural assumptions of the African continent. Annie Gagiano therefore argues that the "discomfiture of some critics with the African cosmopolitanism or African modernism embodied in Marechera's work" relates to a representative passage in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's influential 1986 essay collection, *Decolonising the Mind*, which declares that if an African acquires the "thought-processes and values of the foreign tongue" he or she becomes distanced or "alienated from the values of his mother-tongue or from the language of the masses" (Habila 257). Marechera, however, commented on the subject of African nationalism, "in his typical eloquent and iconoclastic manner […]: 'If you are a writer for a specific nation or a specific race, then fuck you'" (Habila 257).

The metaphoric "House of Hunger", as Bryce (231) suggests, is "both a place and a habitation, and the body and the mind". The novella's title, through the reference to hunger, invokes the tension between the inside and the outside of the body that constitutes a significant aspect of the text and that harnesses the imagery of abjection. In *The House of Hunge*r, not only is literal food desperately required, owing to the narrator's poverty, but also the social, political, and cultural nourishment lacking in the lives of the voiceless and powerless in Rhodesian society. Here both the literal body and the social body are starving; Marechera's writing renders both "bodies" abject in order to suggest the corrosion not only of individual subjectivity but also of systems of oppression. In this way, he subscribes to the way in which, according to Esty (44), African writers suspicious of colonialism and nationalism use corporeal or "excremental tropes to register the tension between the demands of the […] subject and the demands of the social collective".

Thus, according to Bryce (223), "[s]exuality and the body are, for Marechera, a template for social reality, so that his narrative of post-Independence Zimbabwe is in a very real sense 'written on the body'". Moreover, she observes the "slipperiness" of boundaries in Marechera's imagery as well as the "elision of discrete categories, the replacement of sharply defined difference by multifarious diversity, the metonymic correspondence of body/nation, the ease of transition between inner and outer, and the embodiment of all this in language itself" (Bryce 222). Of interest here is Marechera's "ease of transition between inner and outer" and the "slipperiness" between boundaries that the novella emphasizes, precisely the effects of abjection.

The opening pages of *The House of Hunger*, emphasising the link between the social body and the individual body, foreground Rhodesia's police brutality and government oppression. The narrator's father, for example, "once got into trouble for begging and loitering. And then Peter got jailed for accepting a bribe from a police spy" (12). A strong theme of political oppression is thus established, especially in relation to education and ideas, an oppression from which the narrator does not escape. At the beginning of the novella he is "arrested like everybody else for a few hours" when he and others "rushed out into the streets to protest the discriminatory wage-structure" (12). He and "[a]ll the black youth [were] thirsty for self-knowledge" and he believed that he "could find it in 'political consciousness'" (12). He mentions that there "was not an oasis of thought which [they] did not lick dry; apart from those which had been banned, whose drinking led to arrest and suchlike flea-scratchings" (12). Metaphors of consumption are therefore employed, relating to the novella's title and depicting the narrator and his fellow students' attempts to quench their thirst for knowledge and sustain dissent within an oppressive society. However, the knowledge that they consume, regulated by colonial power, results in "flea-scratchings"—signifiers of another form of consumption, a parasitism turned

against them—alerting the reader to the abject corporeal imagery Marechera uses to describe the oppression and control of the police.

Imagery of oppression, linked to imagery of ingestion and thus to the prevailing trope of the "House of Hunger", continues throughout the novella with mention of "arrests en masse at the university"; "when workers came out to strike there were more arrests" (13). These arrests were "so much a part of one's food that no one even turned a hair when two guerrillas were executed one morning and their bodies later displayed to a group of schoolchildren" (13, emphasis added). According to Kristeva, "food, an absolute necessity for keeping the body alive, inevitably breaks down into digested waste material and in this way mirrors the reality that the body will eventually die and decompose" (Rudge and Holmes 3). Kristeva maintains that "a corpse constitutes the utmost portrayal of the abject" when "a living body" is in "proximity of a cadaver" (Rudge and Holmes 3). Marechera describes arrests as toxic "food" and the Rhodesian government exposes children to the horror of corpses, threatening and dismantling their incipient, innocent subjectivities. Thus the colonial government removes all agency from its colonised subjects, oppressing them further and maintaining a culture of subjugation premised on a loss of individuality.

While oppression is figured as food in the descriptions above, shoved down the gullets of the oppressed, resistance of a kind is figured in abject acts of expulsion. In a description of a conversation, "Peter, as usual when something indistinct disgusts him, farted long and loudly and spat in [the narrator's] general direction, and muttered something about capitalists and imperialists" (20). The close link here between "capitalists and imperialists" and the abject intrusion into "proper" life challenges these ideologies. Like Marechera, Peter invokes the abject to threaten such authority. The abject is thus brought to the fore by political, economic, social, and police oppression: what is eaten must be expelled. This abjection occurs in two related ways, as Marechera's writing suggests. In the racist Rhodesia of Marechera's novella, white people "abject" those they consider "other" to themselves: black people. The white government, for example, tries to "expel" black people, by cordoning them off with "Whites Only" signs (37). By doing so, they construct their sense of a "superior" identity. However, what they abject (blackness) threatens this subjectivity—in Marechera's imaginary, black characters like Peter rebel by deliberately invoking the abject and by engaging in behaviour that foregrounds the bodily limit between the inside and the outside.

The interconnection Marechera postulates between white and black forms of abjection is evident in a striking image. The narrator observes: "Something fighting floated down from a pale blue sky. As it floated down to my level I saw it was a black man and a white man locked in the embrace of struggle" (52). This description seemingly provides an image for Homi Bhaba's argument that "the encounter of colonizer and colonized always affects both" (Bertens 207); they are "locked in the embrace

of struggle". The colonization of Rhodesia is presented here as a process that has affected—and continues to affect—both the colonized and colonizer. When either party tries to reject (abject) the other, they inevitably reject (abject) themselves; in other words, their own identity is premised upon the identity of the other and the identity of the "other" is set up in threatening opposition to the "self"s' provisional subjectivity.

However, in relation to the oppressed, abjection, while it may figure as imagery of resistance, is often also turned against the self. Marechera's explicit narrative treatment of the body and its functions reveals his anti-nationalist attitudes, but when the narrator declares in the first line of the novella, "I got my things and left", he reviews "all the details of the foul turd which my life had been and was even at that moment" (11). Here, at the very outset of the text, abjection is not only evident in the imagery but also reflected in the fragmentary narration—the Kristevan semiotic—and the uncertainty of subjectivity that the opening sentence suggests (Who is this character? Why is he leaving? From where?). The narrator observes:

> In the House of Hunger diseases were the strange irruptions of a disturbed universe. Measles or mumps were the symptoms of a malign order. Even a common cold could become a casus belli between neighbours. And add to that the stench of our decaying family life with its perpetual headaches of gut-rot and soul-sickness and rats gnawing the cheese and me worrying it the next morning like a child gently scratching a pleasurable sore on its index finger. (18)

Here the breakdown of the boundaries between the "horrific" and the "clean" is strongly emphasised. The narrator's society is defined by the collective social, cultural and political disease, the "malign order" of the social body. This malign order is shared by the oppressor and oppressed, but is most significantly lived by the latter. Thus the narrator's internal monologue reveals his beaten morale: "My generation had all but been consumed by gut-rot" (59). Social aberrations—such as violence—are exposed and have consumed the narrator's generation, resulting in social decay and loathing, both other- and self-related. Marechera thus "worries" the theme of social decay, like, as he puts it, "a child gently scratching a pleasurable sore on its index finger" (18).

Unsurprisingly, then, abject imagery accumulates in *The House of Hunger*, indexing social and individual degradation, a narrative fascination with corporeality expressed through the character, Julia, who contemplates the human body: "Tubes […] That's what being human means. Insides. Entrails. All twisted up in a knot. A red knot"; to which the narrator replies, "The augury of life-steaming entrails" (61). Julia says, "When I was young […] I wanted to look at my insides. Rip them inside out and see what I really was like" (61). Like Julia, Marechera insists on exposing the viscera, on looking at them and revealing them in the attempt to destabilize identity.

Indeed, the corporeal abject disrupts the seemingly congruent border between the subject and society and Marechera's interest in abjection draws together the oppressor and the oppressed, defying the boundary between them. Certainly, the trope of the abject within the novella distorts the boundary between subject and object: as argued above, images of the abject "connect" the characters into a single, social body because the boundaries between them become obscure as they are subjected to the same system of subjugation. Alan Ramón Ward, without taking a psychoanalytic approach, phrases this differently: "Individualism is rejected in the space Marechera calls the House of Hunger in favour of a collective vision in which each person is alienated from the direct experiences of his or her body" (73). As Grogan notes, "[g]roup identity, like individual subjectivity, is maintained via abjection" ("(Im)Purity, Danger and the Body in Doris Lessing's The Grass is Singing" 32). Through the image of the stain, Marechera too suggests the interconnection between society (or political cohesion) and the oppressed individual. The narrator, for example, recounting his father's death, links it to the machinery of twentieth-century colonialism: "The old man died beneath the wheels of the twentieth century. There was nothing left but stains, bloodstains and fragments of flesh, when the whole length of it was through with eating him" (60). The narrator believes that "the same thing is happening to [his] generation" (60). The "stain" is a motif throughout the novella that represents the loss of individuality and social liberties. The "bulldozers have been and gone and where once our heroes danced there is nothing but a hideous stain" (60).

White characters, Marechera suggests, are also not immune to the reducing logic of the stain. Richter, a white student whom the narrator meets "by chance" and whom the military had left with "locust-like raspings of wings in his mind" (86) when they were done with him, goes about "meticulously dissect[ing] silence", a characteristic the narrator admires, by "scalpelling it to its very entrails and with a sterile pin pointing out to us organs of interest". In other words, he provides "invariably harrowing accounts of atrocities he had either witnessed or taken part in" (86). When Richter dies, he too is "crunched to a stain by a train" (86), invoking again the metaphor of "the wheels of the twentieth century". Thus Richter, despite being white, is also deprived of individuality under the domination of the state. Yet Marechera not only criticizes the dominating white government, he also criticizes his fellow black citizens. He notices: "The barman, impressed by [Julia's] massive breasts, was thoughtfully reducing her to a stain on a sheet. A true hero of our time. Reducing everything to shit" (55). Again, the motif of the "stain" is reiterated to indicate the loss of individuality and the corruption of social life extending into the distorted lives and behaviour of each individual.

Marechera thus compares the "impropriety" of bodily functions to abject human society, which, much like the repressed aspects of the human body, is viewed as "unclean" and "improper". The narrator condemns human endeavours throughout

history: "we are all sticky with the stinking stains of history" (57). This is perhaps why Marechera does not subscribe to a nationalist ideology or one of heroic resistance, either of which would attempt to establish a circumscribed culture based upon the abjection of difference: for him, few groups of people have been isolated from "outside" influences; in other words, few groups have been left "unstained" by history.

Further illustrating this point, the narrator describes his best friend Phillip's poems. He observes in them "songs of a golden age of black heroes; of myths and legends and sprites. And ghouls. These were the exposed veins dripping through the body of the poems. One of them was about Julia and [him]self; it was entitled 'Something Rotten'" (74). The poem reminds the narrator of an abject scenario: it was a "time when I was writing an article about shantytown and while inspecting the pit-latrines there I fell into the filthy hole. I am still not quite recovered from the experience" (74). The narrator still embodies this encounter with the abject, in all its horror and trauma: it is part of the colonial condition linked, moreover, to his suspicion of a heroism based upon racial and nationalist identity. Ambiguously, the "filthy hole" signifies the "pit-latrines" but could also connote the narrator's state of mind upon seeing the conditions in which people must live, or upon responding to various political ideologies—a state of mind that remains with him.

Kristeva's theory that "cultures have set up rituals" (*Powers of Horror* 49) to deal with the threat of abjection perhaps explains the use of abject imagery in literature. Within modernity, including within the twentieth-century colonial order, where "societies develop and religions wane, art takes over the function of purification, often by conjuring up the abject things it seeks to dispel" (*Powers of Horror* 49). Literature thus provides a "catharsis and purging of what is deemed other or abject", meaning that "often these literary products show a dark side of humanity" (*Powers of Horror* 57). Marechera's litany of abject imagery throughout *The House of Hunger* arguably attempts to cleanse the abjection of his own social reality. Habila (256), suggesting this cathartic dynamic, quotes David Kerr, arguing that it is "the possibility of art as a solution to the meaningless contingency of life that allows Marechera to create *The House of Hunger* at all, and he is acutely aware that the very act of writing the novella is almost an act of defiance, plucking meaning from chaos". While Marechera appears to write to express the collapse of meaning, it is also the act of writing that creates meaning for him. *The House of Hunger* is thus saturated with images of corporeality to the extent that the text itself appears corporeal and becomes abject, illustrating Kristeva's assertion that literature often exhibits a dark, abject side of humanity. Indeed, Bryce (257) argues that the "aspects of existence which social codes function to contain, repress and censor, are brought to light by the artist, who symbolically on our behalf confronts our deepest fears: fear of defilement and death"; in other words, the abject.

Marechera, however, also confronts the deepest fears of the colonial order. As Mansfield (4) argues, "the abject challenges established 'systems of order, meaning,

truth and law […] and laws that produce a controlled and manageable subject'". The white, colonial social body views blackness as "social excrement" and seeks to discharge it from the inside of the body politic to the outside. Grogan notes that the inherent problem in this process of othering and expelling is that "excrement" is an example of "a part of the body that can never be finally expelled" ("(Im)Purity" 32); in the same way, the white social body cannot expel the "others" it constructs in the attempt to prop up its identity. Bryce (228), in her discussion of the imagery in another of Marechera's works—*Black Sunlight*—observes how the characters are "victims of torture rationalized by ideology" and are "society's excreta, that which it prefers to flush out of sight, but which the writer, through the medium of language, washes to the surface again". Colonial power in *The House of Hunger* requires the (black) body for its racist assumptions, which is perhaps why Marechera "tears the body apart" through the abject text, simultaneously rendering identity abject and thus inassimilable so that these kinds of meanings—based on physical differences—will become meaningless.

Conclusion

The House of Hunger (1978) predates Kristeva's theory of abjection, but Marechera shows how exposure to the abject creates horror and disgust and subsequently threatens oppressive subjectivities. Abjection emerges in the conditions created by a repressive government that seeks to police that which it considers abject, or "other", to itself. *The House of Hunger* is set in the context of the extreme violence and oppression of the ruling Rhodesian government. Its systems of power sought to repress black people, whom the colonial order considered abject—"unclean", "improper", and a threat to its sense of coherence, meaning, truth and law. Marechera's abject imagery emphasises this political dynamic but destabilises the boundaries between subject and object, "self" and "other". *The House of Hunger*, through abject imagery and textuality, indirectly reveals how the colonial regime enforced a loss of subjectivity on the colonised other and thus how it established a society on the basis of abjection. Yet Marechera's writing explicitly exposes the inside of the body to reveal how the abject constitutes everyone in his society. It is through the abject, then, that he reveals the threatened sense of self—of both the colonised and the coloniser—constituting subjectivity within a colonial context.

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Notes

1. In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva posits the terms "symbolic" and "semiotic" to refer respectively to the ordering signifying capacity of language and that characterised by the disordering, abject entrance of corporeality into language. John Lechte argues that the semiotic is evident in the "dynamic and unrepresentable poetic dimension of language—its rhymes, rhythms, intonations, alliterations—melody, the music of language" (Lechte 5); it is evident, moreover, in the disruption of grammar and syntax.
2. The relation between various characters in the novella is not always immediately clear; "Peter's" connection to the narrator is not established. Marechera therefore does not make it easy for the reader to establish the identities of the characters, which adds to the novella's emphasis upon the slipperiness of identity, the loss of subjectivity.
3. This quotation strongly recalls the first lines of Allen Ginsberg's "Howl", arguably drawing into the text another, among many, "western" influence similarly stimulated by the imagery of hunger, corporeality and abjection: "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked, / dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix" (Ginsberg 9, ll. 1–2).

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Modern Swahili: the integration of Arabic culture into Swahili literature

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Modern Swahili: the integration of Arabic culture into Swahili literature

Due to her geographical position, the African continent has for many centuries hosted visitors from other continents such as Asia and Europe. Such visitors came to Africa as explorers, missionaries, traders and colonialists. Over the years, the continent has played host to the Chinese, Portuguese, Persians, Indians, Arabs and Europeans. Arabs have had a particularly long history of interaction with East African people, and have therefore made a significant contribution to the development of the Swahili language. Swahili is an African native language of Bantu origin which had been in existence before the arrival of Arabs in East Africa. The long period of interaction between Arabs and the locals led to linguistic borrowing mainly from Arabic to Swahili. The presence of loanwords in Swahili is evidence of cultural interaction between the Swahili and Arabic people. The Arabic words are borrowed from diverse registers of the language. Hence, Swahili literature is loaded with Arabic cultural aspects through Arabic loanwords. Many literary works are examples of Swahili literature that contains such words. As a result, there is evidence of Swahili integrating Arabic culture in its literature, an aspect that this paper seeks to highlight. **Keywords:** Arabic, cultural integration, linguistic borrowing, Swahili literature.

Introduction

Swahili is a term used to refer to a society of people living along the coast of East Africa whose native language is Kiswahili, a Bantu language spoken mainly in East Africa and beyond. It is spoken by well over 200 million people within Africa in Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Mozambique, Zambia and Malawi (Massamba et al. 2). Swahili functions as the official language in Kenya, Tanzania and Burundi. It is also used as the national language in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi. Mazrui and Mazrui state that Swahili functions as a medium of trade, religion, education, civil administration, practical politics and collective bargaining throughout the East African region (160). In other words, Swahili is the lingua franca of the entire region East and Central Africa. Choge states: "Kiswahili is a regional language in East Africa countries where it wears several hats as a vernacular, national and official language, lingua franca and a vehicular in various spheres of life" (172). Prior to the arrival of foreigners on the East African coast, the Swahili led their life with their own religion, beliefs, economic activities, language and social activities as their culture. They had their name as a people before it was changed by the Arabs to Swahili. "[T]he name 'Swahili' is derived

from Arabic denoting 'language of the coastal people'" (Mazrui and Mazrui 170).

Arabic, on the other hand, is a Semitic language spoken by 350–400 million people in the Arab world and beyond. Akidah states that Modern Standard Arabic is the standard Arabic dialect that is spoken beyond geographical boundaries (2). In this article, "Arabic" refers to Modern Standard Arabic. The word Arab refers to a society of people with Asiatic origin speaking a Semitic group language called Arabic. The Arabs travelled to the East African coast by sea and settled, where they met and mingled with the Swahili people. When Arabs came to the East African coast, they also had their own way of life. They came to Africa mainly to do trade. As the Arabs traded in East Africa, they intermarried with the Swahili people. The Arabs also introduced their religion to the Swahili people that led to the majority of Swahili converting to Islam. In the long period of interaction between the Arabs and Swahili people, many Arabic words were borrowed into Swahili, thanks to cultural integration.

Prior to the arrival of Arabs to the East African coast, in Swahili culture, children belonged to their mother and not father; a kind of matriarchal system. In addition, spirits were given feminine names such as *Mwana Chambi, Mwana Mkisi* and *Mwana Mtwapa* (Chiraghdin and Mnyampala x). The Arabs came to East Africa with a culture that differed from that of the Swahili. One of the major differences between Arabic and Swahili culture was religion. Arabs came with their Islamic religion which they introduced to the Swahili people. Another cultural aspect is the language; over a period of contact between Arabs and Swahili, intermarriage took place, trade expanded, and Islam rapidly spread along the coast of East Africa, resulting in cultural integration. The Swahili people adopted much of Arabic cultural aspects such as their cuisine, manner of dress, religion, education, trade and art. In the process, Arabic words also found their way into Swahili through linguistic borrowing. As Boesch says, "culture has the potential to change rapidly if a new social model becomes available" (83). This is what happened to Swahili culture; as a result of social integration between the Swahili and Arabs, Swahili culture has changed by adopting Arabic cultural aspects. These borrowed cultural aspects are reflected in Swahili literature through loanwords from Arabic.

In this study, I used purposive sampling of select Swahili literary works from two genres, that is, poetry and prose. The two genres were selected on the basis that they are more readily available in print form compared to other genres such as drama. The criteria used to select these works was the use of loanwords in the texts, as well as the time of their publication. I wished to investigate both classical and modern literary works in Swahili to show how loanwords have featured in these works. In poetry, I selected *Inkishafi* (1980) by Sayyid Abdalla A. Nassir, and '*Sikate Tamaa* (1980) by Said A. Mohamed to represent classical authors; while *Bara Jingine* (2001) by Kithaka wa Mberia represents modern authors. I also selected the novel *Adili na Nduguze* by Shaaban Robert (1952) representing classical authors and *Siku*

Njema (1996) by Ken Walibora representing modern authors. *Sikate Tamaa* (Said A. Mohamed) and *Adili na Nduguze* (Robert) are Tanzanian Swahili texts (see Wamitila 123), whereas the rest of the texts are Kenyan texts.

I identified loanwords from Arabic used in the selected works. I then categorized the loanwords according to their respective registers, that is, religion, economy, administration, education, literature and social culture. The identified sample of loanwords selected from the mentioned literary works are attached in the appendix to this paper.

Linguistic borrowing from Arabic to Swahili

Swahili and Arabic came into contact in the early years of the 10th century, when Arabs travelled and settled along the coast of East Africa between the 9th and 10th centuries (Harries 224–5). According to Chiraghdin and Mnyampala, one of the reasons Arabic loanwords are more prevalent in Swahili, as compared to loanwords from other languages such as Portuguese, Persian, French, English and German, is that the Arabian Gulf is the closest to the coast of East Africa. Due to this proximity, Arabs made frequent journeys to and from Africa and, therefore, its speakers interacted most with the Bantu people (mostly Swahili) along the East African coast (1). The Arabs' and Swahilis' long history of contact led to inter-marriage and borrowing of words mainly from Arabic to Swahili. Mazrui and Mazrui state that the contact between Swahili and Arabs was not merely religious and cultural, but also economic (126). Polome alludes to the fact that the Swahili people shared the faith and culture of Arabs (10). According to Chiraghdin and Mnyampala, the second reason why Swahili borrowed from Arabic is that many Arabic words were used in the teaching of the Islamic religion (5). From this, one can see that the learning of Islam by the Swahili contributed to cultural contact and therefore, to linguistic borrowing largely of religious terms from Arabic to Swahili. Examples of loanwords borrowed in the domain of religion include: *dini* (religion), *dhambi* (sin) and *jahanam* (hell). Apart from religion, the Arab-Swahili interaction in trade also contributed to linguistic borrowing of words such as *bidhaa* (products), *dhahabu* (gold), *fedha* (silver) and *khasara* (loss). Cultural integration between the two groups of people led to borrowed words such as *dunia* (world), *amani* (peace), *taji* (crown) and *rafiki* (friend). There are also words related to the arts that were borrowed from Arabic to Swahili; for instance, *fasihi* (literature), *sanaa* (art), *utenzi* (long poem), *ubeti* (stanza) and *hadithi* (story).

Indigenous African languages have borrowed from other languages, especially English, French and Swahili. Thus, linguistic borrowing does not reduce the status of a language; rather it helps the language to expand its vocabulary and therefore its functional dimension. There are two main reasons as to why linguistic borrowing occurs; these are need and prestige (Anttila 155). Mwaliwa asserts this about Swahili

by stating that Swahili borrowed items from Arabic to meet certain functional needs (50). This applies especially to words found in the domain of religion (Islam) as stated by Mazrui and Mazrui, "Swahili developed within Islamic culture and borrowed many Arabic words of Islamic religion" (174). Examples of words borrowed from Arabic to Swahili to cater for new religious concepts include: *Ramadhan* (holy month of Muslim fast), *Idd* (Muslim festival) and *Madrasa* (Islamic religious school). These were borrowed into Swahili to represent new concepts that hitherto were not present in Swahili. Some words were borrowed into Swahili to cater for concepts that are not new to the community, for instance: *Mola* (God), *Harusi* (wedding) and *Maradhi* (diseases). These words were borrowed into Swahili for the reason of prestige, given that there are indigenous words that represented them prior to the arrival of Arabs. The Bantu Swahili words for *Mola*, *Harusi* and *Maradhi* are *Mungu* (God), *ndoa* (wedding) and *magonjwa* (diseases), respectively.

When words are borrowed into a certain language, they either get adapted or adopted in terms of their structure. Mwaliwa affirms that most of the Arabic words were adapted to conform to the linguistic structure of Swahili (285). This means that the loanwords were structurally changed to fit into the structure of Swahili. Words that hitherto had Arabic syllable structures were modified to conform to Swahili syllable orientation especially CV (consonant and vowel). For instance, the words *birika* (kettle), *askofu* (bishop) and *adhuhuri* (noon) have been changed to adapt to the Swahili structure. Yet, a few words have been rendered into Swahili as they were in Arabic having closed syllables, for example: *maktaba* (library), *labda* (perhaps) and *maalum* (special). In addition, Swahili adopted three Arabic sound segments through borrowed words; the sound segments /gh/, /dh/ and /th/ in words such as *ghadhabu* (wrath), *ghafla* (suddenly), *dhiki* (distress), *dhambi* (sin), *thawabu* (reward) and *thibitisha* (confirm) have now become part of Swahili phonology. Such borrowed words are used by the authors of Swahili literature under study.

Overview of Swahili literature

Swahili has been used as a medium of communication in written texts including literary works. Educational books are available for teaching Swahili as a language to pupils and students in primary and secondary levels, respectively. In addition, literary works in poetry, drama, short stories and novels are also available in large numbers. Several authors from around the region have produced literary works using Swahili, such as Shaaban Robert, Said Ahmed Mohamed, Abdilatif Abdalla, Mohamed Suleiman Mohamed, Zainab Burhani, Shafi Adam Shafi, Alamin Mazrui, Euphrase Kezilahabi, Katama Mkangi, Emmanuel Mbogo, Kithaka wa Mberia, Mwendah Mbatia, John Habwe, Kyallo Wadi Wamitila, Ken Walibora and many more. These literary works have been read widely across the region particularly in schools, colleges and universities offering Swahili and its literature as subjects. Even though

English literature is also prevalent in the East Africa region, Swahili literature is making its presence felt in the contemporary period. This is an indication that Swahili literature is thriving in East Africa particularly in Kenya and Tanzania (Choge 183).

Evidence of written literature in Swahili dates as far as the 17th century with the oldest surviving manuscript called *Hamziya* that was written in 1652 (Amidu 114). Authors of both traditional and modern Swahili literature have contributed immensely to the development of Swahili literature in the region. First, they have contributed towards the widespread use of Swahili in the region. More so, the use of literary expressions such as idioms, proverbs, vocabulary and so on, has been inherited by the community through Swahili literature. Swahili culture has also been well explained and understood by the readership in this region thanks to Swahili literature written by scholars. The Swahili way of life and especially how modernity is infiltrating Swahili culture is well captured in many of the literary works in the region.

Analysis of the selected Swahili literary works

Inkishafi (1980), which literally means soul-searching, was authored by Sayyid Abdalla A. Nasiri. This is a long poem consisting of seventy-nine stanzas believed to have been composed by the author between 1810 and 1820 A. D. (wa Mberia 92). It describes Swahili life on Pate Island. This text revolves around the theme of mortal life in which the author advises us to live according to God's will and shun earthly glory that is only temporary. The poem depicts the world as a dangerous place, unclean and deceptive to man, which promises man water, only for man to realize that there was no water, but a mirage. He contends that if man does not shun evil and live according to the will of God, he will end up in hell. The poet artistically paints three pictures to drive home his message. In the first part, the poet paints a picture of Pate Island basking in wealth and glory. Here, we see a picture of great men living in prosperity as is characterised by gold and silver, riches and power, living in splendid houses, and being full of joy and merriment daily (wa Mberia 93). The second part of the poem depicts Pate Island in ruins and desolation. The wealth and glory are no more to be found on the island. Instead it is depicted that bats, spiders, owls, vultures, doves, cockroaches and crickets have taken over the place (wa Mberia 94). According to the poet, Pate Island's downfall was because of pride that was exhibited by the inhabitants during the earlier days of glory. Since they did not take heed to God's way of life, they ended up in punishment through death. The third part of the poem gives a picture of hell, where the poet describes the various stages of hell with its horrors and agonies (wa Mberia 95). According to the poet, those who refuse to live in line with God's will, end up in hell where there is torture by fire after death. The poem is influenced by Islamic teachings, the author being an Islamic scholar and in line with teachings as indicated in the Islamic Holy book, the Quran.

Inkishafi makes use of loanwords in the religious register such as *bismillahi* and *dhambi*. The poet introduces the name of God by using an Arabic loanword at the start of his poem. This tradition is common in many epics; being Muslim, the poets always began their compositions in this religious manner, for instance, *Utenzi wa Fumo Liyongo* also begins in the same way. The effect of *bismillahi,* which contains the name of God (Allah), is that it gives God the first and lofty place in the poem. The poet acknowledges God as the one who gives him inspiration in the creation of the poem. This loanword is used in the first stanza; in fact, it is the first word of the whole epic. This shows the importance given to God by the poet. There is no equivalent of this loanword in Swahili, given that Allah is the God of Muslims who was introduced to the Swahili by the Arabs. This tradition was then passed over to generations that followed to date. The loanword *dhambi* (sin) is used in stanza 71 of the epic where the poet talks of an oppressor who in the end is punished. In line 3 of the verse, the poet says that the oppressor will be punished with all the sins committed by those he oppressed. In other words, evil people will finally pay for their sins. In this poem, the poet equates any form of injustice with sin, which is punishable on earth and in the afterlife by God. Given that the author of *Inkishafi* is Muslim, he makes use of these words knowing that his audience, which was initially Muslim, understands them. These loanwords are frequently used in the religious domain to represent Islamic concepts that bring together people from the two communities, in this case Arabs and the Swahili. An equivalent word for *dhambi* in Swahili is *kosa,* which means a mistake or violation. However, the author chooses to use the Arabic loanword *dhambi* instead of *kosa*. In my view, the reason for this choice is the intensity of the word *dhambi*—the mistake connoted by *dhambi* is graver compared to the one connoted by *kosa*. Moreover, the loanword *dhambi* has a religious connotation, as it means breaking of the laws of God, which leads to certain consequences. The author aimed at depicting how the oppressor violated God's law through injustice, and the appropriate word was *dhambi*.

Loanwords in an economic register such as *fedha* and *dhahabu* are used in *Inkishafi*. Although the text centers around religious themes, it also contains words that are commonly used in trade among Arabs and the Swahili people. In stanza 34, the word *wakwasi* refers to the rich or affluent, who possess a lot of wealth. The poet has used this Swahili word to paint a picture of very rich people who lived in Pate Island in those days of glory. The loanwords *fedha* and *dhahabu* are used in the last line of the verse, referring to gold and silver respectively: precious goods possessed only by rich people. This shows how wealthy the people of Pate Island were. Without mentioning the gold and silver, and their luxurious lifestyle, it would be difficult to understand the extent of their wealth. The loanwords *fedha* and *dhahabu* do not have their equivalents in Swahili, given that these concepts were newly introduced to the Swahili people by the Arabs. For this reason, the loanwords have an element of

prestige. In the administration register, *Inkishafi* has a loanword *mawaziri* (*waziri* in singular form) in stanza 61. Here, the poet narrates that there once lived lords and ministers in the government who were always accompanied by a security detail. However, they are no longer alive, but buried in tiny, dusty and darkened graves. A government official of the position of minister is a powerful person who can have whatsoever he commands to be done. Ironically, death does not have respect even for the most powerful people. According to the poet, all the then powerful people of Pate, just like renowned scholars, jurists and prophets like King Solomon, are dead and buried in their graves. In Swahili, a minister or any person occupying a leadership position is referred to as *kiongozi* or *msimamizi.* The author chooses to use the loanword *waziri* because it is more prestigious compared to the Swahili words which are ordinary. Apart from prestige, the loanword *waziri* bears more weight in terms of the responsibility and power vested therein and has a specific connotation that is in tandem with the changed system of governance in Swahili society after the arrival of Arabs.

Sikate Tamaa (1980) is a collection of poems composed by Said A. Mohamed; and edited by Abdilatif Abdalla. The poems in *Sikate Tamaa* (Do not give up) centre around the reality of life in the world, highlighting suffering and oppression of the poor. Several of the poems discuss good and bad leadership in the third world countries especially after independence. Thematically, the poems can be categorized into two groups, namely political poems and poems about everyday life. In the political poems, the poet paints a picture of the ills rendered by leaders, corruption in particular, thus rebuking such leaders. For instance, in the poem "Nimeamka!" (I have woken up!), the poet says that he is now alert and will not be deceived again by those looting from him. The poet in "Ajabu" (Strange) shows how farmers who work hard in the fields do not enjoy the fruit of their labour; instead, the rich are the ones who benefit from the farmers' harvest. In the poem "Ukoloni na Ukolonimamboleo" (Colonialism and Neo-colonialism), the poet draws a comparison between colonialism and neo-colonialism, showing that the latter is worse than the former. This poem implies that African leadership is ruthless and wicked compared to the colonial masters. There are many poems about everyday matters such as not giving up in life in "Sikate Tamaa" (Do not give up), not to be choosy in job searching in "Mtu hachagui Kazi" (One does not choose a job) and oppression of women by men in "Imani ya Mwana" (Faith of a child). In terms of structure, the poet tries to deviate from traditional poetic structures.The poet in *Sikate Tamaa* uses the loanword *shujaa* in the poem "Namsifu Mwanamke" (In praise of woman). The word *shujaa* represents a hero who in most cases is a male person. *Shujaa* is a brave person or a warrior, who has gone through battles and came out victorious. In the African context, women never went to battle; they remained at home as their men went to the battlefront. In this poem, the poet depicts a woman warrior who is very brave

despite traditional societal expectation. According to the poet, this woman is strong, firm, merciful, hard working and brave like a man. The poet uses the word *shujaa* in this poem to effectively explain the characteristics of this new African woman. In Swahili, an equivalent of *shujaa* is the word *nguli.* Despite having a Swahili word, the poet chose to use a loanword, for prestige reasons.

Bara Jingine (Another continent, 2001) is a collection of modern poems authored by Kithaka wa Mberia. It contains a total of thirty-four poems which are thematically categorized into two groups, namely poems on political and social topics, and poems to do with nature and environmental matters (Bertoncini 92). Structurally, the poems in *Bara Jingine* are composed in free verse and are generally short (Bertoncini 94). These are modern poems in Swahili as opposed to the traditional prosodic poems which are composed by adhering to the strict rules of equal stanzas, rhyme and meter. Modern poetry in Swahili is characterized by free verse, absence of rhymes and meter, and no equal number of stanzas in a verse. Thus, *Bara Jingine* is representative of modern Swahili poetry. Bertocini asserts that "Kithaka wa Mberia together with other East African contemporary poets has made a great contribution towards the renewal of the genre, proving that Swahili poetry is able to express universal themes and reach high artistic standards even without following traditional models" (103).

"Kikaoni Addis Ababa" (In a meeting in Addis Ababa) paints a picture of a meeting held by then presidents of African countries who met in the capital city of Ethiopia. This happened during the apartheid days in South Africa under the rule of P. W. Botha who also attended the meeting. In that meeting, all the African presidents rebuked the then president of South Africa for the violence and deaths suffered by poor South Africans of African descent. They lashed out at him for the innocent blood that was shed following the brutal shooting and killing of African school children in Soweto. "Jumapili ya Damu" (Bloody Sunday) is a poem that describes the kind of violence that takes place in African countries under military regimes. It paints a picture where shops are suddenly broken into and looted followed by gunshots and merciless killing of people. In this poem, the poet seems to allude to the regimes of former presidents Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria, Jean-Bedel Bokassa of the Central African Republic, Idi Amin Dada of Uganda, Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire and Samuel Doe of Liberia. The poet finally longs for a day when African countries will be ruled by democratically elected leaders.

Social topics such as gender-based violence against women feature in certain poems (Bertoncini 92). The poem "Giza Mbele" (Darkness ahead), is a story of a schoolgirl who is abducted and raped on her way from school. As a result, the girl becomes pregnant and, cannot, therefore, proceed with her education. Likewise, "Pamela" is a poem that describes a young schoolgirl who is gang-raped and later drops out of school. Because of the rape, she goes mad and begins loitering in the market place naked. Different people in the community try to explain the predica-

ment that has befallen Pamela—some saying it is God's wrath for her sins, others claiming it is witchcraft; while others suggest it is the ghost of her departed maternal uncle that is tormenting her.

Poems about the environment include "Ngao" (Shield), in which the poet-speaker laments that through his technological activities, man is slowly destroying the ozone layer, thus exposing himself to the harmful rays of the sun. In the poem "Mimi, Mto Nairobi" (I, River Nairobi), the poet paints a picture of River Nairobi, lamenting how Nairobi people are destroying the river. The river is dying due to its being harmed by waste in the form of oil, tins, tyres and all manner of garbage being dumped unto it. When people moved to Nairobi city, they found the river very clean and used its waters in their various activities. Now the river regrets the fact that even though it co-exists with Nairobi people, the people do not appreciate it in turn.

The poet of *Bara Jingine* has used loanwords from the economic register such as *umiliki* (possessions) and *sokoni* (in the market). In the third stanza of the poem "Jumapili ya Damu" the poet uses the loanword *umiliki*. Economic activity is suddenly disrupted by the violence caused by military regimes. Due to the military violence in the city, all the merchandise in the shops is looted, leaving the shopkeepers whose possessions have been looted poorer. Although the Swahili had possessions prior to the coming of Arabs, they seem to have no word for it. Therefore, this loanword was used for the reason of need; there is no Swahili word that can be used in its place. In part three of the poem "Pamela", the poet uses the loanword *sokoni*, in which he describes Pamela's life after her ordeal of being gang raped. According to the poet, Pamela resorts to a life of loitering in the market place after eventually becoming mad. Here, the irony is that a market is a place which is busy with economical activities, as people come to buy and sell. On the contrary, Pamela is not engaging in economical activities at the market because of her rape ordeal. The word *sokoni* which is used metaphorically, shows the effect of rape on Pamela. In other words, evil acts such as violence meted on women end up affecting women's economic power by derailing their studies and career development. Swahili has words for "market," that is, *chete* and *gulio*. However, the poet used the loanword *sokoni*, again for the reason of prestige. In this case, the loanword plays the role of decorating the poem for aesthetic purposes. It is also important to note that the Swahili words *chete* and *ngulio* are not used in everyday conversation of the speakers; instead, the words *soko* (market) and *sokoni* (in the market) are often used.

Adili na Nduguze (1952) is a novel authored by Shaaban Robert. It is a story of Adili whose brothers are jealous of him. The novel "is concerned with the virtue of charity, the criticism of futile jealousy and the lashing out of punishment that deforms the physical structure of human beings instead of reforming them morally" (Wafula 67). The loanword *Adili* is used for the main character of this novel. This word refers to something or someone righteous and morally upright. The narrator uses this name

to portray the unquestionable character of this person called Adili. As a government officer, Adili maintains a high level of integrity in all that he does, and this is the theme being showcased through the main character. The virtue of being a good person had been in Swahili before the coming of the Arabs. The word that was used by Swahili people to refer to integrity is *mwenendo mwema,* which literarily means, good behavior or conduct. Thus, for prestige reasons, the author uses the loanword *Adili,* which has more weight in terms of integrity compared to the Swahili word.

Siku Njema (1996), literally translated as "Good Day", is a novel by Ken Walibora. It is a story about a young man known as Kongowea Mswahili, who was born to a talented *taarab* singer called Zainabu Makame. The loanword refers to a special kind of Swahili music whose melody is Arabian or Indian. Through the depiction of Mswahili's mother as a gifted *taarab* singer, the author depicts Swahili culture, because that type of music is a popular genre within it. This story shows that Zainabu Makame is a woman of integrity both in her private and public life as a *taarab* musician. In Swahili, there is no equivalent for *taarab* since this kind of music is a new concept that was introduced into Swahili culture. Even though the Swahili had their own types of music, there is no Swahili word that could be used to refer to *taarab* music. Hence, the loanword *taarab* serves both need and prestige reasons in this story.

My analysis of the literary texts has demonstrated that most loanwords were borrowed to cater for functional needs and prestige especially in the domains of commerce and religion. The examples given are just but a few of the many loanwords identified in the selected literary works. One could thus argue that literature enhances the idea of cultural integration through showcasing the Arabic words borrowed into Swahili.

Conclusion

Linguistic borrowing is a product of cultural contact among speakers of Swahili and Arabic. Moreover, this cultural contact has led to cultural integration from Arabic to Swahili which happened especially when the Swahili people embraced the Islamic faith. Apart from Islam, the Swahili also adopted Arabic culture into their own and borrowed their linguistic terms into the Swahili language, which are evident in Swahili literature. As witnessed above, the language used in Swahili literary works contains a lot of words borrowed from Arabic. Linguistic borrowing from Arabic to Swahili has led to the realisation of many Arabic words in Swahili. As such, Swahili has continued to enrich her vocabulary in many socio-cultural, religious and economic domains of society. Words borrowed from Arabic have become part and parcel of Swahili both in spoken and written forms. Thus, Arabic has enriched Swahili literature with its vocabulary, which is also integrated in Swahili culture. Linguistic borrowing can be said to have a significant contribution to the growth and development of Swahili. Swahili has benefited from Arabic vocabulary because of

linguistic borrowing. It is through linguistic borrowing that Swahili contains many words from Arabic; and this is the reason many people mistake Swahili either to be an Arabic dialect, or to have Arabic origins. Hence, Swahili has ended up having a lot of cultural concepts in the spheres of religion, economics, education, socio- cultural, administration and literature borrowed from Arabic. The loanwords from Arabic are widely used by writers of Swahili literary works ranging from the novel, poetry, the short story and plays, as witnessed in the writings of Sayyid Abdalla A. Nasiri, Shaaban Robert, Said A. Mohamed, Kithaka wa Mberia and Ken Walibora, who use loanwords effectively in the writing of their literary texts.

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Appendix: Loanwords in the selected literary texts

Inkishafi

Kiswahili	**Gloss**
Askari	Guard
Bidhaa	Product
Bismillahi	In the name of God
Dhahabu	Gold
Dhambi	Sin
Dhiki	Distress
Dini	Religion
Dunia	World
Enzi	Era
Fasihi	Literature
Fedha	Silver
Hadithi	Story
Haki	Justice
Hali	Condition
Hela	Money
Inkishafi	Soul-searching
Jahanam	Hell
Kalamu	Pen
Khasara	Loss
Marashi	Perfume
Mola	God
Mtume	Prophet
Safari	Journey
Sala	Prayer
Salamu	Greeting
Sanaa	Art
Shetani	Satan
Toba	Repentance
Ubeti	Stanza
Utenzi	Narrative poem
Wahakiki	Critics
Washairi	Poets
Waziri	Minister

Sikate Tamaa

Ari	Zeal
Asubuhi	Morning
Dawa	Medicine
Dhamana	Surety
Fahari	Pride
Fasihi	Literature
Ghali	Expensive
Haba	Little
Hadaa	Deceive
Hadithi	Story
Hotuba	Speech
Huria	Free
Imani	Faith
Jahanamu	Hell
Kiburi	Pride
Kubariki	To bless
Kufisidi	To destroy
Madaraka	Power
Mali	Wealth
Mashariki	East
Mdhamini	Guarantor
Milele	Forever
Nielimike	To be educated
Raha	Comfort
Roho	Spirit
Sanaa	Art
Shujaa	Hero
Tamaa	Greed
Thabiti	To be firm
Thamani	Value
Ubeti	Stanza
Utawala	Rule
Utenzi	Narrative Poem
Wahakiki	Critics
Washairi	Poets
Watukufu	Glorious people

Bara Jingine

Aibu	Shame
Amani	Peace
Amri	Order
Barafu	Ice
Binadamu	Human being
Bunduki	Rifle
Dhiki	Distress
Dhulumiwa	Oppressed
Enzi	Era
Fasihi	Literature
Ghadhabu	Wrath
Habari	News
Hadithi	Story
Hayawani	Beast
Kahawa	Coffee
Maduka	Shops
Maghala	Store rooms
Mahadhi	Rhythm
Mashairi	Poems
Mauti	Death
Msafiri	Traveller
Sanaa	Art
Serikali	Government
Siasa	Politics
Sokoni	In the market
Sura	Chapter
Tabasamu	Smile
Taifa	Nation
Taratibu	Slowly
Tiba	Medical treatment
Ubeti	Stanza
Ufisadi	Corruption
Ufukara	Poverty
Umiliki	Possessions
Utafiti	Research
Utenzi	Epic Poem
Viwanda	Industries
Wahakiki	Critics
Walimu	Teachers
Washairi	Poets

Adili na Nduguze

Adili	Moral
Almasi	Diamond
Amirijeshi	Commander
Ardhi	Land
Arobaini	Forty
Birika	Kettle
Daftarini	In an exercise book
Dola	State
Faida	Profit
Gharama	Cost
Habari	News
Harusi	Wedding
Hasidi	Malicious
Hazina	Treasure
Imamu	Imam
Ishara	Sign
Ishirini	Twenty
Karibu	Welcome
Lugha	Language
Maalum	Special
Madiwani	Councillors
Mali	Wealth
Maradhi	Disease
Mashuhuri	Famous
Mfalme	King
Mwadilifu	Moral person
Nahodha	Captain
Naibu	Deputy
Rai	Plead
Sanifu	Skilled
Sheria	Law
Sifa	Praise
Starehe	Comfort
Suluhu	Solution
Tabia	Behaviour
Taji	Crown
Tamasha	Festivity
Thuluthi	A third
Walikariri	They recited
Waziri	Minister
Yamkini	Probably

Siku Njema

Alhamdulilahi	Praise be to God
Almuradi	So long as
Amirijeshi	Commander
Darubini	Telescope
Dola	State
Dua	Prayer
Elimu	Education
Ghadhabu	Wrath
Gharama	Cost
Haramu	Illegitimate
Hasidi	Malicious
Hayati	Deceased
Husudu	Envy
Inshallah	God willing
Jazba	Emotion
Joho	Robe
Kahaba	Prostitute
Madiwani	Councillors
Maelfu	Thousands
Makala	Article
Maktaba	Library
Mfalme	King
Mwanaharamu	Illegitimate child
Naam	Yes
Naibu	Deputy
Rafiki	Friend
Rasilmali	Assets
Rubani	Pilot
Saumu	A fast
Sheria	Law
Sukari	Sugar
Taarab	Taarab music
Takriban	Almost
Taswira	Imagery
Umma	Public
Ushairi	Poetry
Wakati	Time
Yamini	Oath

Land of cemetery: funereal images in the poetry of Musa Idris Okpanachi

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Land of cemetery: funereal images in the poetry of Musa Idris Okpanachi

This paper focuses on Musa Idris Okpanachi's poetry: *The Eaters of the Living* (2007), *From the Margins of Paradise* (2012), and *Music of the Dead* (2016). Nigeria, even after the military had relinquished power over a decade ago, is still faced with the issues that provoked the trope of protest in much of the poetry published between the mid-eighties and late nineties. Okpanachi's poetry revisits these issues, demonstrating that democracy has been no less horrifying than military despotism. Dark, haunting images of blood, corpses, and cemetery recur in all three collections, depicting the regularity of death in the nation. I argue that Okpanachi employs funereal imagery to comment on the state's morbid relationship with its citizenry. The Nigerian state is represented as murderous, so death fulfills its political objective. I conclude that although Okpanachi articulates a cynical commentary on postcolonial Nigeria, he marshals his creative energies to illuminate the political moment of his time. **Keywords:** democracy, funereal imagery, necropolitics, Nigerian literature, Musa Idris Okpanachi.

Introduction

Nigerian creative writers tend to employ poetry as a cultural medium to document historic political moments. Nigeria's current democracy is over seventeen years old, and it presents a theme definite enough to provide stimulus for poetic exposition. Not much contemporary poetry has interrogated the present political moment with the same fervour and urgency displayed by the previous generations of poets. In addition, compared to the volume of critical studies on prose, poetry criticism in Nigeria is still paltry. It is not surprising to note that scholarship on the poetry of Musa Idris Okpanachi, a university scholar and award-winning poet with three published poetry collections to his credit, is little. This paper aims to stimulate interest in Okpanachi's poetry and to examine his artistic vision within the ethos of social commitment, while foregrounding his contribution to the discourse of democratic struggle.

Nigeria remains one of the countries in the world where death seems to occur quite regularly, even though it has not been at war since 1970, when the civil war ended. Thousands have died avoidably since the military handed over power to a civilian administration in 1999. I use the term "avoidably" because the government tends to ignore certain contentious issues of a sectional and religious nature that ultimately snowball into sporadic and mass killings. The menace of the Fulani herdsmen, for

instance, has been treated casually by the federal authorities. Why has democracy transformed this oil-rich nation into a "land of cemetery"? This is the question Musa Idris Okpanachi reflects on in his poetry.

A question that I examine in this paper is: What might Okpanachi's preoccupation with images of blood, corpses, graves, and cemetery tell us about his vision and his homeland? To answer this question, I begin by examining the funereal imagery in the texts. Next, I point out the significance of this imagery within the context of social commitment. I read Okpanachi's poetry as a stand against power. Evident in the poetry is the tone of marked disenchantment with the body politic, but this feeling is informed by the poet's appreciation of the functionality of art. Using Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics, I argue that Okpanachi employs funereal imagery to comment on the state's morbid relationship with its citizenry. Okpanachi represents the Nigerian state as murderous. Generally, death is perceived as a social issue, but to Okpanachi, it is political, its means legitimated by an operative (il)logic of violence. Death, therefore, fulfils a necessary objective. By utilising satiric and hyperbolic elements, and limpid diction interspersed with sepulchral images, Okpanachi calls attention to the disposability of human life. He decries the degeneration indicative of abysmal political leadership, while articulating social concerns and deprecating the political elite for their treachery and despoliation of the citizenry. I conclude that although Okpanachi articulates a cynical commentary on postcolonial Nigeria, he marshals his creative energies to illuminate the political moment of his time.

Tradition, despotism, and dissidence

Military rule in Nigeria officially ended on 29 May 1999, a historic moment that heralded the restoration of democracy. Prior to 1999, the presidential election, having been held on 12 June 1993, was annulled on 23 June 1993 by General Ibrahim Babaginda, then military head of state, in rather controversial circumstances. This action, ill-timed and divisive as it was, not only terminated the Third Republic but also threatened national unity. The consequent denunciation of the military action was vocal and sustained at the time, though such activism routinely culminated in opponents of the junta being rounded up, incarcerated, or even eliminated. This political moment, as Isidore Diala observes, nurtured the explosion of "anti-military poetry" (2) in the Nigerian literary tradition. In a similar vein, Olaniyi Okunoye has argued that the military rule was a catalyst for the growth of Nigerian poetry. He chronicles the way Nigerian poetry, given impetus by the failure of the military from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s, crystallised a poetics of anti-establishment (64). However, the installation of Olusegun Obasanjo, an ex-military head of state, as the president marked a return to democratic rule, inaugurating the Fourth Republic.

The independence struggle in the 1950s, the civil war in the late 1960s, and the military rule in the 1980s and 1990s, have all featured prominently in various poetic

works by Nigerian poets. Many of these poets belong to the third generation of Nigerian literary tradition. They are so categorized because they were born in the 1960s, after the nation's independence from Britain. Notable among these poets are Ogaga Ifowodo, Maik Nwosu, Promise Okekwe, Remi Raji, Esiaba Irobi, Unoma Azuah, Chiedu Ezeanah, Toyin-Adewale, Pius Adesanmi, Obiwu, Uche Nduka, Nnimmo Bassey, Afam Akeh, Angela Nwosu, Emman Shehu, Onookome Okome, Amatoritsero Ede, Joe Ushie, Olu Oguibe, Idzia Ahmad, Obi Nwakanma, Obu Udoezo, and others.

As Chinua Achebe rightly posited in 1983, "[t]he problem with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership" (1). The abiding motif of political leadership, whose failure this generation of poets locate in the military dictatorships of General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida (1986–93) and the late General Sani Abacha (1993–98), is central to their poetry. Aboh comments that "this generation of poets engages their poems as avenues to register their contempt with a system that makes them slaves in their own country. […] Above all, these poets have continued to forge the link between the poets and their society; making their poems an outlet for the people's socio-political expression" (2).

Okpanachi belongs to this third generation, in part by age and in part because his poetics evinces a similar consistency in the demonstration of commitment to tradition, thereby continuing the trope of dissidence in the Nigerian poetic tradition. Romanus Egudu, Egya Sule, and Olaronke Temiloluwa Onibonukuta have examined Musa Idris Okpanachi's poetry. Romanus Aboh examines the significance of modal verbs on the speaker's attitude in the poetry of four Nigerian poets. In undertaking a linguistic analysis of Okpanachi's poetry collection *The Eaters of the Living*, he points out the way the poet unflinchingly engages issues of national weight. Egya Sule identifies the poet as representative of "the oppressed people of the country", against the "despot and her cohorts" ("Poetry as dialogue: A Reading of Recent Anglophone Nigerian Poetry" 85). In another essay, "Imagining Beast: Images of the Oppressor in Recent Nigerian Poetry in English," Sule surveys a representative sample of Nigerian poems and highlights the usage of bestial imagery in Okpanachi's poems to denigrate and delegitimize the ruling class, thus revealing its inhuman tendencies.

Morbidity, democracy, and (necro) poetry

Achille Mbembe's critique of power illuminates the nexus between politics and death, and how the state has grown necropolitical in its relationship with its citizens, so as to exercise control over mortality. Although Mbembe applies his concept of necropolitics to theorize the realities of social life under colonial occupation, as experienced by the people in Israeli-controlled Palestinian territories, and in the apartheid state of South Africa, I find his concept pertinent as a framework to understanding the Nigerian state's investment in an economy of death. Sovereignty for the Nigerian state implies that it must decide who may live and who must die (see Mbembe 12–4),

in that politics assumes the form of a "war without end" (Mbembe 23). Unsurprisingly, the police, the military, and the other state apparatuses, completely repressive in the Althuserrian sense, cease from protecting and providing security for the citizens. Rather they function as death-machines, dealing death at will, wielding the power of life and death over citizens. But citizenship in such a state approximates the status of the "living dead" (Mbembe 40), since the necropolitical state has already transformed the land into a death-world. The state apparatus, vested with the right to kill, indubitably believe that to kill is right. A perverse logic thus underpins and authorizes the economy of death, such that death becomes so commonplace the political elite appear to glory in and celebrate it.

If military despotism provided the dominant theme in much of Nigerian poetry published between the mid-1980s and 1990s, civilian misrule became the operative theme for Okpanachi's poetic ruminations. It is troubling—and very ironic—that more Nigerians have possibly been killed in various sectional, religious, and politically-motivated killings in the last 17 years of civilian administration than in the almost 30 years of military despotism. One may attribute this morbid situation to state apathy and irresolution. Okpanachi is a poet invested in the political discourse of nationhood. I now analyse selected poems in which funereal imagery recurs in *The Eaters of the Living* (2007), *From the Margins of Paradise* (2012) and *Music of the Dead* (2016). I shall focus primarily on the latter publication because the imagery is more pronounced in that collection than it is in the earlier collections.

Okpanachi's debut collection, *The Eaters of the Living*, opens with "Silence of time", a poem which, on the surface, might indicate the woebegone days of military rule, but on a closer reading will reveal that the images are synonymous with the civilian government in recent times. Considering that the poem was first published in 2007, eight years after the end of military dictatorship, its overarching imagery of "bones crushed / under the menace of boots", of "curfew, emergency", "riots on the streets", "blood flooded", "butcher", and "knife" (*Eaters* 10) exemplify the political realities of Nigerian democracy. However, the images of grave and cemetery make their first appearance in "We give you this country". Irony is employed in this poem for a climactic effect.

> We give you this country
> Because your heart desires it
> Because it is where you
> Spread yourself
> To defile the land
> To rape the maid
> To change the constitution
> Even from your *grave*. (*Eaters* 12, my emphasis)

The instruments of repression forged to enforce silence populate the "Code of silence". In this poem, terror seeks "the blood of / Our youths / Who dare face / The Sun" (*Eaters* 13), and bravery is punishable by death. Another poem, "Manifesto", depicts the familiar terror emblematic of "an iron rule" (*Eaters* 14) that threatens and obliterates freedom. The ruler, rather than bringing a harvest of plenty to his people, promises a season of plagues. In fact, he brings the "gift of a coffin". Bloody images fill the following lines:

> I shall bleed your head
> To make you reasonable
> And inject you with poisoned
> Bayonet to keep you alive
>
> […]
>
> I give you the flower of my love
> That will lure you to death
> Here is my manifesto
> Written with your blood. (*Eaters* 15)

A hint of cannibalism is discernible in the ruler's glee: "Welcome to the state dinner / As guests to be eaten" (*Eaters* 16). In the eponymous poem, "The eaters of the living", the poet uses the verb "eat" as a metaphor for the rapacity of the state. The refrain "They eat" is used as a rhetorical device to underline the consummate greed of politicians who consume "everything and everyone" (*Eaters* 28). The following lines illustrate this rapacity:

> They eat like termites
> They eat like locusts
> They eat like cancer cells
>
> […]
>
> They eat the festering sores of the people
> They eat our phlegm
> They eat our corpses
>
> […]
>
> They eat the skin of the poor. (*Eaters* 28)

The poet's identification of his role as a politically conscious poet enables him to engage with issues that excoriate as well as indict the necropolitical state. Poems such

as "The mirror" and "The spectators" reiterate the images of blood. In "Dialogue", specifically, we are told that the ruler "celebrates / with the champagne of blood" (*Eaters* 39). Dark images pulsate in "The concert of cannibals" and "Your excellency". In the former, the land is described as "where corpses sprouted / into gravestones of memorial poetry", whereas the latter tells of vultures hovering "over the carcass / of the nation" (*Eaters* 56, 59). The use of animal imagery is a motif in Okpanachi's poetry, and this clearly inflates the viciousness of the state. The conflation of the politicians with beasts is to deny them subjectivities and sensibilities, thereby presenting them as predatory. Politicians are therefore "a pack of wolves" that "trade / with our blood" (*Eaters* 67).

There are sparse representations of the funereal in *From the Margins of Paradise*. Notwithstanding, the theme of death remains evident in "Love me and leave me", a satirical poem chronicling the ruler's "brutal rituals of love":

> Love me your own way
> Tie me to the stake
> To celebrate my free will
> Give me the liberty that is a chain
> And spell my freedom
> In the colour of death
>
> Hate me to love me
> Torture me to love me more
> Burn me to cherish me
> Kill me to give life. (*Margins* 29)

The vile triumphalism of the political cabal finds accent in "Children of the night" in the collection *From the Margins of Paradise*. Members of this class boast:

> We murder in the name of democracy
> We plunder in the name of austerity
> We massacre in the name of security
> We maim in the name of justice
>
> […]
>
> We pillage the land
> Until you become paupers
> We are the predators
> You forever remain preys
>
> […]

We are the bloodsuckers
The vampires of the new nation. (*Margins* 56)

Images of graves, corpses, and cemetery in this collection appear for the first time in "When they die". It is a poem about the pomp that occasions the funerals of politicians. *Grave* is mentioned four times, *caskets*, and *coffins* twice, and *cemetery* once, all pointing out the fact that the ruler himself cannot escape death even when flown "on a private jet / in a million caskets of delight" (*Margins* 58). The image of death is pronounced in "The legion of cain," as it describes how politicians tend to "toy with life / to remain immortal" (*Margins* 62). Though the biblical reference—the story of Cain and Abel—is not developed, killing is implied in the stanza below:

They write the laws
With golden edges of the sword
In the blood of the innocent
Across the throne

[…]

Here the gallows are tall
Here the play of the dead
Has a silent audience
Here your rights die before you. (*Margins* 62)

The image of the vampire is recognisable in "A dirty tea party", though more horrid images are presented subsequently:

Slabs for the unborn
A headstone for the foetus

[…]

We vote in the ballot of graves
In democracy of coffins

[…]

And bury people in shrouds
Of ballot papers with their legs
Jutting out of the graves. (*Margins* 104)

Not even babies and the unborn are exempted from the brutality of the state and its repressive apparatuses, and so Okpanachi's poetry provides us with a lens, even if darkly, through which to interrogate the ways in which death has structured the post-military reality of many Nigerians. For the poet, democracy has only created a condition in which politics has become the work of death (see Mbembe 16).

Music of the Dead opens with "A Long Silence", a prose poem which presents in dense rhythm a montage of uncanny scenes of "an age stranger than time and chameleon" (*Music* 1). In this strange age, the news of people dying is common, but the causes of their deaths might seem ludicrous were it not strange. For instance, "the common news" in this prose poem is that "somebody dies from sneezing, another one from seconds of coughing, one from being shot several times by an invisible bard of death, yet another from laughter and one after a feather carried by the breeze hit him" (*Music* 1–2).

Due to the commonness of death in the land, the poet bemoans the fact that "the graveyards are full; the country is a cemetery in the hands of the dead" (*Music* 2). The bard of death, personified by the ruler, and the shepherds his minions, have ushered in an age where it is "so easy to die" (2). Aside from the plethora of horrific imagery, the poet further uses words signifying death such as "extinction", "drowning", "killing", and "immolation". The poem prefaces the kind of imagery one will mainly come across in the collection—imagery denoting various acts of dying.

"Democracy of Cemetery" tells of a child who dies "[f]rom gunshot wounds/from the bullet(ing)" of the "local council dog" (*Music* 4). Its use of the funerary imagery of "blood", "shroud," "grave", "pall", and "undertaker" restates the commonness of death in the body politic, as foreshadowed in the opening poem. The sequence of poems in "Dogs and Angels 1-111" narrate the manifestations of brutality orchestrated by the ruler and his "butchers" and "dogs" (*Music* 10–1). Death is evoked in the poem, but more striking is the poet's appropriation of a biblical narrative to amplify tragic experiences:

> A male child must perish
> Rivers must run blood
> Vermin must take over the land
> So Pharaoh must be born
>
> Pharaoh must be born again
> To extinguish rights and mind
> To beatify people with blood
> On gallows of love. (*Music* 9–10)

The above poem references the plagues of Egypt, ten calamities that occurred during the reign of Pharaoh. Here, a similar tyrant is born anew, his reign no less brutal than

his biblical counterpart. The poet tells us that the tyrant is known to "spill rose blood as souvenir / to the land of cemetery" (*Music* 11). The country, though depicted as a cemetery, becomes the "treasured garden" of the new Pharaoh who, rather ironically, chooses to sequester himself in the Rock, fenced in by "graves becoming hedges" (*Music* 12). The Rock here operates as a synecdoche for Aso Rock, the presidential villa in Nigeria, where the ruler deems himself safe from the "reach of death" (*Music* 12).

Death is implied in "The Forerunner", a poem portraying the ruler's perversity as he turns the world on its head and leaves behind a trail of death (*Music* 18). The ruler's perversity is further elaborated in "Scoundrels", and we find that the ruler has inaugurated a "new game of war", in which he is wont to "put babies on death row" (20–1). In the rule of scoundrels, not even babies and children are spared from terror and violence. The image of death recurs in "Spider", and again terror is evoked in the aliases by which the ruler is addressed: "the mastercraft of fear", the "sorcerer […] [who] pulps people / to disinfect his hands with [their] blood" (*Music* 22, 23). The image of the sorcerer-ruler "turn[ing] children to jerboas / hunted by snakes" (*Music* 22) is ghastly (*jerboas* are hopping desert rodents found predominantly in northern Africa). Grisly images teem in "The Sharks", a poem that opens with "Crows have inherited / the blood of children" (*Music* 26). The poem forewarns of danger that both children and the unborn face. The political class is represented as the "undertakers of power" that presides over the "democratic coffins" and voting is tangentially described as "to drown" in "the high seas" (*Music* 26, 27), after the following grisly image:

> We have dug 150 million graves
> For people to vote with their bodies
> Submitting to the undertakers of power. (*Music* 26)

The theme of death finds some resonance in "Black Flower", a poem which recounts the "seasons of massacre" orchestrated by the political cabal who has "death written on their tongues" (*Music* 28). In the seasons of massacre, the undertakers of power are found to be "play[ing] solitaire with corpses" (*Music* 28–9). A desolate city is portrayed in "Without a Name" where "human faces hanging / Upside down sprout everywhere" (*Music* 30). This poem echoes T. S. Eliot's poem "The Journey of the Magi", and the city where the Magi visit typifies what Mbembe calls death-worlds, a kind of "social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead" (Mbembe 40). In this city, "blood rains from the sky", "vultures feast on carcasses", and "children drink / spices of hemlock" (*Music* 30–1). There is indeed no innocence, no beauty, no redemption, but depravity, ugliness, devastation—and of course death in this necropolis. A biblical reference is also utilised to nuance its narrative depth: "The star of the Magi trails blood / Splashed across the sky" (*Music* 30). What is recounted in "Without a Name" is something

mournful: death, not birth, is presaged by the star of the Magi. Moreover, the biblical Magi are heralds of good news, but in the poem, they are harbingers of death, seeking not a new-born king but "a mangled messiah" (*Music* 30). The penultimate line consolidates on the funerary: "Hearses carry casks of musk / To the graveyards for the predators / Who nail roses on the Cross" (*Music* 31).

Emmanuel Obiechina contends that the poet must "become the sensitive needle that probes and locates our emotional traumas, our anxieties, elations and fears, no less than our hopes and aspirations" (211). There is no artistic creed that demands that every poet be involved in social activism or political revolution, although there is something remarkably altruistic and noble about a poet choosing to identify with the collective struggle of the people against authoritarian forces. Okpanachi employs his art to decry statist hegemonic systems authorising death. He explores one of such systems in "The Constitution". The constitution referred here is not the supreme document encapsulating the people's hopes and aspirations, but the type that "will write the codes / of pains" and "punish with laws written by swords" (*Music* 68). It is constructed to inflict more hardship on the already impoverished people, while herding them closer to their death. It also ensures that anyone who defies its stipulations will have "their faces marked with red-hot iron" (*Music* 68). This fiery image referenced in the opening poem alludes to the branding of people's faces (with the mark of the beast, perhaps) during the reign of the biblical antichrist. We can make out the sense of glee exhibited by the makers of this constitution in "The Hawkers of Blood". As the heirs of the "primitive gods of war", they celebrate death and declare that

> Mass murder is our carnival
> Death sits between our eyes seeing
> The world through the lens of war. (*Music* 77)

The scenes recreated here recall the devastation in certain parts of Nigeria masterminded by the Islamist terrorist group Boko Haram. Their attacks have resulted in the deaths of thousands of citizens. The briefest poem in the entire collection is "The News", and it enumerates various representations of dying such as "Maiming / Massacre (mass acre) / Murder / Mangle / Mutilate" (*Music* 78). Gog and Magog are identified in the Bible as two nations that will wage an apocalyptic battle against the children of Israel. As a result, there will be a slaughter so great it would take months to have all the dead buried completely. The poet only appropriates these biblical names but not the narrative in titling his poem, "The Gog and Magog". Although the poet barely hints at war, he peppers the poem with a few dark images. The politicians are described as murderous, their "paunches are / the mass graves of the people" and they "play ninepins with human heads" (*Music* 80–1).

Irony and satire are strong features of Okpanachi's poems, and he employs them

effectively in "You the People's Choice", a poem satirizing the ruler as Pharaoh. Intolerant of opposition, his reign marks "the season of madness". We learn that he "Lick[s] their blood off [his] fingers / And eat[s] their flesh as right" (*Music* 85). It is not only the state that the poet criticises, for he also charges against everyone who is complicit in the dehumanisation of the citizenry. He calls them the "new butchers" in "My Father's House", a poetic parody of *Our Lord's Prayer* or the Pater Noster, one of the most-widely spoken prayers in the world. In this poem, the poet implicates the "professional murderers" before God:

> The judge who miscarries justice
> The hangman who unfurls the noose
> The tailor who sews the shroud
> The butcher who stitches the flesh

The list runs on:

> The carpenter who makes the coffins
> The undertaker who closes the graves
> The executioners of mourners of the beloved
> The priest who lies against God
> The poet whose tears are the streams of treason. (*Music* 92)

The atrocities of these butchers are set in relief in "King of Cemetery". The poem's depiction of events may well be the most bizarre in the collection, for we are told that the butchers "rape the dead in their graves", while ensuring that those "they bury alive" do not leave the cemetery (*Music* 96).

Charles Nnolim argues that the postcolonial writer must take a stand for or against power, for she cannot afford to stand by and watch her land consumed by forces of misrule (223). In his poetry, Okpanachi fulfills what Breyten Breytenbach expects of the writer that he be the questioner, the implacable critic, and the exponent of the aspirations of the people (166). Okpanachi, in an interview I conducted with him in 2014, declared that "Poetry is a veritable voice of dissent against anything that works against human rights, freedom and humanity" (n. p.). This underwrites and sums up his pact with society, his artistic vision. His fascination with funereal imagery is not that he delights in the horrific, but that he is attempting to expose the spectrality of death and to focus the reader's attention on the morbidity of postcolonial experiences. He denounces unbridled pursuit of power and its abuse, while revealing that although the nation is no longer brutalised by military junta, it nonetheless remains in a stranglehold.

Conclusion

Taken together, Musa Idris Okpanachi's *The Eaters of the Living, From the Margins of Paradise*, and *Music of the Dead* signal the extent to which Nigeria has foundered in its

democratic journey. His opus offers us a way to reflect on questions of mortality and citizenship in a world haunted by death. Death has become so banal that precarity marks the life of citizens. The citizens of this macabre postcolonial world may have only succeeded in replacing one set of death-merchants with another, since the civilian government seems even more deadly and exploitative than the military was. It is the proclivities of the political class to despoil and destroy rather than nurture and salvage that Okpanachi has captured rather too trenchantly, even if grimly. This class is therefore portrayed as non-humans, a metaphor that is typically associated with African tyrants. By employing images both dark and haunting in his poetry, the poet intends to alert the people against the danger of inertia, lest they be left with "a country of cemetery." Okpanachi's tones may be ironic, insistent, and cynical—but underneath all of this is the poet's unstinting commitment to the democratic struggle of the postcolony.

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Huldeblyk

Christo van Rensburg (1938–2018): akademikus van formaat

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Dosent en studieleier, departementshoof, akademikus, navorser—so sou 'n mens prof. M. C. J. (Christo) van Rensburg se professionele loopbaan met 'n paar breë kwashale kom karakteriseer.

Christo, wat gepromoveer het met die proefskrif *Die struktuur van die sin in Afrikaans: 'n ontleding van bepaalde patrone teen die agtergrond van die huidige teorieë oor die transformasioneel-generatiewe grammatika*, het aan die Universiteit van Pretoria, sy alma mater, as dosent begin. Hier het sy studente wat, in meer as een geval, latere kollegas sou word, onder meer deur sy toedoen algaande kennis gemaak met verskillende jonger rigtings in die taalwetenskap: die linguistiese stilistiek, die TGG, die sosiolinguistiek, e.d.m. Hy het ook meegewerk om vernuwende onderrig-leerstrategieë in te voer soos die gebruik van werkboeke en volgstukke met oop ruimtes vir aantekeninge.

Ná 'n relatief kort akademiese tyd aan die Universiteit van die Vrystaat, keer hy terug na Tukkies waar hy prof. Réna Pretorius later as departementshoof opvolg. As studieleier van M- en D-studente was hy rigtinggewer, begeleier en raadgewer en as departementshoof het hy nie net akademiese en bestuursleiding verskaf nie maar ook as simpatieke mentor vir veral jonger kollegas opgetree. Voor sy aftrede het hy verder 'n rol gespeel in die totstandkoming van UP se Eenheid en vir Akademiese Geletterdheid waarvan hy die eerste direkteur was.

In die April 2018-nuusbrief van die Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie word o.m. geskryf dat Christo "se hele loopbaan… in diens van Afrikaans gestaan [het] en danksy hom het verskeie uiters belangrike sienings oor die taal as studieterrein en oor die taal se herkoms na vore gekom." Sy grootste bydrae lê dan ook waarskynlik op navorsingsgebied, spesifiek oor o.m. die variëteite van Afrikaans wat hy geïdentifiseer en nagevors het (Oranjerivier-, Kaapse en Oosgrens-Afrikaans) en die tekens van "Afrikaans" wat tot vóór 1652 nagespoor kan word met die ontmoetings van Nederlandse seevaarders en Khoi-sprekers aan die Kaap. Daarmee het hy ook die grondslag gelê vir verdere navorsing waardeur bepaalde uitgangspunte en gevolgtrekkings gekwalifiseer en verfyn is.

Hierdie navorsing het in verskillende wetenskaplike en ook meer populêre publikasies neerslag gevind. So was daar byvoorbeeld in 1995 "Afrikaans se Kreoolse status" wat in *'n Man van woorde. Feesbundel vir Louis Eksteen* verskyn het, en in 2016 "Die vroegste Khoi-Afrikaans" in *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe*. Primêr vir algemene lesers en voorgraadse studente bedoel is weer *Taalvariëteite en die wording van Afrikaans in Afrika* (1990) met sy klem, reeds in die titel, op Afrikaans as taal van Afrika, en *So kry ons Afrikaans* (2012). Laasgenoemde is in opdrag van die Afrikaanse Taalraad geskryf met die doel dat die storie oor die herkoms van Afrikaans opnuut nagevors sou word en die gedeelde geskiedenis van Afrikaans en sy sprekers vertel kon word. So is daar wegbeweeg van 'n verdelende taalgeskiedenis. Na wat berig word, wou prof. Van Rensburg op die dag van sy dood nog die hersiene uitgawe van dié publikasie finaal afrond.

Christo was lank lid van die Taalkommissie van die Akademie—verantwoordelik vir die samestelling en hersiening van die *Afrikaanse woordelys en spelreëls*—en daarom was dit gepas dat hy teen die einde van 2017 die Hertzog-gedenklesing gelewer het met die titel "Toe die maak van die *Afrikaanse woordelyste & spelreëls* ook perdekoop was."

Erkenning vir sy baanbrekerswerk op die gebied van die Afrikaanse (historiese) taalkunde en die bevordering van en diens ten behoewe van Afrikaans in sy verskillende geledinge het, soos te verwagte, nie uitgebly nie. In 2001 het *Taallandskap: huldigingsbundel vir Christo van Rensburg* verskyn en in 2018 is sowel die C.J. Langenhovenprys vir Taalwetenskap as die Jan H. Maraisprys vir 'n uitnemende bydrae tot Afrikaans as wetenskapstaal aan hom toegeken.

In sy omgang met mense—vriende, kollegas, studente—was Christo, sover dit van hom afgehang het, vriendelik, tegemoetkomend en het hy nooit uit die hoogte opgetree nie. Tiperend hiervan was die feit dat hy, toe ons—sy studente van kort tevore—sy kollegas geword het, nie wou hoor dat ons hom op sy titel aanspreek nie.

Christo van Rensburg: akademikus van formaat—ons eer sy nagedagtenis.

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RESENSIE-ARTIKEL

’n Boer in beton: *Hierdie huis* deur Kleinboer

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To farm in concrete: *Hierdie huis* (This House) by Kleinboer

This review article is an attempt to interpret and evaluate the novel *Hierdie huis* within a specific context, namely that of urban writing. This is done first and foremost with reference to Afrikaans literature, but also in a wider context with reference to English South African literature (e.g. Ivan Vladislavic) and to relevant theories like that of the city dweller (*flâneur*) in the critical writings of Walter Benjamin. In recent Dutch literature several novels have been published (amongst others by Marc Reugebrink and Ilja Leonard Pfeijffer) that share certain motifs and strategies with Kleinboer’s trilogy and they are discussed in greater detail. In this article the focus is on this third novel in what ostensibly is a coherent trilogy or prose cycle and not primarily a rejection of the traditional Afrikaans farm novel as often is asserted by literary critics; in actual fact it is a creative renewal of this genre, although often in a parodical fashion. In conclusion this novel is described as typical of “metamodernism” in its quest for meaningful moral and philosophical “master” narratives, rejected in postmodernism. In this novel the main character recognizes The Other as a fellow human-being and his etymological quests stresses hybridity which implies that linguistic (or racial) purity is a farce. Postcolonial *métissage* is central in this novel and the conclusion is that the forming of new identities has seldom (or never) been described in Afrikaans literature as in this trilogy. **Keywords:** *flâneur*, metamodernism, postcolonial *métissage*, satirical travelogue, urban writing.

Inleidende opmerkings: die Afrikaanse verstedeliking

In Van Coller (“Die representasie van plaas, dorp en stad in die Afrikaanse prosa” en “Die Afrikaanse prosa se peregrinasie van die plaas na die stad”) word ’n taamlik volledige beskrywing gegee van die Afrikaner se verstedeliking en die neerslag daarvan in die Afrikaanse prosa.[1] Vanselfsprekend vind die (toenemende) verstedeliking van swart mense én die blanke se stedelike ervaring net voor en ná die demokratiese bedeling ook neerslag in die Engelstalige Suid-Afrikaanse letterkunde. Hoewel ek na enkele Engelse skrywers verwys, is my eie ondersoek toegespits op die Afrikaanse letterkunde. Dit is opvallend dat min vergelykende studies gedoen is met die proefskrif van Barbara Burger ’n opmerklike uitsondering.[2]

Enkele kernpunte uit my vroeëre studie word hier opsommend weergegee omdat dit relevant is vir ’n bespreking van Kleinboer se jongste roman, *Hierdie huis* wat pas verskyn het. Vir die Afrikaner was die stad van oudsher nie net ’n broeiplek van sondes nie, maar is dit ook gesien as verlengstuk van Britse imperialisme. Teen 1916 was daar al na raming 106 000 armblankes en teen 1934 tot 300 000 wat byna almal

Afrikaners was. Die verarmde Afrikaners het aanvanklik in ellendige toestande in agterbuurtes gewoon (Giliomee 275) waarna dikwels deur Engelse op neerhalende wyse verwys is: Vrededorp is spottenderwys deur Engelssprekendes "Blikkiesdorp" genoem, Fordsburg is "Veldschoendorp" genoem en Brixton, wat "Lappiesdorp" genoem is, was hul eerste "sitplekke" (Van Jaarsveld 179).

Die verstedeliking van die Afrikaner het in die eerste plek gegaan oor 'n beweging van die plase na Johannesburg weens die ontdekking van goud op die Witwatersrand en die gevolglike werkgeleenthede. Soos die Afrikaner in Johannesburg-omgewing ryker geword het, is uitbeweeg van "fietas", Jeppestown, Newtown na werker-woonbuurte soos Westdene, Rossetenville, Aucklandpark en Mayfair. Hierdie proses staan sentraal in Vincent Pienaar se roman, *Jo'burg, die blues en 'n Ford Thunderbird* (2003). Johannesburg is "Judasburg" genoem. Só blyk dit dat die Afrikaner ambivalent gestaan het teenoor die stad: 'n noodsaaklike euwel vir oorlewing, maar geen onvoorwaardelike aanvaarding nie. Selfs by Kleinboer duur hierdie ambivalensie steeds voort en speel hy in sy jongste roman, *Hierdie huis,* voortdurend die Lotto om uit die stad te kan ontsnap. Tog is die aanvaarding van die stad al veel groter.

Van Jaarsveld (167) onderskei drie fases in die verstedelikingsproses van die Afrikaner: die tydperk van 1886–1920, 1920–1948 en 1948 tot hede. Die snelste verstedeliking van die Afrikaner het plaasgevind in die jare ná die Anglo-Boereoorlog tot Uniewording in 1910. Die onopgeleide mans het meestal in myne gewerk en vroue het wasgoed gewas, maar moes ook soms noodgedwonge as prostitute werk. Volgens Albertyn, Du Toit en Theron (321–38) was die belangrikste maatskaplike vraagstukke drankmisbruik, onsedelikheid en prostitusie, dobbelary, kinderlyding, misdaad en rassevermenging (kyk ook Giliomee 275). Kleinboer se drieluik en ook steeds *Hierdie huis*, is 'n staalkaart van bykans al hierdie "vraagstukke", hoewel daar min aandag bestee word aan kinderlyding. Albertyn, Du Toit en Theron (327) en andere se ondersoek dui daarop dat daar waarskynlik 40 000 prostitute bedrywig was. Daar is in 1945 die reusesom van 3,5 miljoen pond bestee aan weddenskappe tydens hondewedrenne: "(d)ie meeste besoekers by die resies is Afrikaners" (Van Coller, "Afrikaanse prosa" 60).

Die (voor)stadroman

Die naam Jochem van Bruggen is sinoniem met die Afrikaanse (voor)stadroman, veral sy *Ampie*-trilogie het 'n bykans onaantasbare kanonieke status verwerf (kyk Schoonees 215–31). Dit is opvallend dat latere, moderne voorstadromans steeds skatpligtig is aan *Ampie* (Van Coller, "Tussen nostalgie en parodie: die Afrikaanse prosa in die jare negentig (deel II)" 271–5 en Van Coller, *Tussenstand* 102) en in die teken staan van die armblanke-problematiek. Veral Van Bruggen se skildering van "Blikkiesdorp" en "die verslegte blankedom" soos die skrywer daarna verwys (*Ampie* 59), kom later soos 'n eggo voor in ander werke oor die voorstadbestaan.

Van Bruggen se *Ampie* strek sy skadu uit oor latere Afrikaanse romans, veral

gesitueer in die voorstad en met "arm-blankes" as die karakters (onder andere *Triomf*; *Ons is nie almal so nie*; *Jo'burg, die blues en 'n swart Ford Thunderbird*; *Stinkafrikaners* en *Roepman*), werke wat in Van Coller ("Representasie van plaas" en "Afrikaanse prosa") in groter besonderhede ontleed word. Selfs die buitestander-figuur word hier vir die eerste keer fasetryk vergestalt in die Afrikaanse prosa (Botha 81, 82). In die prosawerk van Ivan Vladislavić waarvan die eerstes handel oor die laaste dekades van die twintigste eeu, is die voorstad (soos Kensington) te midde van die "Afrikanisering" van Johannesburg se middestad steeds 'n wit enklave, waar swart indringing (hetsy deur smouse of musikante van die Heilsleër) met argwaan aanskou word.

Henriette Roos verwys na talle Afrikaanse romans wat rondom die eeuwending verskyn het en handel oor die "banale bedrywighede van werkers en klerke en polisiemense in verafgeleë, kleindorpse of voorstedelike omgewings" (67). Vincent Pienaar se *Jo'burg, die blues en 'n swart Ford Thunderbird* (2003) is na my gevoel 'n geslaagde uitbeelding van die voorstadlewe in Johannesburg. Pienaar se roman representeer weliswaar 'n bestaan van verloedering, drankmisbruik en seksuele uitspattigheid, maar óók die strewe na sosiale aanvaarding en 'n lappie grond, aspekte wat steeds voorkom in Kleinboer se trilogie. Soos in *Siener in die suburbs*, *Triomf* én by Kleinboer speel die motor (hier Willie se Ford Thunderbird) in Pienaar se roman 'n belangrike rol as "ontsnappingsmetafoor". Soos later sal blyk, is die ek-verteller in *Hierdie huis* se bejaarde Mercedes ewe mankoliekig as die motors in P. G. du Plessis en Marlene van Niekerk se tekste. Desondanks bestaan daar by wit karakters nog (die moontlikheid van) mobiliteit. Die meerderheid swart inwoners van Johannesburg is aangewese op openbare vervoer óf hulle moet loop. Burger (12) verwys na Sarah Nuttall wat beweer dat 'n individu se beweging deur die stad "bemagtigend" is, maar stel dit ook duidelik dat beweging ook afhanklik is van ekonomiese faktore, onder meer die toegang tot (eie) vervoer. Fishman (409) beweer egter dat stap in 'n stad bevrydend is en dat die stad "tot stand kom", "geskep" word deur die verskillende roetes wat die stapper volg: hoe meer gevarieerd; hoe ryker en divers is die stadservaring (Ngara 204).

Naas J. Lub se sketse oor die Afrikaner in die goudstad (*Eenvoudige mense*, 1908; *Donker Johannesburg*, 1910 en *In en om die goudstad*, 1912), P. J. Groenewald se roman, *Frans* (1931) is dit veral C. M. van den Heever se roman, *Groei* (1933) waarin die stad as tema 'n prominente plek inneem. *Groei* is veral 'n staalkaart van "plattelandsverarming en plaasverlating". In hierdie roman suggereer Van den Heever (ten spyte van wetenskaplike bewyse as teendeel) dat dit beter is om op die plaas te bly as om in die stad ten gronde te gaan. Schoonees (307) bestempel die boodskap van die roman as 'n oproep dat die volk moet teruggaan na die ou paaie. Die roman is "die hunkering na die eenvoudige plaaslewe", 'n treursang "oor die ontaarding van die beste nasie-eienskappe as gevolg van die ekonomiese druk" (Van Coller, "Afrikaanse prosa" 107).

Van die vroegste en mees negatiewe weergawes van die Afrikaner se kennismaking met die stadslewe kom voor in Roelf Britz se romans, *Mammon se afgronde* (1944) en *Die lokstem van verleiding* (1945). Soos baie van die ander romans duidelik opvoedkundig was deurdat hulle die lesers wil inlei in die kunste en letterkunde, word hier verwys na die "Carnegie-kommissie" wat "in 1931 vasgestel het dat 17,5% van die blanke bevolking van Suid-Afrika baie arm is, en dat die stad se agterbuurte die broeiplek is van potensiële jeugmisdadigers". Dobbelary is een van die sondes wat hier beskryf word. Ook in die onoortuigende en soetsappige roman, *Op haar plek* (1946) van Sannie Bruwer, word weer eens verwys na die bevindinge van die Carnegie-kommissie en staan die plaas en stad in gespanne verhouding.

Van die mees geslaagde uitbeeldings van die stad in die jare veertig van die vorige eeu is Willem van der Berg se romans *Reisigers na nêrens* (1946) en *Temas en variasies* (1947) wat steeds enigsins onderskat is. Van der Berg se romans wyk ook af van die geykte patroon waar die stad veelal gelyk gestel word met Johannesburg. Hier word 'n gesofistikeerde Kaapstad met sy restourante, nagklubs en plesiersoekers beskryf, 'n representasie wat meer as 'n dekade later weer in Leroux se eerste siklus sal voorkom en wat Marita van der Vyver se nog latere werk (byvoorbeeld *Wegkomkans*, 1999) in baie opsigte vooruitloop.

Selfs in die werk van die Sestigers kry 'n mens steeds 'n oorwegend negatiewe representasie van die stad, hoewel Brink veral ook die positiewe eienskappe van Parys belig. Waarskynlik word hierdie wêreldstad nie net deur Brink gekies vanweë sy eie vertroudheid daarmee nie, maar omdat—soos later uitvoeriger sal blyk—Parys dié stad was van die literêre *flâneur.* In Etienne Leroux se eerste siklus is die stad 'n plek wat in die teken staan van vermaak (restourante, nagklubs, bioskope) en geld. Die Kaapstad wat Leroux skilder, het min plek vir die enkelinge (soos Colet van Velden en Gysbrecht Edelhart) en dwing mense tot 'n patroonmatige en eenselwige bestaan. Orde en chaos staan op 'n gespanne voet en die gewone mens is die speelbal van dié magte en hul verteenwoordigers: industrialiste (soos Julius Johnson), anargiste (soos Juliana Doepels), die eendsterte en selfs die kerk. Die beskrywing van die stad in Leroux se *Die mugu* is negatief, die "ligte, kras neonkleure, die gloed van fabrieke, die flikkering van hawe-ligte, die winkelvensters met hulle skyn van wellewendheid dramatiseer alle tegniese ontwikkeling—verskerp die gevoel dat die enkeling nietig is voor die grootse opset, dat lewensdrama universeel is, dat die persoonlike probleme verdwyn in die groot sinnelike, oorweldigende stroom." Selfs die argetipiese buitestander, Gysbrecht Edelhart word deur die klatergoud op sleeptou geneem: "Ek is deel van die stad, besluit Gysbrecht en slenter verblind die neonkosmos tegemoet" (118). In sy tweedaagse peregrinasie deur Kaapstad ontdek Gysbrecht voortdurend nuwe ruimtes (18) en "lees" so die stad—ook as palimpses (67)—as 't ware vir die eerste keer. Veel later sal ook Ivan Vladislavić se karakters verdwaal in Johannesburg sodat hulle beland in ruimtes waar hulle onbekend is en weens die vervreemding (verwant aan

Sklovskij se *ostranenie*) met nuwe oë daarna kan kyk (kyk ook Burger 156).

Leroux se tweede, (Welgevonden)-siklus speel aanvanklik af op 'n plaas, Welgevonden. Tog bly die stad, veral deur sy boheemse bewoners, 'n aanwesigheid. In *Die derde oog* (1966) word die stad voorgestel as die moderne Hades en sy "shopping centre" word 'n travestie van die antieke tempels. Selde in Afrikaans is die stad so negatief voorgestel en die parallel wat getrek word tussen die stad en die onderwêreld van Dante met al die verskillende soorte sondaars, dra veral hiertoe by. In *18-44* (1967) is die stad minder sentraal, maar steeds die plek waar die owerspelige ontmoetings met die "vurige Rus" plaasvind en waar mnr. Y sy paradysverlies ervaar. *Isis Isis Isis* (1969) is 'n moderne (en satiriese) reisverhaal, maar die beeld van die stad wat hier uit die verf kom, is een van oppervlakkige soeke na plesier, 'n frenetiese "reis na nêrens".

Daar kan met redelike stelligheid beweer word dat hoewel die stad in die latere werk van André P. Brink meer 'n "natuurlike" ruimte raak (*Gerugte van reën*, 1978; *'n Droë wit seisoen*, 1979), dit steeds geen ideale ruimte word nie. In die latere werk van Brink (byvoorbeeld *Donkermaan*, 2000) is die stad tewens 'n ruimte waarin moord, roof en verkragting aan die orde van die dag is. In die dekade van sewentig, veral, staan geweld voorop en word die stad dikwels die plek waarin dié tema beskrywe word (kyk *Liefs nie op straat nie*, John Miles, 1970). Kannemeyer ("Scriba van die leuen") bring Etienne van Heerden se satiriese roman, *Casspirs en campari's* (1991) in verband met Leroux se *Hilaria* (1957) "met sy uitbeelding van die advertensiewese en die banale wêreld van geldmagnate".

Negatiewe representasie van die (eietydse) stadsbestaan waarin pedofilie, sodomie, vigs en moord voorkom, tref ons aan in Harry Kalmer se roman *Kniediep* (1998) en ook in Jaco Fouché se roman *Die ryk van die rawe* (1996). Wat in beide werke opval, is die apatiese reaksie van karakters op hul goor bestaan. In Kalmer se roman skuil subtiele verwysings na wat al genoem is "Pulp Fiction"-prosa. Soos by Fouché se roman wat vol elemente is van die *graphic novel*, skuil daar 'n diepgaande kritiek teen die moderne (stads)bestaan.

Ook in die "gay-literatuur" van veral Koos Prinsloo (*Slagplaas,* 1992), Danie Botha (*Die Soft Rock Klub,* 1995) en Johann de Lange (veral in *Tweede natuur,* 2000), word die stadsruimte steeds uiters negatief beskrywe. Selfs die Kaapstad van Francois Loots se *Nagvoëls* (2001) is oorwegend onherbergsaam en word gekontrasteer met die geborge agrariese verlede. In die gay-tekste staan die individu voorop en gaan dit primêr om sy persoonlike ervarings. Ooreenkomste tussen Jaco Fouché se tweede werk, *Paartie by Jakes*, en Leroux word aangetoon deur verskeie literatore (kyk onder andere Van Coller, *Tussenstand*), byvoorbeeld die uitbeelding van doellose jongmense op soek na "'n lewende mite" en die uitbeelding van passiewe buitestanders. *Droster* (1996) van Tinus Horn eggo weer die uitsiglose stadsbestaan van die ná-oorlog, soos beskrywe in Leroux se *Hilaria.*

In verskeie korter tekste van Hennie Aucamp, Abraham H. de Vries, Jaco Botha, Herman Wasserman, Riana Scheepers en Eben Venter rondom die eeuwisseling speel verskeie verhale af in die stadsmilieu. Telkens staan negatiewe aspekte van die destydse Suid-Afrikaanse bestaan voorop: moord, verkragting, stedelike verval en rassisme. Van die sterkste—en negatiefste—uitbeeldings van die moderne stad kom voor in twee romans wat onderskeidelik handel oor Londen en Parys (Jaco Fouché se *Die ryk van die rawe* en Dan Roodt se *Moltrein*).

'n Voorlopige slotsom van Van Coller ("Representasie van plaas" en "Afrikaanse prosa") was dat, geoordeel aan die hand van die oorgrote meerderheid literêre tekste, die Afrikaanse prosa nog nooit volkome vrede gemaak het met die stad nie. Resenter prosawerke—met die moontlike uitsondering van Kleinboer se drieluik en Schalk Schoombie se *Boomkastele*—het hierdie beeld nie wesenlik verander nie. Die aangrypende roman van S. J. Naudé, *Die derde spoel* speel af in wêreldstede (Londen en Berlyn), is skatpligtig aan die opvattings van Walter Benjamin oor die *flâneur* én gee 'n troostelose beeld van die stad as labirint met brutale argitektoniese monsters wat die menslikheid bedreig. Voorop staan die uitbeelding van die bestaan van haweloses, hulle wat as nomades die ordelike stad bedreig.[3] Of hierdie wantroue jeens die stad die gevolg is van die werklikheid, 'n ideologiese vooroordeel, hunkering na 'n bykans mitiese agrariese hinterland waar 'n ongerepte bestaan vermoed word, óf as gevolg van 'n kollektiewe (ingebore) wantroue teen die stad, sal slegs verdere ondersoek kan verklaar. Loots verwys in 'n ongepubliseerde voorlesing na Wiid, die sterwende hoofkarakter in Marlene van Niekerk se *Memorandum* en sy ontheemding in 'n moderne stadsomgewing (Parow). Om werklik tuis te raak in 'n stad, moet 'n "eksistensiële territorium" (volgens die denkwyse van Guattari, *Chaosmosis* en *Three Ecologies*) deur mense geskep word. Dit kan geskied deur die "terugkeer na 'n estetiese paradigma" (7), soos die kollektiewe opgaan in musiek en poësie en die skep van 'n eie habitat of natuurlike omgewing (kyk ook *Kringfluit* van Vincent Pienaar). Dit is klaarblyklik ook die oplossing vir sy eie ontheemding in die verloederde Yeoville wat die ek-verteller in Kleinboer se siklus nastreef: huis en werf raak toenemend 'n herskepte paradys waar bome en struike gekultiveer word, voëls nesmaak en die ek-verteller selfs op Bybelse wyse bemoeienis maak met die miere (*Hierdie huis* 372). Hy "beken" sy vrou gereeld (en gee dit getrou weer) en vind veral vertroosting in sy skryfwerk en musiek. In die ikoniese Afrikaanse grootstadroman van Etienne Leroux, *Die mugu*, tref ons reeds hierdie poging aan om 'n natuurlike paradys te skep in die stad wanneer die tuinier naarstiglik probeer om 'n kremetart "in die Kaap te laat groei" (127).

Kontrei

Kleinboer het in 2004 die Jan Rabie-prys ontvang vir sy debuutwerk, *Kontrei* (2003). Hierdie roman het mettertyd kultusstatus verwerf en is hoog gewaardeer. Veral André P. Brink wat 'n belangrike letterkundige, kritikus en kanoniseerder was se

besonder lowende resensie het 'n deurslaggewende rol gespeel in die kanonisering van hierdie roman. André P. Brink was, aanvanklik as vaste resensent vir *Rapport*, 'n sleutelfiguur in die Afrikaanse literatuursisteem van die laaste dekades van die vorige eeu. Hy het meerdere kere die reputasies van skrywers gemaak óf gebreek.

Brink ("Dié boek word 'n aanklag teen uitgewer" 13) was aanvanklik baie krities jeens Eleanor Baker se roman, *Splinterspel* (1973) en oor *Mörketiden* (1975) is hy eweneens redelik neerhalend. Met die verskyning van *Weerkaatsings* (1984) bestempel Brink ("Só trap resensent darem nie modder op goeie, lekker boek nie!" 17) egter hierdie roman as "een van die subtielste prosawerke wat lank (sic) in Afrikaans verskyn het". Brink se "ommekeer" hou waarskynlik verband met die deurbraak van die postmodernisme met 'n veel meer demokratiese inslag waarin nie net onder meer die "mixing" van sogenaamde "hoë" en "lae" vorme van kultuur inslag vind nie, maar die hiërargieë self op losse skroewe geplaas word.

Ook in die geval van Abraham Phillips se ylerige debuutwerk, *Die verdwaalde land* (1992), het Brink se lowende resensie (wat ook op die agterblad afgedruk is) byna eiehandig gesorg vir Phillips se kanonisering. Dit was duidelik dat Brink hoë waardering het vir boeke wat nuwe blikke bied op veral sosiale (rasse-)ervarings. Die debuutwerk van Kleinboer gee inderdaad 'n boeiende kyk op 'n bestaan en 'n ruimte wat vir die gemiddelde Afrikaanse leser relatief onbekend was en waarskynlik steeds is: die middestadbestaan van 'n Afrikaner wat getroud is met 'n swart vrou, wat leef in 'n veelrassige omgewing en sy tyd veral deurbring deur besoeke aan swart prostitute. Die hoofpersoon se bestaan is deurspek met herinneringe aan 'n landelike bestaan, vol humoristiese uitweidings en godsdienstige verwysings. Van die uitvoerigste en positiefste kommentaar oor hierdie roman is dié van André P. Brink ("Kontrei is koning" 76): "In die vorm van 'n onthou-jy-brief aan sy tweelingbroer, Sarel, lewer die verteller verslag van sy lewe in die grootstad, wat 'n versoeking skep om te kyk na hoe dit oor die generasies neerslag gevind het in die Afrikaanse prosa—van die vergestalting van die Bose in die eerste taalbewegings, tot die hartelose plek van verdrukking wat dit vir 'n Mikro of Johanssen was, tot die nihilistiese maar ook uitdagende ruimte van Willem van der Berg of C. J. M. Nienaber, tot die plek waar ou mites ten gronde gaan, maar ook nuwes gebore word in die tyd van Sestig, tot die "gewone" leefruimte van goed en kwaad, beskawing én wildernis, van John Miles af verder. By Kleinboer bied die stad ongetwyfeld allerlei vorme van geweld en bedreiging, maar dit is bowenal *tuiste, heimat* en *kontrei*."

Ook Visagie ("Wit mans, swart vroue: *Man-Bitch* van Johan van Wyk (2001) en *Kontrei* van Kleinboer (2003) as seksuele outobiografieë" 236) wys op die (gevaarlike) stadsruimte waarbinne die verteller in *Kontrei* hom bevind. Yeoville in Johannesburg het vroeër oorwegend wit inwoners gehad "maar [is] vandag hoofsaaklik'n swart migrantebuurt waar misdaad 'n groot probleem is". So slaap die hoofkarakter met 'n rewolwer onder die bed en maak sy voordeur net oop met 'n panga in die hand;

'n gegewe wat steeds onveranderlik beskryf word in sy jongste roman, *Hierdie huis* (2017). Ten spyte van baie beskrywings van die (stads)ruimte moes ek met Fouché (Van Coller, *Tussenstand* 102) saamstem dat daar meer van gemaak kon wees. Wat beskrywe word, is meestal kroeë en woonplekke van prostitute en die hoofkarakter se woonruimte, veral sy agtertuin. Die stad self bly skimmig en vaag en aspekte daarvan word byvoorbeeld nooit onthullend ontdek soos in romans van Van den Berg (*Reisigers na nêrens*); Leroux (*Die mugu*) en Fouché (*Die ryk van die rawe*) nie.

Na aanleiding van N. P. van Wyk Louw se opmerking in *Vernuwing in die prosa* (129) dat *Die eerste lewe van Colet* deur Etienne Leroux los sou staan "van elke moontlike *ekonomiese* groeigrond […] niemand […] skyn iets soos werk te hê, of geldelike kommer, of bemoei hom selfs met die stoflike" het ek dit ook van toepassing gemaak op *Kontrei.* Dalk het die skrywer hierdie tipe kritiek ter harte geneem, want dit is opvallend hoe veel meer besonderhede verstrek word juis oor die werk van die ekverteller, die artikels wat hy redigeer en veral die frustrasies daaraan verbonde in die jongste werk *Hierdie huis.*

Terwyl Brink ("Kontrei is koning" 77) die verteller (en by implikasie die teks) in *Kontrei* behoudend vind en die hoofpersoon beskrywe as iemand wat getrou bly aan "die stel bourgeois-waardes wat hy uit sy jeug saamdra", sien Visagie ("Wit mans") hierdie teks as normdeurbrekend.[4] Dit is volgens hom 'n soeke na nuwe identiteite wat

> berus op toenadering tot en identifikasie met die historiese ander van die blanke in Afrika, naamlik swart mense en spesifiek swart vroue. Daar is verder 'n erkenning […] dat hierdie identiteite gebore moet word uit die drek van honderde jare van geslagtelike- en rasseongelykheid in Suid-Afrika, 'n geboorte wat moet plaasvind binne liminale ruimtes soos […] Yeoville in Johannesburg waar kulturele wederkerigheid en hibridisering noodsaaklike oorlewingstrategieë geword het. (245)

Aan die hand van die jongste roman, lyk dit asof beide Brink en Visagie reg was. Hierdie motief van hibridisering as voorvereiste vir identifikasie met die Ander word nog veel sterker uitgebou, maar vreemd genoeg is die koestering van eie identiteit én taal vir die hoofkarakter 'n voorvereiste juis vir aanvaarding van die Ander.

Ek verskil ook van Hambidge (6) wat beweer het dat *Kontrei* 'n roman is "wat bewustelik inskryf teen die plaasroman se kodes van die boer op die land". Daar is talle voorbeelde in hierdie werk wat duidelik aantoon dat die hoofkarakter "'n boer in beton" is, terughunker na 'n landelike bestaan en probeer om 'n stukkie paradys te skep in Yeoville. My slotsom was dat hierdie roman nie 'n totale inskryf teen of ontlediging van die kodes van die plaasroman is nie; veel eerder 'n permutasie daarvan. Dit was en *is* interessant om Kleinboer se werk te lees binne die Afrikaanse literêre tradisie, veral wat betref prosawerke wat handel oor die Afrikaner se verhuising na die stad. Uit die hele Kleinboer-trilogie wat ek later as *siklus* bestempel, blyk dit dat *al* die stadseuwels waarteen tradisionele Afrikaanse plaas- en dorpsromans

waarsku: hoerery, geldverkwisting, drankmisbruik, dwelmmiddels, owerspel en veral rasvermenging ruimskoots hierin voorkom. Dit word só die beliggaming van 'n doemprofesie wat in byna elke tradisionele Afrikaanse plaas- of dorpsroman voorkom: as jy in die stad wil tuiswees, moet jy word soos die stad.

Werfsonde

Werfsonde (2013) handel weer eens oor die verkapte outobiografiese persoon, die skrywer met die van "De Villiers" (85) wat werk by 'n landboutydskrif, getroud is met 'n Zoeloevrou en soos 'n Odusseus van ouds swerf van huis na kroeg en van kroeg na bordeel. Van meet af aan is dit duidelik dat hy moeite het met die versoening van die Westerse en Afrika-kulture, maar ook met verlede en hede, want nóg hy nóg sy vrou kan hulle ooit bevry van hul verledes (15). Die titel van hierdie fragmentariese "roman" verwys in die eerste plek na die futiele poging van die hoofpersoon om sy eie lushof op eie werf ("Webbstraat 66, Yeoville, noordoos van Johannesburg se middestad") te skep (13). Nie altyd maklik nie, want rondlopers, diere, blaffende honde en bywoners bring voortdurend sy outonomie in die gedrang. Dalk was dit ook 'n manier om die futiliteit te suggereer van 'n tradisionele (wit) burgerlike bestaan in 'n wêreld van oorgang.

Die titel hou verband met "swerfsonde" en "erfsonde". Deur die hele trilogie is dit duidelik dat die hoofkarakter diep gebuk gaan onder sy sondebesef, maar hom moeilik kan bevry van veral sy drang na losbandige seks. "Swerf" beteken in die eerste plek doellose peregrinasie, maar in Engels ook "cruising", 'n term gelaai met seksuele bybetekenisse. Aanvanklik het dit 'n spesifieke gay-betekenis gehad, maar algaande het dit verruim tot 'n begrip vir die soeke na "vryblywende" seks in die algemeen. *Werfsonde* is—soos trouens ook in *Kontrei* en *Hierdie huis*—die weergawe van die sinlose, goor en monotone bestaan. Die voortdurende herhaling versterk die onderliggende verveling, maar skep ook iets dwangmatigs; 'n motief wat in die jongste roman veel sterker figureer. Alles word ook uitvergroot op 'n hiperboliese wyse, veral die hoofkarakter se Walter Mitty-agtige seksuele potensie en vermoëns (113).

Waar "flanneren" of doeloos rondswerf 'n heel spesifieke betekenis dra in die Europese literatuur, is swerf by Kleinboer eerder verwant aan die tipiese "road movie" waar die dolende persoon sosiale, ekonomiese en politieke spanninge registreer en representeer en dikwels die speelbal raak van die noodlot. Burger (82) verwys na die werk van Walter Benjamin wat die *flâneur* byvoorbeeld sien in ekonomiese terme: hy neem 'n bepaalde posisie in binne die kapitalisme en is naas waarnemer, ook verbruiker, produsent én produk. Wanneer Burger (83) aanvoer dat Kleinboer se teks toon dat hy "gemerk word deur sy situasie en die fantasmagoriese drome van die kapitalisme op hom 'uitgekrap' word" eggo sy Benjamin se Marxistiese opvattings op klakkelose wyse.

Werfsonde se verwantskap met die satiriese reisverhaal én die pikareske tradisie is duidelik, want in hierdie roman is die hoofkarakter inderdaad ook 'n reisiger ("Ek reis

voorlopig maar binne Johannesburg", 115), wat self dikwels die satiriese objek raak. Die hoofpersoon skryf hier nie 'n brief nie, maar SMS'e aan sy tweelingbroer, hy dink steeds voortdurend aan sy tipiese Afrikaner-jeug én daar is steeds 'n godsdienstige register (kyk 35 bo) aanwesig. Nuut is dat hy veel meer vleis in sy werf braai as in die vorige teks; 'n bykans ritualistiese bevestiging van die vryheid op *sy* werf, maar ook van sy Afrikaner-herkoms. Burger (32, 138) haal ook filosowe aan wat beweer het dat die bou van 'n huis 'n vorm van bewoning is, dat die huis beskerming bied, 'n betekenisskeppende omgang met ruimte is en die plek is waar(deur) sin gemaak kan word van die wêreld. Les bes: ook die plek is waar betekenisgewende rituele uitgevoer word. Veral die laasgenoemde aktiwiteit vind baie plaas in *Hierdie huis.* Al hierdie motiewe kom onverswak voor in *Hierdie huis*. In *Werfsonde* reeds is daar baie verwysings na die klassieke musiek (dalk as indeksikaal van 'n Westerse bestaan) en ook die poësie. Die ek-verteller siteer ook van sy eie gedigte; soms met 'n verrassende inslag (104), maar oor die algemeen swak. Sitering van die eie poësie kom ook voor in *Hierdie huis*, helaas van niks beter kwaliteit nie.

Ten spyte van knap beskrywings maak die tweede roman tog 'n ietwat vermoeide en selfs gedateerde (en by tye anachronistiese) indruk weens onder meer gedateerde verwysings. In my resensie het ek opgemerk dat dit lyk asof die manuskrip vir 'n geruime tyd op die rak beland het en eers weer later uitgegee is. Die hoofkarakter se huwelik en gesinslewe is ewe disfunksioneel as in die debuutwerk; daar word steeds gedrink en (dagga) gerook én omgegaan met swart prostitute.

Hierdie huis

Die derde boek in Kleinboer se Yeoville-trilogie (of siklus) is *Hierdie huis* (2017). Soos altyd is die motto's stemvurke. Daar word gewag gemaak van die feit dat 42 die perfekte getal is, 'n gegewe wat 'n belangrike rol speel in sy soeke na geluk deur die spel met getalle. Die aanhaling uit die werk van Breyten Breytenbach plaas sintuiglike ervarings voorop—die soeke daarna is een van die sentrale motiewe in die roman—en die aanhaling van Nietzsche gaan oor aanpasbaarheid en oor hoe die mens se strewe na reinheid onvermydelik besoedeling noodsaak. Die laaste aanhaling—'n sitaat uit Amos 8 ("Op dié dag" moet lees "In dié dag") is die vierde en 'n besonder somber visioen.[5] Die gebruik van 'n gedeelte uit Amos as motto is nie om dowe neute nie. Amos word bestempel as 'n eietydse representasie van dit wat korrup en onmenslik is; net soos *Hierdie huis* 'n representasie is van 'n reeks (sondige) gebeure. Die betrokke aanhaling handel oor geestelike ontbering, oor die onvermoë om God te hoor en die gevolglike koerslose bestaan. 'n Mens ontkom nie aan die gevolgtrekking dat die abstrakte outeur hier sy eie hoofkarakter (dus homself) in gedagte het nie (Vosloo en Van Rensburg 1020, 1033).

Burger bespreek in haar proefskrif 'n versameling Afrikaanse en Engelse tekste waarin nie net die stedelike ruimte sentraal staan nie, maar waarin huis, tuiste,

beskutting, en dergelike aanduidings sentraal staan; dikwels in samehang of kontras met landelike ruimtes soos plase. Dit is opvallend dat "plaas", "stad" en "huis" (en die onderliggende spanninge daartussen) ook figureer in enkele seminale Nederlandse tekste van die afgelope jare. Werke van Francisca Treur, Dimitri van Toren, Gerbrand Bakker en Robert Vuijsje is maar enkele tekste waaraan gedink kan word.

Marc Reugebrink (1960), 'n Nederlander wat in Vlaandere woon, se roman, *Het huis van de zalmen* (2016) is al as eksemplaries van die huidige Nederlandstalige prosa beskou, onder meer deur Yves T'Sjoen in 'n persoonlike gesprek. Hierdie roman het hoë lof van resensente ontvang en dit is al in verband gebring met skrywers soos W. F. Hermans en Simon Vestdijk. En sodanige vermeldings of "mentions" (Rosengren, "Literary criticism: future invented" en "Time and literary fame") is 'n bekende kanoniseringstegniek.

Dit is 'n verhaal oor 'n man wat 'n restourant bedryf en dan na Noorweë reis om wilde en geteelde salm met mekaar te vergelyk. Hy is doodtevrede met gekweekte salm solank dit lekker smaak; sy kok daarteenoor verkies die wilde salm wat outentiek en getrou aan sy aard leef en as 't ware nooit sy plek van herkoms verraai nie. Later word hy in kennis gestel dat sy ma gesterf het. Wanneer hy sy ma se woonstel opruim, besef hy dat sy eintlik vir hom 'n onbekende was. Sy (her)konstruering aan die hand van haar dokumente is tegelykertyd 'n manier om ook insig in homself te kry—hy wat soos die gekweekte salm van homself, sy plek van herkoms; kortom van sy verlede vervreem is. Die titel van die roman verwys enersyds na iets staties (soos die verlede); andersyds gevul met dinamiese en ontglippende elemente. En soos met enige historiese herkonstruksie slaag jy nooit daarin om 'n koherente geheel te skep nie; dit bly interpretasie en invul. Du Plooy (91) verwys in haar bespreking van Willem van Toorn se bundel, *Het stuwmeer* (2004), na die betekenis wat Jung in sy beskrywing van die menslike psige aan die begrip "huis" heg. Dit is volgens hom die argetipiese beeld van die geheue. In hierdie roman is huis dus gelyk aan die menselewe, maar eintlik dit wat die individuele menslike bestaan uniek maak; die persoonlike verlede en die herinneringe daaraan. Soos by Wolkers se hoofkarakter in *Terug naar Oegstgeest* ontstaan psigiese probleme wanneer die verlede vergeet of verdring word.

Die bekroonde roman *La Superba* van Ilja Leonard Pfeijffer (oor die Italiaanse hawestad, Genua—waar die skrywer ook al 'n tyd woon—en onder meer handel oor 'n vlugteling uit Afrika wat daar bly) is een van die sterkste betrokke Nederlandse romans van die afgelope jare. *La Superb*a kan in 'n sekere sin beskryf word as 'n "grootstadsroman" wat afspeel in 'n stad wat trekke van 'n labirint vertoon en waardeur 'n karakter (of karakters) 'n reis onderneem, dikwels as *flâneur*, 'n begrip wat verwys na 'n doellose waarnemer en wat deur Walter Benjamin van toepassing gemaak is op die werk van Baudelaire. Grootstadverhale (soos *Berlin Alexanderplatz* van Alfred Döblin; *Ulysses* deur James Joyce en *Die mugu* van Etienne Leroux) is

kenmerkend van die modernistiese roman. Die stad waarin die gebeure plaasvind, is meestal belangrik; by Pfeijffer is Genua al bestempel as die hoofkarakter van die roman, veral dan die historiese stadskern wat reeds uit die Middeleeue dagteken met al sy straatjies wat kruis-en-dwars loop. Verkenning van so 'n stad is derhalwe ook 'n argeologiese proses waardeur die stad as 't ware "gelees" word deur die waarnemer. Sodanige romans is dikwels meerstemmig, vol epistemologiese twyfel, karakters is veelal buitestanders en die stad word telkens 'n vyandige ruimte—soos in Jaco Fouché se moderne weergawe van dié romantipe in *Die ryk van die rawe*, 1996. Die Genua wat in hierdie (eweneens meerstemmige) roman van Pfeijffer beskryf word, is ook 'n vyandige doolhof waarin talle mense soos Senegalese vlugtelinge, hoere, maar ook skrywers dool.[6] Nie verniet nie, verwys die romantitel "La Superba" nie net na Genua nie, maar beteken dit ook "die hoogmoedige" en eenselwige stad op rots gebou: eers onaantasbaar, nou die teiken van duisende vlugtelinge uit Afrika.

En baie soos in Leroux se roman *Die mugu* is die soektog een na 'n beter bestaan, maar ook is dit 'n soeke na die self; hier na inspirasie om te skryf. Soos gesê, woon en werk Pfeijffer reeds sedert 2007 vir lang tye per jaar in Genua. Daarom toon die roman ook outobiografiese trekke, want Pfeijffer is self die Nederlandse immigrante-skrywer Ilja (of Leonardo of Giulia) wie se paaie kruis met 'n vlugteling, Djiby uit Senegal. Soos Gysbrecht Edelhart in *Die mugu* kruis ook Ilja se pad dié van 'n bonte versameling (arge)tipes: die anima, die hoer, die "trickster", ensovoort. Soos by Joyce is hierdie roman ook vol sinne uit ander tale (Latyn, Italiaans en Engels) en speel die fisiese ruimte 'n belangrike rol: die ken van die (ritmes van) die stad is deel van die peregrinasie. Ricoeur (148) verwys na Emmanuel Kant wat reeds beweer het dat tyd en ruimte saamhang.

> Dit impliseer dat alle herinneringe sowel 'n temporele as 'n ruimtelike aspek behels […] Die bewustheid daarvan dat 'n liggaam/persoon plek beslaan of inneem, word ook altyd bedink en onthou in terme van verwysings, hoe indirek ook al, na punte, lyne, oppervlaktes, volumes en afstande […] 'n Stad is dus 'n komplekse menslike konstruksie wat deur mense bewoon word sodat die hede en die verlede daarin saambestaan en waarin daar soveel ruimtelike en temporele interaksies aan die werk is, dat dit heeltemal onontwarbaar is as 'n mens by die oppervlakkige verskyningsvorme daarvan verbykyk. (Du Plooy 89–90).

Die stad is 'n palimpses van tye, geskiedenis en kultuur en moet as 't ware gelees word. Dit doen Pfeijffer in hierdie roman. In 'n sin is hierdie roman ook 'n metaroman deurdat die skrywer in 'n lang brief vertel van die roman wat hy wil skryf van die daaglikse lewe, maar ook van migrasie. Algaande neem die roman so vorm aan.

Die verband tussen die bogenoemde romans met Kleinboer se roman is oorduidelik. Reeds op die heel eerste bladsy (9) is die openingswoorde: "My vrou Lungi, het gesterf op die dag wat die Olimpiese Spele in Beijing begin het: Vrydag

8 Augustus 2008." En iets later lees ons: "In die weke ná haar dood het ek duisende rou woorde oor haar in (sic!) my rekenaar getik. Ek is ná ses jaar gereed om weer daarna te kyk. Dis nie net maanskyn en rosegeur nie, ek het ons struwelings ook opgeteken." Kleinboer se enigsins onsamehangende relaas is eweneens 'n terugkyk op 'n geskiedenis: eerstens die huwelik van bykans 15 jaar met Lungi, maar toenemend ook op 'n omvattender geskiedenis; dié van sy jeug in die era van apartheid. Ook hierdie roman is daarom 'n historiese rekonstruksie van én 'n individuele én 'n kollektiewe geskiedenis. Soos in die geval van die hoofpersoon in Reugebrink se roman blyk dit ook dat baie gebeure vergeet of verdring is en maak Kleinboer ook van dokumente uit die verlede gebruik as geheuesteun: op bladsy 283 word daar byvoorbeeld 'n kwitansie afgedruk wat dagteken uit sy besoek aan Kenia en op bladsy 288 'n inskrywing van 'n jong vrou, Mercy, op 'n stukkie karton. Kennelik is "huis" ook hier die argetipiese beeld van die geheue.

Pfeijffer se roman is 'n roman waaruit groot deernis met "migrante", "vlugtelinge", "nomades" blyk; juis die mense wat groot argwaan gewek het by Hausmann, die beplanner van die moderne Parys en wat hy bestempel het as minderwaardige randkarakters (Loots 4). Anders as die meerderheid Afrikaanse tekste wat in die (voor) stad afspeel, getuig die siklus ook van groter aanvaarding van die multidiversiteit, hoewel daar oorvloedige bewyse is dat hy hom steeds afsonder in sy huis én in die restourante en kroeë waar merendeels mense van Europese afkoms teenwoordig is—vergelykbaar met Vladislavić se Aubrey Tearle in *The Restless Supermarket* (2002). Desondanks is Kleinboer se *Hierdie huis* 'n roman waarin die Afrikaner 'n holte vir die voet in die stad gevind het en dalk tog iets ervaar van 'n bewoonbare "eksistensiële territorium". Die sporadiese nostalgiese hunkering na die "boereparadys" het nie verdwyn nie, net soos ook die verleidinge van die stad (hoere, drank, dobbel) springlewendig is, trouens die hoofkarakter swig telkens voor die verleidings daarvan. Tog oorleef die gesin (hoe disfunksioneel ook al) te midde van al hierdie bedreigings: daar word steeds op kleinskaal geboer, die Boek het steeds 'n sentrale plek, Afrikaans word nie net gekoester nie; dit word etimologies ontleed en teruggevoer tot die wortels daarvan—en "wortels" (ook as "risoom") is 'n sentrale motief in die hele siklus.[7] In feite is baie stede (soos in *La Superba* van Ilja Pfeijffer) 'n doolhof, 'n netwerk van strate en stegies met onder die oppervlak nie net die rioolverbindings soos 'n labirint nie, maar ook die argeologiese reste van vroeëre beskawings as kollektiewe geheue. In wese die beeld van 'n netwerk wortels of risoom. Dit is opvallend dat die letterlike ondergrond van die stad meestal vir haweloses, veral swart mense 'n natuurlike habitat is. Burger (180) haal in hierdie verband 'n gedeelte aan uit Ingrid Winterbach se *Vlakwater* (68) waar gesê word dat die inwoners van die stad die stad ken, ook "die tonnels en waterpype […] Hierdie ouens het hulle hand op die ondergrondse pols van die stad." Ook Ivan Vladislavić is deurgaans besig om volgens Nuttall (91) Johannesburg se ondergrondse ruimtes te ondersoek, sy "literal

underneath, its historical past, its figures of marginality […] and the archeology of words in its literary texts". Ngara (311) praat van "mysterious spaces underfoot, known only to those who could see it" (kyk ook Burger 189). Reeds in *Die mugu* van Etienne Leroux tref ons al 'n beskrywing aan van die stad se ondergrond: "Die stad is 'n miernes wat gebreek is—uit tonneltjies borrel die inwoners skynbaar doelloos in en uit" (118).

In *Hierdie huis* is die huis die deiktiese sentrum, waar die skryfwerk verrig word en die verlede geherkonstrueer word. Dit is ook die woonplek van 'n gesin wat nie anders beskryf kan word as totaal disfunksioneel nie: die vrou werk nie, is ingeskryf vir haar matriekeksamen wat sy stralend druip en sy probeer sporadies om die skyn te bewaar van 'n hardwerkende Zoeloevrou deur wasgoed te was, te kook en die huis te verf, maar eintlik bring sy haar tyd deur sjebeens te besoek en gereeld smoordronk by die huis op te daag. Die seun, Jomo, wat op skool is in sy puberteitsjare, skipper eweneens rond tussen goed en kwaad en probeer om tussen die verleidings van sigarette, drank, verdowingsmiddels en meisies op die regte pad te bly. Die hoofkarakter se lewe (by die huis) is nie bepaald opwindend nie: "Vat seks, kroeë en Lotto weg en my lewe is amper saai: plante natgooi, visdam opvul, honde park toe vat vir 'n wilde gehol. Daar is darem braai ook. Gisteraand het ek 'n Texan steak gebraai. Die houtskool is van gesifte Namibiese hardehout gemaak en deur Patat du Toit verpak. Lungi het pap gekook en sous gemaak, gesê 'My job is finished' en sjebeen toe verkas. Ek het 'n koue bottel premier grand crû in die agterplaas bewerk en die kole se vonke het onder die gemarineerde beesvleis gespat" (302).

Die hoofkarakter en ek-verteller se peregrinasie-obsessie uit die eerste twee romans, is steeds onverswak en hy besoek veral bordele, kroeë en klubs op 'n gereelde basis.[8] Daar ontmoet hy 'n bonte mengelmoes karakters, maar sy vriende is veral figure uit die ou kolonies (Nederland, Portugal, Engeland) wat nog iets van die koloniale verlede bewaar in hul taalgebruik, eetvoorkeure en hulle marginaliteit in 'n volstrek postkoloniale era en ruimte. 'n Vraag wat hom opdring, is of die ek-verteller se representasie van swart vroue (onder andere Lungi) nie stereotiperend is nie en of sy obsessie met swart hoere spruit uit die tipiese koloniale misbruik van swart vroue (soos in verskeie romans oor die destydse Belgiese Kongo); 'n verwyt wat trouens ook gerig is jeens Jeff Geeraerts weens sy beskrywing van seksuele omgang met swart vroue in sy Gangreen-Black Venus-siklus, onder andere in *Black Venus* (1968). Of is dit juis 'n illustrasie van vereenselwiging met swart mense en volkome integrasie in die hibriditeit van nasionaliteite en tale wat die huidige Suid-Afrika (veral in Johannesburg en omstreke) kenmerk? Vladislavic is al hewig gekritiseer oor die gebrek aan diepgaande uitbeelding van swart mense in sy werk (Ngara 317); Kleinboer sou hierdie verwyt ook moeilik kon vryspring.

Die hoofkarakter (De Villiers) werk by die *Farmer's Weekly* as taalversorger-redakteur en vind sy werk vervelig en versmorend. Dalk sou 'n ondersoek na die ooreenkomste

(en verskille) tussen Kleinboer se hoofkarakter en Vladislavic se Aubrey Tearle in *The Restless Supermarket* die moeite loon. Tearle was ook 'n teksversorger, geïnteresseerd in etimologie en leksikografie, is ewe geobsedeerd met getalle, droom van die ontsnapping na 'n utopiese ruimte én besoek by voorkeur ruimtes waar die Europese beskaafdheid nog bestaan. In sy geval word beweer dat sy voortdurende klassifikasie spruit uit sy behoefte aan beheer en dat hy besig is met "linguistic and social proofreading" (Ngara 225). Vir Kleinboer se hoofkarakter is sy werk slegs 'n manier om geld te verdien vir sy grootste uitgawes: betalings aan hoere, drank-aankope, geld aan Lungi vir haar sjebeen-besoeke, die aankoop van vleis en drank vir sy gereelde vleisbraaie op eie werf én steeds oplopende uitgawes aan sy ou Mercedes. Oor dié motor, nou skaars 'n skim van verlore glorie, kry hy te hore dat die motor dalk nog kan dien as ryding naby die huis, maar dat lang reise daarmee waagstukke sou wees. Onwillekeurig bring die literêre leser dit in verband met twee ander legendariese motors uit die stadsmilieu waarna al verwys is: die motor waaraan Jakes voortdurend werk in P. G. du Plessis se *Siener in die suburbs* (1971) en "Molletjie" die ewe kapot motortjie waarmee Marlene van Niekerk se Benades uit *Triomf* (1993) wil ontvlug na die Noorde. In beide werke is die motors metafore vir gefnuikte ontsnappings; ook die hoofkarakter in *Hierdie huis* is as 't ware verdoem tot sy huis in Webbstraat 66, Yeoville én tot sy vreemde bestaan: "Ek hou my neus skoon op eie werf" (11). Dat "hierdie huis" ook geen idilliese ruimte is nie, raak gou duidelik: "Ek wou al dikwels wegkom van hierdie huis met sy kakkerlakke, lekkende dak en rotte, maar mens het groot geld nodig om permanent te ontvlug" (57). Aan die einde van die roman lees ons dat daar 'n "sms van Beauty", Lungi se niggie, op sy foon "beland het". Want "[i]n die Zoeloe-tradisie word 'n wewenaar aangemoedig om 'n vrou uit dieselfde familie te neem. Dalk, oor 'n paar maande …" (386). Lees jy die inskrywing oor Kleinboer op Wikipedia blyk dit dat Lungi se kleinniggie "by Kleinboer" ingetrek het.

Dit bevestig reeds iets van 'n sikliese bestaan én sikliese aard van die trilogie. 'n Siklus is immers 'n deel van samehangende dele wat sirkel om 'n kern(tematiek) en dit ontwikkel en herhaal op so 'n wyse dat daar 'n geheelbetekenis ontstaan wat nie in een van die afsonderlike dele so omvattend verwesenlik word nie. Tipies van 'n prosasiklus is nie net die sentrale tema daarvan nie, maar ook die herhalende karakters, ruimtes en motiewe. Kleinboer se vertellende ek, sy vrou Lungi en seun Jomo figureer in al drie die boeke, net soos die groter ruimte: Johannesburg en omstreke, veral Yeoville, maar veral die huis waaroor ek al enkele opmerkings gemaak het. Die hele poging om iets van die agrariese verlede te herkonstrueer, raak algaande sterker en in *Hierdie huis* word daar in veel groter besonderhede vertel oor die verskillende bome en struike, die voëls en die verbete poging om 'n klein paradys te skep (kyk byvoorbeeld die liriese beskrywing op 370). Oënskynlik is die sentrale motief van hierdie siklus (ook volgens die resepsie) die verslag van 'n wit man in die "nuwe Suid-Afrika" (boonop getroud met 'n swart vrou en woonagtig

in 'n "swart" ruimte). Op bladsy 121 kom daar 'n sin voor wat na my gevoel nie net die boek verbind met die vorige nie, maar wat in wese dié sentrale motief is van die siklus: "'n [m]ens moet ondanks die belemmerings maar voortgaan met die lewe".[9] Die hoofkarakter se voortdurende onvrede met sy werk, sy huwelik, sy geldelike situasie, die verloederde ruimte, aspekte van sy jeug; alles spruit uit 'n eksistensiële krisis en 'n onvermoë om hom te versoen met "de helaasheid der dingen".[10]

Die metanarratiewe verwysings is belangrik en toon aan dat skryf nie bloot terapeuties is nie, maar ook esteties bedag is: "Hierdie boek bevat huislike episodes, werkskofte, sekstoneeltjies, terugflitse na my jeug, dorslesse, taalbrokkies wat nie maklik vertaal kan word nie, bedreigings, Bybelversies, oortredings en misstappe, visvang in die groot poel van geluk, reisfragmente, sterftes, rou en berou, 'n paar stukkies Kafka. Ek lewe my so in dinge in wat lank terug gebeur het dat die verlede tyd soms na teenswoordig spring" (12). Hierdie roman is daarom verwant aan byvoorbeeld Etienne Leroux se *18-44* waar die knolskrywer, Meneer Y, ook skryf aan sy roman wat eweneens 'n poging is om die verlede weer te gee en die hede te begryp én waar die deiktiese sentrum ook (meestal) die eie huis is. Die skrywende hoofkarakter in *Hierdie huis* leef "grootliks" in sy eie kop, "'n geheime lewe feitlik onder Lungi se neus" (110).

Uit hierdie ooreenkomste tussen die lewenslope van die hoofkarakter en skrywer, die gelykenis in name en die gebruik van paratekste is *Hierdie huis* nie net 'n roman nie, maar vertoon dit verskeie kenmerke van 'n (verkapte) outobiografie. Soos in die geval van Jan Wolkers se outobiografiese roman, *Terug naar Oegstgeest* lê die romanmatige aspekte veral in die werking van die assosiatiewe verbeelding en in die gebruik van literêre procédés (soos die innerlike monoloog, détail-inventarisse, beeldspraak, metaforiek, klank-eksperimente, ensovoorts). Die "waarheid" van die narratief verhoog tog lesersbetrokkenheid. Outentisiteit word egter veral verkry deur die minitueuse wyse waarop aspekte van die werklikheid weergegee word deur skerp waarnemings gerugsteun deur feite: pryse, plekke en 'n hele arsenaal van name van werklike persone soos Melt Myburgh, A. S. van Straten, Fransjohan Pretorius en dergelike.

Die hoofkarakter se noukeurige optekening van elemente uit die werklikheid is duidelik neo-realisties, verwant aan byvoorbeeld die werkwyse van die neo-realistiese digters in Nederland en België.

Die poësie van die digter Herman de Coninck word gesien as die beste van hierdie groep in Vlaandere. De Coninck sien die "nieuw-realisme" as poësie wat handel oor egte dinge: nie gedigte oor die ewige ontwykende vrou nie, maar "liefdesverdriet om een konkrete vrouw die je zonet gezegd heeft dat je een klootzak bent en dat je in het vervolg zélf je ondergoed, inklusief stijfstaande sokken, kunt wassen. Het eerste is romantisch, het tweede is hinderlijk echt, daar schrijf je geen gedichten over. Het nieuw-realisme probeert dit nu juist wél te doen" (De Coninck 485).

Vir De Coninck is daar twee soorte poësie: dié wat ontsnap aan die werklikheid en dan dié soort wat juis die werklikheid belangriker vind. Die laasgenoemde poësie is ook meer beskeie: dit wil nie in die plek van iets staan nie; dit wil bloot kommentaar wees op die werklikheid. Dit is volgens De Coninck neo-realistiese poësie. Eenvoudig weliswaar, maar nie emosieloos nie: "Ik heb dat trouwens altijd typisch Hollands gevonden, dat emotieloze: het krenterig omspringen met gevoelens net als met bankbiljetten" (De Coninck 490).

Kleinboer se tipe neo-realisme is vergelykbaar hiermee: skerp optekening van die werklikheid, maar ook altyd verbonde met gevoelens. Dikwels van ontnugtering: "want rowwe Yeoville het amper geen wittes meer nie en seker fokol satyn […] ek gee nou boedel oor teen die oormag rommel" (11). Dan weer van verwondering: "[m]y skop was een uit 'n miljoen, ek weet nie of ek in my leeftyd weer so 'n volmaakte ding sal regkry nie" (160). Meer dikwels gaan dit om die gevoel van moedeloosheid en die besef "een broodkruimel te zijn op de rok van het universum", soos Lucebert dit gestel het. Soms grens die anekdotiese representasies aan die absurde, soos sy uiters noukeurige relaas oor 'n bolletjie snot (372).

Die werklikheid word kortom nie beskryf as 'n veilige heimat nie. Vastigheid bied alleen feite, so divers as dié op Chappie-papiere, verklarings uit (etimologiese) woordeboeke en rekenaarwebwerwe en veral getalle. Die laasgenoemde (saam met woorde) is vir die ek-verteller bykans magies en die toevallige volgorde daarvan kan hom dalkies die Lotto-wenner maak. Dit sal hom, soos aan Gysbrecht Edelhart uit *Die mugu*, die geleentheid bied om drome waar te maak, te ontsnap aan die sleur van 'n gewone lewe wat bestaan uit werk, bestaansprobleme en 'n disfunksionele gesin. Daarom word taal op allerlei maniere ingespan, 'n getal aan letters gekoppel en word daar telkens daarna gestrewe om die magiese getal 42 te bereik. Hierdie opeenvolging van getalle word dan telkens ingeskryf vir die Lotto-trekking en—voorspelbaar—skuur hy dikwels daarnaas (met vier korrekte getalle), maar wen dit nooit nie. Sy obsessie met getalle en (die betekenis van) woorde het iets obsessief-kompulsief: 'n psigiese toestand wat daarop gemik is om dit wat bedreigend is, te probeer beheer.

'n Obsessie (dwanggedagte) is basies 'n steeds terugkerende idee. 'n Dwangmatige obsessie het tot gevolg dat iemand steeds dieselfde handelinge uitvoer. Dit ontaard soms in 'n dwangsteurnis, 'n psigiese toestand waarsonder iemand nie kan funksioneer nie. Soms word sodanige obsessies veroorsaak deur beskadiging van die brein, maar meer dikwels weens traumatiese ervarings. Vir die hoofkarakter is die lewe traumaties. Die logika van getalle bied 'n vashouplek, hoewel dit hom helaas nie in staat stel om die Lotto te wen nie. 'n Ander obsessie is om die betekenis van woorde presies na te gaan, skynbaar met die hulp van 'n etimologiese woordeboek. Weer eens gaan dit om 'n manier om houvas te probeer kry op taal wat self meerduidige (onbetroubaar) is én betekenis wat ontglippend is. Tog is dit ook 'n proses van argivering waardeur Afrikaanse woorde en hul herkoms bewaar word, net soos die

talle idiome wat op bykans elke bladsy aangetref word. Hierin, maar ook in die wyse waarop hiërargieë afgebreek word en lustig aangehaal word uit die letterkunde (veral uit Kafka en die Afrikaanse poësie), maar ook uit popliedere en Chappie-papiere, is hierdie roman postmodernisties te noem.

Volgens Visagie se definisie ("Moderniteit en die Afrikaanse literatuur" 9) sou hierdie roman eerder tuishoort by wat hy op die spoor van Vaessens (7–9) "metamodernisme" (ook genoem "laat postmodernisme" of "postpostmodernisme") noem. Die metamodernisme besef die noodsaak vir 'n uitkoms uit die doolhof (of doodloopstraat) van die postmodernisme en streef daarna "om met 'n hernude naïwiteit en optimisme vorentoe te beweeg, maar word getemper deur die afwesigheid van 'n duidelike horison en geskikte diskoerse om 'n nuwe opregtheid sonder meer te omarm" (Visagie, "Moderniteit" 11). Tipies van die karakters binne hierdie filosofiese raamwerk, probeer ook Kleinboer se hoofkarakter etiese raamwerke vind om binne te lewe, al besef hy voortdurend dat hy deur eie promiskue gedrag aandadig is aan die vernietiging van sy huwelik. Een van hierdie vastighede vind hy in die Bybel wat hy skynbaar weens nostalgiese redes meestal nie uit die 1983-vertaling aanhaal nie. "Ek was lank Bybelloos, maar het later weer ene gekoop, sommer 'n slapband op die sypaadjie, vir R15. Al glo ek nie die Boodskap nie, is die Skrif tog deel van my wortels […] Ek is nie aggressief teenoor die Woord nie, eerder nostalgies. Ek wil die Boek soms oopslaan om vir ateïste te wys dat 'n alledaagse uitdrukking soos *'n lewende hond is beter as 'n dooie leeu* 'n Bybelversie is, of om op my eie lig wat 'n halwe leeftyd gelede deur 'n Kemptonparkse kerkvenster geskyn het, te onthou" (125). Dit is opvallend nie net hoe dikwels daar uit die Bybel aangehaal word nie, maar ook hoe Bybelse aanhalings telkens vervorm word, byvoorbeeld "maar nogtans sal ek probeer jubel" (177) en op Bybelse trant geskryf word (142) en "In die kraal van my vader is daar ontelbaar baie beeste. As dit nie so was nie, sou ek hulle gaan tel en 'n presiese getal verskaf het" (380) wat 'n verwringing van Johannes 14:2 is.

Slotsom

'n Resensie-artikel is volgens die normale verwagting 'n waardebepaling. Nie net van wat vroeër die "intrinsieke" waarde genoem is nie, maar veral op grond van kontekstuele aspekte soos die gesprek met die tradisie van én die genre én die literêre sisteem. Kleinboer se roman is op die oog af uitgesponne, herhalend en by tye oervervelig weens die herhalende beskrywings van sy (obsessiewe) gedrag: besoeke aan hoere, die opstel van ellelange lysies sinne met nommerwaardes daarnaas, vleisbraai in sy agterplaas, gesprekke met drinkebroers, relase van Lungi se besoeke aan sjebeens, ensovoort. As registrasie (en representasie) van 'n Afrikaner se grootstadbestaan in ons eie tyd staan dit egter (ook intertekstueel) in die ry van talle sodanige representasies in Afrikaans en is dit dalk juis weens die eiesoortige aard

daarvan boeiend. In *Gister* (1941) deur C. M. van den Heever kry ons byvoorbeeld die volgende beskrywing van Johannesburg:

> Die hoë geboue staan nog grys en hard daar, met hulle onderste gedeelte in die skaduwee en hulle toppe in die weke lig van die komende dag. Die teerstrate lê sag en swart soos hulle na alle kante toe in die fris môrestemming wegvloei en in die verte hang 'n mistigheid oor die geboue, en die uitgroeiende lig dring stadigaan daarin deur en dit word helderder sodat die dun blou streep van 'n rantjiereeks yl teen die wasigheid van die horison breek. Die wiele sing al vinniger oor die pad, wat nou uit die belemmeringe van die stad losgewikkel is en in die koelheid van die nuwe dag oop lê na die vlaktes toe. (203)

Die hoë geboue word as kleurloos, hard en leweloos beskrywe. Sonder enige mense is die stadsomgewing 'n onherbergsame ruimte. Net dit wat buite die stad is (die rantjiereeks) of wat uitvlug uit die stad bied (die strate wat lei na 'n ander ruimte) word met ander "sagte" byvoeglike naamwoorde beskryf. En die verteller kan nie aan die einde van die beskrywing nalaat om die kontras tussen stad en die landelike te beklemtoon nie. Hierdie beskrywing is op die eerste sig tekenend van die destydse Afrikaanse onvrede met die stad én in pas met Van den Heever se landelike idealisme. Loots (3) verwys na Wiid, die hoofkarakter in *Memorandum* se beskrywing van Parow met "die strate daaromheen neerdrukkend"; sy "stad [is] geen sentrum van humanitas [nie], bepaald nie die hart van beskawing en kultuur nie." In wese eggo dit die beskrywing van Van den Heever se ouktoriële verteller. Daaruit kan afgelei word dat die Afrikaanse prosa steeds negatief staan teenoor die stad, dalk omdat Parow se strate hier gevestig word "as 'n variasie op die arkades, gange en stegies van die 19e-eeuse Parys". Uit Loots se verdere argumentasie—met 'n aanhaling van Marlene van Niekerk self waar sy beweer dat 'n snoesige plek "miskien een van die mees fundamentele fantasieë van die menslike bestaan" is—word duidelik gestel dat Parow (en die woonplek van Wiid) geen "snoesige plek" is nie.

Loots (3) verwys ook na die "armoedige, maar besige Afrika-markplein" in Parow se arkadesentrum wat in *Memorandum* gestel word teenoor die "Paryse wandelgange en die Belgiese variant in Brussel". Die beskrywing van die stadsomgewing in *Hierdie huis* herinner baie hieraan:

> By talle straatstalletjies word besigheid gedoen. Nie net groente en vrugte word verkwansel nie, maar ook telefoonoproepe, sigarette, vadoeke, musiek, selfs rou vis wat op planke lê […] Hier is ook slotte en speelkaarte, kamme en borsels, kombuisgereedskap en toiletpapier, naelknippers en donkerbrille te koop. Los tampons word deur die tralies aangegee, ook Lotto-kaartjies. Die plek leef! (335)

Hierdie fokaliseerder laat nie net blyk dat 'n verskeidenheid mense in harmonie leef nie, maar deur sy detail-inventaris word gesuggereer dat alles wat nodig is vir

'n bestaan voor hande is. Moeiteloos word produkte tipies van die plaas ("groente en vrugte") en rou vis vermeng met wat al bestempel is as "fictional dreck" (Stevick 272), die gemors, vullis of die metafore van ons tyd.

Loots (5) verwys na die werk van die Franse sosioloog, Anne Querrien ('n student van Felix Guattari) wat onderskei tussen die metropool en die hoofstad ("metropolis" en "capital"). Die metropool is ontvanklik vir immigrasie en multidiversiteit; die streng hiërargiese hoofstad nie. Die hoofkarakter in *Hierdie huis* staan in hierdie siklus in 'n verhouding tot die Ander, een waarin die verskil van die ander erken én waardeer word, maar die Ander ook nooit gesien word as totaal verskillend nie. Só 'n benadering verskil byvoorbeeld radikaal van representasies van die Ander in die tradisionele plaas- en dorpsromans in Afrikaans.

Hierdie hoofkarakter en ek-verteller se voortdurende etimologiese speurtogte voer hom telkemale na verskeie tale wat aan die wortel lê van Afrikaans. In wese is dit 'n verwysing na die opvatting van hibriditeit (waarna reeds vroeër verwys is) wat eintlik impliseer dat daar nooit sprake kan wees van linguistiese, kulturele én rasse-suiwerheid nie (en uiteraard ook weer eens die *risoom*-gedagte uitdruk). Dit is asof die sentrale ruimte in die siklus (Johannesburg en omstreke, veral Yeoville) een is waarin verskillende rasse en kulture ontmoet en vermeng. In die postkoloniale kritiek word dit soms *kreolisering* genoem wat vir party kritici dieselfde beteken as *métissage* en vir ander die gevolg is daarvan: die vermenging van groepe, nuwe kulturele vorme, nuwe tale en die uiteindelike skepping van nuwe identiteite (Prabhu en Quayson 230 en verder). In geen ander Afrikaanse skrywer se werk word die proses van die vorming van 'n nuwe identiteit so volhoudend beskryf nie. Dit alleen maak van hierdie siklus iets opmerkliks.

Aantekeninge

1. Kyk ook Van Coller ("Representasie van plaas"). Burger se proefskrif is baanbrekerswerk, omdat dit vergelykend werk. Dit word egter ontsier deur 'n gebrek aan kritiese afstand ten opsigte van sekondêre literatuur, waaronder ook teoretiese uitgangspunte. Dit blyk die beste uit die kritieklose aanhaling (90) van die uiters omstrede stelling dat prostitusie in wese 'n "openlike verteenwoordiging", dus konkretisering is "van hoe heteroseksuele verhoudings in die algemeen werk". Dan gaan sy verder in haar kritieklose napraat van Benjamin deur skynbaar goedkeurend te verwys na sy stelling dat "álle menslike interaksie in die algemeen die vorm van ekonomiese transaksies aanneem" (90). 'n Oortuigde Christen, Boeddhis of humanis, sal slegs meewarig glimlag en Benjamin se boek toemaak en na die vergeetrak verban, óf dit summier wegsmyt. Daar kom ook baie stellings soos die volgende voor waarvoor geen empiriese bewys ooit aangevoer [kan] word nie: "geslagsrolle in die kapitalistiese patriargale samelewing veroorsaak dat die man se rol dié van subjektiewe waarnemer is, terwyl die vrou se rol dié van voorwerp is waarna gekyk word" (90). In Ngara (148 en verder) word duidelik gemaak dat in die moderne stadsliteratuur deur Ivan Vladislavić hierdie "gendered and racialized gaze" omgekeer word en dat ook mans (en veral wit mans) bekyk word. Nog 'n voorbeeld is die volgende stelling: "[d]ie feit dat die verteller van Werfsonde met 'n rewolwer onder die bed slaap sodat hy sy huis en gesin kan beskerm ingeval daar 'moeilikheid kom' (Burger 9, 39 en 95) is 'n herkenbare eienskap van hegemoniese Afrikanermanlikheid." Die feit dat geweld in Suid-Afrika veroorsaak dat mense van alle geslagte en ras toenemend met rewolwers binne bereik slaap, ontkrag al meteen hierdie absurde hipotese. Nog só 'n vereenvoudigende veralgemening is die stelling dat

"alle mense eintlik diere is—gefokus op hulle eie oorlewing" (124). So 'n stelling is nie bewysbaar nie, skeer alle lewende wesens oor dieselfde kam en is weinig meer as 'n persoonlike opinie, iets waarop die ondersoeker vanselfsprekend geregtig is, as dit egter nie dien as kapstokke waaraan interpretasie opgehang word nie.

2. Ngara (156) noem byvoorbeeld Marlene van Niekerk se *Triomf* sonder om dit te ontleed.
3. Kyk Loots (4) en haar verwysing na Hausmann (die persoon wat verantwoordelik was vir die stadsinrigting van die "modern" Parys) wat hom uitgespreek het teen die "inval" van dié nomades in die moderne Parys.
4. Visagie ("Wit mans" 251) stel dit só: "Op grond van Kleinboer se waardering van die huislike roetine en sy liefde vir tuinmaak, beskou André P. Brink […] *Kontrei* as 'n behoudende boek."
5. Elders word daar ook foutief aangehaal uit die Bybel waar die aanhaling uit Spreuke 31 uit vers 6 en nie ook uit 7 kom nie (*Hierdie huis* 123). Soms is die verklaring van Nederlandse sitate (soos op 153) ook foutief. 'n Goeie redakteur /teksversorger moes dit voorkom het.
6. Harry Kalmer se fragmentariese roman, *'n Duisend stories oor Johannesburg* (2014), wat handel oor "mense wat kom en gaan" sou met vrug met Pfeijffer se roman vergelyk kon word, veral vanweë die uitbeelding van die posisie van migrante.
7. Volgens Deleuze en Guattari (7) is die risoom 'n metafoor vir enige verskeidenheid in die natuur en die lewe in die algemeen en vanselfsprekend ook op die interverbondenheid van dinge (kyk ook Van Niekerk 27).
8. "Dis nie net jagsheid wat my hierheen [na bordele] dryf nie. Is dit rustelоosheid, is dit my oerdrange wat deur drank geroer word, is dit uit pure gewoonte dat ek telkens hier eindig, of is dit onvervuldheid by die werk en frustrasie by die huis?" (315)
9. Ek eindig my resensie van die vorige roman, *Werfsonde* met die volgende opmerking: "Maar bloot vanweë sy onverbloemde liefde vir en verknogtheid aan Afrikaans (101 en 129) wat by tye die taal laat sprankel, sy eerlike weergawe van sy onvermoë om hom van vooroordele los te maak én sy wilsbesluit om soos 'n Gysbrecht Edelhart te bly voortlewe, is die boek lesenswaardig."
10. Op bladsy 378 bereken die hoofkarakter dat sy voortdurende besoeke aan bordele hom reeds R200 000 uit die sak gejaag het!

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Under Glass.
Claire Robertson. Cape Town: Umuzi, 2018. 300pp. ISBN 978-1-4152-0970-7.
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Claire Robertson has produced three substantial novels: *The Spiral House* (winner of the Sunday Times Fiction Prize), *The Magistrate of Gower*, and now *Under Glass*. She is mining a rich and distinctive vein of historical evocation; although each novel is set in a different time and milieu, they feel of a piece. There are certain similarities of voice between the three, some overlaps in their circling around issues of women's domesticity, repressed sexualities, conditions of entrapment of "sorry green colonialists" (*Glass* 84) on the margins of greater societal forces. Though they are period pieces of exquisite precision, world events revolve in a shadowy dance behind the primary scenes of a slave house, a kitchen, an isolated magistracy, a sugar plantation.

The Spiral House is set in two periods, narrated in interlocking chapters. The first is the 1790s in the Cape Colony, focused on the experiences of a Dutch-Malay woman, Katreijn van de Caab, caught in a strange twilight zone, technically free but obliged still to live much as a slave, yet better-educated than many of her "masters". The second strand is set a century and a half later, mostly on a mission station in the Limpopo borderlands and refracted through one Sister Vergilius. Despite some commonalities of theme, this feels a touch contrived: two novels, almost, struggling to escape a single cover. *The Magistrate of Gower*, with its Hardy-like title, is more satisfactorily singular in its chronological line (roughly 1900–39), even as the omniscient narration ranges across characters. Gower is a small Karoo-type dorp, its inhabitants barely aware of bigger cities or the surrounding countryside. Robertson has moved to occupy a space in between the dyspeptic modern urban novel and the conventional plaasroman with its expansive bucolic spaces. Her settings admirably suit characters who are caught in liminal situations, like Magistrate Vos in his tortured sexuality, whose stories are seldom told.

Under Glass explores another such neglected space, yet one just as common and crucial to white settlement: the sugar cane estate in peri-coastal Zululand in the mid-1800s. This is also a two-strand novel, but cannily integrated. The main strand is omniscient but centred on the character of Mrs Chetwyn, wife to an emergent

sugar-cane farmer and mother of five. The second, alternating voice belongs to the youngest of the five, "Cosmo", whose true position in the family emerges only in the last quarter or so. Only a second reading reveals just how cunningly the clues are laid—and omitted. In the opening pages, we learn that certain household members are "loyal to [a] conspiracy"—but I will not reveal its precise nature here.

At least three aspects of Robertson's writing deserve highlighting. One is how a density of research is deftly integrated into the portrayal of everyday textures and the revelation of character—what she might well call a "housewifely" use of "lore, vigilance and care with thoroughness, thrift and duty" (72). Each novel is intimately informative without ever feeling didactic. Much is filtered through the primary purview of the domestic, even ruminations on wider dynamics of empire, agriculture or science; never does the technically omniscient narrator obtrude. Rather, what is not said is equally important: almost every sentence is resonant with implication. The richness lies somewhere between the intellectuality of George Eliot and the metaphoric lyricism of Australia's Patrick White.

This relates closely to a second aspect: Robertson's remarkable control of voice. In all three novels, she has developed a mode of present-tense narration which is influenced by the cadences and vocabularies of the depicted period, but which still feels unique—both authentic and invented, as it were—a sort of "neo-archaism". In the case of Katreijn in *The Spiral House* a non-English speaker's sensibility is conveyed in a unique, exotic yet natural English argot: a triumph. In the case of Cosmo, the sensibility of a child, despite being considered from a point of adult sophistication, is almost magically conveyed in the present tense. If there is a tiny criticism to be injected here, it is that the passages of interiority briefly accorded to the Zulu manservant/guide Fuze, or to the indentured Indian maid Griffin, are not strongly enough differentiated from Mrs Chetwyn or, for that matter, Magistrate Vos. A danger, perhaps, of falling victim to one's own success. (Though our fashionable shibboleths of race and gender are present throughout, they are filtered through complex relationships, a strategy refreshingly free of cant, gross binarism and sentimentality.)

Thirdly, Robertson's narrative focus is not only on domestic space and activity, which is evoked with an extraordinary density of accoutrements and processes, but on bodily responses even to intellectual thought. Character is conveyed through gesture and sensation rather than through authorial "telling". Building personalities and milieux pixel by pixel, as it were, Robertson places a lot of faith in her reader to sense the implications. Consequently, there is scarcely a dull sentence in the entire novel, scarcely a paragraph not worth re-reading for its balance, resonance, and lyricism. A representative passage:

> "The land is uneasy. Almost uncanny," he [Chetwyn] says. He makes a picture of suspicious homesteads and women alone and marks of newness and

> strange patterns in the way cattle are herded and rivers forded. He speaks of a sense of tremors, the quivers that will sweep across the flanks of a horse hours after it has been in a carriage wreck—tremors under the surface, startlement never far, nerves rinsed and taut. But oh, the look of it. "It has a way with hills," he says, and strokes the air as if stroking an animal's flank, and speaks of hills that follow one another in successive swells to the north, or cut off to the east, all sharing the same blunt, sudden end … (55).

Beautifully done: the sentences are carried by a rhythmic quality; the metaphors evoke the characters' own lifeways; a forceful poetry sparks through, as in the assonance of "blunt, sudden". A concise indirectness of speech is preferred over empty dialogue. These are hallmarks of a novelist who is, I believe, writing as well as anyone in the country today.

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At the February Lectures on Queer Life in the Global South at the University of South Africa in Pretoria in 2018, an audience member asked Makhosazana Xaba whether politics or aesthetics weighed heavier in the selection of the short stories for *Queer Africa* 2 (following on *Queer Africa: new and collected fiction* published in 2013). Xaba answered that while her and Martin's project is political, they want the stories to "seduce" the reader into being immersed in the different perspectives represented by the various stories. Their agenda is therefore political *and* aesthetic, undermining the idea that the two are opposed.

This, then, is a different strategy than that adopted by writers who popularised queer writing in the 1980's and 1990's, such as Kathy Acker or (Afrikaans short story writer) Koos Prinsloo. Far from seducing the reader, they aimed at shocking her or him out of complacency. Some stories in *Queer Africa* 2, most prominently "Philip" by Barbara Adair, "Mirage of War" by S. van Rooyen and "My Dad Forgot my Name?" by Victor Lewis do employ a strategy of challenging readers' moral preconceptions.

Most stories, however, are gentler, subtly transporting readers to the everyday lives of queer people in Africa. This in itself is radical considering the violent and bureaucratic suppression they are often faced with. "Perilous Love" by Jennifer Shitna Ayebazibwe tells the story of the relationship between Ugandan Tibahitana and German Ilsa, and the decision they must make on whether to stay in Uganda given that they could face up to fourteen years in prison (144). It is one of the stories that most successfully combines delicate descriptions of the specific details that

make up people's lives—"They were lying face up on the intricately patterned mat, heads resting against folded arms, the valley laid out below them. Smoke rose lazily in the distance, a cow mooed somewhere, breaking the silence" (143)—while conveying the danger of their situation. Another story that successfully follows this approach is "This Tomorrow Was Christmas" by Juliet Kushaba, dealing with the character of Siima's attempt to introduce her family to her life partner. Coincidentally, both these stories are set in Uganda—or perhaps it is not a coincidence, considering the severity of Uganda's anti-homosexuality laws.

From the perspective of literary studies, the stories that are not particularly challenging are still innovative, in the sense that clichéd tropes and narratives associated with both queerness and Africa are challenged. Even just juxtaposing these two supposedly incompatible terms in the title ("queer" and "Africa") can be considered a queering of dominant oppressive discourses.

As should already be clear from the descriptions of "Perilous Love" and "This Tomorrow Was Christmas" some of the tropes associated with narratives with a LGBTQ+ theme are present in the collection: coming out stories, tragic unrequited love, etc. The sheer variety of the stories, however, defy such easy classification. Like Nick Mulgrew's "Ace", smartly placed at the beginning of the collection, they refuse to be "shaped and gnarled into new postures" (6).

Like "Queer", "Africa" also evokes certain expectations. As with queerness, these expectations are both embraced and resisted by certain stories. "Chebov's Light" by Nancy Lindah Ilamwenya is written in a social realist style that calls to mind the writing of Chinua Achebe and Mariama Bâ (amongst others) and like them she focuses on the cultural capital of motherhood in some African communities. By depicting the ancestrally sanctioned marriage of a woman unable to have children to a woman with children (18), Ilamwenya locates same-sex relationships at the centre of an African tradition, rather than at odds with it. The same is true of "Åwúre Ìfẹ̀ràn" by Rafeeat Aliyu, in which lesbian desire is (implicitly) engineered by the love potion of a babalawo, a traditional healer.

Another story that experiments with African literary structures is "The Stone" by Matshepo Thafeng, which plays with oral storytelling in unexpected ways. "Mirage of war" by S. van Rooyen can also be read in dialogue with the Afrikaans genre of the *grensverhaal* (stories set during the South African border wars of the 1980's).

Several stories allude to attempts to find a home, a place to build a life, at the intersection of being queer and African. In "Pub 360" by H. W. Mukami, such a fictional home is created in the shape of a pub that the protagonist buys in order to find herself and where she can "speak [her] soul out so freely to strangers" and where "ostracised women" can connect (243). In "Pampers" by Olakunle Ologunro falling in love is described as "the sensation of arriving home from a long, weary journey" (277). In a similar

way *Queer Africa* 2 is, especially for queer readers, a home, fostering a pan-African community that does not necessarily have contact with each other outside of literature. In this sense, the collection can be considered a "homespace" as bell hooks (42) describes it: "one's homeplace was the one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist".

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The Keeper of the Kumm.
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In 'n tyd waar daar gepraat word oor grondonteiening sonder vergoeding, swart ekonomiese bemagting met "African first", word *The Keeper of the Kumm* deur Sylvia Vollenhoven 'n baie belangrike boek in die geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika. Hierdie outobiografie is nie alleen die weergawe van 'n individu se lewensreis nie, dit is ook 'n geskiedskrywing, 'n vertelling van dit wat verborge gelê het of wat verborge gehou was of miskien nog verborge gehou word.

Die boek begin met die verteller wat hulp soek vir haar ongesteldheid. Vele besoeke aan dokters en toedien van Westerse medisyne bring geen verandering mee nie en die verteller wend haar tot tradisionele Afrika-medisyne en metodes. Interessant genoeg is die tradisionele dokter 'n wit man, Niall. Die beveel dat sy 'n geestebeswering ondergaan want sy het, "picked up a deathly energy […] the energy of a dead person, maybe several entities, and that is what is causing the chaos in your life" (14). Ná die Femba-ritueel of geestesbeswering verbeter die gesondheidstoestand van die verteller geleidelik. Wat met haar gebeur het, word vergelyk met wat met die Khoisan god /Kaggen gebeur. /Kaggen herwin weer sy krag ná elke beproewing. Hy word beter deur water te drink en hom te beroep op magiese gelowe soos in die storie van //Kabbo. Die verteller sê voorts: "we have been stripped of our ancestral places and our names. We are largely ignorant of our heritage and true identity. But if we search with open hearts, our rituals and stories can revive us" (288).

Ten spyte van 'n Waarheids- en Versoeningskommissie, een wat deesdae "gebrekkig" genoem word, wil dit voorkom asof die land in 'n afwaartse spiraal beweeg.

Suid-Afrika, 24 jaar ná die koms van demokrasie is ten spyte van vele veranderinge, positiewe ontwikkelinge, steeds 'n rasverdeelde land, geweldgeteisterd en het 'n gaping tussen ryk en arm wat al groter word. Gepaard met hierdie ellendes gaan die vergrype aan staatsgeld en staatskaping. In *The Keeper of the Kumm* is die verteller se ondervindinge 'n mikrokosmos van wat die groter

bevolking in Suid-Afrika gedurende apartheid deurgemaak het. Sy is egter ook 'n baanbreker in sekere gevalle. Haar reis as 'n joernalis neem haar na plekke wat beide soet en suur ondervindinge meebring. Een so 'n geval is haar dekking van die dood van Samora Machel, die eertydse president van Mosambiek wat in 'n vliegongeluk op Suid-Afrikaanse bodem omgekom het. Haar ondervindinge is wat min joernaliste al ervaar het en getuig van 'n passie vir haar beroep. Die gevare wat sy moes navigeer, word in diepte beskryf en is amper ongelooflik gegee die feit dat die gebeure plaasvind in die tyd toe die beleid van apartheid hoogty in Suid-Afrika gevier het.

Die koms van die nuwe Suid-Afrika bring ná die aanvanklike euforie, groot teleurstellings. Die verteller bevind haarself weer in 'n identiteitskrisis ongeag haar identifisering met die Swart Bewussynsbeweging. Sy begin stelselmatig vervreemd voel, nie in staat om haar plek in die demokrasie te vind nie. Haar onverklaarbare siekte het alles te doen met 'n diskoers van uitsluiting wat stelselmatig posvat in die land. Dit is eers wanneer sy die Bleek en Lloyd joernale in die argiewe teëkom dat daar 'n lig opgaan. Haar ontmoeting met //Kabbo begin haar geleidelike herstel.

The Keeper of the Kumm vertel die storie van miljoene ontwortelde Suid-Afrikaners. Omdat die Waarheids- en Versoeningskommissie so gebrekkig was, moes daar meer pogings aangewend word om die effek van hierdie ontworteling te verstaan en die herstel te bewerkstellig. Te min aandag word gegee aan die letsels gelos deur kolonialisme en apartheid aan die wat as "kleurling, gemeng, bruin" bekend gestaan het. Hierdie gemeenskap het op groot skaal rassisme geïnternaliseer en die effek daarvan is akuut deur die verteller beleef. Ongelukkig het die selektiewe onthou van die geskiedenis vele afstammelinge van die inheemse Khoi en San, afstammelinge van die slawe vervreem en kon 'n pad na herstel nie uitgewerk word nie. Die herstel van die verteller is onlosmaaklik verbind aan die onthou van haar ondervindinge, die opgrawe van haar "komvandaan" en die opneem van haar regmatige plek in 'n nuwe Suid-Afrika. Hierdie boek vra vir 'n herbesin oor wie en wat "African" is en aan wie almal die land behoort.

The Keeper of the Kumm is 'n belangrike bydrae tot die Suid-Afrikaanse literatuurerfenis. Dit is 'n tydige "vermaning" dat die Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis nie op 'n vasgestelde datum begin het nie. Dit is ook 'n bevestiging dat daar verskeie kulture is en dat almal se stories vertel moet word. Die afwaartse spiraal in die Suid-Afrikaanse gemeenskap wat hetsy deur geweld of korrupsie plaasvind, kan ook toegeskryf word aan die "mis-vertel" of die "on-vertel" van Suid-Afrikaanse stories.

By die lees van *The Keeper of the Kumm* het hierdie resensent weereens besef dat die vertel van stories belangrik is omdat die slagoffer en die werklike dader mekaar in die storie ontmoet. Dit is hier waar "truth and reconciliation" kan plaasvind. Sylvia Vollenhoven skryf aan die einde van die derde deel van die boek:

But the nagging is always there. My

> friends are Xhosa and black, Nama and black, Venda and black. A richness of identity that speaks in their history. I am just black. BC has rescued me from colouredness but does not contain the potential for an identity linked to my history.
>
> Delving into //Kabbo's story and the Bleek-Lloyd archive has made me understand that my history, my claim to this land lies in moving beyond an amorphous, universal blackness. (241)

The Keeper of the Kumm is tegnies goed geskryf. Die innerlike konflik wat die verteller regdeur die boek ervaar, bring 'n nuuskierigheid in die leser na vore, so ook dan die ontknoping van die verskeie terme van identifikasie wat regdeur die verteller se lewe loop, "Mixed, Coloured, Black, Khoisan". Vir diegene wat met vrae oor identiteit spook en ook vir die wat 'n stukkie Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis wil verstaan, sal hierdie boek 'n belangrike toevoeging wees. Ek beveel hierdie boek aan vir alle Suid-Afrikaners in die hoop dat die boek wel in Afrikaans en isiXhosa vertaal sal word.

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The History of Intimacy.
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I

Gabeba Baderoon se gedigte ontleed die verskillende posisies van liminaliteite: kindwees; man teenoor vrou; geboorteland teenoor nuwe rusplek; Distrik Ses versus apartheid; Moesliem en Christen …

In 2004 behaal Baderoon 'n doktorsgraad oor die representasie van Islam in Suid-Afrika. Sy het wyd klasgegee in sowel Europa as in die VSA en tans is sy medeprofessor in *Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies and African Studies* aan die Universiteit van Pennsilvanië.

Baderoon se gedigte het my nog altyd bekoor. In 2005 was ek op 'n paneel vir die DaimlerChrysler-prys toe sy die eerste plek behaal het teen 'n hand vol ander digters wat tans hul regmatige plek ingeneem het as digters.

A Hundred Silences het in 2006 eweneens by Kwela verskyn. Ander titels is *The Dream in the Next Body* en *The Museum of Ordinary Life*.

Hierdie jongste bundel word opgedra aan haar moeder: "Groundbreaker, Healer, Muse". Oor die moeder en digterlike taal, dink 'n mens onmiddellik aan Julia Kristeva se *Desire in Language* (1980) en die semiotiek: die moederfiguur is 'n ambivalente figuur in die vroulike onbewuste: een wat die digter wil uitwis én behou. Trouens, 'n mens sou hierdie hele komplekse bundel kon lees met Kristeva ter hand: Kristeva oor

melancholie; Kristeva oor eensaamheid; Kristeva oor die baarmoeder; Kristeva oor bannelingskap; Kristeva oor vrouwees.

By Baderoon is daar 'n voortdurende beweging tussen die wet van die vader en die wet van die moeder, oftewel tussen die simboliese orde en die semiotiese orde. Die eie identiteit, soos afgelees in hierdie bundel, is 'n pynlike een: 'n wegbeweeg van die "law of the mother" en die vader se ontdekking van seksuele betreding (70) saam met die pynlike raspolitiek wat die jong kind ervaar het. Dit word pakkend weergegee in "The History of Intimacy" (66). Deur oor die moeder se ervaring van die ongelykhede te skryf (sy word hier 'n buikspreker vir die moeder), word 'n hele gemeenskap se ervaring weergegee. Sy bely: "Since the beginning, you have been breath, / and poetry" (67).

"The Law of the Mother" (70) handel oor verlies aan maagdelikheid (op 'n wrede manier) met die sosiale en psigologiese implikasies wat dit inhou vir vroue. Hierdie sterk gedig analiseer die volledige implikasies van die betreding (met 'n slim toespeling op *Thelma and Louise*). Die terapiesessie maak haar bewus van die gebrokenheid van die liggaam:

> that 'broken' is a boundary
> and the body is time
> as well as place.

II

In "Answering" (69) word raspolitiek en genderpolitiek saamgesnoer. Identiteit is immers altyd 'n samesnoering van ras, klas en gender. Hier in 'n werksonderhoud word sy deur twee manne ondervra met een wat meen hy haat dit wanneer swart vroue oor die voetoorgang stap asof "hulle" al die tyd in die wêreld het; die ander een vra vir 'n antwoord wat sy nie by die pinko-liberale plek (die Universiteit van Kaapstad) geleer het nie—iets wat hom sal verras. Die gedig eindig so:

> I don't get the job and sometimes
> think of what he sees, stalled
> at the light, metal drumming
> beneath his feet, as a woman cuts
> across the world, answering
> only to herself (69).

Húlle, die twee regsgeleerdes, waar die digter aansoek doen vir 'n werk as sekretaresse (met twee grade) word 'n gedig wat al die gendersake opper via Hélène Cixous (*The Laugh of the Medusa*, 1975) en June Singer (*Androgyny: Toward a New Theory of Sexuality*, 1976).

III

Baderoon se gedigte is eweneens fassinerend in die "cross over" tussen Engels en Afrikaans. Onder haar verse roer daar dikwels verwysings na die Suid-Afrikaanse kultuur.

Sy voorsien die leser van 'n nuttige glossarium soos *nuh* (nè), *doenya se goete* (aardse dinge), *ja* (yes), *sloot* en *tjorrie*.

Die taalaspek van haar bundel is dus iets wat ondersoek moet word: die gebruik van spreektaal uit 'n Afrikaanse en Moesliemkultuur wat ons vind in 'n gedig wat in Engels geskryf is.

"Everything We've Said" (30) bly egter net 'n stelling—dit kon verder gegaan het in die spel tussen tale. "The Blue of the Night Before We Left (39) huiwer om 'n distigon te word.

IV

In "Cardinal Points" (73) word name van mense genoem (Louise, Jane, David) en die leser wonder of hierdie name werklik relevant is vir die gedig se betekenis? Dalk vir hierdie lesers. Robert Lowell het meer gedoen wanneer hy name in gedigte gebruik het sodat die persone argetipiese status verwerf het. Die aangrypende liefdesgedig "Not You" (90) werk met die inkantatiewe herhaling van "I love" in al sy semantiese duidinge. Die gedig eindig soos volg:

> I think poetry is the flood
> for the not-you I've prepared for
> from the start. (61)

Stilte (silence), tronke, hawestede, oorgange en dus die posisie van liminaliteit, word telkens vanuit verskillende hoeke belig. "Poetry for Beginners" (9) sal 'n mens nie sommer gou vergeet nie. Hoe iemand iets vra en dit jou terugruk en jou eie aannames oor die digkuns laat ondersoek.

Daar is 'n lange lys van bedankings wat ook 'n bietjie vertonerig is oor al die vererings en besoeke.

In die geheel gesien, is dit 'n ryp bundel waarin die ek-spreker vreesloos skryf oor ongeregtighede. Hierdie leser bewonder veral die beskrywing van liggaamlike betredings. Dit moes ongelooflike moed gekos het om hierdie verse te skryf en uiteindelik te publiseer.

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Toen met een lijst van nu errond. Herman de Coninck Biografie.

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"Ik ween om bloemen in de knop gebroken". Dié reël van Willem Kloos kom by my op by die besef van die verlies dat 'n digter soos Herman de Coninck (1944–97) se werk nie in die vroeë jare sewentig in Suid-Afrika behoorlik bekend was nie. Agterna gesien het verskeie jong Afrikaanse digters onbewustelik in hom 'n medestander gehad. Dit geld trouens ook die Nederlandse digters met wie De Coninck sterk bande gehad het soos Rutger Kopland. Dat Daniel Hugo uiteindelik sou sorg vir 'n bloemlesing vertalings uit sy werk, *Liefde miskien* (1997), dien wel as skrale troos.

Om hierdie rede alleen al is Thomas Eyskens se onlangs verskene *Toen met een lijst van nu errond. Herman de Coninck Biografie* boeiende leesstof.

Eyskens vertel die verhaal van 'n jong digter wat soos so dikwels in die literatuurgeskiedenis 'n moeisame aanloop meegemaak het. Daarteenoor sou De Coninck dié naam word in die Vlaamse poësie teen die einde van die eeu. Die literêre blaaie onder sy redakteurskap in die *Nieuw Wereldtijdschrift* en *De Morgen* het die genre op vele maniere gepromoveer. Verskeie jong digters is deur hom aan die hand geneem op weg na uiteindelike bundeling. Die verkope van sy versamelde gedigte wat 'n jaar ná sy dood verskyn, sou met die verskyning van die 19de druk in 1997 al 50 000 eksemplare beloop.

'n Belangrike baken is Lionel Deflo se poging om in die vroeë jare sewentig die jongste ontwikkelinge onder een noemer te bring: die "Nieuw-realistische poëzie in Vlaanderen". Die kritikus Hugo Brems sou hierdie tendens later soos volg in sy *Altijd weer vogels die nesten beginnen* omskryf: "gedichten waarin een helder en communicatief taalgebruik in dienst stond van maatschappijkritiek, waarin alledaagse tafereeltjes werden geschetst of waarin op een speelse manier omgegaan werd met wrijvingen tussen taal en werkelijkheid" (330). Die jong De Coninck is hier volledig deel van en plaas die klem op 'n poging om kommunikatief te wees in teenkanting van die "experimentelen" wat lesers met hul verwikkelde verse afgeskrik het. Hy skryf aan Deflo dat dit nie vir hom saakmaak waaroor poësie gaan nie: "Maar ze kan het tenminste allemaal proberen op een verstaanbare manier te zijn. En daarom juich ik de historische invloed van het nieuw-realisme toe" (Brems 331).

Eyskens bring sy biografielesers telkens op 'n helder wyse terug by die ontwikkeling van die poëtika wat De Coninck se werk onderlê en steeds geld in sy vele opstelle oor hierdie genre.

Hy toon aan hoe De Coninck hom reeds as student uitspreek teen die "overdaad aan beelden" in die "experimentele" poësie van die Nederlandse en Vlaamse Vijftigers en standpunt inneem "voor het gebruik van een lenige en hartstochtelijke spreektaal zoals hij die onder andere terugvond bij Marthinus Nijhoff". En verder: "Ook het credo van Hermans toekomstige poëzie zit er al in verwerkt: gevoelens zo naakt mogelijk weergeven" (106).

Hierdie ontwikkeling roep ook wel sterk weerstand op teenoor "dat onding dat 'nieuw-realistische poëzie' schijnt te heten". Dit sou "in wezen een truc en een stuk camouflage" wees "om het ten hemel schreiende gebrek aan talent te verbergen". (197). De Coninck wys uiteindelik daarop dat hy op sy beurt gekant is teen die epigone van die "experimentelen": "die vonden op den duur al dat moeilijke geschrijf enorm gemakkelijk". Hy besluit: "Ik heb daar de slogan aan overgehouden: moeilijk schrijven is gemakkelijk. En omgekeerd is gemakkelijk schrijven een van de moeilijkste dingen die er zijn" (197).

Dit bring noodwendig die verhouding tussen poësie en werklikheid ter sprake. Eyskens toon aan dat De Coninck as student-kritikus al meen (na aanleiding van 'n gedig van Remco Campert) dat "poëzie verder moet gaan dan alleen maar de werkelijkheid bij te kleuren. Poëzie moet ook inwerken op de werkelijkheid, moet de werkelijkheid aanvaardbaar maken om in te kunnen leven. 'Dichten is werken, de wereld veranderen'". (164) Hy haal in dié opsig aan uit De Coninck se gedig uit 1966 "Zo is hier elke dag: de bloemen":

> En even sterk zijn hier de dichters.
> Hun stevige beelden bewerken de realiteit
> als boeren het land,
> een hele werkelijkheid kunnen zij
> in hun armen dragen.

Eyskens noem verderaan: "Het was volgens Herman een illusie om te denken dat poëzie de werkelijkheid kan

representeren, want dichters bewerken de werkelijkheid voortdurend met woordspelingen, beelden en klankeffecten" (194).

Verhelderend in dié opsig is ook De Coninck se uitsprake oor die weergee van gevoelens: "Poëzie is het overstijgen van ervaringen en gevoelens, niet het weergeven ervan" (194). Wanneer hy teen die einde van sy lewe optree as gasdosent in Groningen kom hy terug op die kwessie van ontroering. Die aanleiding is sy gedig "Shoah" wat hy uiteindelik weggelaat het uit sy laaste bundel, *Enkelvoud*. In die gedig gebruik hy die wegvoer van Jode tydens die Tweede Wêreldoorlog na vernietigingskampe as metafoor. "Een van de wetten van de ontroering is dat je het drama kleiner moet maken dan het is, dat is altijd sympathiek." Die omgekeerde lei eerder tot verleentheid: "Ontroering in de poëzie is pure woordberekening. Maar soms reken je verkeerd" (401).

Eyskens laat in die loop van die biografie dus sien hoe die digter ontwikkel het tot 'n heel bewuste vakman.

Beginnende digters sou hulle ook wel kan troos aan die opdraande stryd van die jong De Coninck om uiteindelik gepubliseer te word. Wanneer hy in die jare sestig 'n aantal gedigte voorlê by die interuniversitêre blad *Ruimte*, word dit deur die bank geweier. Eyskens noem: "Een ervan was 'je ogen na geween', de oerversie van wat later Hermans bekendste gedicht zou worden, 'Verjaardagsvers'" (107). Daarna sal dié gedig ook eers nog afgewys word deur *Dietse Warande & Belfort*!

Eyskens se biografie is uiteindelik die verhaal nie slegs van die lotgevalle van 'n individuele digter nie, maar van 'n hele generasie, van reaksie en aksie in die geskiedenis van die "land der letteren".

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Van kant gemaak.
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Die Tweede Wêreldoorlog mag wel 'n prominente plek inneem in die Wes-Europese kulturele geheue, maar dit is veral die Eerste Wêreldoorlog wat die Vlaamse identiteit bepaal het. Dit is nie verbasend dat die resente toename van historiese fiksie in Vlaandere fokus op die loopgraafoorlog van 1914–18 nie. Dit het immers die Belgiese landskap—letterlik en figuurlik—verander. Uit die keur van boeke en digbundels wat 'n eeu ná die trauma verskyn het, stel Protea Boekhuis vir die Afrikaanse leser ná Stefan Hertmans se *Oorlog en terpentyn* (2016) nou ook Kris van Steenberge se droomdebuut *Van kant gemaak* (2017) beskikbaar. *Woesten* (die oorspronklike Nederlandse titel uit 2013) is ook vertaal in Duits, Engels en Spaans, en die filmregte is reeds verkoop.

Hoewel die boek se lokprente stel dat stories van Van Steenberge (1963) se oupa oor die Groot Oorlog die kiem vir sy roman vorm, is *Van kant gemaak* nie in

die eerste plek 'n oorlogsroman nie. Dit is net Guillaume Duponselle, een van die hoofpersone, wat op die front skielik uit die roman verdwyn met die eenvoudige mededeling dat "die liggaam van die heer Docteur Duponselle, vrywilligerarts in die leër, deurboor [word] in 'n koeëlreën, soos 'n sif" (154). Die verhaal speel nie af tydens die oorlog nie en die feite uit die geskiedenisboeke bly beperk tot 'n eenmalige vermelding van die fortegordel rondom Luik en die Duitsers se vernietigende dik Berthas (145).

Van Steenberge skryf in die eerste plek 'n Vlaamse familieroman wat rondom die oorlog gesitueer is, en wat afspeel in die arm plattelandse dorpie, Woesten, naby die frontstad Ieper. Die roman bring tot uitdrukking wat die geskiedenisboeke aan die literêre outeur oorlaat: die menslike emosie, en die *condition humaine*. Soos die verteller van die onheilspellende lokrolprent op Van Steenberge se webtuiste dit stel: "Soms springt de tijd vooruit—met schokken—zonder dat je er erg in hebt wat hij aanricht met de mensen rondom je". Dit het vir Van Steenberge onder andere "de Bronzen Uil" besorg—die jaarlikse Vlaamse literatuurprys vir die beste Nederlandstalige debuut. Die pryskomitee noem *Van kant gemaak* tereg "een zorgvuldig opgebouwd verhaal waarin verschillende personages een eigen interpretatie geven van hun zoektocht naar hun lotsbestemming".

Die opbou in kombinasie met die verteltegniek is inderdaad opvallend. Die roman bestaan uit vyf dele en daar is nie net een hoofpersoon nie. In elke deel word die visie van een van vier gesinslede aangebied: eerstens van die ma, Elisabeth, en in die tweede afdeling van die pa, Guillaume, albei deur 'n alwetende derdepersoonsverteller. Elisabeth, die pragtige dogter van die dorpie se smid, trou met dié Brusselse dokter. Sy intellek lyk veelbelowend vir hulle toekoms (Elisabeth se ma is 'n kantklosser), maar lekker is net 'n vinger lank. Hulle kry twee seuns genaamd Valentyn en Naamloos, wat so genoem word omdat hy "'n afgryslike vervorming" is (49). Almal dink sy dood sal vinnig kom, alhoewel dit nie so is nie. Guillaume kwyn skielik weg en gee hom oor aan drank. Van Steenberge laat die leser gis oor die sielkundige oorsaak van die dokter se reaksie tot en met die tweede deel van die roman, waarin Guillaume sentraal staan.

Toe breek die oorlog uit. Elisabeth se kop word by die huis verbrysel en Guillaume sterf kort daarna op die slagveld. Die roman wat die leser 130 bladsye lank meesleep in die tragiese gesinslewe in 'n skinderdorpie, ontwikkel onverwags tot 'n *whodunnit*. Tog slaag dit nie daarin om 'n meeslepende moordverhaal te word nie. In die derde en vierde deel vertel Valentyn en Naamloos respektiewelik, albei vanuit 'n eerstepersoonsperspektief. Hoewel die nuwe kyk op die psigies getormenteerde Guillaume interessant is (Valentyn noem hom nêrens 'Pa' nie), is hulle stemme nie heeltemal oortuigend nie. Daar is herhalings van informasie en fragmente wat die boek momentum laat verloor, en die woordeskat en styl is opmerklik na aan die eerste twee dele. Naamloos het die intellek van sy pa geërf (hy blyk plotseling Latyn te kan lees), maar die leser was nie

voorberei op hierdie *deus ex machina* nie. Wat Valentyn betref, word hy 'n slagoffer van kindermisbruik in die Katolieke Kerk. Die priester vermoor Elisabeth omdat sy in die sakrestie inkom toe Valentyn sy vingers vou om meneer Pastoor se "harde vleis, stewige kloppende vleis" (191). Hoewel 'n historiese roman eerstens kenmerkend is vir die tyd waarin dit geskryf word, voel die insluiting van dié openbaring in hierdie verhaal onnodig. Die romankarakters bied ook nie nuwe insigte omtrent die kerkmisbruik nie.

Die laaste deel van die roman is 'n samesang van Valentyn en Naamloos. Hulle vertel afwisselend en kyk vanaf die Isle of Wight terug op hulle verlede anderkant die water. So 'n tweestemmige ons-verteller is interessant en laat die leser nadink oor wie eintlik die alwetende verteller in die eerste twee dele van die roman was. Ongelukkig vind die leser eers in hierdie laaste 40 bladsye uit van hierdie fokuspunt van die roman. Sommige lesers sal ook die eind-goed-alles-goed *kitsch* vind.

'n Historiese roman is 'n uitdaging vir vertalers. In sy "notas deur die vertaler" skryf Fanie Olivier—wat verantwoordelik was vir die Afrikaanse vertaling van J. M. Coetzee se *Disgrace*—dat daar min van die Vlaamse aanwesigheid in die roman in Afrikaans tereg kom. Inderdaad, "het hof" het die neutrale woord "sangdiens" geword. Tog het hy "enkele Franse woorde behou" om die *couleur local* lewendig te hou.'n Mens kan egter wonder of almal die Frans verstaan, asook die Latyn. Somtyds is daar 'n neerlandistiese woordkeuse, soos byvoorbeeld "godverdomme". Nietemin lees die Afrikaans maklik, en die dubbelsinnigheid van die Afrikaanse titel is opvallend: dit dui ook op die beroemde destydse kant-wêreld van België. (Ek is nie seker of dit Olivier is wat met die titel opgekom het nie.)

In konklusie is *Van kant gemaak* 'n geslaagde toevoeging aan die genre van vertaalde historiese fiksie in Afrikaans. Indien 'n mens dit as 'n tragiese familieroman lees, sal die intrige van die dorpie nog lank in die kop bly meepraat.

Geraadpleegde bronne

Van Steenberge, Kris. *Kris Van Steenberge*. www.krisvansteenberge.be.

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Die wêreld van die storie.
Willie Burger. Van Schaik, 2018. 170 pp. ISBN: 978 0 627 03607 1.
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Die wêreld van die storie (2018) deur Willie Burger fokus op "storiewêrelde en die verhouding tussen storiewêrelde en ander wêrelde (waaronder ook die leser se leefwêreld)" (9). Die begrip "wêreld" is die vertrekpunt tot 'n meer "positiewe" lees van verhalende tekste (in teenstelling met die sogenaamde "hermeneutiek van agterdog"), en vloei voort vanuit 'n "verwondering oor die ontstaan van kammawêrelde tydens die leesproses en die betowerende ervaring dat hierdie wêrelde

die leser kan meevoer" (159). Met die fokus op "storiewêrelde" enersyds en "ander wêrelde" andersyds, poog Burger om 'n goue middeweg te vind tussen dit wat Pascal Casanova die "interne teksgerigte literêre kritiek" en "eksterne kritiek" (12) noem. Burger wil steeds die uniekheid van die literêre werk laat sien, maar terselfdertyd rekenskap gee dat die werk binne 'n sekere konteks tot stand kom.

As voorbeeld van Burger se soeke na 'n middeweg kan gewys word op twee voorbeelde, waarvan die eerste geassosieer word met "interne kritiek" (of die "effek van die teks") en die tweede met "eksterne kritiek" (of die poging om die "werk" en die "wêreld" met mekaar te versoen). Eerstens word gewys op die gedeelte oor handelingskomposisies (plots) (37–42), wat die "effek van die teks" belig. Hier word nie stilgestaan by klassieke narratologiese ondersoekmetodes nie, maar gewys op 'n studie wat 'n groep wiskundiges en statistici in 2016 gepubliseer het oor die basiese vorms van stories. Met behulp van wiskundige modelle het hulle ses storielyne gevind, naamlik "Iets tot niets", "Niets tot iets", "Man-in-die-gat-vertelling", "Ikarus-plot", "Aspoestertjie-plot" en "Oedipus-plot", wat insig bied in die wyse waarop storiewêrelde tot stand kom (40–1). Hierdeur kan gesien word hoe vertellings lank nie meer net vanuit die klassieke narratologie bestudeer word nie; trouens, een van die sterk punte van Burger se studie is die manier waarop hy verskeie dissiplines betrek in sy ondersoek na die wêreld van die storie, onder andere die kognitiewe wetenskap, psigologie en neurologie (xi).

Tweedens word die "eksterne kritiek" ook nie op 'n rigiede of reduksionistiese wyse uitgevoer wat die storiewêreld "geweld" aandoen nie, maar veel eerder gekyk na die wyse waarop sekere "kontekste" bepalend is vir die manier waarop die kunstenaar op sy of haar wêreld reageer (146–57). Daar word byvoorbeeld geargumenteer dat Afrikaanse skrywers vanuit 'n spesifieke Suid-Afrikaanse konteks skryf met die gevolg dat die Afrikaanse letterkunde nie los gedink kan word van Suid-Afrika se koloniale geskiedenis nie (146–7). 'n Mens sou hier 'n inleiding op die postkolonialisme verwag, wat wél oorsigtelik behandel word, maar Burger het egter nie ten doel om 'n postkoloniale benadering op 'n "instrumentalistiese" wyse te betrek nie (154). Wat voorgestel word rakende die lees van Afrikaanse tekste, is om te vra watter verband daar tussen die kammawêreld van die teks en die postkoloniale wêreld waarin die teks geskryf en gelees word, bestaan (154).

Die wêreld van die storie sien nie soos 'n tipiese handleiding oor vertellings daar uit nie, maar vloei voort vanuit 'n komplekse filosofiese besinning oor die wêreld van die storie. In die eerste hoofstuk dui Burger aan dat hy op Thomas Pavel se vertrekpunt in *Fictional worlds* (1983) steun, naamlik dat "'n alternatiewe moontlike wêreld" (13) deur die literêre teks ontstaan waartoe die leser toegang verkry; dié wêreld is egter nie "'n geslote spel" nie, maar "kan 'n rol speel in die leser se ervarings van die werklikheid waarin hy of sy leef" (13).

Vervolgens word in die volgende vier hoofstukke gefokus op die wyse waarop 'n fiksiewêreld tydens die leesproses tot stand kom, die leser se ervaring van die fiksiewêreld en die vergelyking van die fiksiewêreld met ander wêrelde. Dit word gedoen deurdat in hoofstuk twee in breë trekke ondersoek ingestel word na "vertelling as wêreldskeppende, singewende konstruk", maar ook die "gehalte van die wêreld" wat tot stand vertel word (23). In hoofstuk drie word gefokus op die kognitiewe prosesse van die leser tydens sy of haar ervaring van die fiksiewêreld (57). Hoofstuk vier verken 'n aantal benaderings waarop fiksiewêrelde op betekenisvolle maniere geïnterpreteer kan word (83–4), waarvan die belangrikste die gedeelte is oor die "wêreldskeppende" en "wêreldvergelykende" aspekte van fiksie as 'n manier om fiksiewêrelde te interpreteer (100). Die vyfde hoofstuk belig 'n aantal aspekte van tekste wat as leidrade dien vir die totstandkoming van wêrelde, wat kan help om die wêreld te beskryf en wêrelde met mekaar te vergelyk (107).

Die slothoofstuk laat sien die waarde van Burger se werk, in soverre sy besinning oor die wêreld van die storie (Hoofstuk een) in 'n sekere sin "beantwoord" word, met spesifieke verwysing na Rita Felski se pleidooi om 'n meer "positiewe" benadering tot die lees van literêre tekste: "Felski verduidelik dat 'n begeerte om 'n positiewe beskouing van die betowering van tekste te beklemtoon, nie noodwendig dui op 'n naïwiteit of dat dit 'n konserwatiewe reaksie is nie, maar dat 'n positiewe beskouing noodsaaklik is in 'n tydperk waarin die waarde van letterkunde (en van die geesteswetenskappe in die breë) dikwels bevraagteken word" (159).

Die wêreld van die storie oorbrug 'n leemte in die Afrikaanse literêre wêreld rakende die opskryf van die ontwikkelings in die narratologie sedert die publikasie van André Brink se *Vertelkunde* in 1987. Voorgraadse studente sal baat vind by die boek, aangesien die boek nuttige skryfriglyne bied by die lees van 'n literêre teks. Ook word daar op 'n bondige, dog verstaanbare wyse met gevorderde teoretiese konsepte gewerk, wat nagraadse studente en akademici kan gebruik vir navorsingsdoeleindes.

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Dors.

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Marinda van Zyl se tweede historiese roman, *Dors*, bied 'n blik op die Afrikaner, post-Groot Trek (1876–80), en hoe daar steeds na die land van "melk en heuning" (72) gesoek word. Die roman se trefkrag lê in die mate waartoe die gevolge hiervan op persoonlike vlak, asook op dié van die groep Trekkers, as verteenwoordigend van die Afrikanervolk, die groter samelewing, en die onmiddellike natuur uitspeel.

In 1876 vertrek groepe Transvalers vanaf die Marico- en Krokodilrivier na Damaraland, op soek na 'n nuwe begin, 'n "paradys" (67) waar hulle hulle in vrede kan vestig. Die meeste Boere trek met die motivering om van Engelse anneksasie te vlug, terwyl sommiges se motivering vaag bly: "Wat vir my paradys is, kan vir jou en jou familie hel wees. Dit hang af van die redes waaroor jy wil trek […]" (67). In hulle pad staan die Dors, 'n streek waterlose Kalahari, wat hulle moet oorsteek met die hoop om 'n vreedsame bestaan aan die anderkant te vind. Die tog eis sy tol, wat vrae stel oor die prys wat vir die beoogde verbetering van omstandighede (en simboliese *bevordering* van 'n samelewing) betaal word, oor wat 'n *paradys* beloof om te wees, en ook oor die opofferings wat daarvoor gemaak moet word. Niemand blyk ongeskonde by hul bestemming te arriveer nie, terwyl baie kies om vroeër af te draai of terug te keer. Buiten die ongenadige ruimte tree ander kragte ook antagonisties op. Deurlopend is onenigheid tussen die Boereleiers opmerklik en simbolies van 'n blik op Afrikaner-manlikheid wat stelselmatig ontmitologiseer word.

Die verhaal volg onderskeidelik die Greylings en die Ackermans, wat vir 'n wyle saam trek, maar wie se paaie vir 'n groot gedeelte van die verhaal skei, en tog uiteindelik weer verbind word. Voor in die boek verskyn verkorte stambome van beide gesinne, asook 'n kaart (Dorskaart 1876–80) om die leser te oriënteer. Met die eerste oogopslag kan dit verkeerdelik blyk dat die verhaal as familiesage aangebied word; eerder word die handeling afwisselend deur drie karakters met die verloop van die trek gefokaliseer. Elk word simbolies ingespan om fasette van lyding en verlies te verteenwoordig, asook om tema-ontwikkeling as geheel voort te stu.

Betta Greyling is die vrou van Jan Greyling wat vir die grootste gedeelte van die trek as kommandant optree en, as ervare jagter, die enigste persoon is wat die trekgemeenskap veilig deur die onbekende ruimte kan begelei. Weens etlike verliese van kinders en kleinkinders—insluitend hul jongste seun wat sterf wanneer sy eerste leeujag skeefloop—die feit dat sy sien hoe menige ander Trekkers weens koors en siektes sterf, en sy ook self net-net van die doodsbed opstaan, tree Betta as getuie op vir die lyding wat die Afrikanervrou ervaar. Sy verwoord die prys wat hulle vir die patriargale begeerte om te trek, betaal soos volg: "Die Voortrekkers het dit makliker gehad as ons. Hulle kon die Zoeloes die skuld gee toe hulle kindertjies vermoor is, maar ons het onsself te blameer. Ons het hierheen getrek om ons nageslag te kom uitmoor" (297). Elders word opgemerk dat dit nie die bosveldruimte is wat dodelik is nie, maar die "menslike sotheid" van die Boere (251). Weereens word die motivering vir die trek as verbetering van omstandighede onder die loep geneem.

Adriana Ackerman—'n beeldskone sestienjarige—is die oudste dogter van Jakobus en Celia Ackerman wat 'n beter skut en ruiter as die meeste mans is. Haar onskuld word vroeg in die verhaal van haar geneem en verdere ongeluk dwing haar om vrou-alleen—"hardekool" (163),

soos ’n man behoort te wees—haar lot en die wrede nuwe wêreld aan te pak. Die hoeveelheid ongeluk wat sy teëkom is voldoende om haar as heldin te vestig wat simbolies ’n stereotipiese beeld van die Afrikanervrou uitdaag. Die onderdanige rol van die vrou in ’n patriargale bestel word sodoende uitgedaag, asook die idee van vroulikheid en eienskappe wat stereotipies aan ’n vrou verleen word. Ten spyte hiervan is die hoeveelheid ongeluk wat Adriana beleef met tye oorbodig, wat dreig om die verhaal af te water tot ’n blote avontuurverhaal, en afbreuk doen aan die realisme wat die historiese roman as genre grotendeels handhaaf.

Teenoor Adriana word die agtienjarige Tiaan—Jan Greyling se kneg—ingespan om die blik van die Afrikanerman te ontmitologiseer. As kneg is Tiaan daarvoor verantwoordelik om allerhande take te verrig, maar hy verkry algaande groter verantwoordelikhede, insluitend om saam met die jaggeselskap ’n olifant plat te trek (waarvoor hy met ’n olifanttand van sy eie beloon word). Tiaan se aanvanklike doel is egter om ’n troupant, ’n voëlspesie wat in Damaraland voorkom, te skets en sodoende sy afgestorwe pa se wens te vervul. Mettertyd, ná die Greylings se pad van die Ackermans s’n skei, gaan hy op soek na Adriana, wat die roman ook as liefdesverhaal ontwikkel. Sy sagmoedige, dog waagmoedige geaardheid, asook sy liefde vir skets en waterverf (wat uiteindelik van groot waarde vir hom is) staan in kontras met die bravade van die stereotipiese Afrikanerman. Sy opoffering vir Adriana, en selflose aanvaarding van haar mannetjiesagtigheid, dra by tot ’n alternatiewe blik op Afrikanermanlikheid.

Lyding en verlies staan sentraal in die verhaal, terwyl idees rondom *verbetering* en sogenaamde *bevordering* ondersoek word. Verblindende begeerte hierna word as die dors wat “jy nie met water kan les nie” (88) beskryf. Tog kan hierdie metafoor uitgebrei word na die verwoesting wat menslike begeerte saai ten opsigte van onregte wat die self, die groter samelewing en die natuur aangedoen word. Uiteindelik suggereer die verhaal dat dit eerder geliefdes as beter omstandighede is wat as ’n paradys nagejaag moet word. Ten spyte van die somber toon wat meestal heers, bied die ontwikkeling van Tiaan en Adriana se verhouding vertroosting dat daar, te midde van swaar tye, altyd hoop op nuwe lewe bestaan. Deurgaans word stereotipes van die Afrikaner gejukstaponeer met argetipes, soos dié in die karakters van Tiaan en Adriana, wat moontlik holrug gery kan voorkom. In wese poog Marinda van Zyl in *Dors* om ’n alternatief tot die onderwerp van die menslike aard, wat by tye meer ongenadig as die ruimte kan wees, te bied, deur die suggestie dat hoop wel seëvier.

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Alles begin met Anna.
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"Anna is die vrou wat so belangrik is dat alles in hierdie verhaal by haar begin" (13). Twee belangrike vrae wat vanuit die staanspoor die leser se aandag prikkel om die roman *Alles begin met Anna* verder te lees, is: *Wie* is Anna en wat is die *alles* waarna daar alreeds in die titel van die roman verwys word?

Alles begin met Anna kom uit die pen van Annemari Coetser. Die leser word reeds by die aanvang van die lees van die roman ingelig dat dit "losweg" gebaseer is op die skrywer se familiegeskiedenis. Dit word vanuit twee karakters se perspektiewe vertel, Poppie Nienaber (Coetser se eie ma) gebore in 1913 en Poppie se ma, Anna, gebore 1873. "Bowenal vertel dit die verhaal van Coetser se eie ouers Poppie en Frikkie, en waar sy, die skrywer, vandaan kom". Hierdie skrywersnota aan die begin van die roman herinner die leser dat daar wel plek-plek 'n verdraaiing van die waarheid geskied.

Om hierdie gegewens verder tot stand te bring, verskyn daar 'n stamboom van Anna (Poppie) se familie, sowel as van haar man Frikkie. Die kaart, wat net voor die proloog verskyn, bied 'n verdere blik op Poppie en Anna se leefwêreld: die Oranje-Vrystaat. Die gebruik van 'n paar ou foto's wat in die roman verskyn, dra by tot die skep van 'n nostalgiese atmosfeer en herinner lesers daaraan dat hulle hier te make het met werklike mense se stories.

Aan die begin van die roman word die leser alreeds voorberei op sekere belangrike gegewens wat die lees van die roman vergemaklik. Die voorblad stel dit duidelik dat hierdie roman "'n familiesage van voor die Anglo-Boereoorlog" is. Dit strek oor drie generasies, met die vertelde tyd wat strek vanaf voor die Anglo-Boereoorlog tot die aanloop en gebeure van die Tweede Wêreldoorlog (vanaf om en by 1835 tot 1942). Boaan elke regterkantse bladsy van die roman word die jaar waarop gefokus word in elke hoofstuk, aangedui. Dit dien as 'n nuttige hulpmiddel vir die leser om tred te hou met die vertelde tyd.

Alhoewel Anna en Poppie se verhale parallel loop, is dit Poppie s'n wat die leser boei om saam met haar meer uit te vind oor haar familie. Die verhaal begin en eindig met Poppie wat in 1942 by 'n treinstasie wag vir 'n trein uit Natal uit. Een van die vrae wat gou by die leser opkom, is wat die werklike rede is hoekom Poppie op die ouderdom van nege saam met haar suster en broers in die Charlotte Theron Kinderhuis moes gaan woon. Toe Poppie vermoed dat die waarheid oor haar ouers vir haar weggesteek word, konfronteer sy haar ouer suster, ook Anna (Sussie Anna). Sussie Anna erken toe dat hulle ma aan 'n geestesversteuring gely het en dat sy die laaste tien jaar van haar lewe in 'n "sielsieke-hospitaal" gebly het. Dit is glad nie wat Poppie verwag het nie en haar skok is duidelik te bespeur wanneer sy eers nie haar suster wil glo nie: "Ekskuus? Wat bedoel jy? […] Nee! […] Jy jok vir my!" (171). Dit is ook die rede hoekom sy wegskram as iemand haar vra van watter Nienabers sy is (104).

Die feit dat sy wonder of hulle op haar sal neersien as sy hulle die waarheid vertel, lewer kommentaar oor die stigma van geestesverteurings gedurende daardie spesifieke tyd. Die vraag wat bydra tot Poppie se innerlike konflik is of sy of haar kinders ook eendag die kans staan om haar ma se sielsiekte oor te erf (179). Sy probeer dus om haar familiegeheim, van veral mans wat by haar vlerksleep, weg te steek—deels omdat sy vrees dat hulle vir haar die trekpas sal gee (12).

Poppie se ma, Anna, se verhaal, wat vervleg is met Poppie s'n, versterk die intrige van die verhaal. Dit wek ook simpatie by die leser, aangesien Anna se lewe beslis deur moeilike tye geteister is. Tydens die Anglo-Boereoorlog moes sy haar eerste man en kind aan die dood afstaan. Sy het ook saam met ander vroue en kinders in 'n konsentrasiekamp gewoon onder ondraaglike omstandighede. Toe sy uiteindelik weer liefde vind, by Poppie se pa, tref die noodlot weer. Sy het daarna gesukkel om die pot aan die kook te hou. Alhoewel Poppie voel dat dit nie genoeg rede was vir haar ma om van haar sinne af te raak nie, herinner Sussie Anna haar deernisvol aan die volgende: "Moenie oordeel nie, Vlooi. Hoe weet jy hoe jy onder soortgelyke omstandighede sou optree?" (178). Oordeel, en wat 'n mens met daardie oordeel maak, vorm 'n belangrike tema in dié familiesage.

Tydens die vertelling van Poppie en Anna se verhale, stel Coetser die leser voor aan manlike karakters, soos Frikkie (Poppie se kêrel, losweg gebaseer op Coetser se pa). Van die verteltyd fokus op Frikke se dae as soldaat en as krysgevangene. Alhoewel hierdie tipe vertellings die twee Annas se verhale onderbreek, bied dit tog 'n insiggewende blik op die gemengde gevoelens van mans wat op een of ander wyse betrokke was by die Suid-Afrikaanse oorlogsgeskiedenis. By Frikkie het daar 'n opgewondenheid oor die avontuur (246) wat die oorlog mag inhou, geheers. Hy sien dit selfs as sy kans om iets van die wêreld te sien (245), met terselfdertyd 'n bangheid vir dit wat mag voorlê. Temas van ontnugtering en verlies sowel as hoe 'n mens 'n nuwe toekoms bou nadat dit wat jy geken het, verwoes is, word ook verken. Dit skakel met beide Poppie en haar ma se verhaal en vra die belangrike vraag: Hoe gaan 'n mens voort met jou lewe? Alhoewel genderstereotiperings aanwesig is by van die vertellings, bied die fokus wat op Poppie en haar ma se verhale geplaas is 'n interessante invalshoek. Dit werp lig op aspekte wat die vrou moes deurmaak gedurende die oorlogsjare.

Coetser se deernisvolle vertelling bied vandag se lesers 'n blik op die genadeloosheid van die oorlog op beide mans en vroue (asook die landskap). Die roman word 'n verkenning van hoe mense hulself moes dwing om voort te gaan, van voor af te begin en hoe dit vir party mense net nie fisies of emosioneel moontlik was om dit te doen nie.

Die teikenmark van *Alles begin met Anna* is beslis nie net diegene wat 'n voorliefde vir die geskiedenis het nie. Terwyl dit daarin slaag om oud en jonk mee te voer na 'n wêreld van ouds, verseker die universele temas van liefde, verlies, armoede, vergifnis, familiekonflik,

politieke konflik, oordeel, moed en hoop dat dit by 'n wye leserspubliek aanklank vind. Terwyl die roman maklik lees, lê die impak by die wete dat dit gebaseer is op die skrywer se eie familie. Die deeglike uiteensetting van die roman met selfs 'n nagedagte (360) bevredig die nuuskierigheid van lesers wat wonder wat in die regte lewe van Poppie, haar suster en broers, en daarby dan ook Coetser se familie, geword het. Die leser vind op 'n interessante wyse uit *wie* Anna is en wat die *alles* is wat met haar begin.

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Kroniek van turf.
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Veteraanskrywer Dolf Van Niekerk bring met sy debuutwerk, *Gannavlei* (1958), vernuwing in die tradisie van die kleindorpse vertelling (Kannemeyer 381) en word 'n sentrale figuur in die Sestiger-literatuurbeweging wat veral met die novelle *Die son struikel* (1960) aandag geniet. Oorhoofs plaas Van Niekerk die "outsider" as karaktertipe in sy prosa-oeuvre onder die mikroskoop en verken ook die verhouding tussen die simboliese "Ek" en die "Ander". Dit is dan ook so in sy 2018-roman *Kroniek van turf* waarin hierdie motief herhaal word om met 'n nuwe blik na 'n ou onderwerp te kyk.

Die roman vertel die verhaal van sewe generasies wat 'n lewe aan die suidpunt van Afrika probeer maak en speel oor bykans vierhonderd jaar af. Dit vertel die geskiedenis van 'n familie, maar ook die van 'n land steeds in wording, wat 'n verweefde identiteitsvorming tot gevolg het.

Eie aan die kroniek as genre (Du Plooy) bied die roman geskiedkundige gebeurtenisse in kronologiese volgorde sonder om akkuraatheid na te streef, maar het eerder die doel om 'n sekere sintese deur die vertelling te bereik. Die gevolg is 'n realistiese, dog romantiese vertelling. Deur 'n familie oor generasies te volg en op elkeen se stryd (politiese en rassestryd, stryd teen die natuur om oorlewing en ook persoonlike stryd) te konsentreer, verken Van Niekerk die mate waarin elke generasie bo en behalwe deur bloed aan mekaar verbind is, maar ook hoe elke generasie aan die grond verbind is. Uiteindelik stel die roman vrae oor hoe identiteit aan grond verbind word, maar raak ook etiese aspekte daaromtrent aan in die verkenning van die verhouding tussen die Afrikaner en die inheemse volke, asook die ons-ons-verhouding (Afrikaner-Afrikaner).

Die titel verwys na die simboliese band tussen grond en identiteit vanweë die simboliese betekenis wat aan die ruimte gegee word: *Kroniek van Turf* is 'n verhaal van die grond—Suid-Afrika—en die mense (meervoud!) wat dit bewoon.

Die roman word in elf hoofstukke opgedeel en word meestal vanuit 'n personaal-gebonde derdepersoons-

verteller se perspektief aangebied. Soms wissel die fokalisators te midde van die handeling in 'n betrokke hoofstuk wanneer 'n protagonis-fokalisator doodgaan. Met hoofstuk sewe tot elf verskuif die verteller-fokalisator na 'n eerstepersoonsverteller wat vir 'n meer intieme leeservaring sorg en ook vir meer karakterontwikkeling.

Tema-ontwikkeling is by tye té naby aan die verhaal se oppervlak, 'n verskynsel wat deels te wyte is aan die genre en omvang van die teks ('n novelle van 135 bladsye). Die temas sluit in: Die ongenaakbaarheid van die land en die stryd om oorlewing; die band tussen identiteit en grond; elkeen se soeke na vrede in 'n land met baie uiteenlopende volke en belange; die verhouding tussen die Afrikaner en die inheemse volke, asook die Afrikaner-Afrikaner-verhouding; etiese kwessies rondom begrippe soos volk en vaderland; die geskiedenis wat herhaal word; die manlike plig teenoor sy gesin; geweld en die minagting van die "ander"; perspektief as bepaler van *wie* die *geskiedenis* bepaal. Die ingeligte leser sal opmerk dat sommige van hierdie temas ooreenkomste toon met die tipiese inhoud van die Afrikaanse plaasroman.

As kroniek speel die verhaalgebeure vinnig af met min ontwikkeling wat aan die meeste karakters verleen word. Hierdie aspek lei aanvanklik tot lesersweerstand, maar die leser ontdek gou dat die herhaling van deurlopende insidente oor generasies heen die groter oogmerk van die verhaal is.

Van Gerrit (die aanvanklike protagonis) se reis vanaf Friesland om onder die VOC aan die Kaap die Goeie Hoop te boer, tot kwessies rondom grondeise op die drumpel van die 1994-verkiesing aan die einde heers 'n deurlopende motief oor hoe onvergewend en ongenaakbaar die Suid-Afrikaanse ruimte is, maar ook hoe pragtig dit is en hoe elke generasie 'n sin vir hoop en vrede daarin vind. Op Gerrit se plaas Nietverdacht in die Roggeland is die ruimte byvoorbeeld een van hoop: "Die ongenaakbaarheid van die land, die ruimtes en die sterre het iets in hom wakker gemaak, hom uitgedaag" (7). Hy word deur vele gevare geteister, veral die vyandigheid van inheemse volke, wat vir konstante konflik in die verloop van die verhaal sorg. Die herhaling van geweld oor die eeue is insiggewend en word 'n sleutel tot die afwisselende voorstellings van enersyds die aftakeling wat oorloë en die minagting van die "ander" meebring, en andersyds die hoop wat familie en die grond waarvoor geveg word, inhou. Gerrit en sy nasate is konstant betrokke by 'n gewelddadige stryd om oorlewing. Gerrit se plaas Nietverwacht word byvoorbeeld afgebrand en hy sterf uiteindelik tydens 'n geveg met die Xhosas terwyl sy seun Johannes toekyk. Johannes en sy broer Daniel en hulle gesinne ervaar ook ongeluk. Johannes moet weens 'n sprinkaanplaag die Renosterberg verlaat en vestig hom in die Grootrivier-distrik waar hy 'n plaas tussen die Gij-Gumaap en die Nieu-Gamaap-riviere by die plaaslike Boesmanstam met vee koop. Dit is hier waar die "ander" vollediger medemens word en 'n verhouding tussen die Afrikanerpatriarg en die Boesmanstam—spesifiek die leier, Kousop—ontstaan,

wat vir generasies onthou sal word. Die roman vertel onder andere 'n verhaal van twee gesinne—een Afrikaner, die ander Boesman—wat vir 'n wyle in vrede saam die land tussen die twee riviere bewoon, totdat die Boesmanstam deur Boeremagte oorwin word. Johannes en sy gesin neem nie deel aan die oorlog teen Kousop nie. Etiese kwessies rondom *wie* geregtigheid bepaal, word verder ondersoek as Johannes van die Boere se onmenslike behandeling van Kousop se vroue en stamlede te hore kom. Uiteindelik sal Johannes se agteragterkleinkind saam met 'n jong Kousop (Kousop se nasaat) ná die Bosoorlog 'n grondeis beveg.

Die roman stel vrae oor wie as buitestaander gesien word. Watter instansie bepaal wie die buitestaander of die "ander" is? Aan wie behoort die grond en is daar 'n manier om dit werklik te bepaal? Die roman is weens die genre en die tema-ontwikkeling sterker afgestem op die literêre leser wat te midde van resente debatte oor grondeise die teks aktueel sal vind.

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Die dag is bros. Sandton City Grootdoop.

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Die enigste Afrikaanse dramadebuut wat in 2017 verskyn het, is die dramaturg en akteur Wessel Pretorius se twee stukke *Die dag is bros* en *Sandton City Grootdoop* wat in een band saamgevat word. Veral eersgenoemde stuk is 'n werk van gehalte wat daarop wys dat Pretorius in die toekoms nog baie kan vermag al het hy in werklikheid reeds vantevore vyf ander teaterstukke op die planke gebring wat nog net nie in druk verskyn het nie. *Die dag is bros* is in 2015 vir die eerste keer by die Innibosfees opgevoer met Sandra Prinsloo, Nicole Holm, Dean-John Smith en Ben Albertyn in die rolverdeling. Ook *Sandton City Grootdoop* word vir die eerste keer in 2015 opgevoer by die Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees in Oudtshoorn met Hanna Borthwick, Roeline Daneel en Joanie Combrink in die rolverdeling.

Die woorde in die titel *Die dag is bros* sluit aan by die uitspraak van die (wit) karakter Tertius as twaalfjarige: "Onder in die swembad voel die dag nie … voel die dag nie asof dit enige oomblik kan breek nie … Bros? Ja, ek dink die beter woord is bros. Anyway, alles is bymekaar en koel en veilig onder in die swembad" (25). Die brosheid van die dag verwys verder na die dag waarop die handeling in die drama plaasvind en wat veral vir Tertius se ma, Elsa, talle skokkende openbaringe inhou.

Die drama is vol verrassende wendinge wanneer dit byvoorbeeld duidelik word dat Tertius reeds dood is en dat sy aanwesigheid verband hou met die innerlike gesprek wat Elsa voortdurend met hom voer. Wanneer die eweneens jong bruin karakter Brian, 'n jeugmisdadiger, sy opwagting maak, tree Tertius op die agtergrond en word die verhouding tussen Elsa en Brian na afloop van Tertius se tragiese dood die fokuspunt van die dramatiese handeling. Brian se belydenis aan Elsa dat hy betrokke was by die aanval op Tertius wat sy lewe gekos het, word een van die mees kritieke oomblikke in die drama. Die stuk word 'n treffende ondersoek na skuld en aandadigheid en bied ook 'n boeiende blik op die waarde van geleerdheid en blootstelling aan die letterkunde in die vorming van mense (by Elsa maar veral by Tertius en Brian). Brian praat met wrangheid oor die geleerdheid wat hy by Elsa ontvang het: "Six months later en ek staan met my fucked-up tekkies voor jou deur en soek vergifnis in disguise. Hier's ek nou. Knowledgeable on Sheila Cussons, N. P. van Wyk Louw en die hele Swedish arthouse oeuvre" (60). Volgens Brian baat kultuuropvoeding 'n mens klaarblyklik maar min indien dit nie met betekenisvolle sosio-ekonomiese opheffing gepaard gaan nie. Soos baie kunstefeesdramas is *Die dag is bros* redelik beperk in omvang, maar dit slaag ondanks die ietwat onbevredigende slot baie goed en as debuutwerk beïndruk dit. Ook as 'n leesteks boei dit 'n mens enduit.

Hierteenoor is *Sandton City Grootdoop* van Wessel Pretorius minder oortuigend hoewel dit nie sonder meriete is nie. Die verhoudingsproblematiek tussen die aktrise Kara en haar twee dogters Lisa en Danél vorm die kern van die handelingsverloop in en rondom die inkopiesentrum Sandton City in Johannesburg waar hulle ná 'n lang tyd weer bymekaar kom en hulle vervreemding van mekaar probeer uitwis. Die geleentheid is die verjaardag van Danél, die oudste van die twee dogters, wat te kampe het met bipolêre depressie. Albei dogters smag na sukses en erkenning nadat Kara haar twee dogters op 'n jeugdige ouderdom in die sorg van hulle pa agtergelaat het sodat sy sonder enige gesinsverpligtinge haar loopbaan as aktrise kon verder voer. In die stuk is dit veral Lisa wat haar woede teenoor haar ma se selfsug by herhaling tot uitdrukking bring. Sy het min geduld met onder meer Kara se onbegrip oor haar lesbiese verhouding, maar Kara is nie bereid om haar kant van die saak te verswyg nie: "Maar wat ek nie gaan eien nie, waarvoor ek nie boete sal doen nie, is hierdie verskoning van 'n persoonlikheid wat jy vir jouself gekweek het nie. Jou infantilisme, jou wrokkigheid teenoor goeie smaak en rede, jou aangeplakte liberalisme, jou lui, passiewe intellek wat homself manifesteer in sarkasme en 'n misplaaste sin van ironie en ek weier veral om te aanvaar dat hierdie onvermoë om iets noemenswaardig met jou lewe te doen, mý skuld is" (121). Die suksesse wat Kara se twee dogters teen die einde van die stuk te beurt val, word op 'n geforseerde manier ingevoer en die stuk bly vassteek in herhalende rusies tussen veral Lisa en Kara sonder dat

werklike verdieping bereik word.

Wessel Pretorius se dubbeldoordebuut by Protea Boekhuis is baie welkom en toon beslis belofte dat hy nog groot suksesse in die teaterwêreld kan behaal. Vir baie jare reeds is Protea Boekhuis een van net enkele uitgewerye wat die moeite doen om dramateksteuit te gee en sodoende lewer hulle 'n onmisbare bydrae tot die bestendiging van die Afrikaanse drama as genre wat weliswaar by kunstefeeste gedy, maar ook 'n sterker vastrapplek in die boekewêreld verdien. Wessel Pretorius se *Die dag is bros. Sandton City Grootdoop* behoort baie lesers se persepsie dat dramateksteuit nie so leesbaar is as byvoorbeeld prosawerke is nie, af te breek. Pretorius slaag naamlik goed daarin om sy leser by die wêrelde wat hy met sy woorde skets, in te trek en tot en met die laaste bladsy aan die lees te hou.

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Gesant van die mispels. Gedigte by skilderye van Adriaen Coorte ca. 1659–1707.
Marlene van Niekerk. Human & Rousseau, 2017. 63 pp. ISBN 978-0-7981-7655-2.

In die stille agterkamer. Gedigte by skilderye van Jan Mankes 1889–1920.
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Gesant van die mispels en *In die stille agterkamer* bevat ekfrastiese gedigte wat geïnspireer is deur 12 en 14 skilderye van onderskeidelik die Nederlandse skilders Adriaen Coorte en Jan Mankes. Telkens word die Afrikaanse gedigte vergesel deur Nederlandse vertalings van Henda Strydom en Van Niekerk.

Die Afrikaanse poësie ken verskeie ekfrastiese gedigte—dikwels bepeinsende reaksies op en inlewings in visuele kunswerke. Hier dink 'n mens aan gedigte van Johan van Wyk, Johann de Lange, Antjie Krog en Fourie Botha, om enkeles te noem.

Marlene van Niekerk se twee bundels onder bespreking is sterk emotiewe, inlewende beskrywings van die onderskeie kunswerke, gevolg deur gedetailleerde besinnings: oor die werk self, die ontstaan daarvan, oor die betrokke kunstenaar se agtergrond en habitus. Dikwels betrek die besinnings ook die liriese subjek se persoonlike konteks en geskiedenis.

Beide kunstenaars het teen die agtergrond van oorlog gewerk: Coorte met die oorlog rondom die Spaanse troonopvolging in die nabyheid en Mankes met die Eerste Wêreldoorlog rondom hom. En beide het gewoon voortgegaan om kuns te skep, sonder om die geweld rondom hulle in hul werke te betrek. In die "Nawoord" tot *In die stille agterkamer* word Mankes se werk soos volg getipeer: "Die ingetoë werk van Mankes verteenwoordig één moontlike respons van kunstenaars op roerige tye: afsondering, tegniese inspanning, 'n verlangsaamde maakproses en emosionele fokus. In sy werke word

die teenstrydighede van sy tyd nie getematiseer of bevoorgrond nie, maar op 'n geordende wyse 'opgelos' via 'n aandagtige, skilderkunstige behandeling van die oppervlakke van alledaagse voorwerpe" (63).

Coorte se werke word weer in die Nawoord tot *Gesant van die mispels* beskryf as "beskeie en intiem. Die beskeidenheid betref nie net die onderwerpe nie—steeds enkele eksemplare van groente of vrugte—maar ook skaal en materiaal. […] Die werke boei deur die effek van miniaturisering en die vreemde, verstilde ligval oor geïsoleerde vorms teen 'n sterk verdonkerde agtergrond. Coorte slaag daarin om deur koel, presiese en niksverklappende vakmanskap die geheimsinnige outonomie van gewone dinge sigbaar te maak" (59). In die laaste gedig in hierdie bundel stel die liriese subjek ook: "Met 'n jaloers-ekfrastiese / gebaar hou ek jou voor as meester van beson- / derhede te midde van misbaar" (*Gesant* 54).

Vanuit beskouings van en besinnings oor die "alledaagse voorwerpe" en "gewone dinge" kom telkens vernuftige, aangrypende gedigte met sterk slotte tot stand. Vergelyk die gedig gebaseer op Coorte se skildery *Een Wan Li-kom met aardbeien* (1704) waarin verskeie kreatiewe prosesse mekaar oorvleuel:

> Jou skilderslig het niks te make met son,
> met skreef of hort of venstergat, dit is nie
> van die dag gemaak, of in warmte
> gedoop, maar gedep met iets beskouliks,
> of, eerder, daarin vasgehou—'n koel
> omarming van iets volledig onomarmbaars,
> die pleroma van bewoning, die wonder-
> baarlike daarvan—'n kommetjie met vrugte
> volgestapel, rustend op 'n blad, met daarin
> vervat 'n onlangse geskiedenis van gebuk-
> kend
> tuur en soek, 'n arm laag tussen die ranke
> ingestrek, drie vingerpunte saamgerond
> in sinlike verwagting, oë met die kleur
> van rypheid ingeprent. Altyd daal die skyn
> gestadig uit die regter- of die linkerkant,
> maar is nie nader te bepaal, en tref die
> aarbeie
> en porselein, die twee gestipte kalwers
> van die ree, met 'n bestendige gelatenheid.
> Sonderling verwant, dié gloed, aan die soort
> vlag wat digters onder aandrang van hul
> bloed onsigbaar na die ondermaanse dra—
> die stok en tou en lap wat hulle altoos
> sprokkel
> uit die puin, en elke keer weer insteek,
> vastrap, hys, ontbondel, opdat dit skoks-
> gewyse uit die kreukel val en in die weedom
> stil bly hang, 'n vlinder pas ontpop, en kierts-
> regop, die klein wit vrede van die woord—
> wildeaarbeiblom.

Mankes se skildery *Parelhoen* (1917) word weer uiters klank- en beeldryk vertolk, met die liriese subjek se konteks asook die eietydse politiek wat saampraat:

> Hierdie skilder, poelpetaat, wat in jou kop
> 'n bergtop sien, in jou pluim 'n wildernis
> waarop hy nag en sterre kwas—hy wis
> nie wat
> hy alles aan die doene was. Vanoggend
> toe ek, aangedaan deur jass-musiek van
> Dollar
> Brand, jou gly-pas repeteer, sien ek
> skielik Leeukop, kry ek die reuk van reën
> op bloekomblare, hoor ek vingertikke
> op 'n gellingkan en toe 'n warm hael van

munte
in my bors, klippe, slae, oproerskote.
Dis één olifantgeraaskal, daardie vaderland
van my, één gelieg en raserny, ongestelp
sedert die bloed en magtelose hulpgeroep
van slawe. Droewe Kaap van dooie siele
waar net die andersmaak van saksofone
ons ooit kan lei oor striemende verskille;
heem van landgenote, weggevlugtes,
hul wat sleutels sonder deure in die bosak
dra, en altyd hierdie ballingklanke sal
herken—in Dublin, Frankfurt, Amsterdam—
die blues wat bresse in die borsbeen
slaan, 'n walvispluim verlange uit die keelgat
blaas. Woza Mntwana! Karnuffel daardie oliekan-
met-polkadots-orkes, laat loop jou jazz
hier in my gellingdrom, die geel van jou simbale
oor my kis. Die kans is, ek word eendag
hierdie kant begrawe met jou triole
op my steen, 'n broeis-kreoolse aardetaal
van windblou wildehoender-lelle
en 'n klein, regop hanekam
van troos.

Die Nederlandse vertalings lewer dikwels nuwe nuanses op, vergelyk die twee gedigweergawes van Coorte se *Vier abrikozen op een stenen tafel* (1698), die variasies op die Eurydice-beeld in die gedig oor *Stilleven met asperges* (1699), "kyker" teenoor "kunstliefhebber" in die gedig oor *Druiventros* (1705), "'n grypsel ou tabak" teenoor "pruimtabak" in die gedig oor *Vanitasstilleven in een nis* (1688) en "speel" teenoor "sluizen" in die gedig oor Mankes se skildery *Lijster op tak* (1910), om enkele variante aan te toon. 'n Vergelyking tussen die Afrikaanse en Nederlandse tekste verlang 'n afsonderlike studie.

Beide bundels bevestig Marlene van Niekerk se statuur as uiters fynsinnige waarnemer en briljante vertolker van intieme beelde.

Human & Rousseau kan gelukgewens word met hul pragtige uitgawes van die bundels.

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