

A Case for Contemporary Third Literature: The Black Experience in the Postmillennial  
Fiction of Three Kwela Authors

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## Abstract

This study seeks to uncover the manner in which the young black experience is constructed in three novels by Sifiso Mzobe, Kgebetli Moele and K. Sello Duiker. *Young Blood*, *Untitled* and *Thirteen Cents* all feature teenage narrators navigating the social milieu of South Africa in the twenty-first century. My analysis is informed by Frantz Fanon's postcolonial theory because South Africa's socio-economic landscape conforms to the divisions laid out in *The Wretched of the Earth*. I contend that post-apartheid South Africa is developing in a manner that is symptomatic of the Fanonian post-independence African state. My close reading of the novels teases out the conditions under which young black subjects must survive and express themselves. I look into the roles of the community, the government, the family, and the school in shaping this experience. Naturally, my discussion segues into questions of sexuality and gender as they intersect with race. I demonstrate how these texts fail and succeed as works of Third Literature, a genre derived from Third Cinema, which I have adapted due to its Fanonian ideological underpinning. Third Literature is a fundamentally revolutionary and activist genre which seeks to pave the way for social change. In this regard, I concern myself with the recommendations these three authors may have for the readers of their texts. In conclusion, these texts demonstrate that racialized identities are social constructs with measurable experiential effects. However, there are ways of actively resisting or even escaping their pressures.

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## Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to examine three literary representations of young black subjects in post-apartheid South Africa. To do this, I have chosen to study three novels by Sifiso Mzobe, Kgebetli Moele and K. Sello Duiker. I am interested in their depictions of postmillennial black identities because it is my belief that Kwela Books – the publisher to which they are signed – concerns itself with nothing if not contemporary South African identities. This is no coincidence since the publishing house “was formed in 1994, the same year in which South Africa was declared a democracy” (“About Kwela” para. 3). Since then, their aim has been “to broaden the scope of Southern African literature, and to document stories that have not yet been told” (para. 2).

In *Young Blood, Untitled: A Novel* and *Thirteen Cents*, we have three groundbreaking narratives which, I argue, have not received as much attention as they deserve from the literary critical establishment. The later texts – Mzobe’s and Moele’s – have received little critical attention due to their recency of publication. *Young Blood* debuted in 2010 to much critical acclaim and fanfare, winning the Herman Charles Bosman Prize for English and the Sunday Times Fiction Prize in 2011, before going on to scoop the Wole Soyinka Prize for African Literature in 2012. Despite this crush of awards, the only readily accessible, in-depth scholarly analysis of the novel is Megan Jones’s “Conspicuous Destruction, Aspiration and Motion in the South African Township”. Moele’s *Untitled* was published in 2013 and has won no awards, which partly explains why the novel has flown under the radar of South African literary critics. One would have hoped they would have interrogated it with the same fervour as his debut novel, *Room 207*, for which he was accused of misogyny. Kopano Ratele and Solani Ngobeni dismissed the novel as “nothing but a hotchpotch of misogyny and ethnic drivel” (29), while Shaun Johnson criticised its depiction of “a world where women are discussed and treated in the most demeaning ways” (para. 12). Johnson is of the view that Moele could have portrayed his female characters in a more sympathetic light. Very few reviewers have lauded the empathy and sensitivity with which Moele’s third novel presents the tale of a brutalised girl. I hope my critical contribution to this discussion will go a little way towards restoring balance to perceptions of Moele’s oeuvre.

*Thirteen Cents*, I must clarify, was not initially published under the Kwela imprint. David Philip was responsible for the first impression in 2000. Duiker was subsequently signed by Kwela for his sophomore effort, *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*, which was released in 2001, and has been in the Kwela stable ever since. *Thirteen Cents*, the latest edition of which was published by Kwela in 2013, won the 2001 Commonwealth Writer's Prize for the best debut novel in the African region. Of the three texts under study, it has undoubtedly received the most critical attention. In comparison to *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*, however, which many regard to be Duiker's finest creation, *Thirteen Cents* has received less critical attention. I have included it for study in this analysis because many see the novel as the nascent, undeveloped proto-version of his second publication, little realising that even though it was published first, Duiker actually wrote *Thirteen Cents* after *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*. His brother, Kamogelo Duiker, confirms this fact in his response to which of his late brother's texts is his favourite: "I enjoyed the second book, which is actually the first book, *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*. He actually wrote *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* first and *Thirteen Cents* second and *Thirteen Cents* got published first. *Quiet Violence* is actually his first book. He wrote that one first" (qtd. in Demir, Moreillon and Muller 28). This upsets the ubiquitous critical assumption that *Quiet Violence* is the more mature work due to its later release, and perhaps even suggests that its predecessor could be the purest, distilled, concentrated manifestation of the artistic project we see in *Quiet Violence*. The cross-pollination of themes between the two texts is obvious but my contention is that, with its darker ending, *Thirteen Cents* is closer to Duiker's worldview than is *Quiet Violence*'s optimistic conclusion. His suicide in 2005 supports this line of thought, and as we shall see, so does the apocalyptic ending of *Thirteen Cents*.

Mzobe's novel reads like a 'how-to' guide on stealing German automobiles. Moele's text delves into the scourge of statutory rape in township schools, and Duiker's work is a fictionalised first-person narrative of life on the streets of Cape Town. All three authors employ teenage narrators to convey the experiences of young black subjects in post-apartheid South Africa. The three Kwela writers were born within five years of each other (1973-1978), so perhaps the concern with the plight of this country's youth is a generational one. In *Young Blood*, Sipho is a seventeen-year-old Umlazi resident who gets sucked into the world of crime. The protagonist of *Untitled*, a resident of Teyageneng, is also seventeen and goes by the name of Mokgethi. Duiker's hero, a boy by the name of Azure, is a thirteen-year-old urchin who is condemned to survive in the underbelly of the Mother City.

All three protagonists are situated in what Frantz Fanon refers to as the colonised's sector, which is diametrically opposed to the colonist's. According to him, "the 'native' sector is not complementary to the European sector. The two confront each other, but not in the service of a higher unity. Governed by a purely Aristotelian logic, they follow the dictates of mutual exclusion: There is no conciliation possible, one of them is superfluous" (*Wretched* 4). The colonised's sector is the informal settlement, the township, the ghetto, and the squalid urban street peopled by the poor majority. We can contrast this sector with the colonist's, which is the clean, secure and comfortable suburb, estate and complex in which the elite minority dwells. I use Fanon as my primary theoretical lens because I believe that South Africa bears the marks of the typical post-independence African state which he describes in *The Wretched of the Earth*. The only fact which sets this country apart is that our colonisers stayed to live shoulder to shoulder with the native inhabitants they had previously oppressed. Apart from the fact that the black ruling elite and upper middle-class have been co-opted into the colonist's sector, it remains almost exclusively white while the colonised's sector is the opposite.

In all the novels, the colonised's sector is characterised by very recognisable traits. The first, as we shall see in *Young Blood*, is violence. I use Fanon to explain the origins of this violence, and to account for its prevalence in the colonised's sector. We see that it is more than arbitrary as it is used to serve a variety of social functions. Mzobe is obligated to thematise violence in a novel that depicts the gangster realm of car thieves, but he does so in a manner which educates us as to the different purposes of violent behaviour. *Untitled* focuses on the sexual violence which has become commonplace in township homes, streets and schools. The question Moele forces us to reflect on is why this behaviour is aberrant everywhere but in the township, where it is tolerated, defended and even legitimised? Duiker's text then explores the manner in which violence is used as a language, a communicative tool that people use to impart meaning to one another. To Duiker, as it is to Fanon, violence is not arbitrary.

The colonised subjects of all three texts often respond to their traumatic living conditions with ostentatious behaviour and substance abuse. In *Young Blood* and *Thirteen Cents*, the gangsters set themselves apart from the crowd in a myriad of ways. The reasons for this behaviour are as goal-oriented as those motivating violence. Again, we see that the streets of the colonised's sector have their own language, in which manner of dress and body comportment communicate meaning. There is also the inferiority complex to which Fanon

points, which comes from the dispossession of the colonised by the colonist. Fanon aids us in understanding how envy motivates the colonised to acquire Western markers of affluence and success. Substances – be they alcoholic or narcotic in nature – also have their utility in the colonised sector. They are put to different uses in Mzobe’s and Duiker’s works, ranging from the personal to the economic.

The colonised subject’s economic plight is often linked to his or her level of education, which is one of the central themes of Moele’s *Untitled*. Mokgethi is a young girl who dreams of going to Oxford but the challenges that she faces attending school in the colonised’s sector almost make the entire enterprise of obtaining a matric certificate farcical. Moele’s novel invites an interrogation of the axiom which Mzobe presents without questioning in *Young Blood*, which is that education is the key to a brighter future. Siphso drops out and then returns to school; Mokgethi remains in school throughout, and Azure is locked out of the school system altogether. Their experiences invite an analysis of the impact that formal education has on the life of the colonised subject.

Moele’s novel also critiques the role of the community in the colonised’s sector. It is easy to blame the plight of the colonised subject on the colonist but the finger-pointing at the legacy of apartheid grows weary. Moele obliges members of the colonised’s sector to share culpability for their suffering, especially that of women and children. Duiker’s *Thirteen Cents* also foregrounds the indifference with which we treat the weakest members of our society, and enables us to see how this indifference quickly fosters the sadism which is then visited on the vulnerable by the powerful. Victimisation is the colonised subject’s first expectation, as is evident in *Untitled*, whose protagonist expects to be raped even before it happens.

The inevitability of violence and the impunity with which its perpetrators behave lead us to question the role of the state and its functionaries. All three novels provide a damning assessment of law enforcement, the judicial system, and state aid or intervention in the lives of the poor. Fanon’s analysis of the ineptitude of the typical post-independence government is wholly applicable to our post-apartheid condition. The parallels are numerous as the texts uncover the manner in which the state has betrayed, and continues to betray its promises to its citizens. No observant reader will have failed to notice the role of neo-liberal capital in our democratic dispensation. I attempt to assess its impact on the colonised subjects depicted in the novels by exploring the informal, often illicit ways in which they participate in the economy.



It goes without saying that the number one differentiator between the colonist's and colonised's sectors is money. The three novels under study present its acquisition as the quickest way out of the colonised's sector. Money is a leveller capable of diminishing the distance between the two sectors. In his or her attempt to procure it, the colonised subject augments his or her moral, gendered and sexual behaviour. This phenomenon debunks certain essentialist notions that have come to be associated with black identity. Michela Wrong notes that, "In much of Africa, 'homophobia' is a meaningless term, given the depth of public hostility to homosexuality. [. . .] [F]or a vast swathe of the prudish public it represents the ultimate of depravities, a vice imported from the effete West to corrupt manly African youth" (92). Duiker's depiction of Azure is especially valuable, given this context. In the protagonist of *Thirteen Cents*, we have a character in which traditional ideas about masculinity and sexuality are controversially contested. This is what makes him the most dynamic of the narrators under study, and perhaps the most complex as regards black identity.

I devote particular attention to the racial dynamics in *Thirteen Cents* because it is the only text in which we see interracial interaction. *Young Blood* is comprised of a homogenous cast of Zulu characters, and *Untitled* is the same except the ethnicity shared is Pedi. All three novels depict a social landscape in which race relations have not changed. Racism is rife and separatism is the order of the day years after the advent of democracy. Mzobe and Moele give the lie to the dream of a rainbow nation but it is Duiker who ultimately gives up on it. In so doing, he makes a point about the performance of individual identity in an overbearing, sheep-minded, backward-looking society. I would love to say that I deal with race as what it is, which is a social construct invented to serve the interests of certain groups who wield power. However, this is impossible for me because the texts that I have chosen divide the South African population into the categories propagated by apartheid, and it would be dishonest to pretend that these categories – which are imposed on individuals from without on the basis of physical appearance – do not impinge on the social reality that they experience. I have therefore opted for a common-sensical approach to race rather than a postmodern one. The latter approach would have us believe that race is not a physical reality, and I must stress that I agree with this view in principle, but maintain that race need not exist in order for there to be racists. Socio-economic class still corresponds, to a large degree, to the distribution of wealth across races during apartheid. So, even though I concede that 'black', 'white' and 'coloured' are not real biological categories, I deal with them as very real social and economic categories which correlate – to a convincing degree – to skin colour.

Lastly, I concern myself with the manner in which these texts may or may not qualify as Third Literature. I adapted this term from the concept of Third Cinema, which is a genre of film created by filmmakers who “made known their opposition to the state or the existing order of things” (Tomaselli, *Cinema of Apartheid* 196-97). Mzobe, Moele and Duiker are not happy with the new South Africa. *Young Blood* is a cautionary tale which is concerned with the limited options available to township youths, which more often than not lead to criminal activity. The novel addresses the systemic social inequality which perpetuates cycles of poverty in some sections of the population, while perennially producing economic prosperity in others. *Untitled* challenges the failure of the state to ensure that the Constitution is felt across all levels of society, from the richest to the poorest. It also exposes the ruling party’s opportunism during election campaigns, where votes are canvassed in communities in which services are not delivered. The last text, *Thirteen Cents*, examines the relationship between our post-apartheid government and neo-liberal capital. It draws attention to the secret war that government is waging against its citizens, in locking the most destitute out of the formal economy. All three texts take issue with police brutality and corruption, which are as endemic to the democratic South African state as they were during apartheid. In their range of thematic concerns, Mzobe, Moele and Duiker give truth to Keyan G. Tomaselli’s assertion that, “Like Alice’s experience in Wonderland, everything in South Africa constantly changes, but nothing is different” (215).

According to Teshome H. Gabriel, “Third World cinema made its debut in the early 1960s” and “was built on the rejection of the concepts and propositions of traditional cinema” (*Aesthetics of Liberation* xi). It emerged as a tool for social change and was contemporaneous with *The Wretched of the Earth*, which it relied upon for its ideological underpinning. Fanon’s influence on the cinematic movement is apparent in Clyde Taylor’s elucidation of its ethos:

The appropriate first response of this perspective is to direct towards the Western patriarchal effort to colonise human creativity a vigorous nihilism in the overly maligned original sense of that revolutionary notion. (‘Here is the ultimatum of our camp: what can be smashed should be smashed; what will stand the blow is good; what will fly into smithereens is rubbish; at any rate, hit out right and left – there will and can be no harm from it’). (97)

The above quotation illustrates that Third Cinema – and indeed Third Literature – is not art for art’s sake. Its concerns, as the name betrays, are those of Third World citizens battling against ever-more insidious forms of neo-imperial domination. The works of Mzobe, Moele and Duiker do not stop at a mere critique of the status quo: they also prescribe ways in which readers can or should respond at the level of real life experience to the social ills depicted in the fiction of the authors. In so doing, each of the writers I have selected embodies what Taylor refers to as “the conscious realisation of the need to orchestrate one’s efforts against cultural imperialism and bourgeois cultural elitism, and therefore against the rationales for these ideological agencies” (105). Their novels are not at the service of the agendas of the West, but are intended to uplift the communities represented by Sipho, Mokgethi and Azure.

This study, therefore, aims to explore how young black bodies inhabit the new South Africa through a close, Fanonian reading of three Kwela texts. According to David Macey, the time is right to reread the Afro-Caribbean theorist because “Fanon was angry”, and without the political instinct of anger there can be no hope for “the wretched of the earth [who] are still with us” (qtd. in Bhabha x). On the task of translating the 2004 edition of *The Wretched of the Earth*, Richard Philcox confesses that, “I had in mind a young reader who would be swept along by Fanon’s thoughts in the language of the twenty-first century” (246). This is an apt stylistic decision given that the novelists under study depict the wretched of the colonised’s sector – at the turn of the millennium in Duiker’s case, and a decade into the twenty-first century in Mzobe’s and Moele’s. My focus is postmillennial in order to better assess the fruits of democracy. Post-apartheid South Africa is the child of three free and fair democratic elections, and on the cusp of the fourth. The same ruling party has held the political reins for over two decades. Enough time has elapsed in order for researchers in any discipline to assess its progress. As I mentioned earlier, it is my contention that the new South Africa resembles the typical Fanonian post-independence African state, therefore my analysis is heavily indebted to his postcolonial theory. I have attempted to clarify, and will continue to qualify my usage of apartheid-era racial categories throughout the thesis.

## Chapter 1

### So, What does it Mean to be Black ‘Young Blood’?

#### 1.1) *Young Blood*: An Introduction

This chapter interrogates the manner in which young black identities are constructed in Mzobe’s Umlazi. As previously stated, I refer to the township as the colonised’s sector because in South Africa, unlike other post-independence African states, the coloniser never left. The reason Umlazi exists in its ethno-racial homogeneity, is a direct result of apartheid law. Its inhabitants also live in the kind of poverty which reflects a distribution of wealth attributable to the time of formal segregation. My point here is obvious: not much has changed. The new South Africa bears an uncanny resemblance to the old, and post-apartheid South Africa – in its twenty-one years of democracy – has ‘developed’ in a manner typical of almost every post-independence African state. A black bourgeoisie has been assimilated into the class of the coloniser, and the change in government has brought with it corruption and empty promises. This is where Fanon’s post-colonial theory is invaluable in my analysis of the socio-political landscape depicted in *Young Blood*.

The chapter is split into three sections covering violence, ostentation, and drugs, as they are connected to gang life. I end the chapter by assessing the novel’s efficacy as a work of Third Literature, a genre derived from the filmic concept of Third Cinema. To reiterate, I adapted the term to apply to literature because Third Cinema “emerged from other neo-colonial countries in North Africa, South America and Asia during the 1960s and 70s” (Tomaselli, *Cinema of Apartheid* 195). Perhaps because of this fact, the critical approach can be used to analyse literary works concerned with South Africa’s post-apartheid condition. Fanon, referred to as “the inspirational guide for Third Cinema” (Gabriel, *Aesthetics of Liberation* 7), also had his most famous work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, published in 1961 – a date that coincides with the emergence of Third Cinema. The overlap between the theory of Third Cinema and Fanon’s post-colonial theory makes it possible for them to be used in

tandem. Tomaselli defines Third Cinema as “the cinema of the guerrilla by camera units: a helping hand in the rebuilding of an oppressed nation and a way of anticipating events in order to expedite them” (*Cinema of Apartheid* 196). It is my contention that *Young Blood* – much like the other novels under consideration in this study – fits this definition as a work of literature, at least to an extent that merits investigation. Gabriel’s elucidation of the term reinforces the point made above:

The various forms of oppression which afflict [. . .] Third World countries form the core of thematic elements in Third Cinema. It is a cinema that is committed to a direct and aggressive opposition to oppression. Its purpose will be validated only if it integrates its objectives with the aspirations, values, struggles and social needs of the oppressed classes. [. . .] it addresses issues of class, culture, religion, sex and national integrity simultaneously. (*Aesthetics of Liberation* 15)

In this chapter, I endeavour to present a reading of the text which illustrates Mzobe’s literary treatment of the main concerns of Third Cinema. I also assess – in addition to the manner in which it is constructed in the text – whether *Young Blood* offers new or different ways of being black. Should it not, then at least it will provide us with a control against which the literary experiments of Moele and Duiker can be compared.

## **1.2) *Young Blood* and Violence**

*Young Blood*, as the title suggests, is a novel dripping with violence. This is due to the subject matter which the narrative explores, namely the nocturnal and nefarious activities which take place in the gangster realm of ‘night-riding’ in Durban. Margaret von Klemperer, on the novel’s front page, describes the narrative as one that focuses “on the lives and frequent deaths of the young bloods, the township high school dropouts who are faced with a stark choice”. What is this stark choice? Siphon, the seventeen-year-old narrator, describes it thus: “Are we born to chase after cash and then die? Out of the gate, I pictured an opposite scenario where Vusi did not steal cars. Where he dropped out of school but decided not to hustle. Always at home asking his unemployed mother for cash. Which was better?” (Mzobe 146). Vusi, Siphon and Musa, the three ‘young bloods’ of the novel, all decide that it is better

to face “the givens in this [gang] life”, which include “backstabbing and double-crossing and jail and death” (191). It is fair to say that these young boys enter this gangsters’ ‘paradise’ with eyes wide open, forearmed with the knowledge that in the criminal underworld, “killing had to happen. Bullets had to right a wrong”, and because of this mortal risk, “[r]emuneration for bravery must make sense” (82, 36). It is Mdala, “a ‘razo’ – a classic old-timer rider” (73), who explains these simple rules to Siphso, the newest recruit in the criminal gang constituted by Sibani, Musa, Vusi and Mdala. It is this same “Original Gangster [. . . ] in constant company with the veterans, the older crooks, the OGs” (131), who lends the novel its title, for it is only he who constantly refers to Siphso as a “young blood” (118, 147, 149, 150, 191, 197), which is a gangster initiate in formal terms. Along with the association with bravery, the moniker also connotes the literal spillage of young blood, linking ‘acts of bravery’ to their almost inevitably violent consequences. Finally, it is Mdala’s ‘exemplary’ lifestyle which provides the model to which Siphso and his friends aspire:

Mdala’s life was the kind that we looked at from a distance and instantly envied. On the other side of fifty, but a decade younger in the looks department, Mdala was a BMW specialist. He knew every secret – for a car is made in layers – on every BMW built after 1980. I’d sometimes see him tearing up the township in his matchbox BMW 535i. It was Avus blue, a sublime acoustic bastard that walked on BBS rims. I once saw him take apart a BMW engine and put it back together – drunk – with indifferent ease. In dress, Mdala was old school, with formal shirts, creased trousers and shiny shoes. In the game of money, though, he was post-future school. He owned two mansions in the township. His taxis always looked new. (73)

This gangland father-figure has a son Siphso’s age whom he encounters in the last chapter. Upon their meeting, Siphso remarks: “It was the first time I had seen him, but there was a familiarity to his face, like he was a younger version of someone I knew well” (218-19), or, I would add, a younger version of someone Siphso would like to be. Mdala’s son drives a Golf IV GTI and dresses in “understated latest-season Hugo Boss – linen shirt, jeans and loafers” (219). Why would Siphso, Musa and Vusi not model themselves on the progeny of Mdala? Siboniso (Mdala’s son) is an embodiment of the chance that they were not born with. By aligning themselves with Mdala, they suspect they may get the “chance to build something”, a “chance to break the cycle of nothingness”, a chance to “step into better things” (101), but it is a chance that they will have to buy with violence, a transaction for which all three ‘young bloods’ are prepared to pay in full. For, as we are warned by Dunga in another Kwela

publication, Niq Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog*: "this is the township [. . .]. Life is cheap and death is absolutely free of charge" (184).

Upon reading *Young Blood*'s dedication page, we encounter the following message: "This book is dedicated to my township and yours", and we are informed, in the note on the author, that Sifiso Mzobe "was born in Umlazi, Durban". The narrative action kicks off in the township of the same name which, in 2013, ranked second only to Inanda in the list of the ten worst precincts for murder in KwaZulu-Natal ("Worst Ten Precincts" 2). It is no surprise then that the first mention of violence occurs within the first ten pages of the novel: "It was May, and the school soccer programme had already been scrapped for the year because of a stabbing incident in the stands during an away game earlier in the year" (Mzobe 8). Of this incident, Siphos remarks: "The scrapping of the soccer programme was not so much a reason I left school but rather a footnote" (8). He only shines on the soccer pitch at school and quickly realises that it is "going to be a long year [. . .] mumbling wrong answers in class and no soccer" (8). By his own admission, his below-par academic performance means that he does "not have the key to a bright future" (8), so instead he opts for a dark future in crime. This is the type of early exposure to violence which forces teenagers into early adulthood. It is the type of violence which means that young narrators, such as Siphos at seventeen (65), or the thirteen-year-old Azure in Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* (1), must declare that they are men. The young Jeremy in Eric Miyeni's *The Release* is also catapulted out of childhood by the sadistic murder of a farmhand by Littlemetalplate, a racist white farmer (108).

Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, diagnoses the psychological symptoms of the violent truncation of childhood in the following terms:

in an African country where intellectual development is unequal, where the violent clash of two worlds has seriously shaken up the old traditions and disrupted ways of thinking, the affectivity and sensitivity of the young African are at the mercy of the aggression contained in Western culture. His family very often proves incapable of counteracting this violence with stability and homogeneity. (136-37)

By contrast, Siphos nuclear family unit is as stable as they come, consisting of two income-earning parents and a ten-year-old sister whom he adores. Relations among the family members are respectful and supportive, but the quiet family life cannot compete with the allure of Western materialism: designer cars, clothes, drinks, drugs, and lifestyles characterise

what Fanon labels the “white folk’s sector” (4). He contrasts this sector that has a belly “permanently full of good things” (4), with the sector in which the natives live:

The colonized’s sector, or at least the “native” quarters, the shanty town, the Medina, the reservation, is a disreputable place inhabited by disreputable people. You are born anywhere, anyhow. You die anywhere, from anything. It’s a world with no space, people are piled one on top of the other, the shacks squeezed tightly together. The colonized’s sector is a famished sector, hungry for bread, meat, shoes, coal, and light. The colonized’s is a sector that crouches and cowers, a sector on its knees, a sector that is prostrate. It’s a sector of niggers, a sector of towelheads. The gaze that the colonized subject casts at the colonist’s sector is a look of lust, a look of envy. Dreams of possession. Every type of possession: of sitting at the colonist’s table and sleeping in his bed, preferably with his wife. The colonized man is an envious man. The colonist is aware of this as he catches the furtive glance, and constantly on his guard, realizes bitterly that: “They want to take our place.” And it’s true there is not one colonized subject who at least once a day does not dream of taking the place of the colonist. (4-5)

The M Section of Umlazi, as Siphon describes it, conforms to Fanon’s description of the native sector. Siphon speculates that, to “this day perhaps, ours is the only road in the hills of Umlazi that is close to being flat” (Mzobe 10). Mama Mkhize’s tavern, which “stands at the entrance to 2524 Close”, is described as “a refuge for all who prefer life lived nocturnally” (10). It is run by “a dynamo of a woman”, who is rumoured to be “related to people for whom killing comes easily” (11). A stream separates Siphon’s M Section from Power, the shantytown of Musa’s childhood. With Fanonian perceptiveness, Siphon observes: “For every suburb there is a township, so for each section in the township a shantytown – add a ghetto to a ghetto” (14), pile bodies on top of bodies. The poverty of life in Power is exemplified by boys who run bare-chested on the soccer pitch, wearing “only shorts, citing the heat as the reason for their dress code” (34), when it is an open secret that they cannot afford T-shirts. We are told that, during the course of Musa’s harsh upbringing, he had to buy “what a child should not have to buy for himself – food and clothes” (34). It is the privation experienced in his formative years which instils in Musa the drive to ‘hustle’ a house in the suburb of Westville.

Although he is slightly better off than Musa, Siphon is not immune to the charms of suburban life. Upon entering Musa’s new neighbourhood for the first time, he observes as follows: “The air you breathe changes in the suburbs. There are more trees than houses, more space than you can imagine. The silence is healthy, the peace of mind a priceless asset. It is the kind of place you should be in if you want to be the fastest forward” (46). And the last



time he exits Westville, oblivious to the fact that he will never return, Siphos voices an unconscious lament:

In the entrance lane [to Umlazi] there were only a few private cars, the odd bus and a handful of taxis with music systems so powerful that when I overtook them the bass hit the centre of my chest and meshed the beat of my heart with another internal organ. It was morning, but house was the music of choice. Odes to the midnight moon blasted at the sunrise. I did not envy the passengers. Schoolchildren on the pavements danced to the bass. All this told me I was home, a world away from the quiet streets of Westville. (180)

This contrast sets up a clear binary opposition which equates the white folk's sector with moving forward or progress, and the native sector with stagnation or regression. It also situates the native sector in the sphere of perpetual darkness, as the sounds of the night are celebrated even in the morning light. What Siphos envies is not the passengers' morning commute from the township to the workplace, but that which is not of the township, namely Mdala's Western signs of material success and Musa's tranquil suburban abode. This alone proves Fanon correct when he asserts that the colonised man is an envious one. The township is characterised by disorder, whereas the suburb is organised. Schoolchildren, who presumably should be at their desks, dance in the ghetto streets on a weekday morning, and poor commuters, who are forced to travel by public transport, are subjected to thumping minibus subwoofers while their suburban counterparts presumably prepare for the workday ahead with sober talk radio. The implication here is obvious: the township is not a place which offers stability and upward mobility. It is a place where one parties and dies, and Siphos vows, as early as the fourth chapter, "not to die in a township" (54).

Eric Miyeni, in *O'Mandingo!: The Only Black at a Dinner Party*, asks: "Who gives a damn when black men die? It is expected. The more violent our death, the more normal" (145). Nowhere is this truer than in the township, and this is the reason for Siphos' vow. However, he knows that, to escape the native sector, he will have to run the same gauntlet of violence as Musa, who sits pretty in the hills of Westville.

Musa earns his stripes through out-and-out violence. When Siphos asks, "What made you take the number?" (Mzobe 69) – with reference to the number system which differentiates one prison gang from another – Musa replies as follows:

So I am sitting on my bed in the corner – me and two other guys in the cell – when four 28s enter and head straight for the old-timer. Everyone froze, even the generals. The old-timer ran to our corner, pulled out two knives, and looked straight into my eyes. The 28s meant business; they had already disembowelled the two generals. The old-timer gave me a knife and told me to stab them. And we [sic] did.

That is how I became a 26 general. It was just spontaneous survival instinct. I stabbed until my hands trembled, then I stabbed some more. I don't want to talk about it any more, Siphoh. Everytime I think about it, the wind smells like blood. (69)

It is solely because of Musa's status as a general of the 26s that he and Siphoh survive their initial encounter with the Cold Hearts, whose fearsome reputation is built on violence alone. We are told that "[d]espite their reputation, the Cold Hearts neither drank nor smoked", and Siphoh cannot recall seeing any of them "talking to the girls at [his birthday] party in Lamontville" (28). He also adds that their "signature was on the cash-in-transit heist up in Stanger that left all the guards dead, as well as the bloody hijackings at Hillcrest, which had brought the flying squad into the township", and that the needless "disembowelling of a taxi driver in broad daylight – over a parking spot – had township people shaking their heads in silent outrage. Was their insanity enshrined in brutality and sheer barbarism?" (28). This evidence suggests that the Cold Hearts do not need a reason to kill; for as Musa explains to Siphoh, they "call themselves 26 [sic] but spill blood like 27s. Their code is kill for whatever" (36). So, when Musa chastises Siphoh for responding to the call of the Cold Hearts to start a hijacked car for them for a lousy R800 he was "never going to get", it is clear that his intervention in the latter's case is necessary "because the Cold Hearts don't pay. Country crooks who came to the city for money; the only thing they know is how to take" (36). Vusi discovers this the hard way when he is conned into a R350 000 scheme by the infamous gang, and returns home in a closed casket after his head is riddled with bullets. There is no one to rescue Vusi, but Musa is there for Siphoh.

The standoff between Musa and the older of the two Cold Hearts ensues after they establish that they are both "money lover[s]" (32), or members of the 26s. The ritualised manner in which the prison gang resolves interpersonal disputes can be seen when both men crouch and raise a single thumb to the face before addressing each other. The older of the two Cold Hearts who have 'abducted' Siphoh then proceeds to dress Musa down:

You see, Mr Superstar from nowhere, everything written on this body tells a story. I am a captain, I have led teams and pushed schemes in and out of prison. Do not fluke me because I know this: the law of the number says it does not matter if it is my soldier or your soldier as long as we get money. Or has the law of the number changed? I hear in Westville Prison you can buy the number these days. Did you buy it, Mr Superstar? Who are you to speak of soldiers? What do you know about the thumb you raise to your face? (31-32)

Musa imposes his dominance and saves his and Siphó's lives by responding as follows:

“Man from the east, money over everything. A captain never talks to a general like this. I am a general here; in essence, I run things.”

Musa took off his T-shirt. The tattoo over his heart showed two playing cards: a two of spades and a six of flies. Its appearance averted the threat of violence, for the younger Cold Heart had climbed out of the car with a knife in his hand. He silently moved away.

“It is as I said – my soldier is coming with me.” Musa crouched firm.

Tattoos in prison are like certificates in society or medals in the army. The Cold Hearts were ready to take out Musa, yet the law of the number proclaimed him untouchable. The older Cold Heart stood up and retreated with a shake of the head. (32)

What has to be noted here is the perverse ease with which life can be threatened and, indeed, taken. It is almost as if violence is that which gives one the right to ‘push’ money-making schemes. If one has not proved one's mettle in the arena of bloodletting, then one does not have the right to pursue the means to life: money. Musa is only a general who ‘runs things’ because he stabbed rival 28s in prison, and the Cold Heart captain feels entitled to use Siphó's expertise because, as he explains to Musa, his body is a monument to his capacity for violence, and he has excelled in criminal activities both in and out of prison. ‘The law of the number’ is the law of the jungle which decrees that it is only death which sustains life. One must kill to eat, and also to make money. The relationship between violence and prosperity is painfully crude, yet it is accepted with the honour of thieves. Musa's response is only as unperturbed as it is because he knows his rank is untouchable, and that this fact will be respected by anyone else who is familiar with ‘the law of the number’. If, as Fanon maintains, the “native is declared impervious to ethics” (*Wretched* 6), then how does one explain this ethical paradox? All parties involved in the standoff – Siphó included, as we learn in the fourth chapter – have demonstrated, and continue to demonstrate a remarkable

propensity to kill, yet they are honour-bound by a code which vouchsafes the lives of those who have climbed highest up the killing ladder.

Such a paradoxical phenomenon is in line with Miyeni's essentialism when he asserts: "You will never see a lion hunting down another to feed its young" (*O'Mandingo!* 262). This line of thought is based on the idea that "Joseph Conrad and his kind were right about one thing, we are animals. And we are proud of it", and that if "being the animals that we are scares the living daylights out of people who mistakenly believe that they are not animals, then so be it" (262, 263). Is the reason why Musa and Sipho survive this encounter because they are perceived to be lions by fellow lions? I would argue that this is an oversimplification. The Cold Hearts certainly demonstrate the ruthlessness of predators in their readiness to terminate any threat to their livelihood. And if animals "live a life of dignity" (262), then their honour-based killing code can be stretched so that it qualifies as 'dignified'. If animals "live truthfully", and "take from the environment only that which they need" (262), then neither Sipho and Musa nor the Cold Hearts can be said to fulfil these two requirements, for their rampant materialism is motivated by excess and ostentation, and at some point or another, all lie to get ahead. If animals "are proud" and "fearless", these gangsters can be said to embody these qualities, but they certainly do not "listen to the seasons and dance to the rhythm of nature" like animals (262, 263). These gangsters are not "majestic" (262). They are not "beautiful" or "graceful" (262). If anything, animals are denigrated by this comparison for the conduct of humans cannot be said to contain the same level of integrity.

No one puts it better than Arundhati Roy in *The God of Small Things*: "no beast has essayed the boundless, infinitely inventive art of human hatred. No beast can match its range and power" (236). It could be argued that from a particular communal perspective, there is behaviour that can be classified as barbaric, as the township folk characterise the antics of the Cold Hearts, because animals do not kill needlessly; only barbarians do. A zebra knows that it can graze peacefully next to a satiated lion, but never next to a hungry one, and never next to a human, for one will kill out of necessity, and the other for no reason at all.

Why this barbarism? Why this total disregard for life? Is it essential to black people or is it a product of circumstance? Fanon explains the predilection for violence thus:

At the individual level we witness a genuine negation of common sense. Whereas the colonist or police officer can beat the colonized subject day in and day out, insult him and shove him to his knees, it is not uncommon to see the colonized subject draw his knife at the slightest hostile or aggressive look from another colonized subject. For the colonized subject's last resort is to defend his personality against his fellow countryman. (*Wretched* 17)

This is why the younger Cold Heart already has his knife drawn before he knows Musa's name, never mind his rank. It is also why Vusi is brutally murdered after the scheme he 'pushes' with the Cold Hearts; he has no rank, and is therefore dispensable. Since we know the Cold Hearts kill for no reason, to them Vusi is nothing more than hired help which can be discarded instead of remunerated. Fanon argues that, at "the individual level, violence is a cleansing force. It rids the colonized of their inferiority complex, of their passive and despairing attitude. It emboldens them, and restores their self-confidence" (51). So, in what is a pathological corrective manoeuvre, the death of one colonised subject affirms the life of another. This is because "the strongest birds gobble up all the grain while the less aggressive become visibly thinner. Any colony tends to become one vast farmyard, one vast concentration camp where the only law is the law of the knife" (232). The Cold Hearts understand Sartre's dictum that either "one must remain terrified or become terrifying" (lv), if one is to survive this concentration camp. For, make no mistake, as Fanon expounds, survival is the only victory for the colonised subject: "In a context of oppression like that of Algeria [or South Africa, I would add], for the colonized, living does not mean embodying a set of values, does not mean integrating oneself into the coherent, constructive development of a world. To live simply means not to die. To exist means staying alive" (*Wretched* 232). Since to live in the colonial context is a victory in itself, it makes psychological sense for the act of killing to represent positive ontological reinforcement: 'He is like me but he is dead. I am like him but I am alive, therefore I have succeeded where he has failed'. Miyeni refers to this particular brand of homicidal ideation as "scarcity thinking" (*O'Mandingo!* 103). According to him, "scarcity thinking leads to very strenuous living" because it is premised on the expectation that eventually, "things get finished" (103). To counter this competitive predisposition, Miyeni encourages oppressed peoples to accept that "if things get finished today, it is the way of the gods; there will be more later when the gods deem fit" (103), but Fanon explains why this kind of blind optimism is not always possible in the colonial context:

The sole obsession is the need to fill that ever shrinking stomach, however little it demands. Who do you take it out on? The French are down on the plain with the police, the army and their tanks. In the mountains there are only Algerians. Up above, Heaven with its promises of an afterlife, down below the French with their firm promises of jail, beatings and executions. Inevitably, you stumble against yourself. Here lies this core of self-hatred that characterizes racial conflict in segregated societies. (*Wretched* 232)

Sipho's run-in with Mtshali's corrupt police unit illustrates Fanon's point, that in "poor, underdeveloped countries where, according to the rule, enormous wealth rubs shoulders with abject poverty, the army and the police form the pillars of the regime" (117). It is the same all over Africa. Wrong presents a similar picture of postmillennial Kenya:

Originally designed for just 200,000 inhabitants, Nairobi now holds 4-4.5 million. [. . .]. That growth consists almost entirely of the poor, whose shacks have filled what were the green spaces in a network of loosely connected satellite settlements. [. . .]. Among the most squalid the continent has to offer, these settlements nuzzle against well-heeled residential areas in provocative intimacy. 'What's striking about Nairobi is that each wealthy neighbourhood lies cheek by jowl with a slum,' remarks former MP Paul Muite. 'It's almost like a twinning arrangement. Poverty and wealth stare each other in the face. And that's simply untenable. Those slum-dwellers know what they're missing, they're educated now. I tell my wife: "There's no way, long term, those guys are going to accept to die of hunger when the smell of your chapattis is wafting over the wall.'"

(148)

Alexandra and Sandton are just as intimate, so are Diepsloot and Saddlebrook in the South African context. It is left to armed private security companies and public law enforcement agencies to patrol the invisible barrier between the colonised's sector and the colonist's. This policing is almost always executed with prejudice against the colonised subject.

Before Sipho is unceremoniously bundled out of 'his' vehicle, he finds himself on the wrong end of "[t]wo pistols and a rifle" (Mzobe 201). It must be added that he is in the policemen's crosshairs before it is established whether he is armed or not. This proves Fanon's argument that in "a world configured by the colonizer, the colonized subject is always presumed guilty" (*Wretched* 16). After "a frantic but thorough search" (Mzobe 201), it is established that Sipho is unarmed, yet is still unnecessarily manhandled even as he lies defencelessly, face-down on the tarmac in handcuffs so tight "the steel cut through the skin to

grind against bone” (202). We are told: “The tarmac was rough against my chest; the knee on my back was so heavy I could feel the road surface embossed on my skin” (202). This type of prejudicial violence at the hands of the authorities confirms what the colonised subject intuitively knows – that, for him, in Fanon’s words, there is no “‘human’ dignity. The colonized subject has never heard of such an ideal. All he has ever seen on his land is that he can be arrested, beaten, and starved with impunity” (*Wretched* 9). The police do not believe that Siphon is a mechanic, as he is reduced to a faceless criminal representative of the native sector: “I can guess where you are from. We know Umlazi boys hustle cars” (Mzobe 205), Mtshali purrs with self-satisfaction. He then proceeds to psychologically intimidate Siphon, with the intention of procuring a bribe. At the end of the night, Siphon walks free, but Mtshali makes off with R21 000 and a BMW 328i, amounting to all the proceeds from Siphon’s criminal career.

So who are the real criminals in a colonial regime? Who terrifies those who terrify others? According to Fanon, it is the ministers who “get rich”, it is their wives who “become floozies, members of the legislature [who] line their pockets, and everybody, down to the police officers and customs officials, [who] joins hands in this huge caravan of corruption” (*Wretched* 117). Who is the native to take it out on? Who must pay when the “very same people who had it constantly drummed into them that the only language they understood was that of force, now decide to express themselves with force” (42)? It is always the same person, namely the native’s brother, as Jacob – Jeremy’s sibling – fatally discovers in Miyeni’s novel. Jeremy rampages through the entire narrative on a revenge mission, obsessed with the idea that “[s]omebody has to pay” (*Release* 8). Someone has to bleed for the physical and psychological violence that he experiences during apartheid. And, by the novel’s end, “Jeremy watches his brother fall back onto the chair” after he squeezes the trigger, and “feels lighter than a feather” (174).

### **1.3) *Young Blood* and Ostentation**

Ostentation, which is connected to gangsterism in *Young Blood*, represents the attempt to redress the dispossession of the colonised. It represents those dreams of possession which end up possessing young men such as Siphon, Musa and Vusi. Fanon takes note of “how the colonized always dream of taking the colonist’s place”, for the colonist’s “hostile, oppressive

and aggressive world, bulldozing the colonized masses, represents not only the hell they would like to escape as quickly as possible but a paradise within arm's reach guarded by ferocious watchdogs" (*Wretched* 16). The least that is owed to the colonised by the coloniser, according to Fanon, is his wife, his house, his food, and his lifestyle, for those are the very possessions of which the colonised was dispossessed, and those are the reasons why the coloniser is rich today. In the colonial context, Fanon argues, "it is clear that what divides this world is first and foremost what species, what race one belongs to. In the colonies the infrastructure is also a superstructure. The cause is effect: you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich" (5). The problem is that the "Western bourgeoisie has erected enough barriers and safeguards for it to fear no real competition from those it exploits and despises", but it urges "the subhuman to rise to the level of Western humanity that it embodies" (109-10). So, now that "the colonies have become a market", and now that the colonial population has become "a consumer market" (26), it stands to reason that humanity, as it is defined by the West, is a commodity accessible by materialism and consumerism. Those who do not possess the financial means to embody Western humanity, do so through what Dingz describes – in *Dog Eat Dog* – as 'affirmative action':

Everything is 'affirmative' nowadays, I thought to myself. Slums or squatter camps have become 'affirmative settlements'. Shoplifting is called 'affirmative transaction'. Carjackers make 'affirmative repossessions'. Even going out with a white person is an 'affirmative romance'. (Mhlongo 79)

'Affirmative action' becomes imperative when one considers that, in colloquial isiZulu, *ungumuntu* means 'you have money'. I have no way of verifying the veracity of this colloquialism other than to draw on personal experience. The troublesome ontological ramifications of this colloquialism become clear when it is brought to light that the literal translation of the phrase is: 'you are a person'. So, according to township isiZulu slang, one is only a person when one has money. This is why, when Siphon deposits money in the 'bank' under his mattress, his father remarks: "You made some cash for yourself. That is good" (Mzobe 108). As Siphon informs us: "My father had been a hustler in his past life. Brave and wild. He may not have shown it, but I knew he was proud when he saw me make money" (54). His mother reinforces this message after Siphon gives his little sister a R50 note: "You made some money for yourself; that is good" (106). Neither parent enquires as to the source



of Siphó's illicit income because, as far as they are concerned, a "man keeps his secrets" (65). They know that Siphó has dropped out of school and does not "roam the streets alone" (57), but they also know that for young men like Siphó, whom Sam Raditlhalo describes as:

stuck between an immediate past where, for many, very little meaningful education was possible, and a 'transitional' present where the 'fruits' of post-apartheid South Africa often seem to be no more than a rumour orchestrated by the upper classes, young blacks in the city use the notion of hustling, 'uku panda' [sic], to turn life into an armour.

("Proletarian Novel" 94-95)

Let us not forget that Siphó's father is no stranger to *ukuphanda*, and that he is a backyard mechanic, and his wife a cleaning lady at Clairwood Hospital. Their socio-economic status dictates that, even though they are unhappy with Siphó's decision to leave school, they are happy that he is not always "at home asking his [. . .] mother for cash" (Mzobe 146). His father intimates as much when he initiates Siphó into the ways of the world:

You are now in the real world. In the real world, money matters. Notes are the tiny hands that spin this world around. The more of these tiny hands you have, the better your life will be. In this real world, you focus on what you want and go hard for it. You see school as an avenue to nowhere, but there are other ways to profit as well. Use your talents to gain. (56)

What are Siphó's talents? Fixing and driving cars. And, when he is asked: "What is it you want from the world?", he answers: "Money" (63). This is the devastating one-word response he gives to old man Mbatha, to whom he applies for the blessing of his ancestors: "Your ancestors say, do what you must do but know where you are going. They will not protect you unnecessarily" (63). What old man Mbatha's message barely conceals is that it is an open secret that Siphó is involved in dark and dangerous activities. Why else would his father add *muthi* to old man Mbatha's treatment and enforce a concomitant "ban on alcohol and sex" (66)? He knows that there is a need to protect his son from thug life, which is why he constantly reminds Siphó that it "is a man-made fairy tale. Don't believe in it. Whatever avenue you choose, don't make the mistake of taking this fairy tale to heart, or anything that

will limit your thoughts” (56). It is reasonable to state, then, that though verbally discouraged, Siphos entry into gangsterism is tacitly approved.

In his dissertation entitled “Space, Body and Subjectivity: Shifting Conceptions of Black African Masculinities in Four Audio-Visual Texts”, Sikhumbuzo Mngadi argues that, while gang subcultures speak of “economic marginalisation [,] they are almost always in collusion with the acquisitive brutal capitalist culture that creates them” (10). This ambivalent attitude towards the status quo sees these gang subcultures condemn middle-class values while striving for luxury in their own lives. This conflicting attitude can be seen in the reasons Siphos provides for refusing to visit Aunt Bessie:

Aunt Bessie lived well. She had a butchery and supermarket in her own shopping complex. She had married some politician guy she met at varsity. Aunt Bessie gave us cash just to visit her. I was fine with the money part; the drawback was boredom and the chills of a Free State winter. Her children – my cousins – spoke English all the time, with a snobbish accent. I was down with none of that plastic life. (Mzobe 51)

Siphos is contemptuous of his ‘coconut’ cousins but is willing to risk his life and freedom to access a similar standard of living. He is perfectly happy to accept hand-outs from his affluent aunt, but is not prepared to interact with her ‘Oreo’ offspring. This sentiment can be simplified: Siphos wants to live like the rich but is not prepared to do the things that rich people do to become rich, such as learning to speak English, getting an education, and most importantly, working hard. In Fanonian terms, Siphos “mimics the Western bourgeoisie in its negative and decadent aspects without having accomplished the initial phases of exploration and invention that are the assets of this Western bourgeoisie whatever the circumstances” (*Wretched* 101). Crime is a shortcut to material success that circumvents personal investment and career development. In short, Siphos wants to ‘be the boss without paying the cost’, a recipe that almost always leads to disaster. He may not be prepared to apply himself at school, but is prepared to apply himself in the various categories of thug life, which include flashy dress sense, feats of bravery or skill, substance abuse, criminal activity, and promiscuity.

Musas self-confidence, expensive attire, and fast car upon his successful return from Johannesburg, instantly seduce Siphos:

[Musa's] 325is had the glassy shine of a Joburg car – as if there was a protective film over the paintwork. Even my father, a die-hard V8 disciple, was a fan of the 325is. A powerful engine on a light, balanced body. Graceful in the brutality of the drift. In the townships, the BMW 325is was – and still is – loved with the same passion by doctors and crooks alike. (Mzobe 16)

The myth surrounding this car is so powerful that it is easy to see why Sipho is entranced. Its nickname in township slang is '*ithemba lamagumusha*', which literally means 'a thug's last hope' in the context of high-speed pursuit by the cops. Once again, I cannot draw on any secondary sources to back me up in this regard. I can only rely on my personal acquaintance with the car's reputation in the townships in which I have lived. This particular BMW has given rise to a string of puns on the acronym, including 'Be My Wife', 'Black Man's Wheels', and a personal favourite, 'Broke My Wallet'. Sipho instantly takes to the car and unwittingly auditions to become a getaway driver by drifting ostentatiously in front of seasoned criminals at his birthday celebration in Lamontville: "Simply to *show off*, I tapped it three times from second gear to third", to the accompaniment of appreciative "whistles over the engine sound" (21). At the end of his daredevil display, Musa excitedly informs him: "All the crooks were asking about you" (26). The message is reinforced by Vusi, who sees him the following day: "You can spin a car, Sipho. All the crooks were asking about you" (40). Effortlessly, Sipho establishes his reputation in the underworld as "the quiet king of drifting" (38).

If – as we are told by the older of the two Cold Hearts early in the novel – "tattoos in prison are like certificates in society or medals in the army" (32), then reputations are like résumés on the township streets. A reputation, passed by word of mouth, attests to the calibre of a criminal and recommends him for future projects to collaborators who may otherwise know nothing of him. Sipho introduces himself to the criminal underworld with a flourish, and it is not long before he is inundated with requests for his highly-sought-after skills. This proves that 'showing off' has a practical value in the gangster realm because it unlocks criminal opportunities. Being noticed, standing out, or commanding attention, are not merely over-compensatory symptoms of personal insecurity; they ensure that people see what one does – good or bad – so that it may be passed on to the next person by word of mouth, thereby enhancing or diminishing one's reputation. This explains the flashy dress sense, loud cars, and conspicuous behaviour so often associated with gangsters. It is because Sipho is noticed at the party in Lamontville that the Cold Hearts track him down to 2524 Close and

demand his services in starting a hijacked car. It is also because Siphó comes highly recommended by Musa that he is given the opportunity to make the first R2000 of his criminal career by helping Vusi strip “a top-of-the-range Nissan Sentra” (38).

Hard on the heels of this initiation follows the opportunity for Siphó to ingratiate himself with Sibani and Mdala, bona fide gangsters who only work with ‘people with pedigree’. Musa recruits Siphó and Vusi to steal cars in a scheme that Sibani has for him “and two other people” (52). Mdala and Sibani know of Siphó’s ‘pedigree’. They know of the tattooed stars on Siphó’s dad’s shoulders, which mean that he was once a high-ranking 26, but even with this knowledge, they do not simply embrace Siphó without first putting him to the test. Sibani instructs Siphó to occupy the driver’s seat of his BMW M5, under the pretext of going to KwaMashu to see Mdala’s friend to collect a bottle of whisky. After Sibani unloads an entire .45 magazine into a suspected police informant’s head, Siphó has a moment of clarity: “The [...] reason it was wrong for me to drive the M5 was that it was the getaway car” (76). When they arrive at one of Sibani’s ‘stash-houses’ in Pinetown, the godfather-figure declares that Siphó has passed the test, if not with consummate cool then at least with competence under pressure: “You can shove a car, Siphó; I will give you that. But you are sweating all over my seats. Are you sick or something?” (78). Siphó’s distressed physiological reaction is completely at odds with Sibani’s calm, and this irks the young man precisely because it telegraphs fear and weakness:

In the township, we grow up around killers, so there is really nothing I fear. I had seen murders before, and even taken life myself. But those thirty minutes at Sibani’s house, after he had emptied the magazine of a .45 pistol into a man’s head, filled every cell in my body with dread. I looked at Sibani in a different light. When I realised I killed a man, I lost my mind completely. But Sibani was enjoying every moment of it. In those minutes, he really scared me. He was quiet, but his face had a look almost of joy. (80)

In the thirty minutes after the successful ‘hit’, Musa laughs uncontrollably while Mdala and Sibani exchange jokes over “a bottle of Glenfiddich” (79). What Siphó does not realise is that the old hands are familiarising him with a routine: ostentatious celebrations always consummate successful acts of violence or thievery. This is why Mdala and Sibani open a twenty-one-year-old bottle of whisky. It is also why Musa suggests that they “check out which clubs are popping” (81). Siphó is not in the mood, but nonetheless, Musa commends him “for a smooth getaway” (82). He also commends Sibani for dealing appropriately with a

police informant because, as he puts it, “Every thing goes smooth without the snakes” (82). Musa thus confirms Ndumiso Ngcobo’s tongue-in-cheek assertion, in *Some of My Best Friends Are White*, that Zulus are a pragmatic people who use violence only to restore order: “Zulus have a well-developed pragmatism. Violence is just the insurance policy we cash in to [re-]establish order” (59).

Sipho grows in stature and confidence after his baptism of fire, and goes on to assist Vusi as a lookout in the ‘affirmative repossession’ of a “dolphin-shaped BMW 535i at Amanzimtoti” (Mzobe 84). Here again, Vusi reinforces the routine of celebrating a successful ‘score’ with ostentatious partying. When he shows up at Sipho’s house the next morning to give him his R2000 share of the spoils, Sipho observes: “For his night out, white had been the colour of choice. New white Jack Purcell tennis shoes, white black-label Hugo Boss jeans and plain white Armani T-shirt” (89). Sipho is amazed by Vusi’s excessive criminal hedonism, and asks: “Are you trying to break records? Three chicks for only one you?” (89). One of these unnamed ‘chicks’ informs Sipho that the foursome “danced on almost all the dance floors in the city” (90). Her friend confirms Vusi’s excess by reminding this ‘chick’ – when she complains that her “feet are burning” – that he “wants to vibe with us until we can vibe no more” (90). The party only stops when the cash runs out. This ties in with the view quoted earlier from *O’Mandingo!*, regarding “scarcity thinking” and how “it leads to strenuous living” (Miyeni 103). It is self-evident that the lives of these ‘young bloods’ are stressful. The deduction that can be made that goes a long way towards explaining the nihilistic spending sprees that these gangsters indulge in is that, as Miyeni puts it: “if things get finished today, it is the way of the gods; there will be more later when the gods deem fit” (103). That is why money burns holes in these boys’ pockets. They do not see the point of having it if it is not to be extravagantly spent. Reckless expenditure only makes sense for those who live fast lives. As Sipho sees it, “they think I’m rich. Being no mood killer, I go with the flow” (Mzobe 46). He does not know how long his good fortune will last. Sipho’s father expresses the same sentiment in his own way after Musa’s luck runs out in life: “The ancestors don’t give warnings when they say ‘no’” (225). Vusi and Sipho display an acute understanding of lady luck’s caprice when they discuss Uncle Sazi’s – a relative of Vusi’s – HIV positive state:

“The house belongs to my uncle Sazi. He used to throw the wildest parties here. I lost my virginity in one of the rooms inside. He stays with us now, a shadow of himself. I’ll

tell you something about this HIV, my friend: it hinders progress. I think, sometimes, of where Uncle Sazi could be if he were not sick. What we are doing now he did ten years ago. He was loaded, Siphoh, and the cars he drove were the flyest,” Vusi said.

“At least he lived a little, he tasted things, drove the flyest,” I said.

“I cannot argue with that because he did live like a king for most of his life. It is the violence with which he is dying that I worry about. Sometimes he is like a person I never met before. He did live, though, I can drink to that at least. Let me check on the ladies.” (91)

The boys appreciate the fact that in the life they have chosen, and the life that has been constructed for black people, not everybody gets to live, taste, or drive ‘the flyest’, and even those who do, do so on borrowed time. This attitude of un-entitlement exists because black people have been conditioned to accept their poverty of life. As Fanon notes, the “colonial subject is a man penned in; apartheid is but one method of compartmentalizing the colonial world. The first thing the colonial subject learns is to remain in his place and not overstep its limits” (*Wretched* 15). That is why these boys console themselves by making hay while the sun shines. They know they can be cut down at any time by gang violence, police brutality, motor accidents, or Aids, which is why they spend everything – money means nothing to the dead.

Finally, with regard to the link between ostentatious behaviour and promiscuity, Siphoh, Vusi and Musa collect girls because they know they are in a privileged position that they have not always occupied. Siphoh informs us of the “discrimination of township girls, for whom reputations were paramount. They never gave this bush mechanic a chance. In the township, only the car thieves and working guys were given the time of day – lots of it” (Mzobe 59). Now that these ‘young bloods’ are ‘working’ car thieves, they are in the enviable position of being able to wreak their vengeance on the female species by collecting them as trophies. Every trophy affirms their masculinity and material success. This is why Musa states in the second chapter, “I made a resolution this year: only pretty girls ride in my car” (42). It is also why after every successful ‘score’, the ‘young bloods’ go hunting for the company of the fairer sex. This predatory behaviour is a psychological reinforcement of their resourcefulness, because the typical township-dwelling black man cannot afford all of the things township women want. On one of the rare dates that Siphoh can actually afford with his long-term girlfriend – now that he is making “crazy hustler money” and not just “survival cash for

smokes” (227) – an exchange which proves just how difficult it is for a township boy to maintain a girlfriend takes place:

“At last, you watch a movie with me,” she said.

“Other times I really don’t have cash or I am busy with fixing cars.”

“Even if I have cash you don’t want to come with me.”

“I want to spend my own money, not your father’s.” (94)

Dingz’s ‘card-trick’, in *Dog Eat Dog*, also demonstrates the ingenious lengths to which a ghetto boy must go to impress the object of his desire if he is cashless. On his intended’s birthday, Dingz steals a birthday card from his roommate: “I blotted out the name *Sakhi* with Tipp-Ex and wrote *Nkanyi* instead. Where it read *Dineo*, I carefully Tipp-Exed over the vowels *e* and *o* and wrote *gz*, so that the name read as *Dingz*” (Mhlongo 107). In Dingz’s case, *Nkanyi* falls for the trick, but just as Siphon does not want to be a kept man, no self-respecting suitor wants to resort to such trickery to stand a chance with the girl of his dreams. The point is that there are easier ways that cannot be accessed readily by the ‘have-nots’. Not only does money provide Siphon with the independence he seeks and open doors, it also opens the thighs of his beloved girlfriend, who preaches abstinence before Siphon gains money by embarking on a criminal career. Money gives Siphon the license to dream of a future with Nana that would be impossible to shape without it: “In all the exotic cars I dreamed of, she had the passenger seat. In some of the cars she was the driver while I was in the passenger seat. Her presence in my future was that definite” (Mzobe 130). His affection for Nana, however, does not interfere with the gangster ritual of celebrating criminal success with floozies. After the swift stripping of the Nissan Sentra, Siphon celebrates with a nameless girl: “One girl rode me on the sand, so slow it seemed to never end” (53). Finally, after he purchases his first car, Siphon wakes up next to a girl he refers to as his “ghost”, because all he can recall is “the complexion of her skin – a light peach bordering on yellow – but almost nothing else about her, except a white summer dress” (100, 98).

Ostentation in the novel, as evidenced in promiscuous behaviour, is therefore simply a gesture that celebrates the spoils of victory after war. As informed by sartorial elegance, it is not an over-compensatory manoeuvre to conceal low self-esteem. It is a manifestation of the apartheid Zulu adage: ‘Just because you are oppressed, it does not mean you should not take

a bath' – in other words, one can feel good about oneself in circumstances which do not permit self-esteem. When one is constantly reminded that one is of no worth by a hostile external environment, praise for one's stylish appearance negates the derogatory racial stereotypes usually attached to that appearance. Flashy clothes, along with flashy cars, also ensure that one is noticed, so that the actions that give rise to one's reputation enhance rather than tarnish it. Ostentation displayed by feats of daring, demonstrates one's aptitude for criminal activities, and alerts potential recruiters to one's skill-set – the only way to access money-making opportunities. For, as Kwame Anthony Appiah notes in *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*: “The problem of who I really am is raised by the facts of what I appear to be, and though it is essential to the mythology of authenticity that this fact should be obscured by its prophets, what I appear to be is fundamentally how I appear to others and only derivatively how I appear to myself” (76). Therefore, in a world where appearances are everything, it makes sense for that which renders one more visible – namely ostentation – to be a core value which informs behaviour.

#### **1.4) *Young Blood* and Drugs**

It is impossible to read Mzobe's *Young Blood* without observing or interrogating the prevalence of illegal substances and their concomitant abuse and distribution. Marijuana is mentioned thirty-eight times in the novel's two-hundred-and-twenty-eight pages, (11, 21, 40, 52, 66, 71, 81, 91, 124, 142, 150, 161, 179, 183, 192), Mandrax nineteen times (11, 70, 97, 118, 150, 183, 191, 200, 219, 220), ecstasy eleven (123, 149, 188, 190, 200), and cocaine four (131, 138, 139, 140). This staggering number of references to drugs points to a community desperately trying to escape the clutches of an oppressive reality through illegal substances. Sobriety is a state to be avoided by using what Siphon refers to as “mind-distorters” (Mzobe 131). We are told that “[b]eer and weed were like daily bread” (125), in a township in which “the smell of marijuana is everywhere” (11). These “instruments to forget” are also one of the only means by which one can “ma[k]e a diamond life” (156), in a context in which one is locked out – to a greater or lesser extent – of the formal economy. Marijuana is used to stave off boredom and forget the daily trauma of a marginalised existence. Ecstasy and Mandrax are regarded as the ‘cash-crops’ of the novel, and cocaine a delicacy that is only sampled at exclusive criminal gatherings.



One can see why gangsterism, drug-abuse and drug-dealing go hand in hand if one considers Fanon's point that, "deep down the colonized subject acknowledges no authority. He is dominated, but not domesticated" (*Wretched* 16). Illegal activities come to represent a form of resistance to social structures and practices which dubiously present themselves as just, while unfairly maintaining a profoundly distorted economic landscape. Profits which lie outside of the tax man's greedy grasp, and which cannot be regulated and policed by the state, are the only sources of income for those who have been banished to the wilderness that lies at the edges of the neo-liberal capitalist centre. Without an education, which he renounces early in the novel, and without 'legitimate' capital (the kind which could have been sourced from a wealthy family, let us say), Siphso both limits himself, and is necessarily limited to a life of improvisation in the criminal underworld.

Apart from Sibani's wish-list of BMWs and Mercedes-Benzes, the novel's plot is driven by two minor drug-dealing schemes of Mdala and Musa. The former plans to distribute Mandrax while the latter wishes to peddle ecstasy. Siphso is roped into both plans after Musa gives him "a practical lecture on one of his many ways of making pocket money" (Mzobe 70). They buy stolen goods from Mandrax addicts in the township then sell them to naïve university students in Westville for triple the price. At the end of the 'tutorial' Siphso tells us that, "R1000 was in my back pocket – the quickest pocket money I ever made" (70). It is the allure of easy money that makes it possible to ignore that the cravings of these Mandrax addicts "lead them to steal even from neighbouring houses in their townships. The risk is tenfold in the townships, though. If they steal from the poor and get caught, death is usually sudden" (70). This sordid contract is accepted by all involved without question, as Siphso describes the "love affair between Mandrax fiends and housebreaking [a]s age old" (70). Fanon is of the view that such risk-taking behaviour is tantamount to these addicts "committing suicide by pitting themselves against their neighbour" (*Wretched* 233). Drug abuse in the context of the township does amount to an indirect or slow form of suicide. The lived reality is unbearable so people, as Siphso puts it, simply "refill [and] create some dreamlike scenes and sins" (Mzobe 97). Homicide perpetrated by the peddlers of these poisons is then excused by the desire to be materially better off than the community compromised.

Mdala shows no concern for the potential market of his Mandrax scheme. The only motivation is that "R7000 makes a profit of R14000 in a matter of days" (118). Uncle Stan, Siphso's successful drug-dealing relative from Pietermaritzburg, reflects a similar disdain for

fellow community members in the advice he gives to his nephew: “First rule is that your product must be quality. Druggies won’t buy if it is shit. Remember you sell to people whose lives revolve around getting high. They may look like shit but they won’t buy your pills if they are shit” (185). This attitude is informed by the black expectation that one must take advantage of those who present themselves to be taken advantage of. Moele, in *Room 207*, describes the malady that plagues black South Africans as a “personal, national hate” (88). Such hate, according to Fanon in *Black Skins, White Masks*, “is typical of peoples that have not kept pace with the evolution of the human race. Or, if one prefers, this is humanity at its lowest” (89).

When one is permanently situated at life’s “tail [,] right after the anus” (Moele, 207 95), it makes sense to attempt to escape the reality of one’s surroundings, if not physically, then through mind- or mood-altering substances. Siphó and crew rely mostly on marijuana to transport them from the drudgery of their existence. It is consumed at celebrations such as Siphó’s birthday party in Lamontville (Mzobe 18), and the braai at the “beaches beyond Willows and the Durban Country Club” (52). At Nana’s matric dance in Winkelspruit, Siphó gives her friends “free rein over Musa’s stash” (129). The excuse is that “[w]eed goes down well with whisky” (129), but the truth is that it stretches out the good times that come few and far between in their young, troubled lives.

Marijuana aids in the digestion of disappointment, such as when Nana informs Siphó that she will not sleep with him. Of the snub, he tells us: “she gave me lectures on readiness. I didn’t understand – and still don’t – how anyone could make tall tales from so meaningless a word. I went to the balcony, smoked a cigarette and a blunt in succession to let my erection subside, and gave her zero for conversation” (48). Siphó’s awareness of his petulance when faced with an undesirable outcome becomes evident when he admits that, “All the women in my life say I handle rejection like a spoiled child, but I won’t change” (48). Perhaps he lacks the maturity to come to terms with the unpredictability of life, but it is precisely when he is confronted with what he perceives to be injustice that he smokes marijuana to blunt the pain of acceptance. It is a mental and emotional crutch, and his expedient use of the drug betrays a cognisance of this fact, which does not bother him. Marijuana, like religion, is the last place of refuge for the hopeless who cannot reconcile their lived experience with their psycho-affective reality.

Most poignantly, Siphho and Musa depend on marijuana to help absorb the trauma of Vusi's gruesome murder. We read that Musa "scraped a match on the blocks left over from the construction of the blue wall and lit up a blunt", before disclosing that Vusi "was shot so many times his mother had to identify his body by birthmarks and gold teeth. From the number of gunshot wounds to his head I think we will say our goodbyes to a closed casket" (142, 143). To be fair, it has to be asked whether there are other mechanisms that teenagers can call upon to process such devastating events. Of what it means to be a black person battered by the currents set in motion by colonialism, Appiah concedes that "as long as I live I know that I will not be out of these woods" (192). The despondency at being trapped in a cycle of inevitable victimisation is echoed in Moele's *Room 207*:

Africa is [. . .] first with mass murders and crime [. . .]. Did you ever ask yourself why a black person would point a gun into a crowd of black people and shoot? [. . .]. We know deep in our hearts, we all really know why. [. . .]. Because it could happen to any of us [. . .]. We have come to expect it, come to accept that my day is coming too. (94-95)

If this is not reason enough to want to alter one's state of mind, then *Young Blood* provides us with a few more. Marijuana functions as a social lubricant in the arrangement of criminal deals. It loosens tongues and predisposes everyone to negotiation. When Musa shouts, "Vusi, where is my M3?" (Mzobe 24) – referring to an 'order' he has placed for a new BMW – it is only because his interlocutor comes asking for rolling paper. Upon Siphho's introduction to Sibani to discuss the wish-list of German cars, he and Musa stumble into "the middle of a smokefest" (71). Again, when Musa and Siphho negotiate their ecstasy deal, it is only after they have "rolled a quick blunt and moved to the balcony to launch it" (124). And lastly, the finer details of Mdala's plan to distribute Mandrax are ironed out over his "stash of genuine Swazi marijuana – the Dom Perignon of weed" (150). Gangsters gather over drugs the way civilians do over dinner tables, as we see at Snow's party in Ballito. This event is described as "the only time ever that the multiracial faces of Durban crimeland were all under one roof", and this happens over "strips of cocaine as thick as highway barrier lines" (131).

The cocaine adds a touch of class but marijuana burns in the background, just as it does whenever there is a mundane task to be performed. It keeps Siphho and Vusi going as they strip the Nissan Sentra: "We revved the blunt. I downed it with water. Vusi guzzled beer. I looked at the Nissan Sentra – the victim of our destruction. It smiled a toothless grin" (40).

During old man Mbatha's *muthi* treatment, which Siphso refers to as his "lung cleaner sauna" (66), to take the edge off sobriety, he "smoked weed without end" (67). Marijuana is sought to help the hands of time tick a little faster during long and testing periods of patience, such as drives "[o]n the freeway to the township" (81), the inertia brought on by full stomachs after a "meal of meat, bread and tomatoes" (91), or the lull of the wake before Vusi's funeral (145, 147). Siphso keeps himself occupied by smoking the drug while hired painters spray his stolen car (179), suggesting that a still and sober mind is akin to a restless one.

On countless occasions, Siphso describes the soporific effect of the drug: "Yesterday [. . .] weed killed my night with the darkest blackout I ever had" (40); "I regret rolling the blunt that meant [. . .] that I dozed off" (59); "I quickly smoked two blunts from Vusi's dark green stash. I fell into a dreamy state" (86); "At Musa's we waited for the darkness with an intense session of weed smoking. I dozed off on the sofa" (147); and "I set my alarm for six in the morning, smoked a blunt and slept on the sofa" (179). This overwhelming evidence allows us to infer that drowsiness is a desired side-effect. Siphso actively pursues "the blank canvas of dreamless sleep" (168), which allows him to quell the rumblings of a disturbed subconscious. Before his arrival at his friend's wake, he informs us of the following: "My weed merchant was not home. I had no excuse – no thumb to hide behind – so I made my way to Vusi's house" (144). He reluctantly drags himself there without his "instruments to forget" (156), fully realising that he will not be able to deal with the event at a remove, balking at the prospect of processing the trauma with a clear mind.

Stereotypically, gangsters deal in drugs, but the stereotype belies the necessary relationship between the people and the product. *Young Blood* shows how members of marginalised communities are forced to eke out an existence in volatile black markets. Bereft of qualifications, they are forced to muscle into the anarchic realm of drug-peddling. Though this underhanded business destroys the moral fabric of their communities, there literally is no alternative way of making a living without preying on the next person. Life presents a trade-off between survival and morality, and as the saying goes, 'a hungry dog knows no master but its belly'. The adage captures the colonial sentiment that black people are immoral savages with cannibalistic tendencies, but when the socio-economic landscape has been crafted by the forces of colonialism, it is impossible for the oppressed to behave in any other fashion.

Drugs are functional in the sense that they allow short-tempered, bloodthirsty, suspicious personalities to see eye-to-eye. Partaking in illegal substances does not turn these violent men

into saints, but the simple gesture of sharing paves the way for negotiation. In a life that ceaselessly assaults the subject's sense of self, narcotics provide temporary respite from an unreasonably brutal reality. The pangs of tortured souls are momentarily laid to rest, and guilty consciences are eased so that sleep may come, however transient it may be. These substances are used to mark the rare times when life is good, and to shield sensitive subjectivities from the frequent times when it is bad. The mundanity of existence can be temporarily forgotten on a high, and traumatic events brooked with some degree of equanimity. We can say that the gangsters in *Young Blood* are not of the socio-economic class that can indulge in prescription, over-the-counter medication to maintain a psychological equilibrium. By necessity, they use that which they can lay their hands on in their immediate environment to make it to the next day. Mzobe, in his exploration of drug-dependency in the context of the township, poignantly re-asks the question oppressed peoples asked themselves during apartheid: 'What do you do when you can't do nothing but there's nothing you can do?'. The answer is the same as it was then: 'You do what you can'.

### 1.5) *Young Blood* as Third Literature

Now that I have covered what I believe to be *Young Blood*'s primary themes, I wish to assess its efficacy as a literary artefact in the post-apartheid society in which it exists. Mzobe's novel not only invites such a critique because it depicts township life twenty odd years into democracy, but the author explicitly states that he intended it "to be a cautionary tale for the young people" (qtd. in Jones 211-12). As Jones contends, while

contemporary township texts interrogate the possibility of social coherence, the disruptive influences of [. . .] *Young Blood* give way to the normative conclusion that "crime doesn't pay" or at least, the physical and psychological costs of crime are not worth paying. This is not to say the [novel] fail[s] to offer any societal critique rather that [its] overriding aims are the assimilation of the individual within some form of meta-narrative. (211)

Mzobe's "didactically framed" narrative follows the trajectory of a *Bildungsroman*, a literary category, which "in South African literatures has a troubled history" (211). During apartheid, the 'Jim Comes to Joburg' narratives failed to convey a convincing picture of a socially

legitimate assimilation of the black individual into society because blacks were not considered citizens by the state. “In post-apartheid South Africa”, as Jones notes, “there exists a compensatory desire to align individual change with romanticized discourses of the ‘new’ South Africa” (211). But I have argued that post-1994 South Africa bears a striking resemblance to the pre-, meaning that characters such as Siphos cannot be fully integrated into society. This means that Mzobe’s cautionary tale cannot but fail as a *Bildungsroman*, given the context in which the story unfolds. To demonstrate this, I use the theory of Third Cinema.

Many of the central tenets informing the genre of Third Cinema are evident in the construction of *Young Blood* as a work of literature. Perhaps the reason Mzobe’s novel embodies some of the film genre’s primary characteristics is because the narrative unfolds cinematically. The episodic chapters and fast-paced action limit the extent to which the interiority of characters is explored, thereby emphasising the external events which actually drive the plot. According to Tomaselli, Mzobe “avoids the development of characters as individualist type heroes”, so that they “exhibit an exclusion from the dominant social consensus [. . .]. They all have a sense of non-belonging and non-identity with the oppressive culture they inhabit, whether nationally, culturally or politically” (*Encountering Modernity* 31, 33). Siphos may appear to be the protagonist of *Young Blood*, but this belies the fact that he comes to stand for a type. He comes to represent every township-dwelling school-dropout who ever got sucked into the world of crime. Siphos, Musa and Vusi are the same in the sense that their fates are easily interchangeable. The fact that Siphos survives is an expedient narrative outcome that allows Mzobe to present education as the only way out of crime and poverty. We can argue then, as Gabriel does, that if Third Literature is “said to have a central protagonist, it is the ‘context’ [. . .]; characters only provide punctuation within it” (“Third Cinema” 60). The context of Mzobe’s novel is the township of Umlazi and the tribulations it serves up for its marginalised youths. Umlazi itself represents other townships, as we see in the dedication: “This book is dedicated to my township and yours”. The ‘young bloods’, one may thus deduce, are the ‘punctuation marks’ that accentuate the pain and fragility of township life. If “the subjects and the critics” of Third Literature are, or should be “[t]he ‘wretched of the earth’, who still inhabit the ghettos and barrios, the shanty towns and medinas, the factories and working districts” (Gabriel, “Third Cinema” 63), then Mzobe’s dedication is important in this regard as it sets up this expectation.

Is the expectation reasonable? It would be naïve to assume that the actual Siphos of the world are out there reading *Young Blood*. Siphos sees no value in education which is the

reason why he walks away from school. We can safely infer then, that *Young Blood* is aimed at a slightly different audience, which if “call[ed] to action” (Tomaselli, *Encountering Modernity* 21), as Third Literature requires, can effect material change in the living conditions of township youths. Fanon, regarded by Gabriel as “the inspirational guide for Third Cinema” (*Aesthetics of Liberation* 7), demands that the colonised intellectual identify with the man on the ground. In *The Wretched of the Earth* we are told that “the colonized intellectual [. . .] who strives for cultural authenticity, must recognize that national truth is first and foremost the national reality” (Fanon 161). Mzobe is faithful to the national reality in his depiction of Umlazi, in that the narrative he constructs “immerse[s] itself in the lives and struggles of the peoples of the Third World” (Gabriel, *Aesthetics of Liberation* xi). He successfully captures what Robert Stam, in the context of a discussion of township life, refers to as “the sense of marginality, of being condemned to survive within scarcity, of being the dumping ground for transnational capitalism, of being obliged to recycle the materials of the dominant culture” (42). It is the dispossession felt by those banished to the perimeters of society, which motivates them to violently repossess the material markers of their exclusion from the mainstream. The misguided materialism that motivates the ‘young bloods’ only serves to demonstrate the urgency of Fanon’s argument for the dispossessed to recognise the terms of their marginalisation:

We cannot go resolutely forward unless we first realize our alienation. We have taken everything from the other side. Yet the other side has given us nothing except to sway us in its direction through a thousand twists, except lure us, seduce us, and imprison us by ten thousand devices, by a hundred thousand tricks. To take also means on several levels being taken. (*Wretched* 163)

Sipho, Musa and Vusi are taken by ‘dreams of possession’, taken by what Ella Shohat refers to as “the mythical norms of Eurocentric aesthetics [which] come to inhabit the intimacy of self-consciousness, leaving severe psychic wounds” (68). As I have argued, Western markers of material success come to stand for a type of personhood attainable by consumerism in the markets that have been created in the ex-colonies. German cars and Italian clothes cover the nakedness of souls who have never truly known what it is to be human. In the world of *Young Blood*, these wounded psyches are anaesthetised by drugs because they can never truly heal. Shohat states that it is a characteristic of “[m]any Third-World [. . .] film and video projects [to] offer strategies for coping with the psychic violence

inflicted by Eurocentric aesthetics” (69). As Third Literature, Mzobe’s novel does the same, albeit through a controversial regimen of drug abuse.

This is not to say that the novel is a pamphlet for substance abuse, for we know that Mzobe intended it to be a cautionary tale. The narrative trajectory, which is very much that of a *Bildungsroman*, can be crudely summarised as follows: boy drops out of school (bad); boy enters gang (worse); boy’s friends die (terrible); boy is nearly arrested (lucky); boy returns to school (good). This predictable formula detracts from *Young Blood*’s impact as a work of Third Literature because, as Tomaselli reminds us, Third Literature, ideally, should be “[r]evolutionary in content, polemical in form [and question] bourgeois esthetic canons” (*Cinema of Apartheid* 196). It is, however, not unusual for Third Literature to shift the stylistic expectations of dominant literature, “without rejecting its form completely [as it] frequently draws on popular genres” (*Encountering Modernity* 31). Mzobe’s novel is a work of crime fiction which, I contend, would have been more effective had it emphasised the criminal success of some its peripheral characters. Uncle Stan proves that in some instances crime pays, as he tells Siphos the following: “If all goes well in this meeting, I will be through with drugs. I want to open a tyre fitment centre here in the city. I just recently realised that there is more money in rubber than in pills” (Mzobe 187). Mdala also gets away with his crimes when he goes into hiding after Musa is shot. In the socio-economic landscape which the novel presents, crime is literally the only career option for some, and the same can be said for South Africa in general.

If one agrees with Tomaselli that, “Third Cinema invokes semiotically open readings, vesting the power of interpretation in the listener/viewer” (*Encountering Modernity* 65), then Third Literature should do the same. Mzobe, however, ends the novel with this prescriptive paragraph: “My mind never again drifted in class. They teach about things of interest to me, I told myself. But in retrospect, I know that I concentrated in class because of everything I saw in the year that I turned seventeen” (228). This limp conclusion to an exhilarating tale makes up the mind of the reader. It summons the usual, hackneyed moral clichés on crime and its consequences on the one hand, and education and its benefits on the other. This conservative conclusion compromises, to an extent at least, the potential radicalism of the narrative.

To his credit, Mzobe does portray “recognisable characters” (Tomaselli, *Encountering Modernity* 21), which is a requirement of Third Literature because “it is informed [by] the cultural tastes and ideological needs of the people it represents” (Gabriel, *Aesthetics of*



*Liberation* xi). It is self-evident that Siphos tastes and needs are those of almost every township-dwelling youth. Here, I refer to financial security, romantic companionship, communal acceptance and physical safety. Mzobe's dedication of his novel to every township illustrates that he is "perceptive of and knowledgeable about the plight of the Third World masses" (Gabriel, "Towards a Critical Theory" 34). Siphos relatability as a character and Umlazi's recognisability as a township, exemplify Gabriel's contention that "in the Third World context the understanding between the viewer and the performers [or the reader and the characters] is that their positions are interchangeable without notice" (41). So, even though I read *Young Blood* as a Sowetan with university training, I recognise Siphos and know his story. I am the target audience who must seek to improve the material conditions from where I come. This project could be started by translating such a work from English to the vernacular. It could be done by adapting this text to film. However it is done, it is clear that I am the colonised intellectual to whom Fanon says, "You can talk about anything you like, but when it comes to talking about that one thing in a man's life that involves opening up new horizons, enlightening your country and standing tall alongside your own people, then muscle power is required" (*Wretched* 167).

### **1.6) *Young Blood*: Conclusions**

*Young Blood* offers little in terms of strategies for the recuperation or (re)construction of black identity. This is not to argue that black identity is innate. All identities, as I shall argue later on in the thesis, are performative and constructed. It cannot be denied that apartheid formulations of race have and continue to attach themselves to skins of different hues. I acknowledge that 'coconuts' and 'wiggas' have contributed to the deconstruction of race as an ideological trap. What I am concerned with are the representations of vernacular language speakers who were restricted to townships and bantustans under apartheid. I am interested to see how those who would have been classified as politically black under the old dispensation, are presented in the post-apartheid fiction of their counterparts (black authors). Black people, as they are portrayed in the novel, are usually violent, promiscuous, conceited druggies. The recourse to education at the end of the novel is also troubling, as we shall see in the next chapter in my discussion of Moele's latest work, *Untitled*.

Mzobe's text shows how Fanon's strategy of 'hitting back' only plays into the hands of 'the system'. *Young Blood* does not problematize the concept of race, or expose it for the social construction that it is. Every character in the novel is black and Zulu except for a few peripheral ones, such as three of the policemen who make up Mtshali's corrupt unit, the course coordinator Siphon sees at the end of the novel, and one or two hijack victims. Mzobe makes it obvious when whites are the targets of car theft, but omits details when blacks are, to the extent that we can say that a black person is not hijacked in the novel. Perhaps this is reflective of Niq Mhlongo's 'affirmative repossession', a concept which reinforces the idea that Western markers of material success are the signs of personhood. When it comes to the victims of violence though, Mzobe makes it clear that they are always black.

Violence in the novel is a great leveller. No one is above it and anyone can fall victim to it. It is used to punish traitors, eliminate rivals, protect loved ones, and settle scores. Sometimes – as we see in the case of the Cold Hearts – it is simply gratuitous. Violence is used to affirm a sense of personhood which is denied by the social conditions. It instils fear in others and, ironically enough, elevates one's status in their eyes. Violence is used to create and maintain social hierarchies, functioning as currency in the group dynamics of gang life. It is a given in the criminal underworld, a necessary risk in the pursuit of a better life. Ultimately, it is violence which scares Siphon straight, leading him to re-evaluate the value of an education and leave behind the risks and rewards of thug life.

Ostentation, as it is connected to gangsterism, increases one's visibility on the township streets. It is the principal determinant of reputations which serve as résumés for crooks. One is either recruited or rejected for criminal activities on the strength of word of mouth. The young thugs of the novel live ostentatiously because they lead fast lives which can be cut short at any moment. They boost their self-worth by spending extravagantly in a world that constantly reminds them that their lives are worth nothing.

Substances are abused in the novel to dull this sense of non-belonging. They are used to kill time or bend it, so that good experiences are extended and bad ones cut short. Drugs are used to fortify sensitive personalities in the face of traumatic events. They are also used as a form of communion whenever gangsters congregate. Finally, narcotics are used to forget and bring on sleep, calling time on what is a nightmarish waking life.

Mzobe's depiction of township life, in its verisimilitude, speaks to the central concerns of Third Literature, namely the lives and struggles of Third World peoples. He foregrounds the

context of the plot rather than the characters, thereby casting them as representatives of South Africa's marginalised masses. Mzobe though, does not do much more than reinforce the Enlightenment conception of black identity. He does not present alternative ways of constructing black subjectivity. That is, he does not interrogate the concept of race in a manner that allows us to make new deductions, or create new formulations around the idea. The novel's weak ending does not pave the way for new ways of inhabiting dark skin. Education is salvation in *Young Blood* but Mzobe does not ask whose education and why. He does not ask why a certificate is needed in order to survive in the society he depicts. The novel's conclusion fails – dismally so – to resolve the weighty sociological problems that it raises. The *Bildung* that Sipho undergoes is, in fact, so exceptionally improbable that it detracts from the authenticity of the text. *Young Blood's* easy categorisation as a crime-fiction *Bildungsroman*, does little to break the conventions of dominant literary traditions. I would go as far as to say it reinforces them. In these ways, the novel fails as a work of Third Literature, but it does, for a specific reader, induce a call to action. By forging a strong sense of identification with its characters, it instils a certain obligation to eliminate the conditions in which the real life Siphos, Musas and Vusis are forced to live.

The next chapter will explore the manner in which young black female identity is presented in the new South Africa. Mokgethi, the teenage protagonist of *Untitled*, stays in school unlike Sipho. She even aspires to attend Oxford one day. It should be interesting to explore the idea of education as a way out of hardship for oppressed black youths. I shall also endeavour to unmask the ways in which biological sex coalesces with the experience of racialized oppression. In reading *Young Blood* and *Untitled* against each other, I hope to reveal the complex manner in which black males and females relate to each other as victims of race-based marginalisation. I shall also see whether Moele, unlike Mzobe, plots new directions for the expression of black identity.

## Chapter 2

### *Untitled* and the Failures of Community and State

#### 2.1) An Introduction to *Untitled*

Moele's third novel allows me to contrast the fortunes of his and Mzobe's narrators. Equal in age and social class, different in sex and attitude, Mokgethi and Siphon represent post-apartheid black youth today. As I have previously acknowledged, the term 'black' is loaded, and the manner in which I apply it grows more nuanced as the thesis develops. In my chapter on Duiker for instance, Azure demonstrates that one need not subscribe to any particular racial category. For the purposes of this chapter, the term applies to those who would have been classified under the category 'black' during apartheid.

The first part of my chapter will deal with the role that education plays in the novel, the second with the influence of the township community, and the last will assess how *Untitled* weighs up as a work of Third Literature. My first section interrogates an idea that is first raised by Mzobe in *Young Blood*, namely that the key to a bright future is a good education. The novel explores the events that befall young people who attend township schools. What becomes of them then and there, and what lies in store for them in the future? Siphon decides to return to school by the conclusion of Mzobe's novel, while Mokgethi never entertains the idea of dropping out. The potential for a parallel reading of both narratives is obvious, and perhaps the conclusions drawn could allow us to assess the current state of public education in South Africa.

Since Fanon's theory is invaluable in understanding social relations in the colonised's sector, I draw upon his formulations to explain some of the maladaptive behaviour which we encounter in the novel. *Untitled* thematises rape, and in order for rape to occur, a level of complicity is required from the community. I focus on the manner in which the citizens of Teyageneng treat the victims as well as the perpetrators of these crimes. The factors which

make such aberrant occurrences commonplace also receive attention. Concomitantly, women's social standing in rural township communities is an issue which I address in some depth.

I then segue into my examination of the novel as Third Literature, in which I draw on the work of Sam Durrant to explain the nature of the relationship between oppressed men and women. His work is relevant because it attempts to formulate possible solutions to the scourge of sexual violence. This section deals with the responsibilities of the post-independence government to its oppressed masses. Here, Fanon is essential once again. Third Cinema theorists are only used in as far as they address the focus areas listed above. Finally, I explore the tensions involved in the creation of astereotypical, context-independent black identities. Here, I rely on the work of George Yancy, who was not used in the previous chapter, because Mzobe did not explore the issue of black identity to any significant degree. Moele's work merits the critic's inclusion.

## **2.2) *Untitled* and (Mis)Education**

In my previous chapter, I introduced my interrogation of the thesis that education is salvation from poverty. In *Untitled*, we have a narrator who is similar to Siphon in age and circumstance, but who, unlike him, reveres education. Justice Malala describes Mokgethi as “a sensitive schoolgirl who harbours dreams of the University of Cape Town and Oxford” (para. 11). There, she intends to obtain a qualification so that she may one day practise actuarial science. She is aware that she “is a very intelligent girl who is concerned about her schoolwork” (Moele, *Untitled* 38). Our young narrator goes on to detail her proficiencies with a self-assurance that belies her years: “I can solve any mathematical equation, write a very sound essay and read and understand a book on my own. I have never, ever failed a test or an exam in my whole schooling life and the last time I took an evaluation test they didn't believe that I was from a rural/disadvantaged primary school” (38). She is not deluded as to her abilities and is fully cognisant of the challenges that lie ahead: “I would love to be in Britain [. . .] but a hundred wishes squared plus nine wants minus a billion complications equals X. X as in the unknown sum. Mathematically I can solve any equation but this X, this real-life X, remains an X no matter what I do” (39). The path to salvation, as Malala reminds us, is mined with “abortions, pregnancies, battles with conservative families and attempts to

evade township thugs. To reach matric is a miracle, to go beyond a triumph of incredible proportions” (para. 13). It is difficult make it out of the township unscathed, as we see in Miyeni’s *The Release*, when Jeremy “tries to explain to an old lady how he escaped the ghetto”, and suggests that “it was a combination of school and luck” (45). Mokgethi intuitively that a similar strategy may work for her, even though she knows the odds are stacked against her from the outset.

It is easy to see why Mokgethi comes to this conclusion, for she is the progeny of highly educated parents. When it is ludicrously suggested that she give up her Oxford dream and apply to a nursing college instead, she responds in lucid fashion: “My mother had a degree from a university, Aunt Sarah has a degree from a university and so does my uncle. [. . .]. Why would I be born to people who have degrees and then disgrace them with a one-year nursing diploma?” (Moele, *Untitled* 55). Mokgethi seems to have a tenuous grasp of the source of her thirst for knowledge as she tells us of her deceased mother:

My mother is no more; she left us, passed away when I was just four years old. She had a BA in social work from the University of the North. I was born exactly four months after she graduated; her degree certificate hangs on the back of my bedroom door. I don’t know who put it there but it has been there since I came into consciousness. At times I thought that this degree was my inheritance, all that she left me. Long time ago, when I was still small, naïve, I used to think that when I was older I would just take it and it would be mine. (10)

Mokgethi brags affectionately about how her “mother was a bookworm” (11), which is unsurprising since the narrator is also an avid reader and a dilettante at writing poetry. She cannot explain where she picked up these literary tastes: “Writing poetry and reading: I do not know why I started doing these things but I am doing them” (36). She goes on to catalogue an impressive list of her favourite titles: “One was Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*. Another was Camara Laye’s *The Dark Child* [. . .]. The funniest book I ever read was Chenjerai Hove’s portrait of Zimbabwean life: *Shebeen Tales*” (37). For a seventeen-year-old girl from a rural township community, her reading habits are refreshingly sophisticated. We can infer then that to some degree, Mokgethi seeks to follow in her mother’s footsteps.

Her father, who is absent during her formative years, is a magistrate who encourages her tentative ambition to attend Oxford one day. He tells her that, “Education has no price. It is as

one's life: priceless" (20). Prior to this, he provides her with the following assurance: "Let your grades talk for you, my dear. Maybe they can make me sell this car for you" (19). She is overjoyed by his outward show of support and contentedly reflects that "at least my dad understood my position" (20). This position is one that is typical of colonised subjects who come to embrace the value of Western epistemologies in a context in which one cannot succeed without them. In Mhlongo's *After Tears*, yet another Kwela text, Bafana reflects an awareness of the limited purchase of African knowledge systems when he tells his mother that, "the only black people that are preserving their culture are those that find it difficult to rise above the yoke of poverty", and this is because "you can't think big in African languages" (175). The sentiment here is that African languages are ill-equipped to convey Western ideas, and because of this their practitioners remain locked out of the dominant discourse that informs neo-liberal capitalism, and its benchmarks for survival and success.

This idea is also at work in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Desertion*, a text which explores how the colonised are unhomed by an education which they are obliged to pursue. For instance, we are told that, a "school education had been a personal quest, an undertaking into which other unspoken ambitions had been displaced, the route to a new and enlightened world" (139). The point is reinforced in another novel that explores similar subject matter. In the world depicted in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, "the English language was the key to the future: no one had a chance without it" (53). It does not matter if the dominant language and its attendant culture alienate one's sense of self, as we are warned in *Desertion*: "They'll make you despise your people and make you eat with a metal spoon and turn you into a monkey who speaks through his nose [ . . . ]. They will turn you into a kafir" (Gurnah 138). This is the cost one has to pay to improve one's material living conditions. It is a transaction that elides the question George Yancy poses from the perspective of the coloniser, in "Whiteness and the Return of the Black Body": "How much can you hate yourself, while forgetting that it came from us?" (232).

Our protagonist is aware that she is the victim of many misfortunes, such as the death of her mother, the absence of her father, her removal from private school, and the victimisation she experiences at the hands of her extended family. These daily tortures are compounded by the hardships of township life, which seem to be more brutal on women. The only people Mokgethi sees living comfortably are those who have bought their way out with a certificate. In addition to Mokgethi's highly educated parents, her Aunt Sarah and Uncle Lefa also possess tertiary qualifications. Uncle Lefa is a "teacher with a BA in Education from the

[local] university, not from a college of education” (Moele, *Untitled* 48). He loves nothing more than to boast about this fact as it sets him apart as, in Mokgethi’s words, “the ultimate man in [the] community” (48). Then there is Aunt Sarah who “is a lecturer at the University of the North” (56), completing Mokgethi’s circle of educated role models. It is not enough to aspire to a certain level of learnedness though, for there are other challenges to negotiate.

In “A Proletarian Novel of the City Streets”, Radithlalo contends that, “Alongside Mhlongo [. . .], Moele writes – deliberately, and with utter conviction – of South Africa’s ‘lost generation[s]’: young people with high expectations who face formidable obstacles” (94). The author of *Untitled* and *Room 207* often moulds characters who are equipped with the intelligence to penetrate the citadels of education, but fail in their quest for academic success due to hostile external environments. To illustrate this point, Radithlalo summarises *Room 207* in the following terms:

It is set in Hillbrow and concerns six college and university drop-outs who share a one-roomed flat: D’nice, Noko, Modishi, Matome, Molamo and S’busiso (aka ‘Zulu-Boy’) [. . .] are drawn to [the city] by necessity and the desire to ‘make it’. [. . .]. Yet unease with this pursuit of happiness also stems from the fact that only a limited few can succeed. (94-95)

Radithlalo sees Matome as the epitome of this near-hopeless pursuit of dreams of possession. When the young man is asked about his primary goal – establishing a label called Brains Records – he replies that he is “building it from nothing with nothing” (Moele, *207* 82). ‘Making it’ is improbable, and this view is reinforced when we are invited to look upon the ‘wall of inspiration’ – a section of the one-roomed flat which is plastered with posters of celebrities – and are told by Noko, the novel’s narrator, that these “are not role models at all but people like you and me, who, in their own ways and byways, made it to the top” (16). This statement demonstrates Radithlalo’s observation that, “Built into the seemingly plotless narrative is the idea that failure in life is not unexpected: the path to the top can be mastered only by a few while others, to varying degrees, settle for second best” (“A Proletarian Novel of the City Streets” 95). Radithlalo sums up the novel’s conclusion neatly, presenting us with a clear picture of the lottery that is life, even for those who were once first in line at institutions such as Wits University:



Matome announces his success with Brain [sic] Records by hosting the “out of Hillbrow” party, which was meant for all of them but ultimately becomes his alone [. . .]. D’nice finally settles into a good job, Molamo becomes the new version of the kept man, Modishi embraces middle-class respectability even as he exhibits borderline psychosis, and S’busiso succumbs to HIV-AIDS. Only Noko acknowledges failure as he journeys out of “dream city” as poor as when he arrived and without his illusions.

(95)

The six flatmates’ varying fortunes reflect “a society in transformation. [. . .] that refuses the neat formulation of ‘a better life for all’ in the idealized ‘Rainbow Nation’” (95).

In *Untitled*, his third novel, Moele continues his deconstruction of the ‘Rainbow Nation’ by depicting a protagonist who buys into the ‘South African dream’, but is ultimately let down by it. As in *Room 207*, education is presented as the path out of poverty, but as we shall see, it is a path laden with danger. Mokgethi begins her educational journey at a private school at which, had she stayed, she would have enjoyed continued access to opportunities of which typical township kids are deprived. In a touching lament, she catalogues these missed opportunities in poetic form:

*If I were there*

*I would be in the library*

*I would be representing the school*

*I would be captain of the netball team*

*I would be discussing careers and my future*

*I would have written the best play ever*

*I would be editor of the school newsletter.* (Moele, *Untitled* 134)

These dreams are only possible in the colonist’s sector, which Fanon describes thus:

The colonist’s sector is a sector built to last, all stone and steel. It’s a sector of lights and paved roads [. . .]. The colonist’s feet can never be glimpsed [. . .]. They are protected by solid shoes in a sector where the streets are clean and smooth, without a pothole, without a stone. The colonist’s sector is a sated, sluggish sector, its belly is permanently full of good things. (*Wretched* 4)

If one recalls Fanon's earlier damning description of the colonised's sector, the contrast is clear. The disparity in the quality of life between these two sectors is made starker by Mokgethi's companion piece, which compares the trajectory she would have taken at her old private school, with the one she is forced to take at her new public school:

*but I am here*

*I am having a nothing indaba with my so-called friends*

*I am just a pupil*

*I am playing netball on game days only*

*I am discussing boyfriends*

*I am starring in a real-life Survivor show*

*I am listening to juicy-greasy gossip*

*Yes [ . . . ] I am here trying-doing the best that I can. (Moele, Untitled 134)*

Mokgethi is only removed from her old private school because, for some mysterious reason, her extended family simply stops paying the fees. She is heartbroken by this sudden eviction from surroundings which she believes would have been her "first step to greatness" (39). The transition is even more difficult to accept because, upon hearing the news, the head of her old school pays her a visit: "I had never talked to the headmaster at my old school, but when I left he personally wanted to know why Mokgethi was leaving his school, to the extent that he came to this house to have the reasons. He was told that the reasons were financial" (183-84). This does not deter him as he reassures Mokgethi's grandmother that, "I am not looking for money; I am here looking for Mokgethi. Can I take her and educate her? I can take her with me now and she will have the best education there is and you can pay me when and only when you have the money" (184). He insists that he is "interested in education, in Mokgethi's education", because "[s]he is one of the brightest pupils [ . . . ] and [ . . . ] to take her to another school [ . . . ] would be a tragedy for all" (184). Mokgethi's grandmother is moved by these stirring words but Aunt Shirley rejects the compromise for undisclosed, spiteful reasons.

Our young narrator is aware that her old headmaster's interest in her future is for her sake as much as the school's. She is familiar with the commercial imperatives that turn elitist private institutions into brands which must then sustain themselves:

I sat down after a month at my new school and compared it to my old school. My new school didn't have a school bus, established sports facilities or modern sports equipment, a library or a laboratory – though it had all the books and laboratory equipment that we needed. Yes my old school was profit-orientated, interested only in maintaining the character of the school and promoting its graduates' achievements for its own ends – they organise reunions every year to maintain a connection with their ex-students, knowing that they will then be likely to bring their own children to the school when the time is right. But even this means that they are interested in every individual who comes into the school. (183)

It is significant that her old school is interested in every pupil's academic development, unlike Mr Shatale – the principal of Teyageneng High School – who is not. This is what Moele has to say about Mokgethi's new principal in an interview with Nancy Richards:

The contradiction between [. . .] the two headmasters, when you see the way they care about the little girl, if you [. . .] compare them, they seal the story of what really is happening, because the first headmaster has interest in the future of the girl, and then the second one has other interests in the future of the girl as well so, I think the story of the two headmasters sums everything up. I think it sums up the sadness I wrote the story in. (n.p.)

We shall come to a discussion of Mr Shatale's 'interests' in due course, but first let us weigh up Mokgethi's assessment of her new school principal:

Shatale is our dictator; the worst kind of stupid dictator-principal, highly educated but completely visionless, like Sese Seko, with childlike goals and dreams and the mentality that the day he dies the whole world will die with him. By virtue of being the leader of a team of forty teachers, he affects them the way Sese Seko affected all his public servants. Even if not all of them are like him, and keep their perversions away from us, they cannot change the culture in the school if Mobuto does not want it changed. At our school, the lazy teachers enjoy their work and the hard workers fall through the cracks. And the pupils learn this from an early age – the pupils here are lazy and have no respect for their teachers. (*Untitled* 185)

So, what happens to students who are locked out of the unhoming, yet life-changing socio-economic benefits of a private education? What is the lot of those who are left at the mercy of a post-apartheid state education? For them, is school a haven that provides temporary sanctuary from the violence of unforgiving township streets? Is a public education a worthwhile personal investment in the construction of a brighter future? It may be for “Clement, Orelia, Lucy, Lefa and Thapelo” who “passed matric with flying colours last year” (187). They motivate Mokgethi because she believes that in extremely difficult circumstances, they “put themselves in the driving seat and drove themselves to those results” (187). Here, Mokgethi recognises the exceptionality of these students’ achievements, but what of the unexceptional cases, or more interestingly, the exceptional cases who cannot but meet up with an unexceptional end?

Mokgethi tells us that, “Teyageneng High School is barely a school” (185), and this is because the teachers there are barely teachers. It would be more accurate to characterise them as sexual predators masquerading as educators. The community gladly entrusts these paedophiles with the noble task of shaping the young, impressionable minds of its most vulnerable members. Lunga Mkila criticises such communities in the following terms in his review: “As if Moele is in conversation with theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who once said, ‘The test of the morality of a society is what it does for its children,’ *Untitled* tackles the issue of teachers preying on young girls like Mokgethi [sic]” (para. 4). In his interview with Richards, Moele stresses the immoral opportunism of this type of sexual predation:

A teacher, you sit with him in the classroom each and every day of your life. Those are [. . .] role models [. . .]. When you sit down with a teacher, and [. . .] you have a relationship [. . .], that’s [. . .] the role model part [. . .], that’s what you want to achieve because this person knows you [. . .]. He knows what you like. He knows your intelligence. He knows your potential. He knows everything about the students, so, that’s what I think we need [. . .]. We need teachers and not paedophiles. (n.p.)

In *Untitled*, we are presented with male teachers who use the authority vested in them by the community as a shroud to cover their aberrant sexual behaviour. They use their salaries, in a context of extreme poverty, to groom young girls into sex slaves. Mokgethi informs us that her own Uncle Lefa, the man who is seen as a pillar of the community because he is a

teacher, “went after Pheladi and Joy and Lebo” (*Untitled* 48), all of whom are Mokgethi’s age. When they ask for her advice, Mokgethi deduces that, “In reality they were only gauging if I approved of them having a relationship with him” (48-49). Advances from adult males are a part of everyday life for young girls, as Mokgethi observes of her best friend: “when a girl is put in this position, she learns to love it and somehow take pride in it, like a prisoner serving a life sentence. Prison life just becomes his life, it is not prison anymore. Lebo is that girl. She is in this position and loving it all” (65). To illustrate her point, Mokgethi details an alarming ritual that is known as ‘a direct under the table challenge’:

There is a thing that Lebo and some of the girls at my school do when a male teacher is teaching. Lebo does it mostly when a lesson bores her and the teacher happens to be a man. Then she will put her feet on the side bars that hold her table’s support together, and open her legs wide, showing off to distract him. (66)

It is after such a challenge that Lebo engages in consensual intercourse with her school principal; a man who happens to be a forty-nine-year-old father of four.

Lebo misguidedly agrees to coitus with Shatale, but rape is an ever-present threat as we see in the case of Little Bonolo. At the age of eleven she is sexually violated by “her class teacher, a senior teacher at that, a husband and father of six” (91). The same man, namely Letshele, tries and fails to rape Mokgethi when she is a child. He grooms her with money to spend at the local *spaza*, and then implores the little Mokgethi to keep the cooldrinks and chocolate bars a secret, “because people will be jealous that you have a teacher for a friend” (97). When Letshele makes his move, she kicks him in the face, and that is the only reason she manages to escape: “Running away didn’t occur to Little Bonolo or maybe Letshele learned from his mistake with Mokgethi. Either way, he had his way with her and got what he had been scheming for” (98). Mokgethi writes a poem entitled “Bonolo”, in which she wants the addressee to “*understand that you are my great South African*” (133). It is shattering to think that a great South African in the post-apartheid context can be thought of as a rape survivor; shattering but true in a country in which the abuse of women and children is the national pastime. Even more shocking is the realisation that some of the victims of this violence are sexually assaulted at school by teachers who are effectively in *loco parentis*.

In the world depicted in *Untitled*, statutory rape is commonplace, for we learn that Lebo is only “the latest of Shatale’s trophies” (74). The prevalence of this crime begs the question

that is raised by Mkila in his review: “why is the ghetto the only place where these vicious deeds appear not as aberrations or deviations from the norm?” (para. 6). We accept that in a context where, as Jane Rosenthal describes it, “young girls in school [. . .] have cellphones (but no airtime), and [. . .] access to computers and TV (while still having to heat water on the stove to wash)” (para. 3), it is easy, as Mokgethi observes, for “[p]eople like Letshele and Shatale [to] use money as bait” (Moele, *Untitled* 101). When a former pupil shows Shatale her results, we are told that, “he took out his wallet, pulled something out of it that looked to be a note, put it on the statement of results and gave it back to her” (101). This is how young schoolgirls are groomed into sex. Should the subtle approach fail, they are simply held down and raped, as is the case with Little Bonolo. These teachers rape students with impunity, which is a symptom of a deeper, communal rot. As I indicated earlier, the community has vested these men with authority; the type that has turned Teyageneng High School into an unsafe place. There is every reason for the young girls of Teyageneng to fear the kind of education on offer at this school, as we see in the concern expressed by Mokgethi:

The worst thing in this community is that most of our male teachers are the ones teaching us, the Lebos of the community, sexual education. They do it on a one-on-one tutorial basis. One can understand a sugar daddy – I am not saying that sugar daddies are okay, but one can understand them. One can say that they are social cripples, but a teacher, a senior teacher and, worst of all, a principal [. . .] none of them will ever “tutor” me. They have tried and tried but I always say no. They have their schemes, their tricks and their traps, but I know them all. My fear now is that they will rape me. After which there will be nothing I can do about it. (91)

It goes without saying that teenage girls should not reasonably expect to be raped on school grounds. So, now that we have established that school is not a safe place to be, let us examine the reasons why. To do this, I focus on the role of the township community depicted in the novel, in the next section of this chapter.

### **2.3) *Untitled* and the Community**

The rural township community depicted in *Untitled* is one that is at war with itself. It is a community that is complicit in the oppression of its women and children. In Teyageneng,

danger not only lurks in the street or at home, but most disturbingly, even at school. Rosenthal accurately observes that, Teyageneng “could be Anyvillage or Anytownship in South Africa” (para. 6), which means that, similarly to Mzobe’s Umlazi in *Young Blood*, Moele’s township comes to be representative rather than context-specific. This representative power grants *Untitled* the authority to comment on the social ills that it explores. When asked what issue his novel addresses, Moele responds to Richards as follows: “There’s a war going on very silently, within our own [. . .] society, [. . .] nobody’s doing anything about it, [. . .] nobody even cares” (n.p.). This war is against “women, young girls, tiny girls” (Rosenthal para. 4).

According to Fanon, the female inhabitant of the colonised’s sector is the primary target of the “aggressiveness sedimented in [the] muscles” of the impotent colonised male (*Wretched* 15). Due to this victimisation, as Homi K. Bhabha states, “The defences of the colonized [female] are tuned like antennae waiting to pick up the hostile signals of a [. . .] divided world. In the process, the colonized [female] acquire[s] a peculiar visceral intelligence dedicated to the survival of body and spirit” (ix). She knows that her “fate is in the balance. [She] live[s] in a doomsday atmosphere”, which explains why she “is constantly tense, on hold, between life and death” (Fanon, *Wretched* 40, 219). Sartre suggests that, this is because she “gets the message: one cannot afford to make a single mistake” (xlv). In Moele’s novel, Mokgethi is vigilant until the last fourteen pages of the narrative, taking pains to ensure that she is indoors before dark unless she is accompanied by James and Mamafa. She describes the pair as the “two people I trust; two people who, I know, understand who the real Mokgethi is. I don’t like to be found anywhere after eighteen hundred without them, as after that I do not trust anyone else. Even my girlfriends will sell me” (Moele, *Untitled* 41). Our young narrator is, in the Fanonian sense, constantly braced for danger, even with the protection of her two best friends. The resignation of township girls to the common fate of rape is first expressed by Mokgethi in the introductory paragraph of the chapter called “James and Mamafa”: “I survived this long because there were people around me who cared and loved Mokgethi, but I knew all along that this day was coming” (41). Again, on the first page of the chapter “Pheladi”, Mokgethi states, “In the part of this big world where I live, young girls are celebrated for a short time, the beautiful ones worshipped until they fall. Yes, we all do fall. I knew that Mokgethi’s fall was coming” (59).

In the end, it is not Shatale who rapes her, but she is constantly on guard against him all the same, as she exhibits in the following confession: “Sometimes I [...] think that, although I

know his tricks, I will one day discover myself in some secluded place, naked in the back of his car, in complete disbelief of the facts” (76). There is a definite sense of powerlessness when it comes to the retention of one’s virginity. One is forever at the mercy of men who could snatch it away at any time. Mokgethi expresses the helplessness of being a woman when her eventual rapist, Thabakgolo, deflowers her: “Lifetimes pass with every in and out and with every in and out the pain and my anger grow until I realise that I am not actually angry with Thabakgolo but with myself for not being able to do anything to stop him” (196). And when it is over, a tearful Mokgethi admits to herself that, “I didn’t want him to do this to me. ‘If I was a man!’ became a full stop to every thought I had. [. . .] if I was a man I would shoot you. [. . .] if I was a man I would cut your balls off right now. If was a man. . . If I was a man. . .” (197). Women can obviously wield knives and shoot guns, but Mokgethi’s lament highlights their seemingly fixed status as permanent victims of male violence. So ever-present is the threat of male abuse, that she reminds herself as she races home after the attack, that the “sun is setting and it crosses my mind that I could get raped again” (198). It is inevitable that as a woman she will be victimised by men. We see this at the end of the novel when she sums up her thoughts on the incident:

I knew it all along, since I was eleven. Ever since that age I have been running, ducking, hiding and looking behind me to avoid this situation. It had to happen, yes, but I wanted it to happen after I turned twenty-one and never like this. I am only seventeen and Thabakgolo raped me. [. . .]. Cry, little girls of my beloved country, the Bonolos, the Pheladis, the Lebos and the Dineos that have to live, are living, in communities full of men who prey on us every day. We have come to accept that there will never be an end to this. We have come to love it because there is nothing we can do about it but extract some joy out of it. The community will victimise us, no matter the reality of the situation. (208)

It is significant that Mokgethi implicates the community in her violation, for as I suggested earlier, it is responsible for the empowerment of these men. Mokgethi describes Teyageneng as “a community in shambles [with] nothing holding it together” (89). In a damning assessment, she continues as follows: “There is nothing [. . .] that anyone from Teyageneng can be proud of. Why? Because the pillars of this community are the likes of Shatale and nothing can grow while they are in charge” (89). This searing indictment of the moral character of the township’s inhabitants is brought on by a series of rumours that she and Shatale are in an affair. Lebo sets local tongues wagging after Mokgethi distances herself



from her friend's sexual relationship with their principal. After Mamafa warns Mokgethi against further involvement with Lebo because "she has a decaying mind" (75), the latter is slighted and embarks on a campaign of character assassination against Mokgethi. Instead of questioning the veracity of the outlandish claims, or questioning the character of the school principal, the people of Teyageneng lap up Lebo's lies and excommunicate Mokgethi. The community is only too eager to believe these allegations because they have seen it all happen before. In a context in which young girls are forced to value men for money, it is easy to believe that a schoolgirl can sleep with her principal. As Mokgethi surmises, "The reality is that men are aware of the problems we face and use money as bait" (101). We see this attitude in one old man's comments after Little Bonolo is raped: "*She is hungry, what can she do*" (101). Instead of receiving support, Bonolo is blackballed:

The community said that she "wanted it", but how can an eleven-year-old girl want to be raped? The community said Little Bonolo was trying to extort money [. . .], but how can an eleven-year-old girl think of extorting money [. . .]? The community said that Little Bonolo was Letshele's mistress [. . .]. But how can an eleven-year-old girl be someone's mistress? (91-92)

This base thinking is symptomatic of a community that has been reduced to the animal level. As Fanon puts it, when colonialism's "Manichaeism reaches its logical conclusion and dehumanizes the colonized subject. [. . .] he [or she] is reduced to the state of an animal" (*Wretched* 7). He goes on to add that, the "values which seemed to ennoble the soul prove worthless because they have nothing in common with the real-life struggles in which the people are engaged" (11). His thesis is persuasive in that it presents us with the hope of rehabilitation for the colonised. This hope is, however, conditional. Fanon contends that, "What matters today, the issue which blocks the horizon, is the need for a redistribution of wealth. Humanity will have to address this question, no matter how devastating the consequences may be" (55). It is only by eliminating the condition of poverty that we may begin to eliminate concomitant antisocial acts of desperation. Fanon is of the view that, "If working [and living] conditions are not modified it will take centuries to humanize this world which the imperialist forces have reduced to the animal level" (57). I concur with his assertion that, "The colonized subject is so starved of anything that humanizes him [or her] [. . .] that [. . .] trivial handouts in some cases manage to impress him [or her]" (90). This contention goes a long way towards explaining the coercion which precedes the sexual

predation of the young girls of *Untitled*. Some of them, as we see in Lebo's case, court the sexual exploitation dealt out by uncouth adult men, in exchange for material comforts and rewards. Perhaps if the colonised's sector bore more of a resemblance to the colonist's, colonised subjects would not be "at constant risk of being disarmed by any sort of concession" (90). While there are other reasons for the mistreatment of women by men in the colonised's sector, the one mentioned above is of telling importance.

After Little Bonolo's rape at the hands of Letshele, the state prosecutor abandons the edicts of law and suggests the following alternative: "can we not just deal with this as a community? Make him pay a certain amount of money? The white man's law will put him in jail but I do not think that will satisfy you. Whereas if you make him pay for doing this, he pays and we are all fine" (Moele, *Untitled* 94). We are then told that, Letshele "paid fifteen thousand rand for his freedom" (95), and was free to continue his paedophilic activities in the community. The suggestion that material recompense can erase the trauma suffered by a victim of sexual assault in the eyes of the community, and that this is the 'African' way of doing things, shows us how the community in question regards its women. If women can be paid for in rituals such as *lobola*, then it follows that any victimisation suffered at the hands of men can be settled with a simple financial transaction.

Social currency can also be deployed in similar fashion, as we see in the case of MmaSetshaba, who is raped at knife point by Thapelo. His father leads a delegation to the family of the aggrieved to make a proposal. After admitting that, "Women have been raped since the beginning of time", he goes on to suggest the following: "Seeing that our son [. . .] has disgraced your daughter, we would ask very shamefully to take your daughter in marriage so that the shame that was cast upon your family is our shame too" (102, 103). Mokgethi describes the arrangement as, "A marriage that began as a violation; two families united in the aftermath of rape" (103). This ritual, we are told by Mkila, is known as *ukuthwala*, and is defined as "the practice of abducting young girls and forcing them into marriage" (para. 7). Unfortunately, it is a "controversial aspect of our national discourse" (para. 7), which forces us to arrive at some unpalatable conclusions about a society in which rape can be legitimised by marriage. If, as Malala reflects, this "is allegedly the way we Africans do it" (para. 11), then we must admit to ourselves – as Mkila does – that, "Our societies are simply organised in such a way that some people count for so little that they can be abused with impunity" (para. 8). We must publically acknowledge that, "We are in the middle of an undeclared war on women and children" (para. 7).

Mokgethi describes a heart-breaking incident which illustrates how the police too are implicated in the patriarchal socio-political apparatus, which contributes to the oppression of women. We are told of a young girl by the name of Dineo who is grievously assaulted by her businessman-entrepreneur boyfriend after allegations of an affair involving her and a schoolteacher. Dineo presses charges but the police inform the accused and actually ask him “what they should do” (Moele, *Untitled* 93). He responds by telling her: “I know where you are. I can see. I have eyes everywhere, watching. Go ahead, open a docket – I will visit jail but you will sleep at the mortuary. [. . .] I will be out in time to help dig your grave” (93). After her own sexual assault, Mokgethi gives voice to plaintive resignation that is prescient in its broad application to women as a social category:

I am crying for help but where am I expecting this help to come from? Who is it I expect to come and help us? I know that there is no woman who can help us. Even if there is one, she will be between men and even if she suggests any action, they will look at her with manly eyes because they are the ones doing this to us. Yes, this woman feels my pain because she has been me – there is a man in her life who once did this to her – but the men she is between have done this to me. How can I expect a man to come and help me if he is the one doing this to me? The people who lead us are these men, the people who write the law are these men, the people who administer justice are these men, and the people who police us are these men. How can they put him in prison? How can they write a law against him? How can they not find in his favour? How can they not protect him? Because he is them.

I wipe away my tears because I have just discovered that this is a very old, very big subjugation. (209)

Her moment of clarity captures the failure of democracy in painful, truthful terms. Moele responds to Richards, when queried on the social impact of his novel, in terms that make it clear what needs to be done in post-apartheid South Africa: “We need to make the Constitution live to the point where it gets to [. . .] rural [. . .] communities, [. . .] the [. . .] poorest [. . .] communities. The Constitution must live. [. . .] if the Constitution only lives for the elite, it becomes functionless” (n.p.). It is clear from the narrative with which we are presented in the novel that South Africa is failing its women and children. Mokgethi hears the following line on television: “The struggle has changed its face” (*Untitled* 209). To her though, “this struggle has not changed its face. This struggle’s face is the same as it ever was because it lacks a woman to lead it” (209). Fanon’s conception of the post-liberation struggle of the colonised extends to the following areas of society: “poverty, illiteracy, and

underdevelopment” (*Wretched* 51). But as we see in the development of our narrator, as “[t]he people stagnate miserably in intolerable poverty [they] slowly become aware of the unspeakable treason of their leaders” (112). Mokgethi comes to realise that as a young woman from the township, she is let down daily by every sector of South African society. I shall now turn my attention to some of the failures of the post-apartheid state in my treatment of *Untitled* as Third Literature.

#### 2.4) *Untitled* as Third Literature

Moele has always been highly critical of the failings of the post-apartheid state. In *Untitled*, as we have seen, he breaks the silence surrounding the covert war against women and children in our homes. He attributes this violence against the weakest members of our society to the failure of the Constitution to reach those it was designed to protect. This cannot but be a failure of the state. Mkila tells us that, Moele’s “oeuvre is about everyday people’s struggles: their hopes and despair, their poverty and the way they are ravaged by HIV/AIDS” (para. 3). For Gabriel, as we have seen, Third Literature is primarily concerned with the following: “*The theme: Lives and struggles of Third World Peoples*” (“Towards a Critical Theory” 33). Malala characterises Moele’s literary project in similar terms when he states that, “He has revealed the emotions, and the blood and the gore, and the children and mothers, behind the newspaper headlines. Moele walks a path not many choose to walk: the voices of the marginalised, abused, defenceless, infuse his writing” (para. 8-9). Rosenthal summarises Moele’s first work of fiction, *Room 207*, as a novel that “showed what it was like to be a young black man with more brains and aspirations than available funds, battling against the odds in Hillbrow in the throes of transformation” (para. 2). His second title, *The Book of the Dead*, is described by Mkila as the “story of a man living with HIV [. . .] whose high point is when the virus, in a moment of ventriloquism, assumes a voice and tells of its conquests” (para. 2). And finally, in *Untitled*, “the protagonist [. . .] takes us on a journey through her life. It is brutal. The school principal sleeps with her friends. The teachers try to lure her into bed” (Malala para. 11). These narratives belie the metanarrative of the ‘Rainbow Nation’ that was promised to us in 1994. Now, a good twenty-one years later, we can assess whether we have indeed received ‘a better life for all’.

As already indicated, Rosenthal maintains that, “Teyageneng [. . .] could be [. . .] Anytownship in South Africa” (para. 6). Let us then take a closer look at the typical South African township as it is described by Mokgethi, in order to see how the majority of the nation’s citizens live. Teyageneng is a community in which “[t]he resource centre that used to act as a library is closed and only termites are reading the books, absolutely no recreational activity is going on and the few recreational facilities that are here have been vandalised” (Moele, *Untitled* 89). With reference to the prevalence of the vandalism of public property, Mokgethi informs us that, “I would love to play tennis and here in our community we have a tennis court that has been vandalised, refurbished, vandalised and refurbished once more and today lies vandalised. In my whole life I have never seen anyone playing tennis there but I hope that one day I will play on it” (38). In addition, the “Youth Club is no more. [. . .] it also closed just like everything else” (89). The paucity of facilities that could provide township youths with the opportunity to engage in constructive activities, as alternatives to the dangers of crime and sex, points to a government that is neglecting certain sections of the population. As Fanon contends, “A government that proclaims itself national must take responsibility for the entire nation, and in underdeveloped countries the youth represents one of the most important sectors” (*Wretched* 141). An idle youth contributes to the perpetuation of the colonial lexicon, which Fanon itemises as: “explosive population growth, [. . .] hysterical masses, [. . .] blank faces, [. . .] shapeless, obese bodies, [. . .] children who seem not to belong to anyone, [. . .] indolence sprawling under the sun, [and] vegetating existence” (7). These children who seem to belong to no one are the Mokgethis of the novel. Bereft of parents, they are forced to live in cramped conditions with extended relatives in communities where their peers are having kids of their own.

Mokgethi exposes the government’s negligence and opportunism when she states that, “There is nothing happening in this community; we are like a commercial farm for the purposes of making. . . Well put it this way – this year I have only seen people canvassing for votes” (Moele, *Untitled* 89). The political opportunism of the post-independence ruling party is decried by Fanon, who reminds us that,

It is not by mobilizing dozens or hundreds of thousands of men and women three or four times a year that you politically educate the masses. These meetings, these spectacular rallies, are similar to the old preindependence tactics whereby you displayed your strength to prove to yourself and to others that you had the people on

your side. The political education of the masses is meant to make adults out of them, not to make them infantile. (*Wretched* 124)

The same sentiment is echoed in *A Season of Migration to the North*, a novel published a decade after Fanon's death. One of Salih's peripheral characters, Abdul Mannan, denounces his government in the following terms: "It's a hopeless government. [. . .] All they're any good at is coming to us every two or three years with their hordes of people, their lorries and their posters: Long live so-and-so, down with so-and-so" (64). Most present-day South Africans will be familiar with such tactics prior to elections. Is it a coincidence that load-shedding has ceased in the second half of the year prior to elections? The masses are not fools though, as Moele deftly illustrates in one of the novel's set-pieces, which he cleverly sets on Freedom Day. A community terrorist known as Tsietsi, "powerful and above the law" (Moele, *Untitled* 117), proceeds to mug Mokgethi and her friends after the public holiday celebrations. Throughout the robbery, he asks a series of sarcastic questions regarding the 'freedom' we have inherited:

Are you running away on Freedom Day? On Freedom Day, are we running away? On Freedom Day? No. No. [. . .]. No way. We cannot run away on Freedom Day. Never, ever on Freedom Day. Never. [. . .]. We do not have to run from anything on Freedom Day. It wouldn't be Freedom Day if we had to run. [. . .] not on Freedom Day. That old man served hard for this day. People died; they sacrificed their lives. (118-19)

And once the thug for whom prison is "a five star hotel" (117), has the group's money in his possession, he concludes with the following toast: "To democracy! [. . .]. To democracy and mounting unbearable poverty. [. . .]. The struggle has changed its face" (124). Moele's use of irony forces us to reflect painfully on the fruits of democracy, and we cannot help but acknowledge the truth of Fanon's prescient words:

The peasant who continues to scratch a living from the soil, the unemployed who never find a job, are never really convinced that their lives have changed, despite the festivities and the flags [. . .]. No matter how hard the bourgeoisie in power tries to prove it, the masses never manage to delude themselves. The masses are hungry [. . .]. The masses begin to keep their distance, to turn their backs on and lose interest in this nation which excludes them. (*Wretched* 114)

According to Fanon, this sense of exclusion breeds an identity crisis in the breast of the colonised subject: “Because it is a systematized negation of the other, a frenzied determination to deny the other any attribute of humanity, colonialism forces the colonized to constantly ask the question: ‘Who am I in reality?’” (182). I share Yancy’s view, which is that, “Who I am as an embodied black body *is* a problem!” (236). Rather than suggesting an essentialist definition of what it means to be black, I am simply referring to that section of the population that was politically disenfranchised, economically marginalised, physically brutalised, and geographically displaced during apartheid, because of crude and arbitrary phenotypical features. If we are prepared to proceed with this working definition of what it means to be black, we shall be able to account for the various crises plaguing the black body. As we are about to move into different ways of inhabiting the black body in post-apartheid society, such an account becomes important.

Shohat reminds us that it is one of Third Literature’s primary tasks to acknowledge “identities [as] not only the given of where one comes from but also the political identification of where one is trying to go” (75). I would like to explore Moele’s treatment of identity in *Untitled* by making use of Sam Durrant’s argument on race in *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning: J. M. Coetzee, Wilson Harris, and Toni Morrison*. Durrant accounts for the failure of community in the following terms:

The “monstrous” histories of slavery, colonialism, [apartheid] or the Holocaust are sublime insofar as they do violence both to the individual and the collective imagination. Such events have been described as collective or cultural trauma not simply by aggregating the traumatic experiences of individual victims, but because they disrupt the “consciousness” of the entire community, destroying the possibility of a common frame of reference and calling into question our sense of being-in-common.

(4)

This is one way of explaining why Teyageneng is a community at war with itself. If we agree that, “At the heart of histories of racism is the negation of the other, an act of exclusion that has ‘pathological’ consequences precisely because it introduces an internal exception into the category of the human” (4), then it is easy for us to extend this theory to the oppression of black women by their male counterparts. We have seen in the novel that the former are

moved around like chattel, objectified by the fragile egos of men in need of validation. The ‘African’ way of doing things, as is seen in the ritual of *ukuthwala* or Letshele’s purchased freedom, reveals what Durrant refers to in his postcolonial treatise, as “the dialectical hinge between nature and culture, the moment where nature reveals itself as the ground of our humanity, and culture as the ground of our inhumanity, as that which renders us inhuman” (42).

The culture which believes that the violation of its women can be recompensed with marriage proposals and financial transactions, has clearly debased them to the level of the inhuman, and, by implication, debased themselves. In addition to the culturally rooted causes of violence to women, Durrant sees “[e]ach act of self-inflicted or familial violence [a]s a way of remembering – while not remembering – the violence done to the whole race” (82). He points to the body as the site where “memories lodge themselves [when] they cannot be verbalized” (87). If one agrees that histories of oppression cannot be retrieved due to the sublime manner in which they disrupt conceptualisations of individual and community, then Durrant’s above contention holds some purchase. What is attractive about his theory is that it offers a way to overcome gender-based violence in colonised societies. He suggests that,

In order to distance themselves from a history of objectification, [the colonised] need to conceive of themselves as something more than “flesh”. If slavery [or apartheid] reduced their sexuality to the bodily fact of biological difference, in order to become sexed *subjects* they need to move beyond this crude essentialization of their sexuality and reopen the question of what it means to be a man or a woman in symbolic or sociocultural terms. (92)

This task is easier said than done, because “[u]nderneath the dark skin that is the biological [or what purports to be the biological] signifier of race lurks the memory of having been identified as less than human, a memory that lodges itself in the flesh precisely because it is a memory of having been reduced to flesh” (96). It is complicated, as Yancy notes, for the black body to house a subjective identity that is ‘just me’: “Blackness prevents a mode of living according to liberalistic ideals. More accurately, it is whites who are able to enact a ‘just me’ status because of their normative status. [. . .] they prevent the Black from hiding in a fictive world where race ceases to matter” (226). The “‘unnatural,’ ‘inhuman’ violence” that we see directed at women in a novel such as *Untitled*, “has its origin”, in Durrant’s estimation, “in the prior violence against nature and humanity [of] the institution[s] of slavery



[and apartheid]" (97). The colonised male's "conception of his own manhood was articulated in a language that was not his own – the language of his owner" (103). It is of little surprise then that without "a cultural definition of their manhood", colonised males "are forced to identify themselves exclusively in terms of their biological sex" (103). This equation results in the subjugation of the women of the colonised's sector. Durrant advocates the abandonment of the "lust to rule" as a strategy to equalise relations between the sexes (71). Mokgethi, and indeed I, would not bet on the odds of men giving up their power. This does not seem to deter her, as she promises herself that, "I am taking centre stage and after I die no woman will ever suffer as I have" (Moele, *Untitled* 209).

Moele does not state how Mokgethi will achieve this end, for his protagonist admits: "there is still a future Mokgethi that I do not know" (2). The darkness of the path toward a self of her own making scares her because she is oblivious to "what the Mokgethi of tomorrow is going to be like" (5). At the beginning of the narrative she advises us that, "I am writing this verse to try to understand the coming Mokgethi. Trying to find a way for her to live comfortably with herself" (6). In her innocent manner, she describes how she came to consciousness: "I found myself being Mokgethi and I had to discover and make this Mokgethi out of what they named Mokgethi. I tried very hard to make a Mokgethi that I, as Mokgethi, would love, a Mokgethi that I was happy and comfortable with" (9). We soon learn though, that this is "the murdered Mokgethi" (6), to whom the narrative serves as an elegy. She starts out as a girl who can easily state, "I love what the mirror is showing me and if anybody has a problem with that, well, sorry, but that's their problem" (144), but ends up being reduced to someone who writhes and wriggles in a desperate attempt to accept her new, violated self. After Thabakgolo rapes her, Mokgethi expresses her mental anguish: "Fuck him! I think as some Mokgethi that I do not recognise takes control of me" (198). Her reaction is natural under the circumstances, but is also characteristic of the distress described by Yancy which is experienced by the oppressed, who are more easily defined from without than within.

While Moele balks at the prospect of plotting a way out for all of South Africa's oppressed women, he must be commended for crafting a narrative of resilience and resistance. According to Paul Willemsen, Third Literature concerns itself with "a rhetoric of becoming" (19), and *Untitled* makes a positive contribution to this discourse. The novel fulfils Shohat's requirement apropos of this mode of writing that such texts call "attention to the sexualized/racialized body as the site of both brutal oppression and creative resistance" (69).

And if “in a Third World context”, as Gabriel states, literature “seeks to: a. decolonize minds b. contribute to the development of a radical consciousness c. lead to a revolutionary transformation of society”, and “d. develop new [. . .] language for the accomplishment of these tasks” (*Aesthetics of Liberation* 3), then only its reception by South African society can be the barometer of the novel’s efficacy. As yet, we cannot regard *Untitled* as a comprehensive work of Third Literature because it is too early to assess its social impact. It is, nonetheless, a gallant attempt at shaking up South African society. Moele parades his novel’s limitations while pointing out the necessity for us as South Africans to change. He does not tell us how to do so but merely insists that we must, and this task I suspect is something we must figure out for ourselves. Here lies the imperative to fashion new South African identities, even if like Mokgethi, we do not yet know what they will be.

### **2.5) *Untitled*: Conclusions**

*Untitled* is a brave novel that leaves us as South African citizens in no doubt as to the unforgivable manner in which we are failing our women and children. It accuses both sexes of failing to protect the most vulnerable members of our society. The pillars of our underprivileged communities are supported by citizens who look the other way when they prey on society. Thus they come to wield the kind of dictatorial power which allows them to abuse the vulnerable with total impunity. No one is there to speak for the victimised except for the author’s protagonist. Moele empowers Mokgethi with a voice that challenges the social order which allows aberrations such as rape to go unpunished.

As I have indicated before, the seventeen-year-old narrator of *Untitled* stays in school, unlike Sipho of *Young Blood*. The logical deduction to make would be that Sipho brings danger to himself by voluntarily entering into a life of crime. In Mokgethi’s case, school would be thought of as a place where teenagers can temporarily escape the violence of township streets, but in Moele’s novel, school is just as dangerous as the world outside its gates. Sexual predators who take the guise of teachers and principals prowl the corridors. These are the people to whom the community gladly hands its progeny. Blindly, they hold on to these men’s past glories even in the face of damning evidence against them. The girls are picked off with a sense of inevitability as one by one, they succumb to statutory rape. Their poverty is plainly visible to the paedophiles who are meant to be their educators, and so these

men groom them with gifts of money and food. Each girl comes to understand the terms of this transaction and some, like Lebo, willingly engage. Others, like Mokgethi, refuse but are relentlessly pursued, and the unfortunate few such as Little Bonolo are simply taken by force. The point, simply put, is that education is not the key to a brighter future, not in communities marked by the structural inequality put in place by apartheid.

Such sexual predation is only commonplace in township schools; it does not occur at Mokgethi's old private school. The township school obviously represents the colonised's sector, while the private school stands for the colonist's. If a state education is the only one on offer for the colonised, who cannot access the private education that is buttressed by economic barriers, then it must be asked whether education is a worthwhile personal investment. If to reach matric is a miracle, and to go beyond a triumph of immeasurable proportions that requires one to run the gauntlet of personal violation, then really, what is the meaning of an education in the township context? If only a few can afford to buy their way out of the ghetto with a certificate, what of the majority who fall by the wayside in the attempt? A minority can, and sometimes do make it to institutions in the colonist's sector, where they imbibe an education informed by Western epistemologies, where they learn of European colonial, imperial and political history, and where they learn very little of themselves except that they are inferior. Not all academic institutions fail to take cognisance of these issues. Transformation is a priority that many are attempting to address. I would not be able to discuss such subject matter if it were not so. Perhaps the process requires patience. While we wait, the price of an education for the colonised continues to be an unhomed sense of self, which unfortunately, is necessary for upward social mobility in a world configured by the coloniser.

Thus far, my definition of selfhood has been culturally informed as opposed to a postmodern conceptualisation of the term. This is because I have tried to illustrate the violence done to the inherited sense of self which emanates from the tradition or culture to which one is born. This core sense of who and what one is, is handed down to the individual before he or she can define it for themselves. It is obviously pliable and changes with time, experience and knowledge, but the point I am making is one must start somewhere. For the colonised, this beginning point is the originary violence from which any sense of self must first recover. The first two novels demonstrate the difficulty of this task but Duiker, as we shall see in the following chapter, shows how selfhood need not be based on a static set of communal beliefs, but instead, is a project in which one is permanently engaged.

The coloniser has left a mark on the township communities which wallow in the poverty and moral bankruptcy that are the legacies of apartheid. In *Untitled*, the complicity of the community in the victimisation of its women and children reflects not only the dehumanising effects of colonial discourse, but also the patriarchal bias of some indigenous African cultures. Identity politics in such cultures are often chauvinistic, endowing males with the right to ownership of property, spouses and children. Women are simply not vested with personhood. They are seen as property which can be bought and sold, and due to the sense of ownership that comes with this objectification, the owners then feel they are entitled to do as they please with their property. The communities of the colonised's sector do not question the evil of its abusive men and instead heap blame on the powerless victims of this abuse. Township women are oppressed at every level: inside the home, in the community, by culture and by the law, because the whole of society is run by men.

As Third Literature, Moele's novel asks searing questions directed at the men who lead this country. Where is this 'better life for all'? What is a 'Rainbow Nation' if the majority in it are poor? Why are township schools veritable crime scenes? Why are township amenities neglected and run-down? *Untitled* answers these questions with a damning indictment of the post-apartheid government: it is because South Africa as a democracy has failed, and worse still, our leaders have failed us. They have failed the youth of this country by neglecting them, and the poor by not delivering as promised. Instead, we have seen a bourgeoisie rise to the top with the mentality that 'it's our turn to eat'. In the process, the police as part of the state apparatus, have been deployed against the masses. They keep them in check while the pilfering of state resources continues undisturbed at the top. The greatest tragedy, the worst betrayal of the democracy that was promised in 1994, is that the Constitution that was billed as the best in the world, and which enshrined the rights of every South African, is in danger of becoming a dead piece of paper. To this day, it has not reached those whom it was meant to protect. The Constitution is not living.

In this milieu, young South Africans attempt to fashion identities for themselves, but this is almost impossible when one is black and female. This double oppression weighs women down with the full weight of patriarchy, inscribing their bodies with meanings that are permanently cast through violence. Through Mokgethi's resilience, Moele attempts to show that it is possible to rebuild the self after one has been shattered by experience. The new self may not resemble the old, but that may be for the best, for all South Africans need to think themselves anew, if not for their own sake, then for the women and children of this country.

As I have mentioned before, this argument is moving towards a sense of identity that is unfettered by social prescriptions, but this cannot happen in a vacuum. The variables accounting for the troubled black collective consciousness must first be acknowledged before individuals can begin to free themselves from their constraints. I am in no way suggesting that identity is static; I am merely saying that not everyone is as free to perform a sense of self as those who occupy privileged positions. There are many chains which continue to bind the colonised: from a lack of education to cramped living spaces which privilege male violence. Once again, as I shall argue, Duiker demonstrates how these shackles can be broken in his text. *Untitled* opens up a discussion of black identity which Mzobe's novel fails to do. Nervously, it points to an unknown, self-willed direction which the colonised may tentatively follow. I intend to pursue this trajectory in the following chapter, and see where it may lead.

## Chapter 3

### *Thirteen Cents: Let the World Burn*

#### 3.1) An Introduction to *Thirteen Cents*

*Thirteen Cents* was published in 2000, making it the oldest text in this study. I include it because, of the three texts discussed, it is the only one that presents us with a multiracial social milieu. Mzobe's and Moele's texts are firmly situated in their localised ethnic communities, but Duiker's allows for interaction between black, white and 'coloured'. For this reason, I believe that it is the novel best positioned to comment on post-apartheid black identity.

Lindy Stiebel argues that "Duiker speaks to young researchers questioning modern South African urban spaces, both hidden and in plain view" (qtd. in Demir, Moreillon and Muller 30). As we shall see, Duiker juxtaposes Cape Town's postcard prettiness with the underbelly of its streets. The relevance of the novel to this critical study is also informed by the fact that, of Duiker's literary oeuvre, *Thirteen Cents* is understudied, since "the bulk of scholarly studies focuses on *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*" (Demir, Moreillon and Muller 31). Many regard the latter text to be his magnum opus, but I am of a similar view to Sally Ann Murray, who finds that it is *Thirteen Cents*, Azure's "harrowing, moving story", to which she keeps "going back" (qtd. in Demir, Moreillon and Muller 29). Raditlhalo is of the view that *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* "broadens and expands on the themes left underdeveloped in *Thirteen Cents*" ("Travelling Salesman" 99), implying that the latter served as a conceptual springboard for the former. Kamogelo Duiker's revelation that *Thirteen Cents* was in fact written after *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*, renders Raditlhalo's assertion fallacious. Nevertheless, his is the default position of the literary-critical establishment towards the two novels, which demonstrates what I perceive to be the need for more focus on *Thirteen Cents*.

Nevertheless, my justification should not detract from the fact that Duiker's whole body of work "left behind priceless delineations of a post-apartheid South Africa awakening to its infinite, if uncertain futures" (96).

The first section of this chapter explores the manner in which money intersects with considerations of masculinity and sexual orientation. I am eager to demonstrate how both are in no way linked to cultural precepts – as they are in *Untitled* – or biological imperatives. The chapter delves deep into what Timothy Johns labels Azure's "economic homosexuality", and elaborates on his contention that, "If sex has a 'market value' the new economy of South Africa will be certain to exploit it" (267, 269). I offer an analysis of Azure's definition of manhood, and interrogate what Raditlhalo calls, "the ultimate and quintessential fear of the heterosexual (African) male" ("Travelling Salesman" 101), namely the fear of being womanised.

In the second section, I map out the racial dynamics behind "the 'Grape Curtain' (a satiric reference to the apparent cocooning of the Western Cape from the rest of the country)" (101). As mentioned earlier, *Thirteen Cents* is the only one of the three texts under consideration in this study that calls for this type of analysis, so any conclusions derived from the interaction between white, 'coloured' and black in the novel may have some bearing on the protagonist's behaviour. From the beginning of *Thirteen Cents*, it is clear that Duiker sets Azure apart from society's neat little categories. My aim is to discover why he does this. What can we conclude about racialized identities from observing Azure's isolated subjectivity?

The last section is a reflection on the impact of Duiker's novel as a work of Third Literature. I attempt to uncover its criticisms of civic society, and isolate Duiker's recommendations to readers of the text. I take my cue from David J. Callenberger, who reflects that, "For many businesses within and outside of South Africa, the end of apartheid meant the beginning of total exploitation. Now postcard, magazine, and other businesses can legally promote and exploit the picturesque 'beauty' of poverty and dilapidation" (94). The suggestion here is that in the new South Africa, government and private capital have aligned to the detriment or neglect of those to whom a better life was promised. I examine whether this is indeed the state of affairs in Duiker's novel. Lastly, I comment on the ending of *Thirteen Cents* as it relates to South Africa's commitment to human and children's rights.

### **3.2) *Thirteen Cents* and Money**

The title of Duiker's debut novel is the most obvious clue to its concern with money, or, more accurately, the lack thereof. It is clear from the first chapter that having money, or not, is a reliable indicator of the lengths to which one will go to acquire it. In the streets which Azure wanders, one's ability to feed and clothe oneself determines whether one becomes a prostitute, pimp, gangster, 'rent-boy', street vendor, drug-dealer, car guard, or beggar. Sometimes it is necessary to practise more than one of these 'trades' because competition is often as stiff as it is unethical.

It is dubious to discuss morality with reference to characters who must make a living off the streets, but Azure introduces this ethical dimension by divulging the following: "I sleep in Sea Point near the swimming pool because it's the safest place to be at night. In town there are too many pimps and gangsters. I don't want to make my money like them" (Duiker 3). Azure does not want to survive by stealing from or doing harm to others, which limits him to selling his body and its services. During the day, he informs us, "I help park cars in Cape Town", and at night he patrols what he describes as "the moffie part of the beach" (3, 8), waiting for men who will pay him for sexual favours. Azure makes the decision to profit from his sexual victimisation even though, around him, pimps like Allen profit from the sexual victimisation of others by soliciting prostitution in places such as Green Point. The decision to be a 'rent-boy' places Azure on moral high ground from which he looks down on Allen's activities. This smugness comes at the price of his sexual innocence but Azure feels empowered by the decision which he takes as one who is "almost a man" (1).

For a child on the cusp of puberty to identify himself as a man is problematic, but Azure embraces the adult responsibility of looking after himself consciously, and with conviction. He tells us proudly, "I can take care of myself" (2), which is his functional definition of adulthood. It is a definition which means that one is only accountable to oneself for how one chooses to survive, even as the imperative to make money largely dictates what one must do. Azure believes he knows what a man is, and is sometimes of the view that money maketh one, but the identities which he, Allen, Gerald and Richard perform open up the question of how poor, racialized bodies exhibit masculinity.

As a parentless, defenceless child of the streets, Azure represents the most wretched of the sector of the colonised. Raditlhalo confirms that our protagonist's story "goes to the core of [. . .] the astonishing rate at which children are now victims of a (violent) society intent on



turning a blind eye to the plight of its weakest members” (“Travelling Salesman” 97-98). It is as a result of his position in society that Azure internalises a few rules, the first being that nothing must jeopardise one’s livelihood. We see this in the patriarchal attitude he has towards his friend Bafana, whom he refers to as “a *lytie*” because he never gets food (Duiker 6). Azure then emphasises the importance of breadwinning by stating that, “I’ve worked too hard to see someone mess up a regular meal for me” (6). He even has to remind himself that he “is not [Bafana’s] father” in order to protect his own frail sense of independence (7).

Azure also possesses what Radithalo describes as, “a clear-eyed understanding of himself as a commodity – a thing to be used by the powerful – and of his ruthless exploitation by pimps and gangsters” (“Travelling Salesman” 98). Radithalo’s observation is in line with Azure’s second rule, which is that, “Grown-ups are strange”; “Grown-ups are fucked up”; “They are full of shit”; “Their minds are rotten”; “They think they know it all”; “They are evil” and, “They are crazy” (Duiker 7, 37, 106, 140, 141, 143,144). Duiker’s protagonist may regard himself as a man in terms of self-sufficiency, but he is aware that he is only playing at being a grown-up. He knows that adults are the ones responsible for his suffering, and so he observes their habits and mimics them in order to capitalise on their vanity, as we see in the confession below:

You must always act like a grown-up. You must speak like them. That means when you speak to a grown-up in town you must look at them in the eyes and use a loud voice because if you speak softly they will swear at you. You must also be clean because grown-ups are always clean. And you must never talk to them like you talk to a *lytie*. Like I can’t talk to them the way I talk to Bafana. I must always say “Sir” or “Madam”. It’s like saying “Magents” except it’s for grown-ups. And when I can remember I say “please” and “thank you”. Those two words are like magic, my secret. They’ve made me nice money every time I used them with a smile. (3)

In context of the dirtier grown-up games Azure has to play, good manners seem like an obscene joke. It is because grown-ups have money and power that a thirteen-year-old boy is put in a position to be a willing male prostitute to the elite, and a helpless sexual assault victim to the poor. Azure’s prostitution speaks to what Radithalo describes as, “the problematic of sexuality as a currency to those who do not have nuclear families” (“A Victory of Sorts” 273). Our protagonist does not regard himself as a homosexual even though he caters to men of that sexual orientation. He views his ‘trade’ in the same light in which a

female prostitute would view hers, in that both woman and boy put themselves at the service of men for money, even though both would do otherwise given a fair choice. We see Azure's identification with the plight of the female prostitute at the end of the first chapter: "Poor Liesel. I know what she does to make money. It's not easy. That's why I never ask her about it" (Duiker 4). This is the same woman to whom Azure is grateful because, as he puts it, "she let me see how a woman looks like naked" (4).

The above quotation bears out Azure's heterosexual disposition even though every sexual encounter he has is of the homosexual variety. He admits that he is "forced to smile" as he is fondled by his first customer of the novel (8). Azure also divulges that he has "to concentrate hard to get excited", and that thinking "of Toni Braxton and Mary J Blige [. . .] usually do the trick" for him (9). His fascination with two of the most prominent black female Rhythm and Blues icons of the 1990s indicates his sexual preference. To Azure, men are nothing more than clientele, as he explains to the hiker with whom he shares a cave towards the end of the novel. "I work with them" (116), he states, while patting his penis, suggesting his line of work.

Azure's detachment to his night-time activities sometimes gives way to homophobia as we see on more than one occasion when he refers to homosexuals as "moffies" or "bastards" (29, 80, 84, 116, 117, 142). This homophobic streak illustrates his disapproval of these men's conduct, for even though he is complicit in homosexual acts, he is aware that he is a child while they are adults. Ironically enough, he iterates his disapproval while claiming not to be a boy: "A boy? I'm not a boy. [. . .]. I've seen a white man let a boy Bafana's age into his car. [. . .]. A boy? Fuck off. [. . .]. I have been fucked by enough bastards and they've come on me with enough come to fill the swimming pool in Sea Point" (142).

Duiker here is careful not to stigmatise homosexuality; instead he condemns intercourse between adults and minors. As Johns puts it, "What we find here is a thirteen-year-old boy oppressed not by homosexual practice per se, but by his depressed economic circumstances. An urchin that happened to be a girl might have experienced similar horrors. Both examples of rape should be equally condemned" (268). The previous two novels under study have presented us with static conceptions of black masculinity. The men of *Young Blood* and *Untitled* conform to heteronormative assumptions. *Thirteen Cents*, on the other hand, opens up the space at which black masculinity intersects with sexuality. This is not quite what one would expect, given that Duiker's is the earliest publication of the three, preceding Mzobe's

and Moele's works by over a decade. Perhaps these later texts suggest that attitudes pertaining to gender and sexuality have stiffened under a populist ANC regime, which makes a novel like *Thirteen Cents* an important contribution to any discussion of contemporary black identity.

Johns characterises the novel in the following terms:

K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* offers a startling, almost counterintuitive portrait of contemporary South African masculinity. Indeed, the novel's depiction of a 13-year-old boy's sexual experiences with men challenges many basic assumptions about the origins of homosexual engagement, both in the novel's immediate setting (South Africa) and across the continent. (250)

I have stated that Azure thinks no less of himself for the deeds he must commit to keep himself alive. On the contrary, he regards himself as a man for his ability to take care of himself. He engages in prostitution for reasons similar to Liesel or any of the novel's other female prostitutes, with the added moral justification that prostitution is a victimless crime. Johns has more to say on the subject:

*Thirteen Cents* depicts how a banal economic rationale can lie behind forms of sexual experience; which is to say, market forces can have more to do with the determination of sexual orientation than free choice or 'authentic' cultural practice, especially for the most vulnerable. In fact, as the novel indicates, in contemporary South Africa pleasure can only be had at a price: Azure, the hero, a desperate street urchin living without any kind of state support or safety net, offers sexual favours to other (usually White and wealthy) men in order to survive. Although, over the course of the novel, the hero explicitly desires women more than men, he must sleep with men to make ends meet. Therefore his sexual orientation appears arbitrary, dependent on the whims of the market. Because men desire him more than women, he bends accordingly. (252)

Azure protects his self-worth and maintains his heterosexual identity by treating his homosexual liaisons like a game. He demonstrates this attitude by boasting about his expertise in the tricks of the 'trade'. In his first homosexual encounter in the novel, he tells us the following: "I know the routine. Once inside his flat he will expect me to strip off at the door" (Duiker 8). And when he is "forced to smile" by the same customer, Azure informs us that, "That's what they expect. Grown-ups, I know their games" (8). When the time comes

for payment and it is less than he expects, he knows to temper his frustration because he might receive repeat business: “I know not to get greedy. He could become a regular” (10). Immediately after this encounter, another white man gives Azure “come-to-bed eyes” and our narrator knows that this is a signal to follow him to his flat (10). Azure also knows which mind games to play to ensure that he does not get taken advantage of by his customers. When he notices something shimmering on the ring finger of his third ‘trick’, he boldly asks, “Do you always wear your wedding ring?” (30). The reason for his brazenness, as he confides to us, is so that his client does not take him for a “fool” and try to cheat him after they have had sex” (30). Again he has the presence of mind to create the opportunity for repeat business as we see when he tells his customer, “I am always at the park at night” (30). And, finally, with Mr Lebowitz, his last ‘trick’ of the novel, Azure lays out the full extent of his sexual knowledge:

I know how to please a man. I know these bastards. I’ve done this a thousand times. They all like it if you play with the part between their balls and asshole. And you must not pull too hard on the dick. It’s better if you play with the dick as close as possible to the tummy, otherwise they say it’s sore or it starts flopping. And the older they get the more it doesn’t stand up against their tummy. One guy’s dick was still down but it was hard. And he wasn’t that old. I think he had a problem with his *piel*. Poor bastard. Imagine having a broken *piel*.

Another thing is I never ask them how that feels. They hate that question. I think it reminds them of their wives or whoever it is they are cheating on. The other thing is if you ask you get strange requests. I don’t want to think about some of the things I’ve had to do to these bastards. No thank you. (84)

Johns makes an important point when he notes that, “the gay experience is not coded as ‘foreign’ in *Thirteen Cents*” (252). Masculinity, first and foremost, is linked to the *piel*, and not necessarily what one does with it. This is why Azure finds it easy to extend sympathy – albeit in a snide way – to the customer with a “broken” one. The gangsters who rape Azure prove that the possession of a *piel* is synonymous with the possession of power. It does not matter whether one uses it to sexually violate boys or women, the point is to exert dominance over one who is weaker. Johns makes the following contribution on sexuality in the novel:

Although wealthy White men, living in nice beachside apartments in Cape Town, lure the 13-year-old into prostitution, tough guys on the other side of the tracks, young

Black and ‘coloured’ men who make up the hybrid tapestry of Cape Town, lure the boy into a gang rape. By underscoring, after White minority rule, the mere economics of sexual coupling across the racial spectrum, the need to merely survive or endure or dominate by having sex a certain way, the novel challenges the idea that ‘homosex is not black culture’ – that is, the idea that African men are somehow more ‘naturally’ connected to traditional culture than to modern economics. (252)

Duiker, this is to say, debunks the myth that homosexual practices are deviations from ‘traditional’ African culture, the same ‘tradition’ that legitimises the rape of young girls by forcing them into marriage in *Untitled*. In both novels, rape is the most forceful expression of masculinity, whether it be on a weaker male or female body.

The rapists of *Thirteen Cents* do not regard themselves as ‘moffies’. Their sexual assault is motivated by an intent to subjugate the other, although I will concede that this subjugation is often colloquially justified as putting the victim in a woman’s place, thereby privileging the masculine over the feminine. So, for instance, Gerald justifies Azure’s sexual violation in the following terms: “You had to understand what it means to be a woman. That’s why they did that to you. I know that you understand what it means to be a woman already. You bleed through the anus when you shit, don’t you?” (Duiker 71). This explanation is offered to Azure after Gerald has given him the name Blue, and has told him in no uncertain terms that, “I own you now” (57). In the same manner, Allen disciplines his prostitutes with battery and threats that he will “*naai*” them (56). We therefore see in Duiker’s novel that males can be reduced to the level of the feminine, but females can never command the type of power that comes with the masculine sexual threat.

So, although the child continues to be aligned with the woman in their joint victimisation by male tyranny, Duiker opens up new spaces in definitions of masculinity with Azure’s insistence that he is a man. The proposition here is that a man need not be the one who exclusively does the raping, but can himself be raped or consensually engage in homosexual sex while consciously identifying himself as a man. In *Young Blood*, a man is defined as a violent philanderer, and in *Untitled*, as a sexual predator. *Thirteen Cents* introduces a conscious element to that identification process by suggesting that one need not even be of the requisite biological age in order to identify oneself as a man. One need not even engage in heterosexual sex in order to regard oneself as wholly masculine; one can be raped or even be a child and still subscribe to a functional definition of manhood. Perhaps this is because, as Johns puts it, “Duiker presents his hero not as one half of an idealised couple, much less part

of a communitarian group, but as a profoundly atomised wanderer – a loner, an urchin unattached to any single mate or traditional patterns” (256). Herein lies the space which Azure exploits to construct his own definition of manhood. As a child of the streets, he heeds only the call of survival, and his ability to hear and obey it is what qualifies him as a man. It is clear to Azure that a man does what he has to, and because he does, he is one. Azure complies with no prescriptions or precepts. His is the kind of agency we see in Mokgethi towards the end of *Untitled*. Even though Azure is younger, unschooled and male, he is as sure as she is of his identity as a gendered subject who has been the victim of sexual abuse.

### 3.3) *Thirteen Cents and Racial Dynamics*

Race relations in Duiker’s novel are as fraught as they were during apartheid. Whites enjoy the best standard of living as entrenched members of the colonist’s sector, while blacks and ‘coloureds’ struggle for ascendancy in the underbelly of Cape Town. The men whom Azure services are always moneyed, beach-house dwellers who, nonetheless, look for a cheap deal on the streets, thereby exhibiting the kind of capitalistic greed which underpins the exploitation of the colonised by the colonist. Azure is often aware of the many times he is short-changed, as emerges from his response to being given R20 by his first ‘trick’: “Peanuts. I’ve earned fifty bucks from a single trick” (Duiker 10). On a subsequent occasion, he expects to receive R70 but only gets R60 from his customer because, as he explains, “He couldn’t resist getting me back after I said he was married. Me and my mouth; I’m always on guard” (30). He needs to be on guard because he is cheated by men who pick him up in luxury sedans and have their way with him in expensive beach-side flats.

The inequality between the colonist’s sector and the colonised’s is evident in Azure’s wonder at the cleanliness of these men’s residences. Upon entering the apartment of his first ‘trick’, he tells us that, “The house is clean and warm. I walk carefully as though careless footsteps might disrupt the cleanliness” (8). The noise of the street does not pierce the walls of the colonist’s sector, as we see in the following exchange in the same man’s house:

“Why are you so quiet?” he says while the water runs.

“I’m just listening.”

“To what?”

“Your house. It’s so quiet.”

“Oh that. Do you want me to put on some music?”

“No, I like it like this. Please.” (8)

Azure revels in the comforts of the colonist’s sector which are a world away from his own. The obligatory shower which precedes sexual intercourse fills him with childlike joy. He can barely contain his excitement, as emerges from his description of the scene:

I bend down to pick up the soap. He gets out to dry himself and leaves me with a few minutes of heaven with warm water and fresh-smelling soap. I slide the soap all over my body, blowing bubbles when I can, a silly grin that only I can enjoy on my face. The water falls on me with pleasure. I tingle with cleanliness. (9)

He sighs with pleasure as he is handed a “fresh-smelling light blue towel” with which to dry himself (9). Cleanliness is important to Azure because, as we have noted from Fanon, the colonised’s sector is a “disreputable place inhabited by disreputable people. [. . .] people are piled one on top of the other” in a sector that is “on its knees” (*Wretched* 4-5). In other words, it is a dirty sector, which is why Azure proclaims that although he may live on the streets, he is proud of the fact that he is clean.

The rudiments of Azure’s daily washing routine contrast sharply with the luxuriant shower scene depicted earlier: “Every morning I take a bath at the beach. I wash with seawater. Sometimes I use a sponge or if I can’t find one I use an old rag. It’s just as good. Then I rinse off the seawater at the tap. It’s not that bad washing with seawater. It’s like anything – you get used to it” (Duiker 2). Azure engages in this daily regime because, whether he is parking cars or prostituting himself, he interacts with adults. And as previously noted, when dealing with grown-ups, “You must be clean because grown-ups are always clean” (3).

Moreover, one must be extra clean when dealing with white adults because they are the inhabitants of “a sector where the streets are clean” (Fanon, *Wretched* 4). Azure is relieved to have bathed prior to his appointment with Mr Lebowitz, even though he knows that customers insist on showering before sex: “I’m glad I washed [. . .]. Imagine if he had to see

my brown dirt” (Duiker 85). It is telling that Azure emphasises the colour of his dirt for he is struck by the white cleanliness of Mr Lebowitz’s apartment. As they enter the flat, Azure observes that, “Almost everything is white” (82). He confesses to feeling “a little strange, like [. . .] a dog with fleas”, before going on to “sit on a white leather sofa” (82). In the bathroom, Azure is amazed by the “white tiles on the floor that show off your reflection” and “the white bath” (85). He is impelled to “wash quickly and [. . .] clean out the bath with a sponge afterwards” (85), so as to leave no trace of his “brown dirt”. After all, he is an interloper who must leave no evidence of his illegitimate presence in the colonist’s sector, however temporary his stay may be. Ultimately, he is a product of the colonised’s sector as he betrays when he is offered an extra pillow by Mr Lebowitz:

“Will this pillow be enough? I can get you another one if you want.”

“No, it’s fine. Actually I like sleeping without one.”

The street I can hear him thinking, but his maddening manners prevent him from saying it. (92)

The gatekeepers of the colonist’s sector are glad to see the back of Azure after Mr Lebowitz has had his way with him. Alfred, the security guard, gives Azure “the evil eye” when he enters the block of flats before his appointment, and watches him “like a cat” when he leaves with his payment after he has transacted his business (82, 95). Johns characterises the relationship between the colonist’s sector and the colonised’s in *Thirteen Cents* in the following terms: “Living on the streets in Cape Town, on the beaches and under bridges, at the margins of a highly privatised, gated environment, one thing also connects the parallel universe, the world of prostitutes and pimps and urchins, to the official, bourgeois universe of the state: money” (258). As previously stated, all of Azure’s customers are white men, which goes to show exactly who is moneyed. For Johns, Azure’s acquiescence to the demands of these men highlights “the poverty of Black agency and Black identity under financial constraints” (254). To Johns, the men who pay for sex with Azure set a “‘price tag’ on Black identity” by exploiting the “market value” of Azure’s sexuality, which, of course, he uses expediently (254, 269). As Johns puts it, “Something as private as sexual orientation can be reduced to a price tag” in the world of *Thirteen Cents* (253).



Duiker depicts whiteness in terms that are all too familiar. In his novel, most whites come across as privileged, exploitative, and prejudiced. Duiker does not portray many of his white characters sympathetically, but rather presents them as embodiments of whiteness. The boys who attempt to lure Bafana and Azure into a drug binge on Sunset Beach are “rich and bored with their money” (Duiker 22). They are presented as veritable mascots of white ignorance who see street life as a “totally outdoor experience” (22). In order “to get the whole experience unedited” (23), they offer the street kids food and narcotics:

“Yeah, so we were kind of trying to tap into your pool of experience. Like we were wondering if you guys would like to trip with us.”

“We’ve got good acid,” the other says, “and we’ll like feed you for the evening [. . .]. Like we were wondering if you would take us to all of your hang-out spots at night. [. . .].”

“What are you saying? You want me to take drugs with you?”

“I’m in,” Bafana butts in.

“Shuddup you,” I tell him.

“Okay, you guys have got this aggression thing completely going. Is that like your way, like that survival of the fittest thing? Okay, I can see that. I can tap into that if you want.”

“Look, I’m not taking drugs with you,” I tell them.

“But this is going to be like a totally awesome experience. Like don’t you want to tap into some raw energy? I mean just think of it. Think of us making art man. Right here right now,” the shorter one says.

“What are you talking about? I’m hungry. I don’t want to talk *kak* with you.” (22-23)

Bafana asks Azure not to talk to his friends so rudely, to which Azure responds as follows: “These are not your friends. Look at how you’re dressed and look at how they’re dressed” (22). Azure is quick to see the terms of the contract on offer and the utter naivety by which it is informed. He is aware that to the privileged, street life is nothing more than an adventure in “urban living” (22). To them, his daily struggle to survive is just an extreme sport, in which they can participate in return for a small fee. Azure is not at all interested in guiding the white boys through a tour of Cape Town’s underbelly because he has to get on with the business of survival. The white boys may treat the street kid’s struggle like a game, and yes as we have seen, so does Azure, but to the street kid the stakes are life and death. It is not a source of

alternative entertainment for the evening. The colonised enter the colonist's sector to make a living, while the colonists enter the colonised's sector for the same voyeuristic purposes which inform township tours. In Callenberger's assessment, "Duiker raises acute awareness to the fact that what white privileged sensibilities may consider spectacular, an impoverished non-white Capetonian may simply consider [. . .] typical" (93). The gulf between the worlds of colonist and colonised exists not only at the levels of social capital and economic freedom, but at the level of simple lived experience. For the most part, whites in the novel can move and do as they please, the only exceptions being those prostitutes and beggars who find themselves relegated to the colonised's sector. Duiker also foregrounds the prejudice of whiteness, although it must be said that whites are not the only racial group guilty of racial prejudice in *Thirteen Cents*. The range of preconceived ideas held by blacks and 'coloureds' shall be discussed a little further on in the section.

After Azure is physically assaulted by Sealy, one of Gerald's henchmen, he is taken to Somerset Hospital by Richard, another of Gerald's gangster acquaintances. When the white doctor inquires as to what happened to Azure, Richard concocts a cover story which leads him to believe that the urchin was caught stealing and then battered by an angry store manager. The doctor is only too happy to lap up this lie, betraying his own racial prejudice in the process. According to him, the trouble with street kids like Azure is that, "you don't know what to do with them [. . .]. And they won't go to a school or a home. They spend their lives sniffing glue and smoking buttons" (Duiker 42). Even though Azure smokes marijuana every now and then, we have seen that his attitude to hard drugs is strictly intolerant, but this does not matter because the doctor already has a fixed idea of the habits of street kids. When he instructs Azure to wear his blue hospital dress, his racism becomes overt: "You better put this around your waist, this is not a jungle" (42). He tells Azure that he has "a good mind not to use a local anaesthetic" with all "the trouble he's been causing" (43), and gives Richard's lie to the nurse, who simply wants to know what happened to the boy. The doctor sympathises with the fictional manager "who was probably just trying to earn a living until trouble came along" (43), and feels free to speculate on Azure's background: "How old is he? Probably thirteen, fourteen. Ran away from home. They all do, you know. Wild kids. And now he's caught stealing a bar of chocolate or something pathetic like that. He deserves what he got" (43). It is astounding that the doctor ignores the fact that Azure is right there and may be capable of understanding and producing English in order to answer for himself. The point is that Azure's story is already written on his body by the adult propagators of official

discourse. He is stigmatised because of the way he looks and because there is no one who will genuinely speak for him, a consequence of what Johns describes as “the ‘hands-off’ social climate of the novel” (254).

Azure is obliged to endure one last haranguing from the doctor who seems more interested in his social state than his physical wellbeing: “Problem with these kids is that they want everything now. They won’t wait for anything. Have you seen how they harass you in town begging you for money after they nearly make you crash into the car you were supposed to park behind. I don’t trust them. And I never give them money. What for? So that they can buy drugs?” (Duiker 43). His attitude is in complete contrast with the Indian nurse who extends maternal compassion to the injured boy. She is the one who alerts the doctor to the fact that Azure has “been complaining about his ankle” (44). The nurse cleans him, wheels him to Orthopaedics, gives him painkillers, and reminds him not to “forget to come back in about eight days’ time to take out the stitches” (45). Unlike the doctor’s, her words evidence a degree of concern. He simply discharges the boy with the following rebuke: “Your back is black and blue with bruises. Nothing a few days’ rest won’t heal. I hope you’ve learned your lesson” (44). Duiker’s juxtaposition of a white doctor and an Indian nurse invites a racialized reading of their polarised attitudes towards their patient. The doctor vents stereotypes about street kids even when he should be performing his duty of care. The inference we can make is that as a white member of the formal economy he is entitled to racially profile anyone who falls outside that category, whether they be a patient or not. We do not see the same sense of entitlement in the novel’s white prostitutes who, of course, fall into the informal economy.

Our protagonist’s last significant encounter with a white person occurs atop Table Mountain in the cave in which he finally takes refuge from the hostile external world. Oscar quite innocently gets trapped up the mountain by encroaching darkness while on a routine hike. He sees light in Azure’s cave and asks to be admitted but confesses that, “I don’t think there’s room enough for two” (112). At this point Azure thinks, “You’re making yourself welcome” (112), which may indicate that he feels his guest is trespassing. He repeats this sentiment when Oscar offers to show him the reservoir on the other side of the mountain “tomorrow” (114): whereas Oscar takes it as a matter of fact that he will stay in the cave overnight, Azure reflects that, “He’s inviting himself again” (114). It does not take long for Azure to lose patience with his visitor’s sense of entitlement, as he tells us that, “I didn’t ask him to come here. There’s plenty of room on the mountain. Why did he have to come here? White people are full of *kak*” (117). Azure comes to a similar conclusion after he and Mr

Lebowitz haggle over his fee. The latter offers only food and a bed while the former insists on food, a bed and an extra R50, which Mr Lebowitz regards as “a hard bargain” (81). Azure simply asks him, “Have you ever slept out here?”, before irately informing us that “White people are full of *kak*” (81).

It is the young man’s firmly held opinion that the failure of whites to sensitise themselves to their privilege places them at a remove from life on the ground. Out at Sea Point towards the end of the narrative, Azure is careful not to litter because, “white people are full of shit [. . .]. If they saw you leaving your rubbish lying around they would probably tell you off or something like that” (151). He intimates while looking out to sea that they feel the beach is theirs: “I like watching people swim. There’s a certain order about it. Out at sea there’ll be one or two white faces, mostly surfers. They don’t fear the sea. As always they go at it like they own the sea” (151). Their lack of fear underpins their sense of entitlement or ownership, as Azure observes on his descent from the top of the mountain:

White people are everywhere. They think they own this mountain [. . .]. They point at things like they fear nothing. Look at this, look at that, I hear them say. Let’s go here, let’s go there. And they walk like they own the road. They don’t look at the ground. They only look ahead of them. That’s why animals are always running away from them when they try and see them up close. White people don’t know fear and animals know that. (124-25)

The suggestion here is that fear imbues one with the necessary humility to live in harmony with one’s surroundings, or at least be aware of those surroundings and everything in them. According to Azure, whites ride roughshod over everyone and everything because they are blinded by arrogance. He, of course, knows fear because he has had to live like an animal, as he confesses:

I know what it means to be scared, to be always on the lookout. I know what it means to hear your own heartbeat. It means you are on your own. [. . .]. I know what it feels like to hear your own fear beating in your ear. I know what it feels like to bite the insides of your mouth to control the fear. I know what it feels like to bite your nails till your fingertips are raw and sensitive to everything you touch. I know fear. And I hate it. I live with it everyday. The streets, they are not safe. (66)

Whites are safely buttressed in the colonist's sector, out of reach of the threats which Azure has to negotiate every day. He cannot engage in frivolity in the way they do, as emerges when Sealy warns him not "to be stupid, only white people say" they "are just going for a walk" (146). He then insists on knowing Azure's destination because in his paradigm, one cannot just wander the streets of Cape Town aimlessly. The freedom of white agency reinforces Yancy's point that "it is whites who are able to enact a 'just me' status" because of their social, economic and institutional privilege (226). We have seen that Azure links his perceived white ownership of physical landmarks to their body language. He sees their entitlement in what they say, how they walk, and what they do when they are out in the world. According to Yancy, white entitlement "can be expressed through the modality of physical comportment, a way of inhabiting physical space, a way of glancing/not glancing" (234).

To illustrate this point, I would like to digress and present a scene from Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, in which the narrator stumbles into the college library and observes the white upper middle-class students' body language:

Tuition at the College-on-the-Hill is fourteen thousand dollars [. . .]. I sense there is a connection between this powerful number and the way the students arrange themselves physically in the reading areas of the library. They sit on broad cushioned seats in various kinds of ungainly posture, clearly calculated to be the identifying signs of some kinship group or secret organization. They are fetal, splayed, knock-kneed, arched, square-knotted, sometimes almost upside-down. [. . .] it is only the language of economic class they are speaking in one of its allowable outward forms. (49)

The haphazard deportment is symptomatic of a devil-may-care attitude which is only possible for those who are completely at ease with their surroundings. The external environment poses no threat to those whose economic status shields them from life's harsher vicissitudes. In *Thirteen Cents*, whiteness is thus clearly synonymous with entitlement, privilege and exploitation. Needless to say, this is a static formulation which conforms to stereotypes about whiteness. There are poor whites in the novel whom I shall touch on momentarily. It is also important to keep in mind that, as Njabulo S. Ndebele reminds us, "there isn't a single whiteness [. . .] there is a multiplicity of 'whitenesses' which we don't understand because these differences have all been papered over by the official whiteness of apartheid" (117).

Unfortunately, Duiker does not explore this multiplicity of whitenesses. His treatment of whiteness situates it firmly in the colonist's sector which oppresses the colonised's.

I now move on to Duiker's depiction of Cape Town's 'coloured' community, which aspires to whiteness even though it is situated in the poverty of the colonised's sector. Allen, Gerald, Liesel, Joyce and Richard all abuse Azure at some point because they see him as black, something less than themselves. Allen, the pimp, beats his white prostitutes in order to feel a sense of power. He tells them, "*Daai glad hare* [. . .] does nothing for me" (Duiker 14), to remind them that Caucasian features will not buy them special treatment in the colonised's sector. Upon witnessing Allen's assault of one of his white prostitutes, Azure surmises as follows: "That's the problem with the white bitches. I find that they never know when to shut up and here the *ouens* don't give them a chance. They are heavy-handed. They just whack. And if that doesn't do it, they *naai* and then they fuck them up even more" (14). Here, violence is used as a "cleansing force" which "rids the colonized of their inferiority complex" (Fanon, *Wretched* 51), albeit temporarily. By exerting violence on a weaker body, the colonised subject feels empowered.

In a conversation between Azure and Vincent, one of his few friends, we learn that Allen is "a bastard who thinks he's white" (Duiker 36). Vincent goes on to say that although he "looks white [. . .] if you look at him closely you can see some coloured blood. He hates it, that's why he's so fucked up. [. . .] imagine being nearly white but not quite. [. . .]. It just eats him up that he's not all white. Why do you think he's always so well-dressed?" (36-37). So, not only does Allen beat up white women to feel that he owns them, he also over-compensates for his desire to be white through expensive sartorial taste. We see this trait when he asks Azure, "See how I'm dressed?", and then rattles off a list including designer labels such as "Rayban, Gucci, Armani and Nike" (32). Azure catches on to Allen's materialism quickly and divulges the lessons it has taught him:

I've learned something from Allen and that is money is everything. It's everything because you can get a house and call the shots. When you're dressed properly grown-ups give you a bit of respect. But as long as I'm me and have no home and wear tattered clothes Allen will never give me proper clothes because that would mean that I can look like him. And no one who knows Allen looks like him. He makes sure of that. Even if it means he strips you himself. He always has to outdress you, outsmart you. It's his way. It's the grown-up way. He only wears Nike shoes and expensive jeans and tops. He always gives me clothes that are about to fall apart, so that I'm always

dependent on him. So that I will always go back to him. But I understand. I have to do it. It's the only way I can be safe on the streets. There are too many monsters out there.

(16)

Azure may be unfortunate enough to live in Allen's territory, but the true monster of *Thirteen Cents* is Gerald, the novel's most explicitly racist character. Much like Allen, we learn that Gerald "thinks he's white because he's got straight hair and a light skin" (35). Other similarities he shares with Allen include gangsterism and antipathy towards Azure. Gerald has it in for Azure because in a moment of confusion, the boy mistakes him for one of his cohorts, Sealy. This would not have been a problem had Sealy been 'coloured', but Sealy is black and Gerald takes exception at being mistaken for a black man. Azure explains the incident to Vincent thus: "I was smoking *zol* with Sealy and then Sealy left to do some shit with Gerald. So then Gerald comes over to me and by mistake I call him Sealy" (34). Vincent responds by saying, "Fuck, you know how that nigga hates black people. You insulted him" (34). Gerald punches Azure after the case of mistaken identity, while screaming, "*Jy, tsek jou naai, ek is nie a kaffir nie*" (19). Azure manages to escape but knows that he must face Gerald sooner or later. He speculates on being captured, picturing the day someone gives him up to his pursuer. In the passage below, he imagines an informant betraying his whereabouts to Gerald, and broods on the likely consequences:

Gerald, you won't guess who I saw in town today. You know that *lytie* who called you a kaffir? And Gerald will only be too happy to let them kick the shit out of me. Beat him till those eyes of his turn purple. Kick the sunshine out of his little smile, that little *moegu*, calling me a kaffir! Who the fuck does he think he is? Just because he's got blue eyes, fuck him, he's still a kaffir. Does he know who I am? Does he know the Twenty-Eights? Does he know what I can do to him? And after that I must apologise to Gerald because Gerald is a clean coloured with straight hair and light skin. And then I must give him some money because my hands are too dirty to buy him anything. (28)

Vincent informs Azure that Gerald "would love to have your blue eyes" (35), which Gerald sees as wasted on a black boy when they would suit his straight hair and light skin better. Azure is painfully aware of the racial hierarchy which situates him at the bottom rung of the social ladder, which is why he eventually gives himself up to the thug, who administers a punishment far worse than the boy had imagined. After Sealy thrashes him according to Gerald's instructions, Richard takes him to hospital and then abducts him. They arrive at a

block of flats in a 'coloured' area where Azure reads the graffiti, "*Mandela se poes*" (49). This graffiti is emblematic of the racial tensions in a city that has been shorn, in the words of Radithlalo, "of its enabling mythologies of 'nation-building', 'reconciliation', and 'economic revival'" ("Travelling Salesman" 98). The brutal gang rape which follows is laden with racial overtones as Richard commands Azure to fellate him: "*Jy dink jy's mos 'n kleurling, ne? Suig. Suig*" (Duiker 53). Because of his blue eyes, Azure is accused of seeing himself as 'coloured' even though he does not. Nevertheless, he must be reminded of his place. As Richard and his friends take turns with him, they refer to him as "*Gemors*", which equates him and his kind to rubbish. When they are done, Azure is told, "You're sleeping outside again. It's too hot in here *en julle kaffirs stink*" (54), just like rubbish.

As I have previously discussed, Azure is raped because Gerald wants him to "understand what it means to be a woman" (71). This does not escape Radithlalo who states that, "By depicting his [that is, Azure's] manhandling, rough treatment and violation, Duiker substitutes the female victim with a male one, inverting the accepted picture of gender violence and showing how violation knows no boundaries" ("Travelling Salesman" 100-01). Indeed, Duiker explains below how he treats violence as a theme in his texts:

I want to show that violence has a deeper meaning [. . .]. Without trivialising its seriousness [. . .] one can say that violence is a culture that communicates a certain message [. . .]. I wanted to explore how violence is not only a way of dominating people, but [. . .] is used by people to communicate with each other and to convey a message. The way in which this happens is deplorable. But we are part of a violent culture, and we never knew a period of rest, not [sic] did we receive help to enter into a process of healing after apartheid [. . .].

It will take some time still, before violence neutralises itself. I look behind it: where does it come from, is it hate, anger or communication? In any case, it's a kind of language. (qtd. in Radithlalo 101-02)

The violence Gerald visits on Azure is intended to communicate that he and his race are subordinate, and can and should be subjugated.

After the incident, Gerald rechristens Azure Blue and takes him under his wing. Compared to the threats Allen and Gerald pose, Joyce and Liesel are mere inconveniences. At first, Azure is cordially dependent on the two 'coloured' women, relying on Liesel for marijuana, and Joyce for leftovers. There is also a level of trust that Azure has for these women. He



regards Liesel as “the only grown-up I trust because she asks me for money and always pays me back a week later” (Duiker 3). And of the other woman he has the following to say: “What I like about Joyce is that she never asks me how I make my money. [. . .] unlike most grown-ups she doesn’t ask too many questions. [. . .]. Sometimes [. . .] she lets me smoke a cigarette with her” (12). She also offers to do Azure’s banking for him. By the end of the novel, though, he is not on speaking terms with either of these ladies, having discovered that Liesel has been lacing his marijuana, and that Joyce has been filching the funds he thought she had been depositing for him. Once again, it must be said, in relation to ‘coloureds’, we have an unsympathetic, fixed, familiar and fairly stereotypical rendering of a particular racial group by Duiker. In contrast, his treatment of Azure is nuanced and complex.

It is tempting to classify Azure as black but this is exactly what Duiker makes it difficult to do. In the words of Callenberger:

Azure [. . .] lives in a world of constant racial indeterminacy because his black skin contrasts with his deep blue eyes; therefore Azure cannot live as a typical black person because black people only notice his eyes, while white Capetonians only notice his skin. [. . .] he [. . .] seems metaphorically lost in Cape Town, existing in a raceless purgatory because his body precludes him from embracing specific racial ties. (91)

Azure begins his narrative by telling us that, “I have blue eyes and a dark skin. I’m used to people staring at me, mostly grown-ups. When I was at school children used to beat me up because I had blue eyes. They hated me for it” (Duiker 1). Now that he is out of school adults are the ones who beat him up. Blacks hit him because he is not black enough, ‘coloureds’ because he is trying to be ‘coloured’, and whites assault him sexually because they are removed from the crude physical violence of the streets. It is my contention that Azure identifies with none of these racial categories. He hates everyone except Vincent because the rest take him for a ride.

We have seen how the ‘coloureds’ in the novel envy Azure his blue eyes because they bring him closer to whiteness than their fair complexions. To escape their violence, Azure is encouraged by Vincent to be “the blackest person” (35). Azure betrays his literal interpretation of the advice by insisting that his skin tone is “not far from *makwerekwere*” (35), which is to say that he almost resembles a dark African foreign national. Vincent, however, is referring to the performative aspects of racial identities, as we see in his

clarification to Azure: “I mean you have to be more black ... like more black than all of us. You must watch what you wear. Like those shoes. Things like that give you away. [. . .]. So now they look at your blue eyes and your shoes and think blue eyes, veldskoene, he’s trying to be white” (35). As an antidote, Vincent prescribes the following performative procedure: “Look at *makwerekwere*. Try and be a little more like them. [. . .]. Maybe you must buy one of their tops” (36). At which point Azure panics and asks, “Are you mad? Allen will kill me. He’ll fuck me up. He’ll say, Wwho [sic] are you trying to be? and I won't know what to say” (36). Azure would not know what to say because he does not know which identity to perform in order not to be beaten up. And the possibility of someone asking who he is trying to be indicates the social pressure on him to adopt a racial identity that he may not feel is his own. Why can he not wear veldskoene? Why can he not be white? Does he not reserve the right to perform whiteness, but reserves the right to perform the identity of the social category which Vincent labels *makwerekwere*? It seems as if should one who is deemed to be black by others fail to perform his or her blackness to satisfaction, the consequences are violent, as Vincent explains to Azure: “That’s why people have beat you up all your life. They think you’re not black enough” (35).

Sealy, a black man, does Gerald’s bidding and hospitalises Azure after his innocent mistake. Gerald tells Azure that, “I’m not going to dirty my hands on a piece of shit like you” (39), which implies that Sealy’s already black hands would not be further sullied by beating Azure. Sealy apologises before assaulting Azure, in a moment of recognition: “Sorry, I have to do this [. . .] he’s watching” (38). Gerald’s insult to Azure is an insult to Sealy, and the latter acknowledges this before executing his boss’s orders. Here, Sealy exemplifies the black man who, according to Steve Biko, needs to be reminded “of his complicity in the crime of allowing himself to be misused and therefore letting evil reign supreme in the country of his birth” (31). Like Biko, we must then ask, “What makes [such a] black man fail to tick? Is he convinced of his own accord of his inabilities? Does he lack in his genetic make-up that rare quality that makes a man willing to die for the realisation of his aspirations? Or is he simply a defeated person? The answer [. . .] is not a clearcut one” (30).

Duiker clearly casts Sealy in the role of the black apartheid enforcer whom Biko regarded as non-black. We may infer that Sealy does not have a choice because Gerald ‘owns’ the bridge underneath which they live, but this excuse does not endear the man to Azure as we see after Gerald’s death. Azure’s mistrust of people, black or otherwise, comes to the fore when he confides in us that he does not “have a good feeling about Sealy” (144). In a heated

moment, he confronts him with the question, “How do I know that you’re not another Gerald?” (139). Race does not factor into Azure’s valuation of Sealy. He simply does not want to be taken for another ride. Azure’s suspicion comes to fruition as Sealy undergoes a metamorphosis before his eyes: “I slowly watch him change. First he gets a gold filling in his front teeth and then he starts buying flashy clothes. And the kind with expensive labels. Arrogance grows in his eyes. [. . .]. He starts reminding me of Allen [. . .]. I don’t know who’s worse” (152). Shortly after this observation, the police arrest Sealy and bulldozers tear the informal settlement down. Azure gives away all of Sealy’s belongings and vows “to go back to the streets” (153). He expresses his abandonment of the black community by telling us that they “can go wherever they’re going without” him (153). And so Azure renounces the company of others for good and climbs up the mountain one last time.

Johns is worth repeating at this point because it is at the narrative’s conclusion that we see that, “Duiker presents his hero not as one half of an idealised couple, much less part of a communitarian group, but as a profoundly atomised wanderer – a loner, an urchin unattached to any single mate or traditional patterns” (256). Azure refuses to identify with any racial group for as long as that group traffics in corruption. His actions make it clear that he would rather be alone, and, as the conclusion makes it clear, see the whole sick society burn.

### **3.4) Adults, Banks, and the Government: *Thirteen Cents* as Third Literature**

Duiker’s novel does the work of Third Literature on several levels. Stylistically, it opens in the mode of urban realism but closes in what can only be described as magical realism, thereby questioning and manipulating established “bourgeois esthetic canons” (Tomaselli, *Cinema of Apartheid* 196). Like the other authors under study, Duiker concerns himself with the fate of a disadvantaged, dispossessed child who must negotiate life in the colonised’s sector. In so doing, his protagonist – similarly to Moele’s – draws “attention to the sexualized/racialized body as the site of both brutal oppression and creative resistance” (Shohat 69), which is a characteristic of Third Literature that I discussed in my second chapter. Additionally, the setting of the novel is more than just a backdrop against which the narrative action takes place. It exerts environmental pressures on the characters, thereby fulfilling Gabriel’s previously mentioned requirement that “the context” act as “central protagonist” in Third Literature. The reason for this is to foreground the living conditions of

the colonised. *Thirteen Cents* is set in a post-apartheid South African city in which the citizenry is divided along racial lines, and completely disregards the plight of its most vulnerable members. Raditlhalo contends that, “*Thirteen Cents* [. . .] explores the underbelly of a South African picturesque city to show the unpalatable side to it, rendering South Africa a ‘nonsense universe’ to some of its peoples” (“A Victory of Sorts” 276). Those responsible for this ‘nonsense universe’ are none other than the government officials who, as Mamadou Abdou Babou Ngom puts it, continue to renege on their “promise of social equality and regard for human rights” (54).

It is clear from the onset that Azure has no safety net. Like Mokgethi, he is a parentless child at the mercy of society. The difference is that there are no extended relatives – however reluctant – willing to take him in. Duiker never overtly politicises the plight of street children, but it is clear from the time Azure reads the graffiti disparaging Mandela before he is raped, that child welfare – one of the ex-president’s foremost concerns – is not a priority for the government of the day. Johns diagnoses the situation as follows:

In essence, the ANC’s neo-liberal system left many out in the cold, fending for themselves, without a safety net. Although this political backdrop never receives full treatment, *Thirteen Cents* nevertheless dramatises the state of the nation through the eyes of a subject living without any kind of government cushion, forced into performing sex acts for economic survival. The urchin’s sexual vulnerability suggests something about the uncertainty unleashed by the ANC’s push for neo-liberal, *laissez-faire* hegemony. Faced with uncertain prospects in a failing public sphere, money concerns dominate the most personal experiences imaginable. (253)

Raditlhalo reminds us that, “Azure’s work is in itself a reminder of the lack of gainful employment for the city’s flotsam, pointing to a larger societal problem of unemployment, which links up with criminality, prostitution and gangsterism (“A Victory of Sorts” 273). Azure steers clear of criminality and gangsterism, but cannot immunise himself from their undesirable effects. Even so, he isolates himself in his independence, which he sees as unavoidable. Below, Johns comments on the defencelessness of the street urchin and the indifference of the South African state:

Although Azure never seeks protection from the ‘New South African’ state, the state never intervenes. Disregard appears mutual – an indication, however implicit, of a

‘hands-off’ economy at work. Thus, in a certain sense, one type of oppression replaces another. For if apartheid, with its draconian pass laws, seemed oppressively ‘hands on,’ then the protagonist of *Thirteen Cents* faces a world that seems oppressively ‘hands-off.’ The helping hand of the state is nowhere to be found. (257-58)

We must ask ourselves why Azure would expect aid from a state which he has seen to be every bit as corrupt as the people living in it. In this democratic South African dispensation, Azure tells us the following: “I’ve seen a woman being raped by policemen at night near the station. [. . .]. I’ve seen a couple drive over a street child and they kept going. I’ve seen a woman give birth at Sea Point and throw it in the sea. [. . .]. I have seen enough rubbish to fill the sea” (Duiker 142). He is under no delusions as to the workings of the state, and knows that its functionaries, such as the police, are only there to collaborate with criminals, if not perpetrate crimes themselves. After Gerald kills a powerful drug lord, we learn that, “This is South Africa [. . .]. The police were also in on it. Times are shit. They also wanted a slice of the action” (59).

Gabriel informs us that, “Inherent in [the] cinema of the Third World are its ties with the social life, ideologies and conflicts of the times. Third Cinema is moved by a concern for the fate of the Third World man [,] woman [and child] threatened by colonial and neo-colonial wars (*Aesthetics of Liberation* 1-2). As Third Literature, Duiker’s work concerns itself with Cape Town’s post-apartheid, socio-economic milieu, and the undeclared war which the state wages against those locked out of the formal economy, having now fully aligned itself with neo-liberal capital.

According to Tomaelli, the forces of neo-imperial capitalism had been “preparing the new black middle class [now the ruling elite] to form an alliance with capital against their homeland compatriots” for some time (*Cinema of Apartheid* 66-67). The exclusionary practices of modern day banks are a product of this alliance. In an incredibly piercing insight, Azure compares their operational tendencies to those of ordinary street thugs:

I have forgotten [. . .] how to hold a pen, so how can I go to the bank myself? Grown-ups ask many questions there. You must remember when you were born and exactly how old you are. You must have an address and it mustn’t be one that keeps changing. Like you must stay in the same spot for say maybe five years and when you move you must tell the bank. They must know everything about your movements. Like how many homes you have and whom must they call when they want to do something with your money. If you ask me they are a bit like gangsters, they want to know everything so that

you cannot run away from them. And you must have an ID and a job that pays you regularly. And every time you put in money they make money for you by lending out your money. They are very clever people who work at banks. (Duiker 12)

All of the requirements listed above may as well be a wish list for Azure. There is no way he can access any of the information required to participate in the formal economy, and without guardians he is not only doomed to a life on the margins, but is also at the mercy of the scruples of others. As we have seen, Joyce – his unofficial bank – defaults on him. Johns has the following to say with regard to the official and unofficial economies of the novel:

The bank's cautious pattern of surveillance is only activated [. . .] if one chooses to belong to the official universe of the status quo; otherwise, the 'bank' of the seedy underworld, run by his 'mother' will take over. One slips without much notice from an official economy into an unofficial one; money rules both spheres. In these ways, the underworld not only mocks the official, proper, bourgeois world above, it also takes over when the other fails. (258)

I do not agree that one has a choice to belong to the official universe of the status quo. Azure certainly does not have one. He has to bank through Joyce, and I am not sure why Johns refers to her as his 'mother'. Since it is true that money rules the official and unofficial spheres, and both are susceptible to crashes and the like, I agree that the underworld economy mocks that of the world above. Azure's comparison of banks and gangsters presents the similarities between the two worlds convincingly and ironically. His assessment shows how both the privileged and underprivileged are ultimately taken advantage of by the same system which creates the two categories in the first place.

Azure responds to this system militantly. As far as he is concerned it is responsible for his oppression, and so it must be destroyed along with its designers, namely adults. His antipathy towards grown-ups is well-documented and, one must say, well-warranted. In the novel, as Radithalo rightly points out, they are nothing more than the representatives of "a society with an atrophied conscience" ("Travelling Salesman" 98). Just before the novel's "ending in a phantasmagoric destruction of the city" (Radithalo, "A Victory of Sorts" 277), Azure passes judgement on the adults of South Africa:

What does [adulthood] mean? It means grown-ups are evil and they use you and they use their children to use you. They use anything they can use and when they get it they still want more. They are never satisfied. I don't really remember a grown-up ever saying enough. They always want more. Even if that more means you have to work till you die. Grown-ups are full of shit. They are evil. Why are they watching me? What do I have that they can't get from their own efforts? There's plenty of other things to steal. Why do they want to steal my mind? Why can't they do things for themselves? Why must I do all the work and someone else must steal it? Grown-ups are devils. They have children so that they can feel good about themselves. So that they can say, I made you, I can take you out of this life, like my father once said. I never forget that. How can anyone say that? Grown-ups have children so that they can say, Oh God I'm going to come. I'm going to shoot all over you.

And why must they always have the first and the last word? Why must I always be in the middle? I didn't ask for trouble. Why do they want to fill my head with ugly things? I see ugly things all the time. Isn't it enough? Do they want me to see and think ugly things all the time? Must I become a stupid pigeon so that they can feel good about themselves? They are stupid. They are fucked up. They are crazy. (Duiker 143-44)

What follows is a reckoning of biblical proportions as the elements combine to bring destruction to Cape Town for – what I argue are – the sins of its inhabitants. This is a reasonable position to take, for Ngom contends that, “*Thirteen Cents*, to be sure, is an indictment of South African society” (44). Accordingly, the novel's ending can be read as retributive. It is an indication “that Sello Duiker does not feel sanguine about the successful addressing of the fate of street children in South Africa” (45). This is why he destroys the city and imbues his protagonist with a sense of calm amidst the chaos. Danyela Demir, Olivier Moreillon and Alan Muller suggest that, “Azure's position atop Table Mountain highlights his detachment from the destruction that is raging over the city below. This detachment further emphasises his increasing drift into a surreal world, which in turn accentuates his violent environment and his abused state of mind” (32). I would like to add that his detachment also marks him as innocent, as victim of the Sodom and Gomorrah which now meets its annihilation. Raditlhalo adds that the “apocalyptic ending, which suggests Azure's post-traumatic stress syndrome, points to the unresolved matters at the heart of a society bent on relentless modernity” (“*Travelling Salesman*” 98-99). Much like his protagonist, Duiker, according to Annari van der Merwe, suffered from “an inability to protect himself from life” (qtd. in Raditlhalo 103). He escaped the human condition through suicide but does not design the same fate for his protagonist; instead he wreaks a godlike vengeance on Azure's behalf. Both his and Azure's paths end in certain death, which suggests a certain incorrigibility about human society. Even though Duiker may seem to recommend the path to self-destruction, it

is still a path “which devises directions for cultural resistance/action against an oppressive social order in *cooperation with the subject*” (Tomaselli, *Cinema of Apartheid* 198).

### 3.5) *Thirteen Cents*: Conclusions

Azure is by far the most complex of the protagonists in the three novels dealt with in this study. His dark skin and blue eyes problematize his identification as black, and his sexual deviance complicates any fixed notion of masculinity. Duiker deliberately casts Azure as an outlier to all social categories in order to challenge the criteria which delineates them. Andy Carolin argues that the Duiker legacy is replete with texts which “disavow the mobilisation of collective political identities. The novels also resist the somewhat totalising transition-era discourses of nation-building by foregrounding the ambiguities and contradictions of individual subjectivities” (qtd. in Demir, Moreillon and Muller 31).

Duiker, in constructing the narrative of a street kid, organises everything in Azure’s world around money. As Johns notes, the protagonist’s “age registers in the reader’s mind against the novel’s titular associations with money – *Thirteen Cents*” (254). It is in the pursuit of money that Duiker’s protagonist engages in behaviours that question preconceived ideas of what it means to be a man, and what it means to be masculine. Much like in *Young Blood*, manhood in Duiker’s novel is equated with the ability to fend for oneself. Siphos steals, which in Mzobe’s novel is presented as daring, hyper-masculine, risk-taking behaviour. Azure takes a moral stance against theft, even though his circumstances are far more pressing than Siphos’. In this little way, against overwhelming odds, we see the first spark of Azure’s agency. We see that his behaviour will only be determined by his circumstances up to a certain point, after which he will decide exactly what he is or is not prepared to do. The same self-determination can be observed in his refusal to take any other drug but marijuana, while those around him reach for crystal meth, Mandrax, and all manner of injectable poisons. His resolve does not waver even in the face of temptation, unlike Mzobe’s protagonist who smokes, sniffs, snorts and imbibes whatever is going. Azure also takes the principled decision never to hurt anyone for money, even though he is exposed to the threat of violence every day. If manhood is defined as the ability to take care of oneself, then safety is another thing that money buys, after food and clothing. Azure needs protection money to placate the



gangsters who rule the streets that he works by night, which is just another reason why he enters the world of male prostitution.

In Azure's choice of vocation, Duiker explores the intersection between masculinity and sexual orientation. The previous two texts discussed in this thesis equate masculinity with heterosexual predatory sex. In *Young Blood* it manifests as male to female promiscuity, and in *Untitled* as male to female rape. In Duiker's sensitive and skilful portrayal, Azure's economically motivated homosexual behaviour is in no way dissonant with his heterosexual orientation. Of course, he suffers the psychological trauma of prostitution this does this confuse his sexual preference. Duiker does not hierarchize sexual orientation, which is a strategy that allows him to challenge heteronormative thinking regarding black males. Johns summarises the impact of this strategy below:

Duiker's novel aids us in rethinking South African debates over sexual orientation. [. . .] by privileging what is, above all, economically motivated [sexual behaviour] over what is 'traditional' and 'authentic' to South Africa, the novel subtly picks apart not only the homophobic rhetoric brewing [. . .] today, but the government's failed economic policies as well. (253)

Azure's opportunistic homosexual sex is consensual, but his brutal gang rape certainly is not. Nevertheless, the rape scene in *Thirteen Cents* is central to Duiker's project of debunking some of the myths concerning masculinity. As Raditlhalo contends, Duiker's depiction of Azure's sexual assault "expresses close identification with [. . .] violated womanhood [. . .], blurring the boundaries of sexual violation and orientation" ("Travelling Salesman" 100). Although Gerald justifies his gang's rape of the boy in misogynistic terms, we cannot but speculate on the sexual orientation of the rapists. Azure's homosexual behaviour is born of necessity but these men voluntarily rape the child. Given their insistence that they are putting him in a woman's place, one has to wonder how they become sufficiently aroused to. Duiker challenges us to take stock of the slippage between homosexuality and heterosexuality. This scene demonstrates that heterosexuals can rape and be raped, just as homosexuals can rape and be raped. As in *Untitled*, the bottom line is that the ultimate affirmation of masculinity seems to be the sexual violation of a weaker body.

The social landscape in *Thirteen Cents* is stratified along apartheid-era racial lines. It is rigid and fixed with very little room for cross-cultural movement. Whites in the novel are

safely buttressed in the colonist's sector, except for the two prostitutes and two beggars in the colonised's sector. As the master caste, they are privileged, entitled and exploitative, interacting with the colonised only in as far as it is expedient. They are also prejudiced towards those who happen to fall outside of the formal economy.

Duiker's 'coloured' characters are extremely racist. They aspire towards whiteness and deplore blackness. Although they fall into the colonised's sector, they accumulate the petty accoutrements of the colonist's sector, mainly through illicit means. Duiker stereotypically casts them as gangsters, pimps, drug-dealers and prostitutes, in what is an unflattering and unsympathetic portrayal of the racial group.

I am of the belief that the world Duiker presents is as static as it is for strategic reasons. The world Azure inhabits has to be a foil for his uniqueness. Duiker's supporting characters have to be stereotypes of one kind or another in order for us to see that Azure is something different, a new formulation, a new idea. For starters, he is defined from without: it is the world that insists he is black with all the derogatory labels it can muster. He only identifies himself as a boy with dark skin and blue eyes.

The blacks of the novel receive no special treatment from Duiker. They come off as weak and impressionable. As far as commonalities go, the only one shared with Azure is that, like him, they are the lowest of the low. Azure is discriminated against by all races because he possesses hybrid features. He is beaten by blacks, abused by coloureds, and used by whites. It is because he is completely alone in the world that he is free to identify with only one person, himself. Even though his subjectivity endures constant bombardment, he refuses to align himself with any group. His power as a character lies in the fact that he is self-defined under circumstances which constantly dictate who and what he is. The refrain, "My mother is dead. My father is dead" (Duiker 161,162,163, 164), is repeated on each of the last four pages of the novel. Its purpose is to remind him that he is completely accountable to himself. In this way, Azure becomes the only character in the novel – and indeed the only character in all three texts – to transcend race.

As Third Literature, *Thirteen Cents* draws our attention to Raditlhalo's observation that, "Cape Town, the tourist destination of the famous and glamorous" is also "the city with some of the worst statistics of child abuse, disappearances and deaths in the country" ("Travelling Salesman" 98). As is the case in *Untitled*, the lack of governmental intervention gives rise to the conditions under which children are preyed upon by social predators. Duiker uses Azure's

brutalisation “to recast sanctimonious pontificating vis-à-vis human and children’s rights” (98). The children, like many of us, have given up on a state that thrives on corruption and police brutality. Azure does not expect any help from those who have perpetrated, or made possible, some of the atrocities he has seen and experienced. Duiker’s novel, much like Moele’s, makes us aware of the war the state is waging against its most vulnerable members.

*Thirteen Cents* makes the post-apartheid state’s exclusionary practices obvious. It is clear that some people are meant to be left by the wayside while others prosper. The novel’s most poignant example of the discrimination that those who are locked out of the formal economy have to face is Azure’s meditation on the workings of banks. On the subject, Johns comments that, “Told from the perspective of a child, the underworld and the official designs of the bank appear of a kind. [. . .] Azure, who possesses no adequate defence [. . .] is no match for the bank and the requirements of brick-and-mortar institutions” (258). Fanon maintains that the move to exclude certain sections of the population from full participation in the life of the country,

is a mask behind which looms an even greater undertaking to dispossess. The intention is to strip the people of their possessions as well as their sovereignty. You can explain anything to the people provided you really want them to understand. And if you think they can be dispensed with, that on the contrary they would be more of a nuisance to the smooth running of the many private and limited companies whose aim is to push them further into misery, then there is no more to be said. (*Wretched* 131)

Azure’s treatment at the hands of grown-ups confirms his status as detritus to society. He is physically and psychologically battered into the realisation that he is on his own. His breakaway from a racialized world in which he has no place represents his only victory. Azure demonstrates that there is no way to be black, or anything else for that matter, if the only point of reference is the self. The problem is that society forces racial categories on its subjects, and those who do not fit are often the victims of violence. The same can be said for sexual orientation and gender identities. Duiker’s life seems to be the ultimate critique of society’s intolerance of difference. His suicide can be read as the ultimate indictment of people who are not prepared to let each other be. In *Thirteen Cents*, he cannot find anything worth salvaging in the society depicted. He seems to suggest that violence is the only language South Africans understand. After Azure refuses a place in the society that refuses him his place, Duiker sees no need for the story to go on.

## Conclusion

This study has attempted to plot the experience of the typical black urban youth since the end of apartheid. To do this, I have relied on three texts from authors who are signed to Kwela Books. I turned to the above-mentioned publishing house because they have their finger on the pulse of ground-breaking developments in contemporary South African literature. *Young Blood*, *Untitled* and *Thirteen Cents* all feature teenage narrators at odds with a hostile adult world. It is a world that is stratified at the levels of race, class and sex. We know that race is a construct but as I stated in my introduction, it need not exist in order for there to be racists. What I mean here is that even though race is an ideological trap, it is one that people still get caught up in. It does not matter whether one identifies as black or not, the outside world makes the phenomenological experience of blackness an event which impinges on the lives of those with dark skins. This is what we see with *Azure*, and it is also what has forced me to deal with racial categories in concrete terms. It has been difficult for me to treat racial categories like manmade inventions – which they are – when there is almost always a correlation between phenotypical appearance and socio-economic status, at least in the texts I have selected. Perhaps I could be accused of suggesting that to treat race as discourse trivialises its material reality. This is just not true. I am simply more concerned with the experiences of those who have been racially marked by this discourse, than I am with carrying out a detailed discourse analysis. The societies depicted in the novels are divided along apartheid lines, with the odd exceptions here and there. Democracy brought with it only cosmetic changes, and has done little to repair the damage of formal segregation. The black ruling elite has been absorbed into the colonist's sector, thereby bearing out Fanon's prediction for almost every post-independence African state. Our state is a little different in

that our colonisers never left but stayed to enjoy their status as the privileged minority, thereby justifying my use of the Fanonian societal divisions of colonist's sector and colonised's.

Sipho, Mokgethi and Azure are all firmly situated in the colonised's sector, and as such have more than a casual acquaintance with violence. To the colonised subject, violence may not only be arbitrary, but also be used to fulfil a variety of functions. In *Young Blood*, it is used to establish criminal hierarchies which are then also maintained or disrupted through violence. It is used for both punitive and intimidatory purposes, which is also the case in the *Thirteen Cents*. Violence is also used to purge feelings of inferiority in the Fanonian sense, as we see in *Untitled*, where the subjugation of weaker female bodies is the default sublimation strategy of males who have, to all intents and purposes, been socially castrated. Azure is also the victim of this brand of violence, as we see when he is womanised by Gerald and his crew. Violence, in all three novels, is a communicative tool which enforces dominant or subordinate status through the application of pain. It is a great leveller in the sense that it pervades almost every social setting, whether it be the home, the street or the school.

Violence is as characteristic of life in the colonised's sector as poverty, making it almost as inescapable. The installation of fear in the colonised subject – the natural outcome of violence – has a direct bearing on the freedom with which black agency expresses itself. Sipho is scared straight and returns to school after his friends are brutally murdered. Mokgethi does not leave the house after six in the evening due to the presence of night prowlers, and Azure cannot move freely between Sea Point and town because of the threat posed by pimps and gangsters. In contrast, whiteness is characterised by a fearlessness which entitles it to the world it inhabits. Black bodies cannot move and express their individuality with the same ease and freedom as their white counterparts, due to the ever-present threat of violence in the colonised's sector.

Black bodies adorn themselves with the Western material markers of success in their quest for some sense of personhood. Since the post-colonies have been turned into consumer markets, and their inhabitants into consumers, humanity or humanness has been reduced to a commodity that is easily purchasable by the acquisitive elite. Those who find themselves locked out of the formal economy due to a lack of education or gainful employment are often treated as subhuman, and as a result behave as such. The criminals of *Young Blood* commit the most heinous of atrocities in their attempts to acquire designer cars and clothes. Some of

the girls of *Untitled* sell their bodies to paedophiles in order to access creature comforts such as airtime and jewellery. And in *Thirteen Cents*, Azure is prepared to do anything for a man who will put R20 in his pocket. Flashy clothes also boost self-esteem in a setting where the colonised subject is often not permitted it. Vusi of *Young Blood* and Allen of *Thirteen Cents* dress as expensively as they do in order to compensate for how cheaply the external world treats them. A life of perdition makes the colonised subject an envious one, who must – more often than not – acquire that which is coveted illicitly.

This perditionous life often predisposes the colonised subject to substance abuse, as we see in both Mzobe's and Duiker's novels. Marijuana is a staple for the 'young bloods' who use it at celebrations, funerals and business meetings. It is also consumed simply to pass the time or to induce sleep. Azure appreciates the soporific effects of the drug whenever he has a few rands to play with at the end of the day. The drug seems to silence the murmurings of troubled consciences who do not have that many ways to self-medicate. Alcohol is also abused by the colonised subject in order to escape reality. In *Young Blood*, successful 'scores' are celebrated with expensive bottles of whisky, and, in *Thirteen Cents*, wine is used to stave off sadness and quieten the rumblings of hungry stomachs. A miasma of intoxicants hangs over the communities depicted in the novels. 'Buttons', *tik*, LSD, ecstasy, cocaine and 'smack' are all alluded to in the texts, pointing to the ubiquitous desire to disrupt a permanent, harsh external reality with a temporary, chemically induced internal one.

Education, the key to a brighter future, is one of the ways which the colonised subject is led to believe that he or she can change his or her external reality. Sipho, Mokgethi and Azure all have extremely complicated relations to the institution that is school. Mzobe's protagonist leaves school to embark on a criminal career that is cut short by a corrupt police unit. He then returns to the pursuit of education after his friends die horribly. Mzobe's novel is a cautionary tale that is supposed to warn youths off crime, but, in so doing, it elides the fact that crime does pay in some instances. Madala, Uncle Stan and Mtshali all get away with their crimes in *Young Blood*, but the moral of Mzobe's story is that kids should stay in school.

Moele's novel exposes the difficulties inherent in obtaining a matric at a school that is situated in the colonised's sector. Mokgethi and her classmates not only have to negotiate hostile relations at home, and navigate streets patrolled by criminals, but also have to avoid the threat of rape at school. In *Untitled*, school is not a haven from the neighbourhood thugs, or a constructive distraction from idleness and mischief; it is a hunting ground for

paedophiles and a breeding ground for ‘gold diggers’. The novel makes it clear that to pass through twelve – or more – years of formal schooling without siring or birthing a child, contracting an STD, falling victim to violent crime, family misfortune or rape, is nothing short of a miracle. Those who come out with ‘the key to a brighter future’ are so exceptional in number, that one must wonder what happens to the rest who fall through the cracks. Mokgethi does not make it to the end of the novel unscathed but to her credit, is determined not to let her trauma derail her. It is not clear how she will survive the next two years in a semi-rural township teeming with social predators, or matriculate from a school that is not only lacking in facilities, but also overseen by opportunistic rapists.

As for Azure, he has no option but to quit school at the age of ten after his parents are murdered. He takes to the streets and devotes every waking hour to the task of survival. It is obvious how Azure is disadvantaged by his lack of education. He is illiterate and completely ignorant of his biographical details. The loss of his guardians is the primary reason for this state of affairs but the fact that he does not attend school means he has no chance of entering the formal economy. Azure is let down by a system which does not intervene in the plight of children who are in his situation, just as Little Bonolo is let down by the failure of the Constitution to protect those who have no one to protect them. One is forced to reflect on the value of an education to the typical, poverty-stricken black youth who is trapped in the township or the street. If anything, these texts reveal that it does not guarantee upward social mobility. Education, like everything in the life of the colonised, is a gamble. It can be cut short, it can become unaffordable, or it can simply slide down the list of one’s priorities.

*Untitled* not only presents the educational space as dysfunctional, but the communal one too. In the novel, the community refuses to accept the crimes of the teachers with whom it trusts its children; instead it enables and defends them according to its patriarchal bias. Defenceless girls are seen as ‘gold digging’ opportunists when teachers who are aware of their poverty lure them into rape with material gifts. Rape is even legitimised through arranged marriages between victims and perpetrators. Moele concerns himself with the plight of the black woman in the colonised’s sector, and shows how she lives under the double oppression of racism and sexism. The male of the colonised’s sector, who has been emasculated by racism, trains his aggression on the weaker bodies of the woman and the child in order to purge himself of his feelings of inferiority. Azure’s rape, which is informed by bigotry at the levels of race and sex, is a clear example of this phenomenon. The promiscuous behaviour of the ‘young bloods’ can also be classified as an affirmation of

masculinity through the sexual conquest of as many female bodies as possible. It is plain to see that our communities are biased towards males because they are the ones who occupy positions of power. For this reason, Mokgethi does not expect any assistance and neither does Azure. Women and children of the colonised's sector are nothing more than chattel. They are property which can be bought, and used under male ownership. In *Untitled*, assaulting a woman is a crime that can be paid for in cash or cows, and the statutory rape of a street kid costs less than R100 in *Thirteen Cents*. In all three texts, no justice is sought by the victims because the police are corrupt. They sell docketts in Moele's novel, steal in Mzobe's, and rape and abet murder in Duiker's text. With no one to protect the weak against the strong, children such as Siphon, Mokgethi and Azure are easily victimised.

Mzobe, Moele and Duiker all illustrate that without money the colonised subject is nothing. Early on in *Young Blood*, Siphon justifies his and also Vusi's entry into crime by telling us that it is better to steal than to hang around at home asking unemployed parents for cash. Money allows for a sense of independence that is welcomed and congratulated by one's relatives. Siphon's parents suspect that he is a criminal but encourage his self-sufficiency all the same. Money gives one access to the type of autonomous movement through the city that is usually only enjoyed by those in the colonist's sector. It also grants one opportunities for sexual gratification because, in the colonised's sector, the ability to provide or improve the material living conditions of a potential sexual partner is the most influential determinant of sexual success. Some of the girls in *Untitled* deliberately fraternise with the teachers and court the attention of men with cars in the hope that they will temporarily elevate them from the poverty on the ground. Azure enjoys his forays into the colonist's sector because they are a reprieve from the hardships of street life. He too knows that only money can make him somebody since he is a product of the colonised's sector. Money can buy a home and decent clothing which make one respectable in the eyes of society.

Just as the girls of *Untitled* give up their bodies to older men for material rewards, so too Azure offers up his to the men of Sea Point in *Thirteen Cents*. His economically motivated homosexuality does not conflict with his default heterosexuality because it is underpinned by the imperative to make money. Here, Duiker manages to destigmatise homosexuality by presenting us with a black male subject whose masculinity is not threatened by sexual intercourse with other men. He debunks the fear of womanisation which traditionally haunts black masculinities. We also see that without money, one may be forced to behave in ways that are antithetical to the beliefs which inform one's identity. The corollary is therefore that



the acquisition of money is often the quickest and simplest way to reduce the distance between the colonist's and colonised's sectors.

All three texts show that to be black in post-apartheid South Africa is not too dissimilar from being black pre-1994. The first two novels present us with homogenous Zulu and Pedi ethnic communities. Other races do not feature to any significant degree in Mzobe's and Moele's works. Mzobe dedicates his novel to every township in South Africa to signify that the Umlazi he depicts symbolises any and every township in the country. And we have seen Jane Rosenthal accord the same symbolic power to the semi-rural school and township Moele presents. In these manifestations of the colonised's sector, black people are poor, violent and uneducated. It is the same in Duiker's *Thirteen Cents*, where they can be contrasted with white and coloured people. Duiker's novel shows not much to have changed in the racial dynamics of the new South Africa. Wealth and power are distributed along the same lines as they were during apartheid, and people continue to slot themselves into the racial categories it created. Azure's sexual victimisation by whites and coloureds reaffirms the racial hierarchy that has blacks at the bottom of humanity.

Duiker presents us with an unchanged society in order to problematize the question of blackness. Azure's hybridity negates the possibility of identification with any racial group. It also shows us how society forces upon the individual identities of its own construction. His victimisation occurs as a consequence of his inability to fit neatly into society's categories, and his ultimate withdrawal, a cue from Duiker as to how to respond to such social pressure.

I have also concerned myself with how these texts show up as Third Literature, which, put another way, is to say that I have tried to assess their impact in the contemporary moment. How do the authors expect us as readers to respond to the concerns they have raised? How have they addressed them, and why have they done so? I began with Mzobe to establish some kind of foothold on the question of contemporary black identity. The intention was that his simple conception of black masculinity would serve as a springboard to launch me into the texts which deal with the subject more delicately. My conclusion is that *Young Blood* is not the strongest example of Third Literature even though it qualifies as such.

The novel's fast pace allows Mzobe to limit his exploration of the characters' interiority and instead focus on the external events which drive the plot. In Third Cinema, as in Third Literature, the primary character is the context or setting, and it is clear in *Young Blood* that the colonised's sector of Umlazi is the principal determinant of the quality of life enjoyed by

its denizens. Mzobe's characters exhibit a sense of exclusion from the mainstream which makes them representative of all township-dwelling youths. His faithful depiction of township life highlights the motivation behind the violent criminal acquisition of cars and other goods. Where the novel fails is in its prescriptive ending which fails to invite semiotically open readings. As I have mentioned, Mzobe fails to highlight the criminal success of some of his peripheral characters and recommends that the path out of poverty is through school, when crime may be the only option for some. This limits the novel's revolutionary impact and leaves it as a failed *Bildungsroman*. Since the black subject has not been assimilated into the romanticised discourses of the new South Africa in the real world, Mzobe cannot but fail to portray a convincing, socially integrated black subject.

Moele responds to the critics who labelled his first novel, *Room 207*, misogynistic with a fictionalised tale of rape that is based on true events. His narrative is at complete odds with the 'better life for all' that was promised to South Africans at the moment of transition. He presents us with the stories behind the victims we see in news headlines every day, and challenges the most progressive Constitution in the world to be worth more than the paper it is written on. In *Untitled*, Moele presents us with a township community that is neglected by its government in terms of service delivery and provision of amenities. The only time the government seems to acknowledge its existence is while canvassing for votes during election season. Moele takes up the question of identity in terms that harken back to the original brutalisation of the black body. He attributes the violent treatment of women in the familial space to the ordinary violence that was done to the black body. Black women are defined from without by white supremacy and black patriarchy. They are even oppressed at the level of culture. The state does not protect them because it is run by men, which means that black female subjects are oppressed by males both privately and publically. Moele cannot plot a way out of the black female experience, given that men continue to assert their dominance through sexual violence. He does, however, explore how the brutalised body can also be a site of resistance or resilience. Mokgethi's determination to rise above her oppression exemplifies Third Literature's preoccupation with narratives of becoming. The protagonist does not know what she will become, but is certain she will become the change that is needed. Moele ends the novel with an optimism that Duiker fails to share.

Duiker's outlook is bleak in *Thirteen Cents* because the government shows complete indifference to the plight of street kids. So ingrained is this disregard that the most vulnerable members of society do not even entertain the hope of aid from the powers that be. 'The

Republic of Cape Town' (yet another satiric reference to the apparent cocooning of the city from the rest of South Africa) is shown to be a jungle in which the weak and defenceless are consumed. Duiker criticises the manner in which the state has aligned itself with private capital to the disadvantage of the downtrodden and disenfranchised. In essence, the state is waging a covert war against its own citizens on behalf of neo-liberal capital. It is locking citizens out of full participation in the formal economy, thus leaving them for dead. The indifference of the state enables the morally bankrupt to take advantage of its surplus inhabitants. Put simply, in a world where a rand can buy anything, people will do anything. Having created a character who resists it, Duiker ultimately gives up on society. Azure shares none of Mokgethi's optimism regarding ways of being black in a hostile world. Duiker recommends rejection and escape as methods of dealing with post-apartheid South Africa: that is, rejection of all of its social categories, be they informed by class or race, and a retreat into the self, which naturally culminates in death: the ultimate resistance to an oppressive existence.

It seems to me that, in the new South Africa, the concept of race is as definitive as it ever was. *Young Blood*, *Untitled* and *Thirteen Cents* demonstrate that South Africa is divided into categories of its own making. There may be no such thing as a black man biologically, but in South Africa – and indeed elsewhere – there is, socially speaking. Yes, one can perform this identity however one chooses but there is a template in place, which in all probability, will be forced upon one. All Moele and Duiker can do is gesture towards ways of resisting the template while conceding that they themselves cannot imagine what lies outside of it.

Perhaps a more discursive reading of these texts may have plotted possible paths out of racialized discourse and its deleterious, deterministic effects on certain sections of the population. However, it can be argued that none of the authors under study deal with the question of race at the level of discourse. They have inherited the terms set by apartheid-era discourse, and divide the population up accordingly. I have worked with the same terms without problematizing them to any significant degree. This, however, is not to suggest that a more sensitive researcher could not have complicated the terms which I have taken and used as they have been given. I am more than prepared to concede that the texts under study may be amenable to a discursive analysis of the social hierarchies depicted by these Kwela authors, even though I may be of the belief that their formulations of South African society could be too simple or fixed to sustain such an enquiry over the length of a thesis.

Fortunately, there are other texts by these writers and others in the Kwela stable, which could more easily accommodate that particular research interest

To be black in the new South Africa almost always means to be poor, marginalised and victimised. Money seems to be the only means of escaping the colonised's sector. There are those who manage it and nominally become members of the colonist's sector, but for those who do not, blackness is often synonymous with suffering. Mokgethi and Azure demonstrate that one need not believe in the values of society in order to be victimised for that which they are perceived as. Moele's protagonist is seen as a black woman in the colonised's sector, and though this is not the only factor which leads to her rape, she is taken advantage of all the same because she is perilously positioned in her society. The same can be said for Duiker's hero, who is seen as a homeless black boy, and is assaulted in just about every way imaginable because of his lowly place in the social order. That is what it means to be black in post-apartheid South Africa, not for everybody, but for the disadvantaged majority. It means almost the same thing it meant in apartheid South Africa. To be black in this country means to be perceived as such, and once perceived as such, treated accordingly. There does not seem to be much choice in the matter in the works of Mzobe, Moele and Duiker.

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