

**“A Man of His Generation”:**

**Portrayals of Masculinity in the Post-Apartheid Novel**

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## Abstract

While portrayals of women in post-apartheid literature have attracted a great deal of academic attention, far less consideration has been given to the depiction of men. My project begins from this point of omission by examining a range of novels to consider how constructions of masculinity have been influenced by South Africa's transition from apartheid rule to democratic governance. Tensions in this new era of constitutionalism between gender equality and older social views are examined, as are the imbrication of these tensions with constructions of race, class, and sexuality. In my analysis, I find that male characters often attempt to embrace the new order but find themselves unable or unwilling to break with patriarchy, misogyny, and homophobia associated with the country's past. In J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* and Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*, the female body is the site for masculinity's self-construction, and this dynamic is informed not only by sexual conquest but by notions of vulnerability and honour. In the crime fiction of Deon Meyer, the challenging of gender stereotypes functions in the resolution of crime, but new masculinities are reliant on the exploitation of women for their construction. In Kgebetli Moele's *The Book of the Dead* and Niq Mhlongo's *Way Back Home*, the effects of the government-supported Black Economic Empowerment programme on the rise of a new black bourgeoisie informs ideas of black masculinity. A chapter on K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* and Eben Venter's *Wolf, Wolf* shows how queer masculinities are constructed in post-apartheid society and how differences in race and class among gay men alter expectations of these models. By offering approaches to the study of masculinity in the post-apartheid novel, this project redresses the lack of critical attention in this area while also contributing new ideas of how gender is constructed.

Drawing together a range of literary texts and genres, this project finds in constructions of masculinity a range of often ambivalent responses to notions of transition and the new in post-apartheid South African literature.

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## Introduction

Consider for a moment two of the most notorious criminal cases to be heard in South Africa since the transition to democracy in 1994, the trials of the country's then Deputy President (now President) Jacob Zuma on charges of rape, and of one of its most high-profile athletes, the Paralympian Oscar Pistorius, for murder. Each speaks to structures of patriarchy and misogyny that reveal widespread views on gender in the country. On 2 November 2005, Zuma was alleged to have raped Fezekile Ntsukela Kuzwayo in a guest room in his Johannesburg home. The victim was the thirty-one-year old daughter of an ANC member who had been imprisoned with Zuma for ten years on Robben Island; she had long considered Zuma a family friend. This did not, however, prevent Zuma from exploiting a relationship of trust. He testified that the sex was consensual and he was merely following Zulu tradition in which, he stated, "leaving a woman in a state of [sexual arousal]" was disrespectful; consequently, what took place between he and the accuser was justified according to tribal custom.<sup>1</sup> The change in the perpetrator/victim dynamic was part of a strategy by Zuma's counsel to disparage Kuzwayo by focusing on her "revealing" clothing and portraying her as a manipulative temptress. The depiction succeeded: Zuma's supporters made numerous threats on Kuzwayo's life, torched her home, and instead of being vilified, Zuma was viewed by many as a "real" Zulu, his actions serving as an example of how men should behave, and blame for the encounter shifted to the victim.<sup>2</sup> The judge, Willem

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Robins, 'Sexual Politics and the Zuma Rape Trial', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 34:2 (2008), 411-427 (p. 421).

<sup>2</sup> This view of Zuma as a "real" Zulu was not diminished by Kuzwayo's revelation that she was HIV-positive and that Zuma was aware of her status at the time of the rape. A recounting of the events that night not only revealed that Zuma had sex without using a condom but also took a shower afterward to, as he claims, reduce the risk of infection. Robins, 'Sexual Politics and the Zuma Rape Trial', p. 415.

van der Merwe, acquitted Zuma of the charges. More focused on navigating the precarious political paths amongst the country's history of racial oppression, its laws, and the constitutional guarantee of respect for cultural difference, van der Merwe might be said to have demonstrated a selective blindness to the issues of power and gender at the heart of the trial. After rendering his verdict, he castigated Zuma for being unable to control his sexual desires and invoked restraint as a means of fulfilling his masculinity, paraphrasing Rudyard Kipling's 1910 poem, "If": "If you can control your sexual urges, then you are a man, my son."<sup>3</sup> This was a strange use of Kipling's poem, which famously addresses the qualifications for manhood, considering that Zuma was sixty-four years old at the time of the trial, and that van der Merwe's example of Western cultural expectations, drawn from an imperial poet's work, was being used to chastise a former anti-apartheid freedom fighter.<sup>4</sup> What is not odd is the characterisation of masculinity that the poem espouses: the suppression of emotion, an unwavering sense of self-confidence, and a staunch perseverance in whatever task a man undertakes from a sense of duty. While these criteria for masculinity are perhaps as widely accepted now as they were a century ago, what is now recognized is the toxic effect of these constructions on society at large.

Although Pistorius's race, age, and upbringing differ from Zuma's, the sense of hypermasculinity his trial revealed him to have constructed for himself, did not. Pistorius's legs were amputated below the knee when he was eleven months old because of a genetic defect. He was fitted with prostheses at an early age, and took up

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<sup>3</sup> Robins, 'Sexual Politics and the Zuma Rape Trial,' p. 415.

<sup>4</sup> The citation is made even stranger when it is considered that the inspiration for the poem was Leander Starr Jameson, an English doctor and politician who lead insurgent forces in the 1895 "Jameson Raid", an attempt by the British South Africa Company to overthrow the Afrikaner-led government of the Transvaal republic. Leonard Thompson, *A History of South Africa* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 115.

running as a teenager, going on to win several gold medals at the Paralympic Games in 2004, 2008, and 2012. Nicknamed the “Blade Runner” for the shape of his metal artificial running limbs, Pistorius achieved global fame for his sporting success and was seen as an inspiration to others for overcoming his disability. The image of Pistorius as a hero ended on 14 February 2013 when he shot his girlfriend, Reeva Steenkamp, through a bathroom door in their home outside Pretoria. At the trial, Pistorius claimed to have believed that he was targeting an intruder who had entered through the bathroom window and that he had fired in self-defence. What was left unstated was the supposition that the “intruder” was black, an idea given credence by Pistorius’s father. When asked about the dozens of guns owned by his family, Henke Pistorius said:

Some of the guns are for hunting and some are for protection, the hand guns. It speaks to the ANC government, look at the white crime levels, why protection is so poor in this country, it’s an aspect of our society.<sup>5</sup>

An action based on racist ideas can be seen to speak to Pistorius’s model of masculinity. By protecting his home, and himself, from an intruder, he would not only honour his masculinity but also prevent it being tarnished. Pistorius’s claim of self-defence, however, was complicated by his choice of ammunition: the gun he used was loaded with Black Talons, a type of bullet designed to expand upon entering the body in order to maximize damage.<sup>6</sup> The need to inflict such destruction on another person moved his claim beyond self-defence to malicious intent, and, by firing through a

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<sup>5</sup> Aislinn Laing, “Oscar Pistorius's father blames South Africa's gun culture on ANC”, *The Telegraph*, 03 March 2013, World News section, pp. 11.

<sup>6</sup> Jacqueline Rose, ‘Bantu in the Bathroom’, *London Review of Books*, 37:22 (2015), 1-15 (p. 7).



locked door with a black man purportedly on the other side, Pistorius's claims also spoke to a level of fear of black criminality akin to the panic invoked by "black peril" over a century before. The term "black peril" can be traced back to George Webb Hardy, a journalist who in 1904 wrote a newspaper article detailing the sexual relationship between a group of white teenage girls and a black labourer in Durban, and has come to mean the "threatened rape of white women by black men" in the country's lexicon.<sup>7</sup> While the social hysteria concerning white women's sexual virtue has been exchanged for personal security in the post-apartheid era, gender politics and violent crime converge in the Pistorius case. If the accused was not firing upon an intruder, as he stated, then Steenkamp could have been his only other target and the use of such a powerful weapon to cause her harm is not only an act of murder but misogyny. Whether the crime was based on sex or race, either motivation can be attributed to a masculinity model reliant on displays of excessive performativity. In a January 2012 article in the *New York Times*, Pistorius demonstrated his love of fast cars and a fascination with guns and their power that speaks to the overriding importance of the "extreme" to inform his gender identity.<sup>8</sup> While his dedication to sport earned Pistorius acclaim and fortune, the mentality contributed to Steenkamp's murder, intentional or otherwise, with the trial verdict disregarding the issue of race or gender as motivation for the crime. The accused was found guilty of "culpable homicide," defined as "the unlawful negligent killing of a *human being*" (my emphasis) but the decision omits gender or race as a factor in Pistorius's motivation.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Gareth Cornwell, "George Webb Hardy's *The Black Peril* and the Social Meaning of 'Black Peril' in Early Twentieth-Century South Africa", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 22:3 (1996), 441-453 (p. 441).

<sup>8</sup> Michael Sokolove, 'The Fast Life of Oscar Pistorius', *New York Times Magazine*, 18 January 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Maretha de Waal, 'Exploring Gender and Disability Stereotypes in the Courtroom', *Agenda*, 29 (2015), 34-43 (p. 37).

In this instance, the court's verdict fits the crime; Pistorius also elided the subjectivity of the victim. The omission of another's subjectivity is a prerogative shared by Zuma and Pistorius and speaks not only the understandings of masculinity that inform this sense of entitlement but how they can be seen to reflect a wider consideration of gender that I will examine in my project.

This thesis aims to contribute to the study of South African literature and culture by analysing portrayals of masculinity informed by the conflict between past understandings and new expectations of manhood in the post-apartheid dispensation. Another aim of this thesis is to address a dearth of scholarship on male gender identity in post-colonial studies and global literatures; broadly speaking, I want to demonstrate how an examination of masculinity can build upon the significant contribution of critics in areas such as race, class, and gender, to offer insight into the complex interconnections of these issues and how they contribute to understandings of masculinity. However, I acknowledge why masculinity has not attracted a great deal of critical interest: a long history of patriarchy that has perpetuated abusive practice in order to maintain social, economic, and political power. A great deal of academic attention has traditionally focused on oppression and how to circumvent it but an examination of men and masculinity would benefit scholarship that includes gender but also race, class and other issues. For example, while some men are oppressors, they can also be seen as oppressed due to the overwhelming expectations of masculinity that construct their identity. Also, some men fail to conform to heteronormative models though they may internalize some of their norms.

The study of masculinities has been greatly informed by the work of women's studies. By establishing the difference between sex and gender, the problematic nature of male/female binaries, and many other insights, women's studies has provided a

foundation for questions to be raised about men and their connection to patriarchy: Do all men have power or want it? Is masculinity the same in different cultures? How does it depend on the categories of race, class, and sexuality? This last question is important to my project and its application to South Africa; since understandings of gender are evolving, so are how they are constructed. “Frameworks that move beyond binary conceptions into relational understanding are... chang[ing] how cultures are understood,” write Ronit Frenkel and Craig MacKenzie, “because strictly reified understandings are not useful in capturing the many layers of imbricated culture constructions such as those defining South Africa today”.<sup>10</sup> In my thesis, I consider this idea and use it as a point of reference in my examination of how masculinities are constructed.

In J.M Coetzee’s *Disgrace*, Achmat Dangor’s *Bitter Fruit*, Deon Meyer’s *Dead Before Dying* and *Devil’s Peak*, Kgebetli Moele’s *The Book of the Dead*, Mhlongo’s *Way Back Home*, K. Sello Duiker’s *Thirteen Cents*, and Eben Venter’s *Wolf, Wolf*, characters struggle to adapt to the country’s new expectations of equality and, for many of them, these troubles involve outdated models of masculinity. The conflict between old ideas and new understandings can be seen to drive the conflict found in these books, and a means of resolution is frequently to produce new masculinities that comply to post-apartheid understandings of gender equality. However, the reticence, or inability, to conform to these understandings often leaves the men in a liminal state, one that positions them in between the present and the past and unable to secure a stable place in the future of the country. In South Africa, the government has had a varying impact on the lives of its peoples depending on the

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<sup>10</sup> Ronit Frenkel and Craig MacKenzie, ‘Conceptualizing “Post-Transitional” South African Literature in English’, *English Studies in Africa*, 53:1 (2010), 1-10 (p. 5).

their social and class position but, most importantly, their race. The apartheid state was premised on racial difference and also informed its various levels of citizenships and civil rights. The changes brought by the transition from apartheid rule to democratic governance are based on race but affect all areas of society; the bill of rights in the nation's constitution forbids discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, and other areas. Apartheid was, "in the most general terms, an interdict against the development of a social formation" and I read this understanding to include gender relations.<sup>11</sup>

One of the reasons I was drawn to the study of masculinity and South African literature was my interest in exploring how the change from apartheid rule to constitutional democracy affected men's identities: How do constitutional notions of equality influence models of masculinity? Do men willingly accept their diminished power or do they remain intransigent to the new social dynamics forming around them? How do non-white men and/or non-heterosexual males react to these new "freedoms?" And how much, if at all, do these "freedoms" exist when compared to the past for the marginalized in society?

Masculinity is not a biological or inherent attribute but a social construction. While this definition means that masculinity can be seen as a collective gender identity, it is also fluid and capable of change. Also, most importantly, there is not a singular masculinity but many different masculinities, each with a characteristic shape and set of features, and are configurations of social practice demonstrated situationally and according to relationship dynamics. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler writes that gender is something that people perform as "a stylised repetition of acts"

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<sup>11</sup> Mark Sanders, 'Remembering Apartheid', *Diacritics*, 32:3 (2002), 60-80 (p. 61).

and is inscribed on the body through constant repetition.<sup>12</sup> The pliability of gender means that individuals can shape their identities, creating impression for themselves but also for how they are viewed by others, however, any change occurs within structures of power and social relationships and is influenced by cultural understandings. Masculinity is not an exception to this idea. Manhood is not separated from social differences and can be seen to contribute to social inequality; men who learn to act as “men” based on notions of oppression, for example, often transfer this understanding to approaches to race and sexuality.

A form of male dominance is called “hegemonic masculinity,” a term coined by sociologist Raewyn Connell that builds on Gramsci’s theory of cultural hegemony, which demonstrates how power relations are constructed by social class. Instead of focusing on class, Connell applies the dialectic to gender and the hierarchies created through positions of social and cultural power.<sup>13</sup> Among hegemonic masculinity’s defining features is its power to silence or subjugate other masculinities by presenting its version as how “real” men should behave in society. Hegemonic masculinity, however, is not stable and must continually respond to challenges to its physical and institutional authority in the workplace, the family, or other areas of society. During apartheid, this power was based on race, specifically the dominance of the white minority population over black, coloured and other non-whites in the country and the contesting (and eventual defeat) of this racist regime also disrupted the authority of white masculinity. Graeme Reid and Liz Walker write that “if colonialism and apartheid shaped the masculinities of the past, the transition to democracy in South Africa in the 1990s has had the effect of unsettling and unseating entrenched

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<sup>12</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 192.

<sup>13</sup> R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2005), p.77.

masculinities...which were, in the main, patriarchal, authoritarian and steeped in violence”.<sup>14</sup> These masculinities were patriarchal, authoritarian and informed by violence and misogyny. Instances of sexual assault are, and were, common in the country, and this frequency is recognized by the authors I examine in this project; almost every novel offers a portrayal of rape. These depictions can be seen a failure of the constitution’s mandate of equality to change the approach to gender. According to Lisa Vetten, there “is no necessary connection between a progressive legislative framework and a reduction in violence against women” and “this state of affairs represents not so much a contradiction as an illustration of the contingent, conditional, and contested nature of gender equality in South Africa”.<sup>15</sup>

In chapter one, acts of rape are portrayed in the post-apartheid present but can be seen as informed by past understandings, especially by ideas of rape and social power. In *Disgrace*, I examine how protagonist, David Lurie, a white, 52-year-old university professor, processes the transition from a place of racial privilege to weakened social status and how his desperation to maintain his model of masculinity involves the sexual assault of a coloured female student. The attack echoes an apartheid-era portrayal in *Bitter Fruit*, where a young coloured woman is raped by an older white police officer, and both novels speak to how rape can be seen to inform masculinities, not only for the male characters but the assault victims. In Dangor’s work, the female victim survives the attack by the police officer but the rape continues to inhabit her present and this stasis impedes it from being turned into a memory. Only the murder of her rapist can be seen to alleviate her pain, and her reliance on the

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<sup>14</sup> Graeme Reid and Liz Walker, eds., *Men Behaving Differently: South African Men Since 1994* (Cape Town: Double Storey Books: 2005), p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> Lisa Vetten, ‘Violence Against Women in South Africa’, in *State of the Nation: South Africa 2007*, ed. by Sakhela Buhlungu, John Daniel, Roger Southall, and Jessica Lutchman (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2009), 425-447 (p. 425).

understanding of gender binaries, revenge, and masculinity can be seen as the only way for her to reconcile with the past.

In May 1994, police colonel Eugene de Kock was arrested for murder, kidnapping, fraud, and other offenses he committed during apartheid. From the mid-1980s to early 90s, de Kock led the country's notorious counterinsurgency unit, C1, and, during this period, ordered the torture and/or killing of thousands of opponents of the apartheid regime.<sup>16</sup> When he was brought before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, de Kock admitted to his participation in these crimes and to personally killing hundreds of black men and women who were in his custody.<sup>17</sup> Although the atrocities committed by the police during apartheid were limited to a select number of men such as de Kock, the entire force was considered complicit by many in the country. In chapter two, I examine the detectives of Deon Meyer's *Dead Before Dying* and *Devil's Peak* and address how the reputation of the apartheid-era police influences the depictions of these characters. In his novels, Meyer can be seen to speak back to this wholesale condemnation of the police force by portraying characters "who have integrity, who serve the nation, and who are not racist despite having trained within the apartheid system".<sup>18</sup> The contesting of assumptions extends to the characters' gender models; both detectives represent versions of masculinity that break with binary understandings associated with the apartheid-era. However,

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<sup>16</sup> Leonard Thompson, *A History of South Africa* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 276.

<sup>17</sup> While De Kock received amnesty for the crimes he had committed for political reasons, but many of them remained unpardoned and he was found guilty on 89 charges and sentenced to 212 years in prison. In 2015, after serving only twenty years of his term, de Kock was released on the orders of Justice Minister Michael Masutha because he had expressed remorse for his actions and aided in the return of several of his victims' remains to their families. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, *A Human Being Died That Night: A South African Woman Confronts the Legacy of Apartheid* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003), p. 135.

<sup>18</sup> Sam Naidu, 'Fears and Desire in South African Crime Fiction', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 39:3 (2013), 727-738 (p. 729).

these portrayals are complicated by the author's use of a genre stereotype. The masculinities of these men are dependent on the exploitation of women, chiefly by the repeated usage of the "rape and revenge" trope in these novels; the detectives don't commit the acts of sexual assault but, in their pursuit of the rapists, these crimes are used to inform their new gender models and complicate their break from past understandings.

Complicated portrayals of male characters aren't unique to crime fiction; novelist Margie Orford views the genre as a medium for the study of men and their behaviour. "The impulse of the crime novel may be described as anthropological," she writes, and "the genre attempts to understand what men do, and why they do it."<sup>19</sup> In this chapter, I will take a similar approach by examining the motivations of the men in Meyer's novels, the influence of the past on their actions, and how genre expectations influence these portrayals.

South Africa's social divisions have long been a topic of its fiction. Race and racial inequality dominated the works of writers during apartheid and offered portrayals of injustices visited on the country's black and coloured population by the system of white rule. *Mine Boy* by Peter Abrahams, Alex La Guma's *Walk in the Night*, *To Every Birth Its Blood* by Wally Serote Mongane, Richard Rive's *Buckingham Palace, District Six*, Sipho Sepamla's *Ride on the Whirlwind*, Tatamkhulu Afrika's *The Innocents*, and *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* by Zoë Wicomb are a few of the very many works published during this period that examine these issues. While race remains the country's principal instrument of social division, class is emerging as a new barrier and can be seen as result of the new economic

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<sup>19</sup> Margie Orford, 'The Grammar of Violence, Writing Crime as Fiction', *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa*, 25:2 (2013), 220-229 (p. 225).



policies. After 1994, the South African government enacted a policy of “black economic empowerment” (BEE) that would allow for the integration of the black majority into the mainstream economy.<sup>20</sup> The plan included the transfer of shares in white-owned businesses to a new class of investors, the removal of blockages to the hiring and promotion of non-whites, and other measures meant to rectify apartheid-era policies of economic inequality.<sup>21</sup> However, as I examine in chapter three, there is a downside to this prosperity and the novels portray how these economic opportunities for the country’s black citizens have an adverse effect on the models of masculinity for its characters. In Moele’s *The Book of the Dead*, the rise in social class for Khutso, the book’s protagonist, fails to provide his life with necessary meaning and this failure results in a manifestation of hypermasculinity informed by wealth and the sexual exploitation of women. In his novel *Way Back Home* Mhlongo uses cronyism, governmental corruption and greed to show how former “revolutionary” Kimathi Tito amassed a fortune in post-apartheid society only to lose his money (and his mind) to the memory of the atrocities he committed during the fight for independence.

In chapter four, I will address the portrayals of queer masculinities and the difficulties these characters have in navigating post-apartheid life in a homophobic society. Despite their calls for social equality, political figures have been reluctant, if not hostile, to supporting the country’s LGBTQ community. A supporter of Winnie Mandela famously waved a placard reading “Homo sex is not in black culture” at her 1991 trial for kidnapping and assault, a reference to the defendant’s claims that her

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<sup>20</sup> The BEE would later be rebranded as the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE or B-BBEE) and include other non-whites, women and the disabled in the early 2000s. This change was in response to criticism that the former policy was too focused on the black members of the country to the detriment of the country’s other disadvantaged communities.

<sup>21</sup> Okechukwu Iheduru, ‘Black Economic Power and Nation-building in Post-Apartheid South Africa’, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 42:1 (2004), 1-30 (p. 4).

unlawful detaining of a group of black boys was to prevent them from engaging in homosexual acts with a white church minister and that her actions were therefore justified.<sup>22</sup> President Jacob Zuma has also voiced his homophobic beliefs. Speaking to a crowd of thousands of his ANC supporters he called same-sex marriage a “disgrace to the nation and to God.”<sup>23</sup> Then, as if to proudly demonstrate the sustaining of this belief into the post-apartheid era, he added, “When I was growing up unqingili (homosexuals) could not stand in front of me. I would knock him out.”<sup>24</sup> The comments can be read not only as homophobic (and possibly pandering to the idea of “gay panic” to defend his violent actions) but as a means to demonstrate how masculinity is constructed through the debasement of non-heteronormative sexualities, accompanied by violence.

In K. Sello Duiker’s *Thirteen Cents* and Eben Venter’s *Wolf, Wolf*, the gay characters are forced to contend with the precarious economic conditions and homophobia of the post-apartheid society of the novels. For Azure, the thirteen-year-old orphan who narrates *Thirteen Cents*, being black and blue-eyed makes for a troubling combination as he attempts to survive on the streets of Cape Town. While a prostitute with male clientele, Azure must still maintain a persona based on heteronormative performativity, one that inhibits his ability to engage with his sexuality and forces him to live only in the present. For Matt, the Afrikaner protagonist of Venter’s novel, his sexuality conflicts with his homophobic, wealthy father’s views. The impending death of the man from cancer, however, does not bring Matt the financial or emotional consolation that he requires and its absence

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<sup>22</sup> *Weekly Mail*, Johannesburg, 15 March 1991.

<sup>23</sup> <http://mg.co.za/article/2006-09-26-zuma-earns-wrath-of-gays-and-lesbians>

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

demonstrates not only his inability to recognize South Africa's changing racial privilege but its ongoing homophobic reality.

The characters that I examine in this thesis are both separated and connected by the means of masculinity construction portrayed in these novels. Race, class and sexuality speak to their differences while also showing how their respective gender identities are informed by these issues. But despite the differences between these men, they all must contend with the country's history of oppression and learn to negotiate a past dominated by patriarchy, racism and misogyny in order to survive in the post-apartheid present. An accounting of both separation and connection is important to my examination of the masculinities offered in these works and must be considered in order to find a space where new models can be constructed that speak to a more equitable future.

## **Masculinity, Violence, and Honour in Two Novels of the Transition**

In the “new South Africa,” understandings of gender can be seen as in constant negotiation. Like race,<sup>25</sup> class and other issues, it is being regularly contested and redefined in the post-apartheid<sup>26</sup> dispensation, an effect that not only demonstrates changing social understandings but the influence of the government. The novels in this chapter speak to these changes; in their portrayals of masculinity, rape, and the function of woman’s bodies, they demonstrate society’s struggle between the acceptance of new ideas and relinquishing of the past and how the state, through the role of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, attempts to unite the country but these measures often expose the faults of the process by revealing its circumscribed considerations of gender and atonement.

The TRC has been called the “most important institutional event [to] shape the post-apartheid landscape.”<sup>27</sup> Created by the South African Parliament with the passage of the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act of 1995, the TRC was mandated to investigate human rights violations that occurred between 1960 and 1994, and to bear witness, to record, and, in some cases to offer amnesty to the perpetrators of these crimes. While many of these offenses were state-sponsored acts of violence, including rape, torture, and murder, and were committed by members of

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<sup>25</sup> I acknowledge that “race” can be viewed as troublesome due to its implication of biological essentialism and homogeneity, however, the subject matter, if not the term, must be recognized in any discourse about South Africa and, in my thesis, this includes its contribution to the construction of masculinities.

<sup>26</sup> Also, I want to clarify that my use of “post-apartheid” is meant to designate a time after 1994 and not to indicate a complete break with the past; my examination finds that period to be very much extant for the characters in the novels.

<sup>27</sup> Lucy Valerie Graham, *State of Peril: Race and Rape in South African Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 135.

the police and intelligence services, opposition organizations, including the African Nation Congress, were also responsible for committing human rights abuses.

Regardless of the political motivation, a full and public testimony was required by the offender in order to be considered for amnesty. During the Commission's hearings, which ran from 1996 to 1998, the testimonies of 25,000 people were considered.

These hearings included not only the testimonies of those who had committed crimes, but also of victims, who were given the opportunity to speak about their abuse in order that the TRC might achieve one of its main objectives: "To lay to rest the country's politically brutal past."<sup>28</sup>

Although the hearings were designed to promote "forgiveness, catharsis and healing," the process has in retrospect been regarded as flawed.<sup>29</sup> While focused on investigating the most socially destructive period in the country's history, the Commission was also intent on forging a "new South Africa."<sup>30</sup> The emphasis on creating a new identity, however, compromised the ideals upon which the Commission was founded. In order to establish a democratically elected government, the concept of retributive justice was exchanged for restorative justice to ensure the participation of right-wing factions in the transition process.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, that TRC focused on specific instances of abuse deflected attention from holding to account the apartheid government ultimately responsible for these acts.<sup>32</sup> The victims of abuse

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<sup>28</sup> Rosemary Nagy, 'The Ambiguities of Reconciliation in South Africa', *Political Studies*, 52:4 (2004), 709-722 (p. 718).

<sup>29</sup> Paul Gready, 'Novel Truths: Literature and Truth Commissions', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 46:1 (2009), 156-176 (p. 156).

<sup>30</sup> Katherine Mack, 'Public Memory as Contested Receptions of the Past', *Reception: Texts, Readers, Audiences, History*, 3:3 (2011), 136-163 (p. 143).

<sup>31</sup> Ronit Frenkel, 'Performing Race, Reconsidering History: Achmat Dangor's Recent Fiction', *Research in African Literatures*, 39:1 (2008), 149-165 (p. 157).

<sup>32</sup> David Attwell and Barbara Harlow, 'Introduction: South African Fiction after Apartheid', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 46:1 (2000), 1-9 (p. 2).

were also forced to compromise. For the “good of the nation,” they were pressured to “accept a moral and material settlement that [was] less than satisfactory”, an agreement that prevented their abusers from being held criminally accountable.<sup>33</sup> These compromises have not only hindered reconciliation for many victims but also allowed for the past to return and haunt them in the present.

The past, in different forms, continues to afflict the characters of two novels published in the immediate aftermath of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings: J.M Coetzee’s *Disgrace* (1999), and Achmat Dangor’s *Bitter Fruit* (2001). The TRC and its proceedings are only peripherally referenced in these works, but the difficulty, and in some cases impossibility, of reconciliation is integral to their plots. In these works, reaching an accord with the past is made possible by adopting new understandings of gender; models of masculinity that rest on ownership or control of women’s bodies are associated with the apartheid-era and to be seen as incommensurate with ideas of equality in the “new South Africa.” However, this change is complicated by the invocation of “honour” and its relationship to retributive violence. While the endorsement of violence by the characters is based on retribution for the violation of women’s bodies, I argue that their advocacy is problematic because it serves not only to promote a return to gender binary thinking and models of masculinity build on the exploitation of women but to hinder reconciliation with past acts of abuse.

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<sup>33</sup> Attwell and Harlow, ‘Introduction: South African Fiction after Apartheid’, p. 2.

**“It is finish”:** Reconciliation and the Trouble with Contrition in J.M. Coetzee’s  
*Disgrace*

In an interview with David Attwell in the 1992 collection *Doubling the Point*, J.M. Coetzee declares that “in South Africa it is not possible to deny the authority of suffering and therefore of the body,” and that this understanding is based on “political reasons, for reasons of power.”<sup>34</sup> This formulation is interesting for how it is addressed in Coetzee’s novel, *Disgrace*, whose protagonist is David Lurie, a white, 52-year-old, twice-divorced university professor living in Cape Town. Lurie can be seen to “deny” both the pain of others and the political power that enables this denial and bases this rejection on a model of masculinity informed by several areas: his race, colonial history, a Romantic envisioning of the world, and his understanding of his body’s ability to attract women for sex. Over several decades Lurie was able to use his good looks, his “magnetism,” to facilitate these encounters and, at the height of his powers, he claims to have “existed in an anxious flurry of promiscuity”.<sup>35</sup> During this period, Lurie describes his sexual encounters as “the backbone of his life”.<sup>36</sup> I read Lurie’s reliance on the “body” to fulfil his masculinity as a type of narrative substitution for his race and class position in South Africa’s patriarchal society, a position where female subservience to his sexual overtures might be expected. This power can be seen to have disappeared since the end of apartheid and results in a crisis for Lurie that he attempts to address throughout the book. It is important to note, however, that Lurie’s narration is unreliable, if not duplicitous, and

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<sup>34</sup> J.M. Coetzee, *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*, ed. by David Attwell (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 248.

<sup>35</sup> J.M. Coetzee, *Disgrace* (New York: Penguin, 1999), p. 7.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7.

often elides considerations that problematize his subjective understandings of events. While Lurie comes across as trustworthy, revealing “truths” about himself that inspire confidence in his account such as his claims that he “is in good health” and “his mind is clear,” upon closer inspection, he becomes more difficult to believe as his disconcerting nature is slowly revealed.<sup>37</sup> At the opening of the novel, Lurie admits that his capacity to attract women has fled, however, he attributes this to his aging body, not to his diminished socio-political position; no longer able to rely on a woman to return his advances, Lurie declares that sex has become a “problem” in need of a solution.<sup>38</sup> This trouble can be ascribed to his model of masculinity and its reliance on female subjugation, a dependence demonstrated by Lurie’s solution to his “problem”: he visits a prostitute at a regular hour every week. On their first encounter, Soraya, we are told, wore makeup, and Lurie asked her to remove it, an accommodation for which she is deemed “compliant,” establishing a precedent for subservience by Soraya that extends to sexual intercourse.<sup>39</sup> She is “not effusive” during sex, instead remaining “rather quiet...and docile” and this behaviour satisfies Lurie because it allows him to maintain his model of masculinity through his expectation of Soraya’s (paid) submission.<sup>40</sup> The regularity of these meetings shows how the model is reaffirmed through repetitive performance:

On Thursday afternoons he drives to Green Point. Punctually at two p.m. he presses the buzzer at the entrance to Windsor Mansions, speaks his name, and enters. Waiting for him at the door of No. 113 is Soraya. He goes straight through to the bedroom, which is pleasant-smelling and softly lit, and

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<sup>37</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, p. 2.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 5, 1.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1.



undresses. Soraya emerges from the bathroom, drops her robe, slides to bed beside him. ‘Have you missed me?’ she asks. ‘I miss you all the time,’ he replies.<sup>41</sup>

The narration emphasises the routine nature of these visits and how they transpire between Lurie and Soraya, a coloured Muslim woman.<sup>42</sup> However, the dialogue can be read to reference something outside of this dynamic. In Lurie’s responses to her question, there is a hint of nostalgia; he can be seen not to miss Soraya but a time where his authority over women could be taken for granted. In this reading, Lurie’s assertion that he finds the situation with Soraya “entirely satisfactory” attracts scepticism; these weekly meetings, and the client/prostitute relationship, can be seen as insufficient. Lurie recognizes that “buy[ing]” women for sex is not the same as submission to his body, and he grows desperate for a return of this power.<sup>43</sup> This desperation is exposed when Lurie encounters Soraya outside of their usual circumstances. The meeting is portrayed as inadvertent; Lurie claims to be “in the city on business” when he spies Soraya with two young boys (supposedly her sons) through the window of a restaurant.<sup>44</sup> The vagueness of his reason for the outing,

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<sup>41</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, p. 1.

<sup>42</sup> The putative belief of Lurie’s preference for “brown-skinned” women has been offered in several pieces of criticism. However, I read the main reason for his interest in a woman is passivity, as I will further demonstrate in this chapter. Lurie is not attracted to their brown skin per se (Melanie is understood to be “coloured”) but to the subjugation to white male dominance that he expects to accompany it and informs his model of masculinity carried over from the apartheid-era. This preference for passivity over race is made even clearer in his brief affair with Dawn, a white secretary from his department at the university, who is not passive but animated during sex. “Bucking and clawing, she works herself into a froth of excitement that...repels him”, Lurie reports, and disappointed by this “failure” to find a docile woman, he shuns her (9). Also, I would like to acknowledge that my use of the term “coloured” in this chapter and others is not without consideration of the complicated historical, racial and social associations of the term.

<sup>43</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, p. 7.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p. 6.

coupled with the elliptical nature of his narration, suggests something deliberate and possibly ominous. According to Lurie, their relationship is based on “lives lived in compartments”, and this encounter might be seen as an indication of Lurie’s wish to change their dynamic.<sup>45</sup> Lurie states that he and Soraya “have been lucky” to find each another, positioning the relationship as more romantic than commercial, and has thought about asking Soraya to spend the night with him on her own time.<sup>46</sup> But, Lurie does not consider what Soraya may want or that her compartmentalization might be to maintain her independence. Lurie’s lack of consideration of these ideas, along with the idea of money as the basis of their relationship, is an example of his reluctance to adapt to the country’s new socio-political realities. When commenting later in the novel about Petrus, his daughter Lucy’s black tenant and employee, Lurie posits that “(i)n the old days one could have had it out with” him if there was a disagreement about employment, meaning that, during apartheid, white bosses could lose their temper while their black workers would not have the same privilege or any recourse if dismissed.<sup>47</sup> Times have changed, and Petrus “is no longer, strictly speaking, hired help.”<sup>48</sup> While Lurie muses that “[i]t is hard to say what Petrus is,” he does admit that the man “has the right to come and go as he wishes.”<sup>49</sup> In these statements, Lurie acknowledges that understandings of race have changed, but, he does not extend this idea of change to gender. The “right to come and go” is not offered to Soraya: after their encounter in the city, she ends their meetings, and leaves the employ of the escort service. However, Soraya’s decision to end their relationship is not accepted by Lurie, and he stalks her. His claim earlier in the book that “[i]f he

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<sup>45</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, p. 1.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, p. 116.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, p. 116.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, p. 116.

wanted a woman he had to learn to pursue her” takes on a troubling connotation here, building on the inadvertent encounter he had with Soraya in the city, and amplifies Lurie’s already disconcerting view of women and his need for their compliance.<sup>50</sup> The pursuit ends only after Lurie has procured Soraya’s address and telephone number through a private investigator and calls her at home. Soraya’s anger at the invasion of her privacy discomforts Lurie; “there had been no intimation of it before,” he claims, but whether this statement should be read as reliable or suspicious, his behaviour speaks to his lack of consideration of Soraya’s subjectivity and his desperation to fulfil his model of masculinity.<sup>51</sup>

For Lurie, the end of these weekly meetings produces an ontological malaise. “There are days where he does not know what to do with himself,” he reports, and this discontent speaks to the lost affirmation of both a woman’s attraction to him and her subservience.<sup>52</sup> Lurie hires another prostitute, this one also named Soraya, but she is only eighteen and is “unpractised,” according to him.<sup>53</sup> This criticism can be read as the girl’s failure to understand Lurie’s need for submission; because she grew up during the country’s period of transition, she lacks the experience of showing racial and gender deference. Without his Thursday assignations with the original Soraya, Lurie finds the week “as featureless as a desert” and his melancholy continues until he encounters Melanie Isaacs, a coloured student, while walking through the university gardens.<sup>54</sup> The episode is couched in terms of happenstance and revelation but also offers the flicker of a return to old ways of thinking: “Does she know that he has an

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<sup>50</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, p. 7.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, p. 10.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, p. 11.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, p. 8.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, p. 18.

eye on her?” Lurie asks himself. “Probably. Women are sensitive to it, to the weight of the desiring gaze.”<sup>55</sup> This observation recalls Lurie’s remark on his former power over women: “If he looked at a woman in a certain way, with a certain intent, she would return his look.” He takes his observation as encouragement, inviting Melanie to his home; he makes her dinner and tries to seduce her.<sup>56</sup> Unable to rely on his “magnetism,” Lurie uses “smooth words” as “old as seduction itself”.<sup>57</sup> While Lurie acknowledges that seduction is an interplay based on deception, if not blatant lies, “at this moment he believes in them,” and feels a resurgence of his former power when he places a hand on Melanie’s cheek and she doesn’t remove it.<sup>58</sup> Lurie’s belief in his own duplicity should not be surprising (he has always been “a great self-deceiver”) but neither should be his failure to seduce Melanie.<sup>59</sup> As Attwell writes, “[i]n order to encode desire, one needs the right code; such codes are the products of culture and therefore historical”. Lurie is unable to recognize that a “code” informed by apartheid-era expectations of submission does not align with current understandings of gender and race in the country; Melanie recognizes this lack, and departs without succumbing to his advances.<sup>60</sup>

When Lurie and Melanie have sex together for the first time, the narration is brief and decidedly lacks her perspective:

He takes her back to his house. On the living-room floor, to the sound of the rain pattering against the windows, he makes love to her. Her body is clear,

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<sup>55</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, p. 12.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, p. 16.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, p. 16.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, p. 188.

<sup>60</sup> David Attwell, ‘Coetzee’s Estrangements’, *NVL: A Forum on Fiction*, 41:2 (2008), 229-243 (p. 234).

simple, in its way perfect; though she is passive throughout, he finds the act pleasurable, so pleasurable that from its climax he tumbles into blank oblivion.<sup>61</sup>

The account starts with an almost romantic quality, the rain creating a peaceful environment for the couple to consummate their relationship, but the invocation of Melanie's docility, as Lucy Graham states, "pulls the attentive reader in contradictory directions".<sup>62</sup> Lurie's "pleasure" tells the reader one thing while Melanie's elided account invokes suspicion and the only recognition of her subjectivity is defined by her passiveness: "the girl is lying beneath [Lurie], her eyes closed, her hands slack above her head, a slight frown on her face."<sup>63</sup> While Melanie's account is omitted, Lurie's experience is portrayed as rejuvenative. He awakes the next morning "in a state of profound wellbeing, which will not go away", and thinks that the feeling can be seen as confirming a rejuvenation of his physical powers.<sup>64</sup> To mark the occasion of their "love-making," as Lurie thinks of it, he orders flowers for Melanie, rejecting roses in lieu of carnations. The latter flower's name means "Flowers of the Gods" in Greek, and phonetically invokes "incarnation" – or perhaps, for Lurie, reincarnation, a new life for him and his sense of magnetism bestowed upon him from the gods.

Lurie's apparent rebirth, however, also produces a return to a sense of entitlement over the female body. This is demonstrated when he goes to Melanie's flat one afternoon and aggressively has sexual intercourse with her. Lurie's actions are

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<sup>61</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, p. 19.

<sup>62</sup> Graham, *State of Peril: Race and Rape in South African Literature*, p. 145.

<sup>63</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, p. 19.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 19-20.

prompted by seeing her on the university stage, wearing a wig and speaking with a *Kaaps* accent while she acts in a play, but the feelings this portrayal incites are foreign to him – he admits only that they are “[s]omething to do with the apparition on the stage.”<sup>65</sup> This reaction can be read as Lurie wanting to possess another woman, one who is “different” than Melanie but equally compliant, and he carries this impression with him to her flat. In fact, Lurie *has* gotten a different woman on this occasion; Melanie protests his advances and struggles to resist him. However, Melanie’s subjectivity, or that of the woman from the play, is disregarded by Lurie and he remains clear in his intent. He states that “nothing will stop him” and the encounter can be read as a sexual assault: he “has given her no warning” and even refers to himself as an “intruder who thrusts himself upon her.”<sup>66</sup> Lurie will only admit to a certain degree of fault and declares the act as “Not rape, not quite that.”<sup>67</sup> Anything beyond this point would disrupt his model of masculinity; Lurie needs for a woman to acquiesce to his “magnetism,” not be physically forced to comply, and the limits that he sets to indemnify himself are also demonstrated during a university committee of inquiry about his treatment of Melanie.

A sexual harassment complaint has been made by Melanie and a hearing is convened to recommend a decision about the case. Lurie is given an opportunity to defend himself against this charge but, instead, he decides to plead “guilty”, even though he has not read Melanie’s complaint. This plea is Lurie’s supposed recognition of his culpability but when prompted by the committee to express contrition, he objects, basing his refusal on “being a servant of Eros” while demonstrating his

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<sup>65</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, p. 24.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, p. 25.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, p. 25.

emotional limitations.<sup>68</sup> It is a confusing statement that is only clarified later in the book when Lurie asserts that he was acting on “the rights of desire” with Melanie, a “right” that he allows himself but does not consider for her.<sup>69</sup> Lurie’s proffering of “desire” to justify his actions shouldn’t be read in isolation.<sup>70</sup> As Todd Reeser writes in *Masculinities in Theory*, desire is “not simply about desire” but “more the way in which power functions through the medium of gender and desire.”<sup>71</sup> In Lurie’s case, his desire can be seen not as much as a sexual longing as a means to fulfil his model of masculinity while the committee of inquiry can be seen to judge this model. Critics such as Sue Kossew, Elizabeth Anker, Mark Sanders and Andrew van der Vlies have read the hearing in *Disgrace* as a commentary on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its practices.<sup>72</sup> The committee in the novel and the TRC share a similar concept: perpetrators who make an admission of guilt for their crimes could receive amnesty for them.<sup>73</sup> However, the committee’s demand for a show of

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<sup>68</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, p. 52.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, p. 89.

<sup>70</sup> The troubling issue of male desire has been previously addressed by the author. Coetzee quotes from *The Confessions of Saint Augustine* in *Doubling the Point* and writes about the philosopher’s crime of once stealing pears when he was a boy. The act was not committed for sustenance but for the pleasure of doing something that was prohibited and Coetzee remarks about the crime that “the knowledge of (Augustine’s heart’s) own desire as a shameful one both satisfies the desire for the experience of shame and fuels a sense of shame” (251). Also, David Lurie is not the only character in a Coetzee novel to struggle with the body and the notions of race and sexual desire. The character of the Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* also visits prostitutes, has an illicit inter-racial relationship with a girl that draws the ire of the community, and is eventually punished for his deeds.

<sup>71</sup> Todd W. Reeser, *Masculinities in Theory: An Introduction* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2010), p. 63.

<sup>72</sup> Sue Kossew, ‘The Politics of Shame and Redemption in J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*’, *Research in African Literatures*, 34:2 (2003), 155-162 (p. 159). Elizabeth Anker, ‘Human Rights, Social Justice, and J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*’, *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies*, 54:2 (2008), 233-267 (p. 237). Andrew van der Vlies, *J.M. Coetzee’s Disgrace: A Reader’s Guide* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), p. 52. Mark Sanders, *Ambiguities of Witnessing: Law and Literature in the Time of a Truth Commission* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 142.

<sup>73</sup> The university inquiry and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) also share a sense of Christian moralism, one demonstrated by their view of contrition, and the connection is addressed by Coetzee in the passage when he has Lurie imagine the committee’s mandate as a religious confession only to deliberately counter it by couching his admission as a “secular plea” to a “secular tribunal” (58). The inclusion of religious figures such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Alex Boraine, a Methodist minister, on the Commission demonstrates the Christian church’s

contrition diverges from the TRC's procedure. As Kossew points out, "remorse was not considered part of the TRC process, as it was deemed too difficult to measure its sincerity" and this elision allows for Coetzee to criticize the TRC's management of the criminal process.<sup>74</sup> Through the university committee's demand for Lurie's compliance with "confession" and willing "abasement," the exchange of an admission of guilt for exculpation parodies the agreement reached by the TRC: the truth for amnesty provision in the country's constitution allowed many of the worst offenders to go unpunished.<sup>75</sup> This scenario also demonstrates how a show of contrition by Lurie would mean a possible step toward reconciliation. However, if reconciliation "demands that we reach a new level of ethical responsibility and community", as Michalinos Zembylas asserts, then this seemingly is not possible for Lurie.<sup>76</sup> He can be seen to assert his limits in these areas by declaring that a guilty plea is "as far as I am prepared to go."<sup>77</sup> A show of contrition would seemingly acknowledge Melanie's subjectivity and her trauma and comprise the model of masculinity informed by female submission to his power.

At the committee's behest, Lurie resigns from his teaching position. The case has drawn media attention and engendered student protests and Lurie leaves Cape Town. He goes to visit his daughter, Lucy, who lives on a rural smallholding in Salem in the Eastern Cape and subsists on the selling of produce and the kennelling of dogs. The relationship between father and daughter is close if not oddly formal (Lucy

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attempts to shape the country's social mores, a practice that extends back centuries but conflicts with post-apartheid notions of equality, a dissonance I will address in a later chapter in regard to LGBTQ rights and heteronormative masculinity expectations for gay men.

<sup>74</sup> Kossew, 'The Politics of Shame and Redemption in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*', p. 159.

<sup>75</sup> Anker, 'Human Rights, Social Justice, and J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*', p. 237.

<sup>76</sup> Michalinos Zembylas, 'Bearing Witness to the Ethics and Politics of Suffering: J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*, Inconsolable Mourning, and the Task of Educators', *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 28:3 (2009), 223-237 (p. 229).

<sup>77</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, p. 55.



addresses him as “David”) and their different lifestyles and belief systems can be seen as a reason for this division. Lucy is a lesbian and a vegetarian and, despite being the daughter of a university professor, she doesn’t possess significant intellectual interests, according to the narration. Despite these differences, Lucy welcomes her father to stay indefinitely, but, Lurie has trouble adapting to country life, especially its understandings of masculinity. He calls himself “a man of the city” and the aspects he associates with this model (erudition, education, a professional job) contrast with these new criteria.<sup>78</sup> Manhood in this part of the country is largely based on “work,” usually in the form of physical labour, and Petrus can be seen to embody this standard. According to Lucy, Petrus is “quite a fellow” by Eastern Cape standards but this valuation is based not only on his labour but his industriousness.<sup>79</sup> Petrus is a co-owner of the produce and kennelling business and also cultivates his own tract of land. He received a grant from the government to purchase the property and is often encountered by Lurie improving his lot: cleaning up the dam, glazing the windows on his house, or ploughing his field. While undertaking these tasks offers an example of masculinity to Lurie, Petrus’s clothing also serves to inform this model: he is usually attired in overalls and boots –traits that contribute to how a “man's masculinity...was measured” in the South African countryside.<sup>80</sup> The connection between work and clothing is important to recognize these traits of masculinity but also to identify their potential means of deception.

While Lurie rejected the idea of reconciliation in his university hearing, he will be forced to reconsider this idea during his time with Lucy, especially in relation to

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<sup>78</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, p. 6.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, p. 62.

<sup>80</sup> Robert Morrell, ‘Of Boys and Men: Masculinity and Gender in Southern African Studies’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 24:4 (1998), 605-630 (p. 623).

how it affects his perception of race, rape, and, most importantly, his understandings of gender models. Not long into his stay, he and Lucy pass three men while they are out for a walk. The immediate tension that results from this encounter can be read racially:

Three men are coming toward them on the path, or two men and a boy. They are walking fast, with countrymen's long strides. The dog at Lucy's side slows down, bristles.

Should we be nervous? he murmurs.

I don't know.

She shortens the Dobermanns' leashes. The men are upon them.

A nod. A greeting, they have passed.

Who are they? he asks.

I've never laid eyes on them before.

They reach the plantation boundary and turn back. The strangers are out of sight.<sup>81</sup>

The narration implies the race of the two men and the boy through the dog's reaction and the dialogue between Lurie and his daughter. Lucy's kennel is populated by watchdogs and they have been "bred to snarl at the mere smell of a black man" and the dialogue furthers this reading by intimating the threat associated with "black

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<sup>81</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, p. 91.

peril.”<sup>82</sup> The terminology comes from dramatized reports of white women being raped by black men.<sup>83</sup> Formulated during the “social hysteria” that took place from 1890 to 1914, accounts of “black peril” detailed the supposedly rapacious sexuality of black men, feeding white paranoia while reinforcing racist stereotypes.<sup>84</sup> While these fears can be seen to inform the dialogue between Lurie and his daughter, the clothing of the group potentially moderates their thinking. The two men are attired in the “masculine” country dress of overalls while the other, a boy, is dressed in a “flowered shirt” and a “little yellow sunhat.”<sup>85</sup> Clothing can be seen to “alter how the body gets imagined” and conflate its representations with “essential elements of the body.”<sup>86</sup> In this instance, the clothes and the bodies of the men can be seen to represent “honest toil” by making a connection between themselves and Petrus’s reputation. The introduction of this character in the novel finds him dressed in the same manner as the men, wearing “blue overalls and rubber boots,” his labour translating to “honest[y]” and, from there, trustworthiness, and this association can be seen to contribute to their belief in the men’s story.<sup>87</sup>

When Lurie and his daughter return to the smallholding, the men are waiting for them and they gain entry to the house, where they rape Lucy and beat Lurie before robbing them. The narration elides Lucy’s sexual assault, focusing instead on Lurie’s viewpoint and his processing of the attack. During the ordeal, he is punched, kicked and knocked unconscious, the blows absorbed by the body subduing him but also

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<sup>82</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, p. 110.

<sup>83</sup> Graham, *State of Peril: Race and Rape in South African Literature*, p. 4.

<sup>84</sup> Charles Van Onselen, ‘The Witches of Suburbia: Domestic Service on the Witwatersrand 1890-1914’, in *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand 1886-1914: Volume 2, New Nineveh* (Raven Press: Johannesburg, 1982), p. 47.

<sup>85</sup> I will address the significance of the boy’s attire and its implications for Lurie’s path to reconciliation later in the chapter.

<sup>86</sup> Reeser, *Masculinities in Theory: An Introduction*, p. 101.

<sup>87</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, p. 64.

altering his subjectivity. Shani D’Cruze and Anupama Rao write that violence “marks and makes bodies” while “render[ing] them incomplete” and Lurie’s “incompleteness” is represented as a metaphysical emasculation.<sup>88</sup> Lurie explored the idea of castration earlier in the novel, wondering if it could be done with assistance (by a doctor) or alone (imagining a man on a chair, snipping at testicles). After being beaten by the men, Lurie is locked in the bathroom, where he declares himself as “helpless” and an “Aunt Sally,” a defenceless female figure.<sup>89</sup> The narration furthers Lurie’s “feminization” by equating his treatment by the men with his rape of Melanie, however, on this occasion he puts himself in her position. After a blow to the head by one of the men, Lurie’s “limbs turn to water and crumple” in much the same manner as when he enfolds Melanie in his arms—where “her limbs crumple like a marionette’s.”<sup>90</sup> This mirroring is a reminder of the hazards of following Lurie’s accounting of events without considering his self-deceptions and his biased perspective becomes more evident when he discusses his understanding of the attack.

The connection Lurie makes between his treatment by the men and his belief in what constituted Melanie’s experience allows him to equate the attack on him to his daughter’s rape. This understanding produces the impression of a shared experience but it conveniently omits considerations of race, gender, sexuality and power that inform Lucy’s rape and his model of masculinity. When Lurie voices his understanding of the attack, this view is challenged by Lucy’s friend, Bev Shaw. After he states “I know what Lucy has been through. I was there,” Lurie’s assumption is

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<sup>88</sup> Shani D’Cruze and Anupama Rao, ‘Violence and the Vulnerabilities of Gender,’ *Gender & History*, 16:3 (2004), 495-512 (p. 503).

<sup>89</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, p. 95.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 93, 24.

quickly corrected, “But you weren’t there,” Bev states, “[Lucy] told me.”<sup>91</sup> The exchange conflates physical presence with physical experience and both speakers fail to grasp the error. Lurie is furious at “being treated like an outsider” and his reaction to Bev’s comment demonstrates his inability to register his Lucy’s gender subjectivity and what issues inform her trauma.<sup>92</sup> His anger prompts him to abandon his female perspective to return to the male viewpoint (“Do they think that he does not know what rape is?...Or do they think that, where rape is concerned, no man can be where the woman is?”) and reinstates the gender binaries that he was attempting to dispute with his argument.<sup>93</sup> Despite this change in perspective, Lurie attempts to access his daughter’s experience during the rape, however, it is an endeavour that is based as much on his solipsism as a wish to establish a substantial emotional connection with Lucy and will fail because he is unable to relinquish his model of masculinity.

The narration has foreshadowed Lurie’s attempt to access his daughter’s subjectivity by having him wear Lucy’s clothes and boots at various points in the novel and by having him sleep in her bed after the sexual assault. But these instances have no acknowledged impact on Lurie and even their symbolism (for example, Lurie walking in his daughter’s shoes) is lost. Finding himself without any other form of guidance, Lurie turns to the Romantics, his area of specialization when he was a professor, and about whose poetry he was teaching a class, with Melanie as one of his students, before his dismissal. Among the Romantics, Lurie looks specifically to Lord Byron, who is the subject of an opera he is composing, in order to assist his attempt to

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<sup>91</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, p. 140.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, p. 141.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, p. 140.

access Lucy's subjectivity.<sup>94</sup> Lurie initially identifies with Byron; both men fled their homes due to sexual misconduct and Lurie feels a connection to the poet's portrayal of Lucifer in the poem "Lara" because of his "mad heart."<sup>95</sup> Lurie's attempts to justify Lucifer's illicit acts are ironic considering that he is attempting to access his daughter's understanding of her rape. He declares "that we are not asked to condemn this being with the mad heart" but, instead, "we are invited to understand and sympathize."<sup>96</sup> Is Lurie advocating that the reader try to understand and sympathize with a rapist? While the proposition may be viewed as abhorrent, it is consistent with Lurie's approach to issues that infringe on his "right" to treat women as he wishes: he either fails to acknowledge their subjectivity (like Soraya or Melanie) or sets limits that excuse him of blame (with the committee of inquiry).

The reason that the Romantics provide little help to Lurie is because he fails to recognize the motives behind the group. The literary movement was guided by "their questioning and rejection of centuries-old power structures and authority figures" in much the same way post-apartheid society is re-evaluating these same issues.<sup>97</sup> The Romantics also fail Lurie musically; his attempts to write an opera based on Byron's life are unsuccessful. Lurie blames this failure on his lack of the "lyrical"—he possesses the ability to "burn," as he deems it, but not to "sing" — and he claims to possess the self-indulgent "desire" of an artist but he is unable to translate it into art.<sup>98</sup> This assertion, however, should be read with scepticism. Instead of representing the ability to create art, the "lyrical" can be seen as "that vital Romantic concept, the

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<sup>94</sup> Lurie later turns to Teresa Guiccioli, Byron's married lover as the focus of his opera and his attempts to access the female "Other", but, he fails to find success in both areas.

<sup>95</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, p 33.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, p. 33.

<sup>97</sup> Margot Beard, 'Lessons from the Dead Masters: Wordsworth and Byron in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*', *English in Africa*, 34:1 (2007), 59-77, p. 60.

<sup>98</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, p. 171.

empathetic imagination” and possession of it “awaken[s] us to the needs of others.”<sup>99</sup> Lurie wants the right to embrace Byron’s hedonism but he ignores what the poets can teach him about connecting emotionally with others on their terms. It is a noted exclusion and speaks to Lurie’s failed attempts to access his daughter’s experience of the rape. Lurie believes he can “think” himself into Lucy’s subject position via her subjugation by the attackers. However, this approach is problematic; Lurie isn’t able to access his daughter’s experience because he doesn’t see subjugation as rape but as sex and even “making love”. This understanding references his rape of Melanie and explains how, after failing to think himself into Lucy’s body during the attack, Lurie finds that he *is* able to occupy the perspective of his daughter’s rapists. The image of Lucy’s docile body not only mimics Melanie’s response to Lurie’s assault of her but also his place during the attack, which is then processed through Lucy’s viewpoint, her “voice choked, she could not breathe, her limbs numb” as *she* is raped by the men.<sup>100</sup> It is a tangle of subjectivities but one that has Lurie’s solipsism firmly as its basis. When he realizes that he has failed, Lurie attempts again to enter Lucy’s subject position, this time by her imaging her thoughts during the rape. He envisions her as irrational, if not in denial of the circumstances (“*This is not happening*”), and her displacement of the experience (“*it is just a dream, a nightmare*”) is a bland platitude that offers no indication of the complexity of Lucy’s ordeal or the severity of her trauma.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Beard, ‘Lessons from the Dead Masters: Wordsworth and Byron in J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*’, pp. 64, 60.

<sup>100</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, p. 160.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, p. 160.

After the failure of Lurie's thought experiment, the narration asks an important question: "does he have it in him to be the woman?"<sup>102</sup> The query is a difficult one to answer and is open to multiple readings, one interpretation posing it as a "question whose terms recognize another's perhaps insurmountable alterity."<sup>103</sup> Afrikaner poet and journalist Antjie Krog addresses this matter of recognition in *Country of My Skull* (1998), her account of the TRC, writing that one of the enduring legacies of apartheid is the difficulty to "think (one's self) into other positions."<sup>104</sup> For Lurie, the question of whether he is able to occupy his daughter's subject position during the rape can be answered with certainty: he does not have the capacity to do so. The question can also be read to ask whether Lurie can somehow occupy Lucy's subject position *after* the attack; can he reconcile with the past as she is attempting to do? Despite the haunting memory of her assault and the possibility that her attackers might return, Lucy is determined to remain on the smallholding. The area has endeared her to rural life and she chooses it as her home. She repeatedly refuses to leave despite her father's pleas to abandon the region, if not the country entirely, and her rejection demonstrates a wish to make peace with the past as will her decision to keep the baby when she learns later she is pregnant from the rape.

The question of whether Lurie is capable of reconciliation can be answered through his evolving relationship with Bev Shaw and, concomitantly, with his treatment of animals.<sup>105</sup> During his stay with his daughter, Lurie volunteers at the

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<sup>102</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, p. 160.

<sup>103</sup> James Meffan and Kim L. Worthington, 'Ethics before Politics: J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*', in *Mapping the Ethical Turn: A Reader in Ethics, Culture, and Literary Theory*, ed. by Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001), p. 144.

<sup>104</sup> Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull: Guilt, Sorrow, and the Limits of Forgiveness in the New South Africa* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998), p. 288.

<sup>105</sup> Several critics, including Rosemary Nagy, Michael Marais, Rachel McCoppin, Derek Attridge, have noted that Lurie's relationship with Bev Shaw, and by extension, dogs, provides him with a



Animal Welfare League and he helps Bev care for wounded animals. A closeness of sorts develops between Lurie and Bev and an assignation is planned. He remarks that she is “sturdy,” with “no breasts to speak of” and her trunk is “like a squat little tub.”<sup>106</sup> These comments are intended to denigrate Bev’s body, especially in comparison to the “sweet flesh of Melanie Isaacs,” by conveying the idea that Lurie understands “reconciliation” as having sex with a woman he does not desire.<sup>107</sup> The lowering of his expectations—“[t]his is what I have to get used to, this and even less than this”—is seen as a type of penance by Lurie but it does not represent a substantive comprehension of reconciliation because he continues to rely on women’s bodies to inform his masculinity.<sup>108</sup> Lurie cannot reconcile with the past if he continues to follow the same understandings that led to his misdeeds and now require his atonement. He is not a stranger to addressing the issue of the past (one of the books he wrote was named *Wordsworth and the Burden of the Past*), but in South Africa, the “past is an ethical and political burden” and Lurie has no interest engaging with it as his attempts to find redemption with dogs will also prove to be unsuccessful.<sup>109</sup>

In addition to helping Bev treat sick animals at the Animal Welfare League, Lurie aids her in the euthanasia of stray or feral dogs. He restrains them while Bev administers the injection and Lurie’s assistance is portrayed as humane; not only does he claim to relieve the animals’ suffering but he is “gripped by what happens in the

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sense of responsibility for the Other that could be seen as a possible sign of transformative change. I will show that I disagree.

<sup>106</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, p. 149.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, p. 150.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, p. 150.

<sup>109</sup> Laurence Wright, ‘David Lurie’s Learning and the Meaning of J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*’, in *J.M. Coetzee’s Austerities*, ed. by Graham Bradshaw and Michael Neill (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010) p. 4.

theatre.”<sup>110</sup> After participating in their demise, Lurie takes the corpses to the incinerator. He states that he could leave the bodies for others to consign to the fire but he performs the deed himself “[f]or his idea of the world,” a nebulous concept that envisions a place where even dead dogs are respected, however, Lurie provides little to substantiate his vision and even less of an indication of how it applies to his life.<sup>111</sup> In terms of absolution for these efforts, I am in agreement with Lucy Graham who writes that “Lurie’s work in the service of dead dogs is not redemptive in itself.”<sup>112</sup> While his participation in the dogs’ deaths may show Lurie’s “refusal to be detached and oblivious about the suffering and tragedy of life,” it is insufficient to speak to *human* lives and these are the focus of his (and the country’s) attempts to reconcile with the past.<sup>113</sup> If Derek Attridge’s assertion that Lurie is able to recognize the “absolute other” because of his connection with animals, then it is a reading that is complicated by Lurie’s encounter with the youngest of his daughter’s attackers near the end of the novel.<sup>114</sup> Lurie finds the teenage boy lurking outside Lucy’s house one afternoon and violently assails him. The boy’s name is Pollux, a choice that Lurie has derided with racist overtones, “Not Mncedisi? Not Nqabayakhe? Nothing unpronounceable?”, and he will further this bigoted impression during the assault.<sup>115</sup> As he is beating Pollux, Lurie declares to himself that “this is what it is like to be a savage!”<sup>116</sup> The reference alludes to Lurie’s time locked in the bathroom during the

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<sup>110</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, p. 143.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, p. 146.

<sup>112</sup> Lucy Valerie Graham, “‘Yes, I am giving him up’: Sacrificial Responsibility and Likeness with Dogs in J. M. Coetzee’s Recent Fiction”, *Scrutiny*2, 1:7 (2002), 4-15 (p. 11).

<sup>113</sup> Kimberley Wedeven Segall, ‘Pursuing Ghosts: The Traumatic Sublime in J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*’, *Research in African Literatures*, 36:4 (2005), 40-54 (p. 47).

<sup>114</sup> Derek Attridge, ‘Age of Bronze, State of Grace: Music and Dogs in Coetzee’s *Disgrace*’, *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*. 34:1 (2000), 98-121 (p. 114).

<sup>115</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, p. 200.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*. p. 206.

attack and his submission is portrayed in martyr-like terms (one that he does not extend to Pollux though). The comparison finds Lurie beholden to the mercy of the “savages” of “darkest Africa” in the same manner as a missionary who has been placed into a “boiling cauldron” by the target of their attempted conversions.<sup>117</sup> However, when Lurie is in the position of power, he seemingly only has compassion for dogs and his attack on Pollux reveals that his bigotry extends beyond race to include homophobia.

A queer reading of Pollux begins with his attire. The clothes he wore on the day of the attack can be read as flamboyant, if not effeminate (“a flowered shirt” and “a little yellow sunhat”), in comparison to the “masculine indicators” of overalls and work boots that the other men wore.<sup>118</sup> Also, the “sunhat” contrasts with Petrus’s workman-like “peaked cap” and is instead closer in style to Lucy’s “straw hat” that she wears in the penultimate scene of the novel.<sup>119</sup> While it is proffered that “there is something wrong with” Pollux, the reference is left to speculation.<sup>120</sup> The statement can be read as an indication of Pollux’s sexuality and that Lucy’s rape, at least in part, may have been an attempt to show him how to “be a man.”<sup>121</sup> Homophobia is not

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<sup>117</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, p. 95.

<sup>118</sup> The reader learns later in the passage that Pollux does not have employment and, therefore without work, can be seen to lack “masculinity” according to the local criteria.

<sup>119</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, pp. 137, 217.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*, p. 200.

<sup>121</sup> While the attack on Lucy can be viewed as an attempt at “corrective rape,” (an act would “divest” Lucy of her lesbianism by replacing it with heterosexuality), I view the attack as a means of imparting masculinity on Pollux through forced heterosexual intercourse. However, this attempt can be viewed as a failure and Pollux returns to Lucy’s house to “perform” his heterosexuality, perhaps to his or his accomplices’ satisfaction. While Lurie initially believes that Pollux is urinating outside the bathroom window, the inference is that the boy was masturbating to the image of Lucy in the shower. Pollux’s sexual interest in Lucy can be seen as staged or as a second failure to “be a man” when he spies Lucy’s bare breasts “unashamedly”, and, therefore, without interest. The fact that Lucy attempts to protect Pollux from the beating demonstrates some level of compassion for him. If Pollux’s attempt at forced sexual intercourse was a failure, Lucy could have intuited his sexuality as the reason and together they suffer under the weight of heteronormativity.

limited to the attackers; Lurie has already offered implicit criticism of his daughter's sexuality by denigrating her former lover, Helen, calling her a "large, sad-looking woman" and hoping that Lucy "would find, or be found by, someone better," that "someone" being a man.<sup>122</sup> Also, the language used by Lurie after attacking Pollux contains culturally coded references to apartheid-era notions of homosexuality: "In the old days we had a word for people like him. Deficient. Mentally deficient. Morally deficient. He should be in an institution."<sup>123</sup> Under apartheid, homosexuality was classified as a "mental disorder" and same-sex "activities" were criminalized by the country's Immorality Bill of 1968 with those convicted of these crimes occasionally confined to asylums.<sup>124</sup> Lurie's attack of Pollux can be seen to reveal his homophobia but it also marks an end to his efforts to achieve reconciliation. If "male misogyny and homophobia are...forms of masculinity in disguise,"<sup>125</sup> as Todd Reeser proposes, then Lurie can be seen to return to his past model of masculinity by introducing "honour" and retributive violence to the text.<sup>126</sup>

To change Lucy's mind about remaining on the smallholding, Lurie attempts to invoke in her the fear of lost "honour." He writes in a letter that she is "on the brink of a dangerous error" and that her "wish to humble (herself) before history" is a mistake that "will strip (her) of all honour."<sup>127</sup> It becomes apparent, however, that Lurie's concern is more about himself when he states that while "Lucy may be able to bend to the tempest," it does not mean that he is capable of the same, at least, "not

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<sup>122</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, p. 60.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid*, p. 208.

<sup>124</sup> Tiffany Fawn Jones, *Psychiatry, Mental Institutions, and the Mad in Apartheid South Africa* (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 119.

<sup>125</sup> Reeser, *Masculinities in Theory: An Introduction*, p. 8.

<sup>126</sup> I will return to the issues of masculinity, queerness and homophobia in chapter four when I examine K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* and Eben Venter's *Wolf, Wolf* and their portrayals of queer domestic spaces.

<sup>127</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, p. 160.

with honour.”<sup>128</sup> The “tempest” can be read as the country’s move towards reconciliation after apartheid and “bend[ing]” to it, according to Lurie, entails a form of subjugation, something he expects of women but is incapable of himself, and justifies his limitations by invoking the possibility of lost “honour.” While Lurie can no longer count on attracting women, he still relies on the female body of his daughter to inform it. Lurie avers that “[i]f Pollux insults his daughter again” (i.e. if the boy peeps at Lucy in the bath) then he “will strike him again,” using Lucy’s body as a means to inform his masculinity through violence.<sup>129</sup> It is an endorsement of retribution that recalls apartheid-era fighting, involving recurrent clashes between government and anti-government forces, and the consequences of which the TRC was largely established to address. After making the claim that he will strike Pollux again if he “insults” Lucy, Lurie states “*Du mußt dein Leben ändern!*: you must change your life.”<sup>130</sup> The sentence in German concludes Rilke’s sonnet *Archaischer Torso Apollos*, translated as *Torso of an Archaic Apollo*. The poem tells of a man looking at the broken statue of Apollo in a museum and the dramatic power of the experience, culminating in the imperative, “You must change your life.” While the entire poem builds to this conclusion, the lines directly preceding it can be seen to speak to Lurie’s situation: “for here there is no place / that does not see you.” Lurie will always be accountable for his actions and to be able to live in post-apartheid society, he must reconcile with them but, within his narrow criteria, his options can be seen as limited. Reconciling with his misdeeds cannot be achieved by having sex with Bev Shaw or

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<sup>128</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, p. 209.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*, p. 209.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid*, p. 209.

disposing of animal carcasses (“What do dogs know of honour?”), but rather must entail the relinquishing of apartheid-era thinking that informs his identity.<sup>131</sup>

A possible example for Lurie to follow in this endeavour (if one does exist in the novel) is Petrus. Considered “a man of substance” by Eastern Cape standards, the past for Petrus has become a clearly defined notion: “it is finish[ed].”<sup>132</sup> In the text, the narration alludes to trauma in Petrus’s personal history and, as a “man of his generation,” it is “[d]oubtless Petrus has been through a lot.”<sup>133</sup> An ongoing premise of Coetzee’s writing “is that you do not choose your history; it chooses you” and, with Petrus, his personal history was undoubtedly shaped by race-based violence.<sup>134</sup> Despite this treatment, Petrus understands that vengeance is not an option and can be seen to reference this idea when describing the attack on Lurie and his daughter: “You say it is bad, what happened,” he states. “I also say it is bad. It is bad. But it is finish.”<sup>135</sup> He speaks with an air of shared experience (“I also say it is bad”) but also one that emphasizes his authority on the issue by declaring its place in his (and the country’s) consciousness (“It is finish”). Like Lucy, Petrus can be seen to “do anything, make any sacrifice, for the sake of peace” and the importance of this goal cannot be understated.<sup>136</sup> Petrus believes that Lucy is “forward-looking” and this notion is based on her willingness to reconcile with the past while also being able to consider the future and its possibilities for improvement.<sup>137</sup> Michalinos Zembylas writes that Lucy is able “to take important steps towards overcoming her disgrace and

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<sup>131</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, p. 46.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 77, 201.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>134</sup> Attwell, ‘Coetzee’s Estrangements’, p. 232.

<sup>135</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, p. 201.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

finding ways to live in a future South Africa” because her perspective “does not entail guilt and punishment.”<sup>138</sup> Lucy demonstrate this view when asked whether she loves the child growing inside of her: “No. How could I? But I will. Love will grow.”<sup>139</sup> When Lucy recommends that her father try to be a “good person,” i.e. to reconcile with the past, he says that “it is too late for me,” and, once more, blames his age: “I’m just an old lag serving out my sentence,” he explains, the statement verifying that his daughter is able to do what he cannot.<sup>140</sup> While Coetzee has portrayed “how deep a moral transformation is needed and of whom it should be expected” in the novel, he has also depicted the “limits of moral transformation” and Lurie’s recalcitrance to change speaks to the trouble of achieving “national unity” in the country.<sup>141</sup> It is a difficult process and, much like the TRC, leaves the country “with a messy, nettle-strewn bed on which the social conscience is destined to find little rest”.<sup>142</sup>

The novel ends with Lurie returning to Salem and taking a room at a boarding house in town. He spends his time working languidly on his opera, using his daughter’s old banjo to compose the music, and helping at the clinic, feeding the animals and cleaning their cages. The last pages detail the emotional connection he has made with a stray dog, one whose time has come to be euthanized, and Lurie’s dilemma about whether to give the animal a reprieve or assist in its demise:

He crosses the surgery. ‘Was that the last?’ asks Bev Shaw.

‘One more.’

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<sup>138</sup> Zembylas, ‘Bearing Witness to the Ethics and Politics of Suffering: J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*, Inconsolable Mourning, and the Task of Educators’, p. 237.

<sup>139</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, p. 216.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid*, p. 216.

<sup>141</sup> Nagy, ‘The Ambiguities of Reconciliation in South Africa’, pp. 708-709.

<sup>142</sup> Rebecca Saunders, ‘*Disgrace* in the Time of the Truth Commission’, *Parallax*, 11:3 (2005) 99-106 (p. 105).

He opens the cage door. 'Come,' he says, bends, opens his arms. The dog wags its crippled rear, sniffs his face, licks his cheeks, his lips, his ears. He does nothing to some it. 'Come.'

Bearing him in his arms like a lamb, he re-enters the surgery. 'I thought you would save him for another week,' says Bev Shaw. 'Are you giving him up?'

'Yes, I am giving him up.'<sup>143</sup>

Like Lurie's first sexual encounter with Melanie, the recounting attempts to romanticize the narrator and position him as someone who is relatable, if not also deserving of sympathy. However, remembering Lurie's actions and his narrative duplicity throughout the novel allows for a different reading of this scene. Rather than view his words as a sign of Lurie's emotional and empathetic development, and his care for the animals as a kind of atonement for his deeds, his account can be read as another example of his extreme narcissism. The killing of a healthy animal is not a sign of a sign of Lurie's humanity but only another demonstration of his egotism and his ongoing denial about his true engagement with the world.

**"It Was Inevitable": The Collusion of the Past with the Present in Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit***

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<sup>143</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, p. 220.



Issues of transformation, morality, and their limits in South African society are also at the heart of Achmat Dangor's fiction. The author's first work, *Kafka's Curse* (1997), addressed the difficulties of negotiating family history and the country's developing views on race in a group of stories set during the last days of apartheid. In that book, Oscar Kahn, a wealthy architect, transforms at various times from Muslim to Jew, from human into a tree, his multiple mutations both embodying and questioning what it is to be "South African." The text that followed, *Bitter Fruit*, also engages with these issues but through a post-apartheid perspective. Set in late-1990s Johannesburg, the novel depicts the efforts of the Ali family (Silas, his wife, Lydia, and their nineteen-year-old son, Mikey) to adapt to the changing socio-political conditions of the period. Divided into chapters named "Memory," "Confession," and "Retribution," Dangor addresses these titular issues by exploring their past and present understandings and how their relationships to gender, violence, and reconciliation speak to notions of individual and collective identities in post-apartheid society.

Silas Ali is a coloured 50-year-old lawyer who has found reconciliation with the past by adopting a new model of masculinity. In the township where he was raised, there were two options for male gender identity: the first was based on one's capacity for physical abuse (both to receive or inflict it) and, the second, one's ability to have sex with women. Silas followed the latter and became well known for his "ability to seduce women" and included in his "conquests" were a friend's mother and the daughter of a white stationmaster.<sup>144</sup> However, it was Silas's success with teenage Frances "Fanny" Dip that brought him the most renown: one afternoon, in the storage

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<sup>144</sup> Achmat Dangor, *Bitter Fruit* (New York: Grove/Atlantic, 2001), p. 104.

room of her father's shop, Frances raised her dress so he could see her genitalia.<sup>145</sup> While the episode involves no physical contact, it is marked by sexual manipulation and racial fetishism: Silas's aim was to confirm the township rumour that Chinese women possess "sideways" pudendum. Even though Silas never detailed what he saw, the encounter furthered his reputation in the minds of the young men of the community and himself.

At the beginning of the novel, Silas's notoriety, and the objectification of women that helped to build it, is to be seen as firmly in the past. It is 1998 and Silas, who once called Frances a "Gong cunt," has renounced these sexist ideas and carefully polices his language. His "adult mind" rejects the use of derogatory terms, and on the rare occasion where he fails to adhere to these new standards (he called an emergency services operator "lady" while phoning for an ambulance), he chastises himself for his insensitivity.<sup>146</sup> The reason behind Silas's transformation is political: he states that "politics drummed out of him the use of [these] words."<sup>147</sup> It is a perspective he has adopted both personally and professionally and is also informed by the post-apartheid version of reconciliation. Working as a liaison between the Ministry of Justice and the TRC, Silas's job is to "find consensus" between the two organizations in order to maintain the country's "political miracle," a task he finds to be increasingly more and more difficult but remains determined to achieve.<sup>148</sup> As for

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<sup>145</sup> Although the book is unclear about the origin of its usage, "Fanny" can be read as the diminutive of Frances or the vulgar slang term for a woman's genitals. I believe it to be the latter and, therefore, will refrain from its subsequent usage in the chapter.

<sup>146</sup> Dangor, *Bitter Fruit*, pp. 105, 18.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid*, p. 18.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid*, p. 63.

his own history, the idea of reconciliation has helped Silas to “absorb” the past “into the flow of his life.”<sup>149</sup>

In the opening passage, Silas happens upon the man who beat him and raped his wife, Lydia, almost twenty years earlier. The man is Francois Du Boise, a former member of the country’s security services, and the reason behind the attack was Silas’s position as a counter-intelligence operative for Umkhonto we Sizwe.<sup>150</sup> But, the country’s political changes now have Silas in a place of authority; he could easily take revenge on Du Boise and questions why he doesn’t use “the power of his position to make the old bastard’s life hell.”<sup>151</sup> Silas, however, does not retaliate for his or Lydia’s treatment by Du Boise and the reason can be seen as his embrace of reconciliation. Catherine Mack writes that “the meaning of the past does not inhere in the events themselves, but rather in the desires of [those] who are motivated by contemporary concerns.”<sup>152</sup> This idea speaks to how Silas and Lydia respectively view the attack: he has “learned to live with what Du Boise had done,” adopting a revised model of masculinity that embraces reconciliation and is now more concerned with the country’s present (and future) than its difficult past;<sup>153</sup> While Silas has been able to make peace with the attack, Lydia remains in crisis. After he tells her about the sighting of Du Boise, she demonstrates her ongoing pain from the attack through her expression of disappointment in her husband’s choice: “If you were a real man, you

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<sup>149</sup> Dangor, *Bitter Fruit*, p. 4.

<sup>150</sup> Umkhonto we Sizwe or “Spear of the Nation” or, later, MK, was the armed wing of the African National Congress. Although the ANC was founded as a non-violent organization, this approach to conflict resolution was viewed as inadequate by the early 1960s and Umkhonto we Sizwe was created. Its task was to sabotage governmental installations while attempting to avoid the infliction of injuries or loss of life, however, these acts resulted in dozens killed and hundreds wounded over several years, and its victims were included in the TRC hearings.

<sup>151</sup> Dangor, *Bitter Fruit*, p. 4.

<sup>152</sup> Mack, ‘Public Memory as Contested Receptions of the Past’, p. 138.

<sup>153</sup> Dangor, *Bitter Fruit*, p. 4.

would have killed him on the spot,” she tells him.<sup>154</sup> Lydia’s contesting of her husband’s manhood not only reveals her understanding of what constitutes masculinity but suggests a way to alleviate her pain; both ideas, however, can be seen as informed by the past when compared to Silas’s rejection of apartheid-era understandings of gender and violence for the sake of reconciliation. This connection to the past becomes clearer when Lydia categorizes “honour” according to gender roles. She contends that to be a man means to “believe in honour” (and violent retribution for her being “[dis]honour[ed]” by Du Boise) and this dynamic involves the sexual objectification of women in order to be fulfilled.<sup>155</sup>

When Lydia speaks about the rape, she positions herself as an item of exchange between Du Boise and Silas: “He took your woman, he fucked your wife,” she tells Silas, and because of this act, she “became his property.”<sup>156</sup> This perspective recalls historical concepts of gender in the country; only with inclusion of the Bill of Rights in the 1996 Constitution did women receive formal recognition as equal citizens. Until that point, South African women were under the social and, at times, legal control of their fathers or husbands.<sup>157</sup> Rather than being repressed by them, Lydia’s retainment of these understandings can be viewed as a way to cope with the trauma of her rape; Silas’s killing of Du Boise could have brought a sense of resolution, and some relief of her pain, that she is unable to find on her own. However, these understandings have seemingly done little to ease Lydia’s suffering

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<sup>154</sup> Dangor, *Bitter Fruit*, p. 17.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>157</sup> Nigel Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa: Conquest, Apartheid, Democracy* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007), p. 156.

otherwise and her adherence to them can be seen to not only inhibit her from participating in post-apartheid society but will have a destructive influence on her son.

In the novel, the TRC is positioned as a potential remedy to Lydia's pain, however, the Commission's promotion of public testimony can be seen to complicate this possibility. According to Jean Comaroff, the hearings were an opportunity to leave "history behind" by engaging in "forms of public recollection" and when Silas urges Lydia to testify it can be seen as a chance for her to reconcile with her painful past.<sup>158</sup> However, appearing before the TRC could also be counterproductive for the victims and Rebecca Saunders writes about the potential hazards of public testimony:

While there is a strong body of evidence that for many victims who testified at the TRC, the process of turning oneself inside out was cathartic, that it restored a sense of human dignity and made possible the process of healing; there are also numerous troubling instances where this visceral outpouring was clearly painful, wounding and even retraumatizing.<sup>159</sup>

Also, while the Commission praised the victims who forgave perpetrators for the benefit of a "new South Africa," "the pressure to forgive misplaced the burden of reconciliation on victims rather than on those who were responsible for apartheid" and complicated their opportunity to heal.<sup>160</sup> But, these are not the only reasons for refusing to testify and Lydia's rejection of this proposal speaks to other troubling aspects of the Commission. When asked by Silas about the reason for her refusal to

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<sup>158</sup> Jean Comaroff, 'The End of History, Again? Pursuing the Past in the Postcolony', in *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*, ed. by Ania Loomba, Suvir Kaul, Matti Bunzl, Antoinette Burton, and Jed Esty (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 127.

<sup>159</sup> Saunders, 'Disgrace in the Time of the Truth Commission', p. 105.

<sup>160</sup> Nagy, 'The Ambiguities of Reconciliation in South Africa', pp. 709-727.

testify, Lydia responds with a question: “You think Archbishop Tutu has ever been fucked up his arse against his will?”<sup>161</sup> This response can be read as a criticism of the TRC for its gendered perspective of apartheid-era crimes and shows how the Commission fails to recognize victims like Lydia. While the TRC was “focused on gross violations of human rights defined as ‘bodily integrity rights’ (killing, abduction/disappearance, torture, or severe ill treatment),”<sup>162</sup> it did not include rape in this definition.<sup>163</sup> Lydia’s reluctance to testify could also be a result of the TRC’s focus on race and how it informed acts of abuse during apartheid. Tutu stated that “we cannot hope properly to understand the history of the period...unless we give apartheid and racism their rightful place as [their] defining features.”<sup>164</sup> For Lydia, race can be seen as secondary to the gender power dynamics that contributed to her rape, and she tells Silas that Tutu will not only “never understand what it’s like to be raped” but also “to be mocked while being raped.”<sup>165</sup> As the daughter of a black father and an Afrikaans mother, Lydia is also verbally abused by Du Boise during the rape by calling her a “nice wild half-kaffir cunt, a lekker wilde Boesman poes” (nice wild Boesman pussy).<sup>166</sup> According to Dobrota Pucherova, Du Boise intended to humiliate Lydia by associating her colouredness with the historical ideas of “immorality, illegitimacy and impurity that colonial racism associated with coloureds, many of whom were descended from the children of indigenous women raped by European

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<sup>161</sup> Dangor, *Bitter Fruit*, p. 16.

<sup>162</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, Vol. 1 (Juta Press: Cape Town, 1998), p. 15.

<sup>163</sup> Only on the recommendation of the Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALs) at the University of Witwatersrand did the TRC arrange for hearings in 1997 and 1998 where women could talk about being raped and were conducted in private, not public, sessions.

<sup>164</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, p. 15.

<sup>165</sup> Dangor, *Bitter Fruit*, p. 16.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid*, p. 17.

colonists” while also “taint[ing] her as sexually promiscuous” by “mark[ing] the rape as a conquest.”<sup>167</sup> For Lydia, “[i]t would not have helped her to appear before the Commission, even at a closed hearing” because “[n]othing in her life would have changed...because of a public confession of pain suffered” and the historical connection between race, rape, shame and misogyny can be seen to contribute to Lydia’s understanding of herself as an object to be exchanged between men while speaking to how retributive violence could bring her relief while the TRC hearings and their calls for reconciliation could not.<sup>168</sup>

Lydia’s ideas about gender can be seen to inhibit her from reconciling with the past because they don’t allow her to change the attack into a memory. According to her, Silas doesn’t “know about the pain” because he has already made this transformation.<sup>169</sup> The statement implies that if Silas knew his wife’s pain, and if he followed her model of masculinity, he would have killed Du Boise when he had the opportunity.<sup>170</sup> However, this idea reveals a contradiction: according to Lydia’s views on gender, Silas isn’t able to know her pain because he isn’t a woman. But Silas’s views are also shown to be problematic: he claims that he *did* know Lydia’s pain, declaring that “I went through it as much as you,” however, he has been able to reconcile with the past without seeking retributive violence.<sup>171</sup> Silas’s narcissistic

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<sup>167</sup> Dobrota Pucherova, ‘Re-Imagining the Other: The Politics of Friendship in Three Twenty-First Century South African Novels’, *Journal of Southern African Studies* (35:4, 2009), 929-943 (p. 933).

<sup>168</sup> Dangor, *Bitter Fruit*, p. 156.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 15, 14.

<sup>170</sup> The attack is offered to the reader only in fleeting recollections from Silas’s perspective. While Lydia is being raped, he is inside the police van and doesn’t witness the event. However, he does hear her “sharp” voice “ascending into a scream, before fading into a moan so removed it seemed to come from his dreams” (12). Silas’s screams can be seen as a reaction to Lydia’s pain, drawing them together, and this connection offers a possible reason for his belief of the attack as a shared event.

<sup>171</sup> Dangor, *Bitter Fruit*, p. 15.

declaration can be seen to reflect his rejection of gender roles, but, he fails to consider how Lydia's pain was informed by a history of misogynistic racism that he was not subjected to and is therefore unable to access: "You can't even begin to imagine the pain," she tells him in response.<sup>172</sup> The country's history of racism and misogyny, along with Lydia's adherence to her understanding of gender roles, can be seen to influence her evaluation of Silas's pain as less severe than her own. According to Lydia and her understanding of masculinity, her rape was only a "wound to [Silas's] ego" and capable of being transformed into a memory, where it is classified as the loss of a possession, a woman to another man, and therefore reconcilable.<sup>173</sup> This view, however, simplifies Silas's pain by eliding its emotional impact on him: after he was severely beaten, Silas declares that he was "helpless, fucken chained in a police van, screaming like a madman" as he was forced to listen to Lydia being raped.<sup>174</sup> Their respective views demonstrate the complicated relationship between pain, gender and history and, because neither is able to access the experience of the other, Silas and Lydia remain at odds about how to best reconcile with the past.

While Silas can be seen to have found relief by turning his pain into a memory, Lydia copes with her trauma by keeping a diary. In this form of "testimony," Lydia "is able to speak of that which remains unspeakable within available public discourse" and, in the first passage, she recounts the details of the attack.<sup>175</sup> But, it does not provide her with catharsis and, by keeping her story private, Lydia inadvertently influences the direction of her son's life. Lydia's experience of being raped is offered

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<sup>172</sup> Dangor, *Bitter Fruit*, p. 14.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid*, p. 14.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid*, p. 14.

<sup>175</sup> Meg Samuelson, 'Speaking Rape Like a Man: Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*', *Annual Review of Islam in South Africa*, 7 (2004), p. 14.



to the reader when Mikey discovers his mother's diary and, previously unaware of the attack, he follows his mother's account closely: "Three nights ago, I was raped. By a policeman, in a veld, flung down on the grass, the darkness above my head my only comfort".<sup>176</sup> He describes her prose as "clear" and "translucent" but also, most importantly, "transcendent" because it is through Lydia's subjectivity that he processes the rape.<sup>177</sup> Mikey's internalization of his mother's narrative perspective is revealed through his free indirect discourse: "She describes the rape in cold detail, Du Boise's eyes, his smell, his grunts, the flicker of fear when he reached the climax and, for a moment, was not in control".<sup>178</sup>

The narration also follows his mother's viewpoint on other aspects of the rape, including her dismissive view of Silas's experience of the attack. In Mikey's retelling, his father's ordeal is either rejected in favour of Lydia's suffering (Silas's "rage" and "his wild screaming...did not lessen her terror but enhanced it") or viewed as complicit in the attack ("his fists hammering against the sides of the police van, giving rhythm to Du Boise's rapacious movements").<sup>179</sup> For Mikey, the adoption of his mother's perspective of the rape also results in a change to his identity: Lydia claims that she was impregnated by Du Boise and that he is Mikey's biological father. However, this claim can be viewed as specious due to its reliance on intuition and conjecture. Lydia writes that she "knew instinctively, the moment (Du Boise) rose and pulled up his trousers" that she had been impregnated, but, as a nurse, she would seemingly know that such certainty isn't biologically feasible.<sup>180</sup> Instead, her belief

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<sup>176</sup> Dangor, *Bitter Fruit*, p. 126.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid, p. 127.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid, p. 127.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid, pp. 127-8.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid, pp. 119-120.

can be seen as a result of the physical and emotional trauma of her rape and informed by the country's history of misogynistic and racial abuse that also prevents her from testifying at the TRC hearings. Mikey does not question his mother's assertion about his paternity but immediately internalizes it: "I am the child of some murderous white man," he declares.<sup>181</sup> It is under the influence of this idea that Mikey transforms; he becomes "calm" and "detached" from the "full import of his mother's words" and experiences a change to his approach to life.<sup>182</sup> Until that point, Mikey abided by a "golden rule – look to the future, always," an idea that can be seen as consistent with Silas's adoption of reconciliation. However, Lydia's revelation about his paternity changes this perspective and he "can no longer think of the future without confronting the past."<sup>183</sup> This encounter will not involve reconciliation, but instead includes the killing of Du Boise as Mikey decides to exchange the future for a return to the past that is a rejection of his father's model of masculinity in favour of Lydia's view of gender binaries.

While Mikey concedes that Silas is a "good father," his idea of him as a "man" changes after reading his mother's diary.<sup>184</sup> Instead of being viewed as progressive for his views on reconciliation, Mikey now finds him to be "sentimental" and "weak-hearted" and begins to lose respect for him.<sup>185</sup> Silas is known as a "fixer" at work but not at home and, after Lydia has an accident and is hospitalized, he is seen to have faltered in his responsibilities as a man.<sup>186</sup> "Everything is going to pieces around the

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<sup>181</sup> Dangor, *Bitter Fruit*, p. 131.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid*, p. 129.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid*, p. 131.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid*, p. 131.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 131, 29.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid*, p. 171.

house,” Mikey states. “Why doesn’t [Silas] do something about it all?”<sup>187</sup> As a remedy to this perceived lack of resolve, Mikey usurps Silas’s position in the home, specifically the relationship between he and his wife. It is a change that Lydia not only endorses but encourages; she always wanted a husband “who feels my pain as his pain,” and when Mikey is being held by his mother, it is “the way she had always wanted to draw a man to her,” a way that brought “her comfort and pleasure.”<sup>188</sup> The allusions of incest are more about physical protection than sexual intimacy and when Mikey inadvertently speaks out loud about his mother, he couches the dynamic between him and Silas in literary terms: “There is a sudden silence in the bathroom. Is his father listening? Odysseus eavesdropping, suspicious of Telemachus’ loud musing about Penelope?”<sup>189</sup> Classical references are not rare in Dangor’s work. He has incorporated them into two of his short stories, “The Homecoming” and “Waiting for Leila”, and in *Bitter Fruit* the Ali family home can be seen as the “site of oedipal transgression.”<sup>190</sup> According to Roger Field, the dynamic between Mikey and Lydia embodies the “odyssean ideal of filial and conjugal commitment” and the concern of “Telemachus” for his mother’s wellbeing can be combined with ideas of incest and patricide from Sophocles’ tragic tale to explain the motivations of these characters.<sup>191</sup> Despite his allusion to *The Odyssey*, Mikey disavows the relevance of the work and its connection to his family and his life and his evaluation of the poem as “[i]ntellectual shit” indicates a growing aversion to greater substantive thought about his decisions.<sup>192</sup> Formerly a precocious student, when asked to describe Homer’s poem

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<sup>187</sup> Dangor, *Bitter Fruit*, p. 143.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid, pp. 121, 162.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid, p. 29.

<sup>190</sup> Roger Field, ‘Coming Home, Coming Out: Achmat Dangor's Journeys Through Myth and Constantin Cavafy’, *English Studies in Africa*, 54:2 (2011), 103-117 (p. 104).

<sup>191</sup> Dangor, *Bitter Fruit*, p. 104.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid, p. 29.

during a class discussion, Mikey can only offer the terms “clichéd” and “Eurocentric” and provides no validating arguments or contextual evidence to support them.<sup>193</sup>

Instead of greater consideration of how this work might relate to his situation (such as the repercussions of Odysseus’s acts of retaliation in a contemporary South Africa setting), he ignores the idea in favour of its representations of masculinity and retributive violence.

In order to kill Du Boise, Mikey seeks help from Silas’s paternal family. As a child from his father’s third marriage, Silas was shunned by the man’s first and “more legitimate” family members and has little interaction with them. The decision to ask them for assistance to kill his purported biological father is not seen by Mikey as odd and his initial excuse for connecting them, “I want to find out more about my beginnings,” is offered without irony.<sup>194</sup> Mikey’s blinkered determination speaks further to his rejection of retributive violence as incommensurate with post-apartheid society, a view that is reinforced by his engagement with Silas’s family. From Moulana, Silas’s half-brother, Mikey learns about the family’s history, including why their father, Ali, left India and ended up in South Africa. During the British occupation of India, Ali’s sister, Hajera, was raped by a colonial soldier and became pregnant. Despite her accusations, the soldier was not punished and Hajera sent away to a remote village to give birth. While she was gone, Ali killed the rapist and fled the country, eventually reaching Johannesburg. The account is as much a parable as a piece of family lore and is offered in response to Mikey’s plan to kill Du Boise:

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<sup>193</sup> Dangor, *Bitter Fruit*, p. 27.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid*, p. 187.

“Hypothetically speaking. If someone without the means, without the power, but with a just cause, comes to you for help, will you give it?”

“In search of vengeance?”

“Justice.”

“Personal justice?”

“Against one person, yes. But he and his actions represent an entire system of injustice”.<sup>195</sup>

Mikey’s rationale, however, fails to substantiate this purpose. His condemnation of apartheid is meant to justify the killing of a single man, however, this act will only “honour” Lydia’s pain and not that of a nation who has also been victimized by this “system of injustice.” Instead, his plan can be seen to focus on fulfilling a model of masculinity informed by retributive violence, one endorsed by his mother, and now, Moulana: “There are certain things people do not forget or forgive,” he states. “Rape is one of them.”<sup>196</sup>

Despite his motive to take revenge for his mother’s exploitation, Mikey’s plan relies on the objectification of women, including his mother and her rape, and reveals the contradiction of his thinking. When Mikey seduces one of his teachers, the reason is not sexual desire but manipulation; he only wants to gain access to the house so he can steal a gun. Mikey also has sex with Kate, one of his father’s co-workers, because she is able to provide him with Du Boise’s home address. This approach to sex is a

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<sup>195</sup> Dangor, *Bitter Fruit*, p. 196.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid*, p. 204.

change from Mikey's previous understanding of the issue. As a teenager, Mikey and his cousin, Mireille, would "play Gandhi," a game he invented where they would lie naked on the bed and resist their sexual urges. The inspiration came from Gandhi's reported ability to sleep with naked girls but refrain from sexual contact with them. For Mikey, the undertaking with Mireille was to "test the ascetic side of himself" and achieve a "Gandhi-like heroism" for his ability to refuse his desires.<sup>197</sup> While Mikey's views on sex have changed, "playing Gandhi" demonstrates a continuation of his views on women. Like Gandhi, he can be seen to objectify them; Mikey uses Mireille to test his resolve, like Gandhi with teenage girls, while rejecting her overtures to have sex. The change for Mikey is not his view of women but his endorsement of violence. Although Dangor includes Gandhi's trials of sexual abstinence to influence Mikey's thinking, there is no mention of the man's endorsement of non-violent social change. The absence of *Satyagraha* in Mikey's thinking indicates an embrace of ideas that won't complicate his narrative; the new role he inhabits, "Mikey the Avenger," is informed by violence and demonstrates an acceptance of Ali Ali's view of revenge.<sup>198</sup> This rejection of Silas's model of masculinity not only clashes with the post-apartheid embrace of reconciliation but can be seen to represent a social regression due to its axiological link to a previous time and place; after killing Du Boise, Mikey reverses the path of Silas's father and immigrates to India, a return predicated on the abuse of women but also on cyclical retributive violence.

If Mikey's use of violence to "right the wrongs" of apartheid and to inform his masculinity is to be seen as regressive, then the model of Nelson Mandela offers a way to break with the past. His appearance in the novel can be seen to validate Silas's

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<sup>197</sup> Dangor, *Bitter Fruit*, p. 36.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid*, p. 240.

understanding of masculinity and his embrace of reconciliation to inform it.<sup>199</sup> At a meeting with his aides, Mandela asks: “Silas Ali, he works for the Minister, he’s a good man, is he?”<sup>200</sup> The question is meant to be rhetorical since it is couched in the “Old Man’s way of confirming something he already believed.”<sup>201</sup> This evaluation can be read as a comment on Silas’s performance as a liaison between the Ministry of Justice and the TRC (Mandela is considered Silas’s “boss” in the novel) but also applied to other areas. In the attack by Du Boise, Silas suffered three cracked ribs and the injury can be viewed through both past and present understandings of masculinity. During apartheid, “pain ma[de] you a man,” with masculinity constructed not only by being the recipient of pain but also by inflicting it on others and the model was informed by violence since “everything you do should be by force.”<sup>202</sup> However, this consideration of masculinity can be seen as changing: “[Y]ou can’t be a man by force. You need to make yourself understood and not by forcing things. This is the society of” Mandela.<sup>203</sup> If Silas is to be seen as a “good man,” it is because he is able to reject the connection between masculinity and violence but also the “ego” Lydia accused him of processing as her pain. At the end of the novel, Lydia is able to achieve reconciliation with the past by having sex with *João*, a twenty-year old medical student from Mozambique, at a neighbour’s party. The experience is portrayed as transformative; after their night together, she decides to leave Silas and start a new life. Despite his wife’s betrayal, Silas is happy that Lydia was able to find relief from

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<sup>199</sup> Mandela appears once more in the novel. As Mikey is standing alone in the street, a convoy of vehicles stops and a car window lowers to reveal Mandela. He asks if Mikey needs any help but his offer is declined. The encounter occurs just after Mikey has acquired the gun to kill Du Boise and with it in his pocket he ruminates briefly about killing Mandela, the “father of the nation”, as well.

<sup>200</sup> Dangor, *Bitter Fruit*, p. 149.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid*, p. 149.

<sup>202</sup> Graeme Reid and Liz Walker, eds., *Men Behaving Differently: South African Men Since 1994* (Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2005), p. 171.

<sup>203</sup> Dangor, *Bitter Fruit*, p. 171.

her pain. He witnessed her having sex with *João*, however, instead of being angry, he found the image “ineluctably beautiful.”<sup>204</sup> Unburdened by resentment, he knew that “now not every man would be a rapist to her” and the affair would bring “release” from her “demons.”<sup>205</sup>

## Conclusion

In 1995, then Minister of Justice Dullah Omar stated that the TRC would provide a “stepping stone toward the historic bridge” of a future for South Africa that would be “founded on the recognition of human rights, democracy and peaceful co-existence.”<sup>206</sup> The TRC process and the country’s future, however, have proven to be more complicated than Omar or many others could have predicted at the time of the hearings along with the ambiguous results of their undertakings. The novels in this chapter offer portrayals of this ambiguity and their depictions of reconciliation through the male imaginary. In *Disgrace*, although Petrus can be seen as someone who has achieved reconciliation in post-apartheid society, this assessment is not without ambivalence. When discussing the possible sex of his unborn child with Lurie and Lucy, Petrus expresses his hope for a boy because a “girl is very expensive.”<sup>207</sup> He explains that “[n]ow, today, the man does not pay for the woman,” an acknowledgement of the country’s post-apartheid notion of gender equality, but he contests this understanding by adhering to “old fashion” views on gender where “I

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<sup>204</sup> Dangor, *Bitter Fruit*, p. 267.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid*, p. 267.

<sup>206</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, p. 116.

<sup>207</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, p. 130.



pay,” he declares (original emphasis).<sup>208</sup> This belief in patriarchal authority is demonstrated by Petrus’s treatment of the pregnant woman.<sup>209</sup> During the discussion about the baby, the mother-to-be remains almost silent. Her reserve is perhaps based on a lack of English language skills but can also be read as female subservience to male dominance. While describing how costly it is to provide for women, Petrus waves a hand above her head and she “modestly drops her eyes,” an act of submission than doesn’t rely on her understanding of English for its meaning to the reader.<sup>210</sup> Although Petrus could be seen as a model for post-apartheid masculinity, he is not without his shortcomings, as are many of the other men. Despite Silas’s embrace of reconciliation and rejection of his sexist ideas, he remains unable to recognize the difference between his experience of the attack and Lydia’s rape and the gender and history that inform her understanding of it. A lack of greater consideration of these issues, and the use of rape as a plot device, is examined in the next chapter.

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<sup>208</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, p. 130.

<sup>209</sup> Whether she is Petrus’s girlfriend or second wife—he already has a wife and children in another part of the country—is left unclear.

<sup>210</sup> Coetzee, *Disgrace*, p. 130.

## **Gender, Revenge and Genre Clichés: Deon Meyer and Post-Apartheid Crime**

### **Fiction**

Detecting and solving crime, says English novelist and critic J.A. Cuddon in *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, with its attendant focus on “the motives, actions, arraignment, judgment, and punishment of a criminal,” has long been “one of the great paradigms of narrative.”<sup>211</sup> Stories involving theft, assault, rape, and murder began with the earliest epics and extend through the history of literature, including such works as *Hamlet*, Browning’s *The Ring and the Book*, Dickens’ *Bleak House*, as well as the works of the “founding fathers” of detective fiction, like William Godwin, Edgar Allen Poe, and Wilkie Collins, and others.<sup>212</sup> Also on this list are more contemporary writers including South Africa’s James McClure, who, between 1971 and 1991, published eight novels that focused on the partnership between an Afrikaner police officer named Tromp Kramer, and a township detective named Mickey Zondi, as they investigated crime in apartheid-era Pietermaritzburg. Crime fiction,<sup>213</sup> writes South African critic Sam Naidu, is a genre that attempts to affect a balance between entertainment (“power to delight”) and edification (“its potential to instruct”); McClure was able to accomplish both.<sup>214</sup> While he wrote “crackerjack mysteries” that captivated his readers, the books were

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<sup>211</sup> John Anthony Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (New York: Penguin Press, 1999), p. 192.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid. p. 192.

<sup>213</sup> I use “crime fiction” as an umbrella term to encompass other similar sub-genres such as the “police procedural”, “detective fiction”, “hard-boiled fiction”, etc. while acknowledging their distinctions in content and subject matter.

<sup>214</sup> Sam Naidu, ‘Crime Fiction, South Africa: A Critical Introduction’, *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa*, 25:2 (2013), 124-135 (p. 126).

also portrayals of racism and corruption that reflected his feelings about apartheid.<sup>215</sup> McClure conveyed this displeasure not only by depicting a police force consistent with its racist reputation, but through the portrayal of a complex dynamic between his two main characters; while Kramer would affect racial prejudice in the company of other white police officers, he would demonstrate his respect for Zondi's intellect and instinct as they pursued the resolution of crime. This imbrication of the professional and the personal spoke to the complexity of policing apartheid-era society without attenuating the behaviour of the police force and allowed McClure to indict a system of rule that was deeply flawed and morally unjust while also enthralling readers with a story of crime and the pursuit of criminals.

Post-apartheid crime fiction writers have followed a similar approach in their works. Since 1994, many authors of works in the genre have used it both to comment on the new nation, while also entertaining their readership. Crime fiction in the country can be seen to offer a “particular form of socio-political engagement”, and has “become a way to talk about race and class, xenophobia” and other matters, even if the genre's engagement with these topics has occasionally drawn criticism.<sup>216</sup> In his work, “‘Cultural Difference’ in Postapartheid South African Crime Fiction,” Leon de Kock writes that some academics claim that crime fiction sacrifices nuance and intricacy for entertainment, and that this “prevents them from securing substantial purchase on sociopolitical issues” that affect the country.<sup>217</sup> This sentiment is

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<sup>215</sup> Bert B. Lockwood Jr, ‘A Study in Black and White: The South Africa of James McClure’, *Human Rights Quarterly*, 5:4 (1983), 440-466 (p. 441).

<sup>216</sup> Jonathan Amid and Leon de Kock, ‘The Crime Novel in Post-Apartheid South Africa: A Preliminary Investigation’, *Scrutiny2: Issues in English Studies in Southern Africa*, 19:1 (2014), 1-23 (pp. 53, 60).

<sup>217</sup> Leon de Kock, ‘From the Subject of Evil to the Evil Subject: “Cultural Difference” in Postapartheid South African Crime Fiction’, *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies* (2014), 28-50 (p.28).

seconded by scholars Michael Titlestad and Ashlee Polatinsky, who argue that “contemporary South African crime writing is inclined to reduce the complex questions regarding the elusive nature of historical truth to generic devices.”<sup>218</sup> The address of these issues, and the questions they engender, were once considered the exclusive domain of the country’s literary fiction, though this perspective is now seen as outdated. Christopher Warnes writes that territorializing by critics such as Titlestad and Polatinsky is not only misguided, but indeed “risk[s] opening up...the old debate between high and popular art.”<sup>219</sup> It is a debate that was settled long ago, he contends, by theorists of cultural studies and popular fiction scholars who “dismantl[ed] the binary between high and popular” literature in order to focus on the reader and “the many ways meaning is generated in the process of reading.”<sup>220</sup>

South African crime writers cross the line between genre and literary fiction by portraying the country’s evolving relationship with its past and often use the figure of the male detective in pursuit of crime’s resolution to demonstrate its complexity. In Diale Thlolwe’s *Ancient Rites* (2012), the protagonist, Thabang Maje, engages with a South Africa “entangled in a myriad of complexities and bafflements” as he attempts to solve the case of a missing woman.<sup>221</sup> While traversing the criminal landscape of Johannesburg, the black teacher and part-time private investigator finds himself navigating the country’s “old certainties and new truths” in order to find her abductor.<sup>222</sup> In *Coldsleep Lullaby* (2005), Andrew Brown addresses the contrast

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<sup>218</sup> Michael Titlestad and Ashlee Polatinsky, ‘Turning to Crime: Mike Nicol’s *The Ibis Tapestry* and *Payback*’, *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 45:2 (2010), 259-273 (p. 260).

<sup>219</sup> Christopher Warnes, ‘Writing Crime in the New South Africa: Negotiating Threat in the Novels of Deon Meyer and Margie Orford’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 38:4 (2012), 981-991 (p. 983).

<sup>220</sup> Ibid, p. 983.

<sup>221</sup> Diale Thlolwe, *Ancient Rites* (Cape Town: Kwela, 2012), p. 23.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid. p. 47.

between past and present views on race and interracial sexual relations by creating a trans-historical narrative that examines these issues three hundred years apart. The book alternates between a cruel slave-owner in eighteenth-century Stellenbosch and the story of Inspector Eberard Februarie, a coloured police officer investigating the murder of a young student in the present-day town. Brown intersects storylines and narrations in order to challenge his readers' perceptions of these issues across time periods. Roger Smith's novel *Wake Up Dead* (2010) explores the perils of the Cape Town underworld by bringing former police officer turned mercenary, Billy Afrika, into contact with township gangsters, gunrunners and other criminals while exploring the country's contentious economic divisions.

The works of Deon Meyer also address the country's changing relationship with its history through the figure of the male detective and his pursuit of the resolution of crime. Meyer is the country's most popular crime fiction author and his novels, written in Afrikaans, have been translated into twenty-seven languages. His popularity can be attributed to his fulfilment of the genre's criteria for success: they are "fast-paced, plot-driven, contain more action than detection" and are "quite violent...usually end[ing] with a climatic chase or physical show-down."<sup>223</sup> In South Africa at least, Meyer's popularity can also be attributed to the connection between his protagonists and his readership and their respective struggles navigating post-apartheid life: many of his works have the figure of the white, middle-aged male as the protagonist—amongst others *Seven Days* (2012), *Icarus* (2016), *Thirteen Hours* (2010), *Cobra* (2014), and the novels that I examine in this chapter, *Dead Before Dying* (1999) and *Devil's Peak* (2007). In the former, Robbery and Homicide

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<sup>223</sup> Naidu, 'Crime Fiction, South Africa: A Critical Introduction', p. 126.

Detective Mat Joubert investigates a series of killings in which the only clue is the murder weapon—a century-old Mauser—while struggling to recover from the murder of his wife. In the latter, Benny Griessel’s fight to remain sober proves to be just as challenging as his search for the killer of child abusers.

Many of Joubert’s and Griessel’s troubles result from their respective understandings of masculinity and the chauvinistic apartheid-era ideas that inform them. Warnes avers that Meyer “cannot but be aware that the deficiencies of white South African masculinity have been publicly exposed, and the need for the rehabilitation of this group explicitly articulated” and I suggest that Meyer attempts to address these issues by constructing new models of masculinities for his protagonists.<sup>224</sup> But, the creation of these models is hindered by the author’s complex if not contradictory methods of gender construction. In the novels, Meyer often positions Joubert and Griessel against characters who blatantly espouse sexist stereotypes in order for his detectives to be seen as progressive, however, the use of stereotypes in the construction of these new masculinities troubles their separation from past understandings of gender. The portrayals of the detectives as breaking with these older understandings is complicated further by the author’s use of the “rape and revenge” cliché to inform their masculinities. The trope is popular in literature and film; novels such as Stieg Larsson’s *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2005), Maria Antònia Oliver Cabrer’s *Estudi en lila* (2016), and Philippe Djian’s *Oh...* (2012) offer different types of rape and revenge scenarios and they has been used in dozens of movies. In her book *Watching Rape: Film and Television in Postfeminist Culture* (2001), Sarah Projansky offers two versions:

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<sup>224</sup> Warnes, ‘Writing Crime in the New South Africa: Negotiating Threat in the Novels of Deon Meyer and Margie Orford’, p. 987.

[S]ometimes the revenge is taken by a man who loses his wife or daughter to a rape/murder, and sometimes the revenge is taken by women who have faced rape themselves. The films in the first category depend on rape to motivate and justify a particularly violent version of masculinity, relegating women to ‘minor props’ in the narrative. The films of the second category, however, can be understood as feminist narratives in which women face rape, recognize that the law will neither protect nor avenge them, and then take the law into their own hands.”<sup>225</sup>

With slight variations, these examples are followed in the works that I examine here. In *Dead Before Dying*, a woman is gang raped and later takes revenge on her attackers by murdering them, and, in *Devil’s Peak*, a teenage girl is kidnapped and raped and her attackers are killed. These depictions of rape and revenge, however, focus less on the victims’ trauma than how they inform the men’s masculinities. In the novels, these “new” models are constructed on gender stereotypes and the exploitation of women and complicate the narrative of the men breaking from past understandings.

### **Detection and “Gender Work”: Negotiating New Models of Masculinity and the Resolution of Crime in *Dead Before Dying***

While Meyer’s *Dead Before Dying* fits the example of a typical crime fiction novel due to its premise of a wily serial killer being pursued by overburdened but diligent

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<sup>225</sup> Sarah Projansky, *Watching Rape: Film and Television in Postfeminist Culture* (NYU Press: New York, 2001), p. 60.

police officers, it can also be seen as a meditation on the evolving gender expectations of the early post-apartheid period. The opening of the novel is set on New Year's Eve 1995 and introduces Mat Joubert, a 32-year-old detective with the Cape Town division of Robbery and Homicide, attending a suburban neighbourhood *braai* (the traditional South African barbeque). The guests at the party are working-class Afrikaners and, in this scene, Meyer immediately establishes gender roles via preparations for the evening meal; the kitchen is portrayed as a women's domain, the "warm and cosy" space filled with "female conversations" while the men occupy the garden in order to oversee the *braai*.<sup>226</sup> For the men, this division of tasks and their spatial regulations allow for them to practice rituals such as communal drinking and conversation, undertaking "gender work" that contributes to what Maurice Berger calls the "complex web of influences" that inform the men's model of masculinity.<sup>227</sup> When Joubert arrives at the *braai*, he is given a beer by Stoffberg, the party's host. While the act is depicted as a well-practiced and hospitable gesture, its perfunctory nature belies its importance to the men's sense of identity. According to Meyer, being given a beer serves as a "passport to the group," and having a "glass in hand" is not only an acknowledgement of one's inclusion but also verifies his masculinity to himself and others.<sup>228</sup> This inclusivity is also established by the banter that occurs between the men and results in "playful pleasure freed from substantive, objective goals" that also reinforces their gender identities:<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Deon Meyer, *Dead Before Dying* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1999), p. 5.

<sup>227</sup> Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis, and Simon Watson, eds., *Constructing Masculinity* (London: Routledge, 1995), p.3.

<sup>228</sup> Meyer, *Dead Before Dying*, p. 6.

<sup>229</sup> Ivan Karp, 'Beer Drinking and Social Experience in an African Society: An Essay in Formal Sociology', in *Explorations in African Systems of Thought*, ed. by Ivan Karp and Charles S. Bird (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1980), p. 83-119.



“No use giving it another injection, Stoff. Its dead.”

“I’ve got to eat before sunrise, Stoff. I have to open shop tomorrow.”

“No way. This liddle lamb will only be ready in February.”

“By that time, it’ll be mutton dressed as lamb.”<sup>230</sup>

The men also talk about sport, tell bawdy jokes and casually discuss work problems and these conversations reinforce this group connectedness. The bond between the men, however, can be seen as more important than their individual identities and, in this scene, the significance is demonstrated by a sense of shared employment. Stoffberg, the funeral director and target of the men’s good-humoured derision, positions his line of work as equivalent to Myburgh, the traffic chief, and Joubert, the police detective: “We’re in the same business...he liked saying. Only different branches.”<sup>231</sup> The men’s sense of connectedness, and the model of group masculinity upon which it is based, elides difference for the sake of inclusivity. For Joubert, it is an understanding in transition and the date of the *braai* can be read as significant; the new year will bring changes that will alter both his ideas of gender and his version of masculinity while also influencing his approach to the resolution of crime.

In the scene following the *braai*, it is New Year’s Day and the occasion is portrayed as an important date in the history of the police service: it is when the Robbery and Homicide division becomes “officially part of the New South Africa.”<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Meyer, *Dead Before Dying*, p. 7.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

The event is portrayed as a change from the old to the new administration, trading an abusive and racist police force for an organization based on equality and protection of all the country's citizens, and is marked by the appointment of Colonel Bart de Wit as the new Commanding Officer.<sup>233</sup> In his introduction of de Wit to the department, the Brigadier General talks about the changing environment of the police and its new expectations, however, little of substantive change is found by the detectives in his remarks. The same can be found in De Wit's introductory speech; the new C.O. demands "loyalty" and "dedication" from the men (there are no female officers) and for them to "strive for zero defect" in their work.<sup>234</sup> Instead of new ideas, the men see

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<sup>233</sup> While his selection could be assumed to meet expectations of a racial change in leadership (the replacement of a white for a black C.O.), Meyer complicates this idea by failing to specify de Wit's race. There is a possible clue through his name (translated as "the White" from Afrikaans) but this reading would be complicated by the character's former membership in the ANC. Although the organization did have white members during apartheid, the amount was small in comparison to other races and there is also the possibility of de Wit being coloured but a description of his physical features offers little to substantiate this idea or other interpretations. The new C.O. is "short and slender. His black hair was thin in front and at the back on the crown. His nose was a beak with a fat mole on the border between organ and cheek" (14). The decision to omit de Wit's race is significant not only because of the country's history of racial oppression and its use of racial taxonomies but its connection to the police service, an organization that was violently racist during the apartheid years and is still recovering from this reputation. I read the author's elision of de Wit's race as an attempt to shift focus from this issue to the role of politics in shaping the post-apartheid police service and the effect of this influence on the men who police the country. When doubts are raised about de Wit's competence, they are not based on the overdetermining factor of race but his qualifications for the position. De Wit is portrayed as a political appointee and still considered a representative of the ANC by the men serving under him despite being forced to resign his membership ("because a cop must be impartial") in order to accept the post (13). With three university degrees and a certificate of recognition for his year's sojourn at Scotland Yard, de Wit is a stark contrast to the previous C.O., Willie Theal, a man of "ascetic" tastes who retired to "grow vegetables on a smallholding" outside Cape Town, however, the class division is seen as less important than de Wit's lack of "local policing" experience, a reference not to Cape Town or other areas but the country itself (13). The absence is attributed to de Wit's ANC membership during apartheid but this reason is considered unsatisfactory to the men (there are no female detectives mentioned) in the department. The men could "live" with de Wit's connection to the ANC but his lack of empirical knowledge of police work is viewed as incommensurate with the country's needs: "What does Scotland Yard know about Africa?" asks one detective (16, 19). The question speaks to the conceit of applying Western ideas to solve Africa's problems and carries with it a history of forced application of socio-political solutions by colonial forces who claimed to "know" what was best for the people they colonized. However, coming from a white South African, the query remains complicated, invoking past conflicts between Afrikaners and the British (all the detectives are Afrikaners), along with the complications of a white man speaking for South Africa. This complication extends to the author's own race and its influence on his subjectivity while also raising the issue of whether it is ethical or even possible to omit race as a consideration of subjectivity, even symbolically, now or in the future.

<sup>234</sup> Meyer, *Dead Before Dying*, p. 16.

de Wit's expectations as unchanged from the previous administration: they would receive the same pay for the same number of hours and the same expected devotion to the job. De Wit's changes for the men, however, are focused more on the physical. The new C.O. has already transformed the space of his office, replacing the "dirty green carpet" and "the sickly pot plant" left by his predecessor with new carpet, furniture and a fresh coat of paint and these changes represent a break from the past that de Wit also expects from his detectives.<sup>235</sup>

Like the men at the *braai*, this group has their own masculine rituals but they are to the detriment of their health. The detectives are obese, heavy drinkers and smokers and de Wit mandates "lifestyle" changes to improve their fitness. The physical conditions of the men are the result of work-related stress and their habits of excess can be viewed as coping strategies for the psychological toil of policing a hyper-violent society. Meyer often provides explicit details of the damaged bodies of crime victims in his books but he also demonstrates how this trauma is re-inflicted on the men who investigate these crimes. For one detective in *Dead Before Dying*, alcohol is a way to forget death's constant "shadow," but drinking destroys his relationship with his family, while another, Sergeant Tony O'Grady is nicknamed "Nougat" because the confection has become his "staple food" and Meyer classifies the man's vice as both his "escape *and* his downfall."<sup>236</sup> Relinquishing these habits, however, will inhibit their ability to do the job: "It's all I can do," says "Nougat" O'Grady, to cope with the stress.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Meyer, *Dead Before Dying*, p. 13.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 29, 209.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid*, p. 298.

For Joubert, there is little difference between the professional and private trauma of policework. His wife, Lara, a fellow police officer, was murdered two years before while working undercover. Unable to reconcile with this loss, Joubert eases the pain, eats, smokes, and drinks to excess. At a meeting with de Wit, Joubert is told to lose fifteen kilos and he is assigned a nutritionist, a doctor and a psychologist to fulfil this order. These sessions and the adoption of new routines will improve Joubert's physical and mental health but also alter his views of gender roles. By encouraging him to cook for himself and imposing a diet of vegetables and lean meat (and a steep reduction in alcohol consumption), the nutritionist moves Joubert from the *braai* into the kitchen, a change that disrupts his understanding of gender roles by removing him from the group setting where masculinity is bestowed and maintained and into the exclusively female space. The doctor's recommendation that Joubert quit smoking and start to exercise will further disrupt his understanding of masculinity while also allowing for its means of construction to be explored.

In his therapy sessions with the psychologist, Dr Hanna Nortier, Joubert discusses the murder of his wife and its effect on his mental and emotional wellbeing. He is haunted by his failure to save her and his feelings of helplessness result in a perceived loss of masculinity. It is a gender model informed by Joubert's father, an apartheid-era policeman, and, in his therapy sessions, Joubert details the man's influence on his ideas of gender, race and the body. The elder Joubert was fit and athletic and often showed this prowess by beating his much younger officers in footraces. These contests were also opportunities to demonstrate his perceived racial superiority and he would challenge the "hotnots" (a derogatory term for coloureds) under his command to race him, his victories serving to reinforce his belief in white supremacy while also fortifying his masculinity. But, the idea of white male authority

is problematized by his son: Joubert was clumsy and slow and was often mocked by his father for his lack of athleticism. According to the elder Joubert, sport bestowed masculinity and, as a teenager, his son attempted to fulfil this idea. His choice of swimming, however, was derided by his father as feminine and incommensurate with masculinity development; play rugby, the man said, because it “gives you balls.”<sup>238</sup> Instead, Joubert gave up all exercise and began to rebel against his father by adopting habits and ideas that opposed the man’s beliefs: smoking, treating non-whites respectfully, and becoming a police detective. When Joubert returns to swimming in order to lose weight, the choice is not an act of defiance against his father but a rejection of the man’s constraining conventions of masculinity in favour of a new understanding.

Joubert’s move away from apartheid-era models of masculinity is also demonstrated in his approach to the investigation of crime. A killer has been targeting middle-aged white men in Cape Town and shooting them with a powerful gun. The victims consist of a mass mail distributor, a hairdresser, a jewellery designer, and an unemployed carpenter but, aside from their age and race, there is nothing else to connect them. To aid in his investigation, Joubert consults a criminal psychologist, Dr Anne Boshoff, who determines that the killer can only be another white male:

The statistics say your murder is a man. A middle-class man with the weight of his background on his shoulders. Why a man? Because most of them are. They’re the sex who have problems in accepting the prison of middle-

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<sup>238</sup> Meyer, *Dead Before Dying*, p. 72.

classness. We live in an era in which we teach our sons that they must achieve, be better, become rich. And if they can't...<sup>239</sup>

Boshoff's conclusion about the killer's identity is problematic; while her reasoning is based on "statistics," she corroborates them by using stereotypes of class and gender. Her compromised thinking on these issues is also demonstrated by her claim that "Men want to be in control-they want to play the game by their rules," the statement speaking to reductionist views by offering a single definition of male identity.<sup>240</sup>

Boshoff's ideas about homosexuality further her portrayal as an unreliable source for the detective to inform his search. When Joubert challenges her idea of fixed gender roles by asking if the perpetrator might be a woman, Boshoff ridicules the suggestion by comparing this likelihood to the killer being a "lesbian chimpanzee."<sup>241</sup> Instead of validating her point, the absurdity of the example undermines Boshoff's argument while also indicating her views on sexuality and masculinity. When she learns that one of the murder victims, Drew Wilson, was gay, Boshoff labels the rest of the men as "closet queens."<sup>242</sup> The comment can be read as homophobic, not only through the classification of gay men as "queens," but by qualifying them homogeneously. This notion is furthered by Boshoff's categorization of the killer as a "man with a problem who kills other men" and bases masculinity on heteronormative sexual practices.<sup>243</sup> The "problem" in this evaluation is the killer is gay; unable to fulfil standards of male

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<sup>239</sup> Meyer, *Dead Before Dying*, p. 228.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid, p. 233.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid, p. 232.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid, p. 229.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid, p. 229.

heteronormative identity by having sexual intercourse with women, the killer will instead “prove his masculinity to himself” by committing acts of violence.<sup>244</sup>

Boshoff’s sexist and homophobic views recall those of the elder Joubert through their reduction of gender to immutable binaries. Joubert, however, can be seen to reject these ideas in his approach to solving the case and, during his interview of Charlie Zeelie, Wilson’s former boyfriend, the interrogation room becomes not only a space for criminal investigation but the contesting of bigoted views of gay men and masculinity. Instead of relying on supposition to inform his judgement, Joubert allows Zeelie to present his own narrative about Wilson and their relationship. Zeelie describes his time with the murder victim in a manner that is devoid of the anger or resentment that might inspire violence (I “liked Drew very much...the attention he paid me...his company, his cheerfulness, his zest for life”) while also challenging the idea of homosexuality as a “problem” that needs to be solved (“it was neither dirty nor wrong... it was just...right”).<sup>245</sup> Zeelie also contests heteronormative expectations of male gender identity by having a “deep and masculine” voice and, as a professional rugby player, he can be seen to have “balls.”<sup>246</sup> Zeelie eventually ended the relationship with Wilson because of the social pressure to conform to heteronormative practices. To his fans, Zeelie wanted to be seen as “normal” and as a “hero” and this reputation isn’t available to him as a gay man.<sup>247</sup> After breaking up with Wilson, he began dating a woman “because it offered a way out” of the conflict between his sexuality and society’s expectations.<sup>248</sup> By allowing Zeelie to present his own story

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<sup>244</sup> Meyer, *Dead Before Dying*, p. 229.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid, p. 127.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid, p. 123.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid, p. 127.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid, p. 128.

(and by dismissing him as a suspect), Joubert contests social expectations, and their stereotypes, in the pursuit of crime's resolution and this defiance extends to ideas about the murder weapon.

A Mauser is found to have killed the men and this choice of gun evokes a connection to the country's troubled past. The weapon was used by Afrikaner forces against the British in the late nineteenth century, and Meyer uses this association to align out-dated ideas of politics with those about gender. This connection can be made when the field marshal of the "Army of the New Afrikaner Boer Republic" declares the weapon to be "the voice of our forefathers, the echo of their blood, spilt for freedom" and its use is "a trumpet call for the uprising of the nation."<sup>249</sup> This vision of the "nation" is founded on fixed ideas about men and race, a martial, violent Afrikaner masculinity that is grounded in the blood of "our forefathers" and the Mauser incites the same type of gendered thinking. A police gun expert classifies the Mauser as "a man's weapon" because it is perceived as too powerful for a woman to use and Dr Boshoff rejects the idea of a female perpetrator in the serial killer case because women only shoot "in self-defence."<sup>250</sup> By looking beyond these assumptions, Joubert is able to discover that the gun is not gendered but speaks to both men and women. While inspecting a Mauser that is the same model as the murder weapon, he finds it to contain both male and female characteristics, "the slender stock was feminine – a soft, sensual curve" while "the magazine" was "square, chunky and blunt...like a male sexual organ."<sup>251</sup> For Joubert, this duality leads him to the idea that the killer is a woman; in his thinking, the male component

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<sup>249</sup> Meyer, *Dead Before Dying*, p. 265.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 221, 217.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid*, p. 141.



represent the victims and the female points to the murderer. Prior to this encounter, Joubert had only seen the Mauser in a photograph and that reproduction “hadn’t prepared him for the...curves and contrasts of the weapon.”<sup>252</sup> The difference between seeing the weapon in the photo and engaging with it in person speaks against the use of reductive thinking to replace subjective evaluations and Joubert follows this tactic to identify the killer.

The connection between the victims and their killer is a college course they attended seven years previously. After the term ended, there was a celebratory outing at a resort where a photograph was taken of the students and their female instructor. Upon seeing the photo, Joubert recognized the “slender” figure of the woman, matching it to the “slender stock” of the gun, and realizes that the killer is Dr Nortier, his psychologist.<sup>253</sup> At the retreat, Nortier was gang raped by her students, an example of violent heteronormative masculinity that sees women as interchangeable objects and queer men as needing ‘fixing’. After they spy a man and woman having sex through a bedroom window, the students go to Nortier’s room and rape her. The men fail to differentiate between consensual sex and rape, denying Nortier’s agency to refuse them by positioning women as interchangeable and compliant sexually: “She fucks too. Just like the other one.”<sup>254</sup> While this version of masculinity is informed by heteronormative sexual practice, the pressure to partake in the rape includes all the men. When Drew Wilson is ordered to participate, his sexuality is disregarded: “You’re a queer...Fuck her,” he is told, the contradiction of this statement lost to the dominance of masculinity construction.<sup>255</sup> Though Wilson attempts to resist, he is

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<sup>252</sup> Meyer, *Dead Before Dying*, p. 141.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid, p. 390.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid, p. 405.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid, p. 406.

forced by the men to rape Nortier. His movements are physically guided by one of them, the man's "hands push[ing] him in and out" of her, but participation in the rape is not considered enough.<sup>256</sup> "I want to see you come," Wilson is told, an act that would verify his masculinity to the group, and, in order to "survive" the overwhelming pressure of heteronormativity, he obeys.<sup>257</sup>

Joubert can be seen as a counter to these men and their feelings of patriarchal entitlement, bigotry and violent misogyny.<sup>258</sup> This idea, however, becomes more complicated when viewing Nortier's rape and subsequent plans for revenge as a means to construct Joubert's new model of masculinity. Joubert's grief over his wife's murder is mitigated by his counselling sessions with Dr Nortier, allowing for his psychological healing as well as learning new ways to be a man, freed from the legacy of his father. When Nortier admits that she scheduled these sessions to learn information about the serial killer case to continue seeking revenge, the disclosure reveals that Joubert's version of masculinity fails to break with past understandings because it depended on female exploitation and misogyny for its construction.

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<sup>256</sup> Meyer, *Dead Before Dying*, p. 406.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid*, p. 406.

<sup>258</sup> In *Dead Before Dying*, Meyer's portrayals of the women who make sexual advances toward Joubert are conflicting. They can be seen as representations of female empowerment by breaking from ideas of women as sexually demure but they also conform to stereotypes such as the sexually precocious "teenage nymph" or the "middle-aged seductress" that appeals to the author's male readership. In the braai scene, Joubert is approached by Stoffberg's eighteen-year-old daughter, Yvonne. She has been in love with him for years and reveals her feelings now because the "time is over for women to simply sit around waiting" (104). Her behaviour, however, conforms to sexual clichés. She flatters Joubert by appealing to his masculinity ("You're the only man here tonight") and rubbing her breasts against his chest (8). In a later passage, she attempts to seduce him by cooking him dinner and then offering herself for "dessert" (107). Dr Boshoff can be seen as an example of female sexual empowerment by flirting with Joubert ("You're so beautifully tall and big...I like big men") but the dialogue is often hackneyed ("It is true what they say about men who carry large guns?") or reads more like a male fantasy of female sexual submission ("I like it when men are rude to me. It keeps me in my place") (228, 232). Joubert, however, does not have sex with either of these women and, instead, constructs his masculinity in other ways.

The revelation of Nortier's rape and her subsequent killing of her attackers also necessitates a reconsideration of her gendered portrayal by the author. While Nortier's use of the Mauser can be seen as an act of defiance against gender expectations, her killing of the men is not as much a demonstration of female empowerment as an example of female exploitation and is consistent with the author's customary portrayal of women. In Meyer's works, women are tortured, mutilated and murdered and the rape scene in *Dead Before Dying* is punctuated by explicit descriptions of the men sexually violating Hanna Nortier.<sup>259</sup> While Meyer offers a complex and nuanced depiction of Nortier's processing of her attack, it is also informed by clichés and further exploitation. The morning after the rape, Nortier felt both disconnected from her body but also unclean. While this contradiction speaks to the often-complicated thoughts and feelings being worked through after being raped, the notion of the rape victim as "dirty" (and the body in need of cleansing afterward) is also a cliché and the narration allows for the opportunity to linger once more over the traumatized female body despite Nortier's declaration that she had been separated from it ("It wasn't my body any longer...They weren't my breasts, and my stomach and my legs").<sup>260</sup> Nortier's trauma, however, goes beyond the physical and emotional to involve the death of her former self: "They killed Hester Clarke," she says, referring to her given name, while also demonstrating the significance of the damage from her attack.<sup>261</sup> But the possibility of a new life, one that leaves trauma in the past, is gendered by the author. Unlike Joubert's "rebirth" after the death of his wife,

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<sup>259</sup> In *Thirteen Hours* (2008), a woman is murdered and another is kidnapped, stripped naked, and is threatened with the cutting off of her nipples if she doesn't provide her kidnappers with her camera's memory card. For Milla, in *Trackers* (2011), she flees from a violent husband and is forced to seek refuge at a woman's shelter.

<sup>260</sup> Meyer, *Dead Before Dying*, p. 407.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid*, p. 408.

Nortier is not afforded the same opportunity and, instead, her new identity is only a means for her to seek revenge.<sup>262</sup> When she finds the Mauser among her grandfather's possessions, she decides to use the weapon on her rapists and, after killing the last of the men, Nortier declares that her "body is clean."<sup>263</sup> This statement is revealed to be problematic: a blood test has revealed that Nortier is HIV positive, a consequence of her rape, and, even after taking her revenge, she remains stuck in a past that continues to traumatize her.

When Joubert eventually apprehends Nortier and confronts her about the murders, her agency is denied once more by a man. After confessing to the crimes, she asks Joubert if he can step outside of the room so she can shoot herself but he rejects this request. The reason is "because she had helped him to heal," however, his refusal denies her the same relief; "heal[ing]" can be seen as only for men.<sup>264</sup> Denying Nortier the right to kill herself also maintains a type of social stability. She cannot be allowed to commit suicide because the book "entertains no illusions that revenge is justifiable, and the order that is restored at the novel's end is contingent upon her arrest."<sup>265</sup> The restoration of a legal "order" can also be read as a gendered order; Nortier is forced to yield to the same patriarchal system that empowered her rapists' sense of entitlement. When Nortier violates the gender order by taking revenge, however, she needs to be returned to her place in society. This return is itself a cliché: crime fiction "is a genre that, since its hardboiled inception with writers like Raymond

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<sup>262</sup> Meyer, *Dead Before Dying*, p. 5.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid, p. 407.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid, p. 408.

<sup>265</sup> Warnes, 'Writing Crime in the New South Africa: Negotiating Threat in the Novels of Deon Meyer and Margie Orford', p. 990.

Chandler, has shown women their place in no uncertain terms” and Meyer perpetuates this idea, whether wittingly or not, in his novel.<sup>266</sup>

### **“It’s not a man. It’s not a woman. It’s me”:** Contesting (and Reinforcing)

#### **Gender Roles in *Devil’s Peak***

*Devil’s Peak* is an intricate and ambitious novel, addressing such timely issues for the country as the drug trade, prostitution, child abuse, and the flawed justice system. To add to this complexity, Meyer includes three main narrative strands: one for Benny Griessel; another for Thobela Mpayipheli, a Xhosa man who is a former Umkhonto we Sizwe soldier turned vigilante; and a third for Christine Van Rooyen, a sex worker and single mother whose story ties the plot together. For the two men, despite their difference in race and their competing sides during apartheid, a doubling emerges between them: both experience the removal of the roles “husband” and “father” from their identity, they each struggle with the issue of social order and how it should be maintained, and both seek violent revenge for a rape that signals a return to past understandings of identity. Mpayipheli’s identity is informed by his years as a soldier but also by his ancestors. As a descendent of Xhosa chiefs, he feels a strong connection to these men and relies on their voices to guide his actions.<sup>267</sup> When Mpayipheli decides to seek vengeance for the rape of a child, his weapon of choice is an assegai, a wooden spear with a sharp iron tip, the type which was used by his Xhosa warriors to fight colonial forces, establishing a link with history that gives his

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<sup>266</sup> Margie Orford, ‘The Grammar of Violence, Writing Crime as Fiction’, *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa*, 25:2 (2013), 220-229 (p. 225).

<sup>267</sup> Deon Meyer, *Heart of the Hunter* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2003), p. 3.

cause the same sense of “absolute conviction” as his ancestors.<sup>268</sup> For Griessel, it means a return to the role of “father.” After his daughter is kidnapped and raped, he rejects his identity as a policeman and crosses the “line” of order demarcated by the legal system to take his revenge on the men. Though Mpayipheli and Griessel are negotiating shifting masculine identities, both in the end resort to older versions of masculinity which rely on women as their props and demonstrates that the doubling of these characters, and their sexist thinking, speaks beyond race or politics.

Benny Griessel can be seen to meet British crime fiction novelist P.D. James’ criteria of the genre’s detective as a “hard-drinking, psychologically flawed and disillusioned” man.<sup>269</sup> As an alcoholic who is haunted by the violence he encounters on the job and a rapidly growing cynicism toward the country’s future, Griessel can also be seen to qualify as a crime fiction cliché. While there are numerous portrayals of hard-drinking detectives, Meyer’s decision that Griessel confront his demons allows the author to “breathe new life” into this trope of the genre.<sup>270</sup> The opening of the book finds Griessel exiled from the family home due to his drinking problem. While he blames his alcoholism on the pressures of the job, his wife is quick to correct him— “[i]t’s you,” she says, not the work, that makes him drink.<sup>271</sup> Aside from being physically banished from his home, removal from the domestic space also problematizes Griessel’s sense of identity; as the self-declared “breadwinner,” he earns money for the family while his wife performs the household duties.<sup>272</sup> Being separated from this gender model, however, reveals that the pressure to drink comes

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<sup>268</sup> Deon Meyer, *Devil’s Peak* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2007), p. 80.

<sup>269</sup> P.D. James, *Talking About Detective Fiction* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2009). p. 154.

<sup>270</sup> Warnes, ‘Writing Crime in the New South Africa: Negotiating Threat in the Novels of Deon Meyer and Margie Orford’, p. 987.

<sup>271</sup> Meyer, *Devil’s Peak*, p. 25.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid*, p. 40.

not from his job as a policeman but from the expectations of being a husband and father. The connection between Griessel's alcoholism and these roles is revealed by his claim that that "if he didn't [have his family], he wouldn't be able to stop drinking."<sup>273</sup> The statement, however, fails to account for the two decades of excessive drinking that accompanied his domestic life and this contradiction is more fully revealed when Griessel is sober.

After checking into the hospital to "dry out," Griessel reconsiders this gender model and its connection to his identity. Heavy drinking is a big part of his identity as a hard-boiled detective but Griessel's doctor challenges this connection. As a recovering alcoholic himself, the doctor knows Griessel's struggle and when he declares that it takes a "brave man to give up alcohol," he not only speaks from experience but he is offering his patient a new version of masculinity to follow.<sup>274</sup> This model contests Griessel's belief that he wouldn't be able to remain sober without his family's support, by shifting the focus of his recovery to his job; the doctor had previously retired to a quiet life at a beach house but after three months he found himself "want[ing] the bottle" again.<sup>275</sup> In order to combat the urge to drink, the doctor returned to practicing medicine and the connection between work and sobriety serves as an example for Griessel, allowing him to reconnect with his identity as a detective but without relying on alcohol to cope with his problems. In post-apartheid writing there is a "narrative reclamation of identity" that results from "the excavation of buried or repressed selves" and, before marriage and fatherhood for Griessel, there

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<sup>273</sup> Meyer, *Devil's Peak*, p. 33.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid, p. 83.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid, p. 94.

was his job as a policeman.<sup>276</sup> When asked why he is a detective, Griessel simply states it's "who I am."<sup>277</sup> From an early age, he could declare with certainty that "I just knew I was a policeman. Don't ask me why... That is how I saw myself."<sup>278</sup>

De Kock's idea of a post-apartheid "narrative reclamation of identity" can be seen to include Mpayipheli, whose reconnection with his identity as a soldier results from the death of his family. Meyer introduced the character in *Heart of the Hunter* (2003) and in that novel Mpayipheli's wife dies in tragic circumstances; in *Devil's Peak*, his son is killed by robbers. Without them, he declares "there was nothing" left in his life and this crisis provokes a reconnection with his past identity.<sup>279</sup> While he was a member of Umkhonto we Sizwe, Mpayipheli had been trained by Soviet and East German spy agencies as an assassin working against the apartheid regime. Post-1994 he becomes an "assassin for hire," – marketing skills once used in the Struggle,<sup>280</sup> but Mpayipheli views himself as a "warrior," someone who fights for a cause, not just as a killer, and he finds a new kind of struggle after his son's murder and the failure of the courts to put his killers in prison. "If children can't depend on the justice system to protect them, then who can they trust?" Mpayipheli asks, before deciding to take on this responsibility himself.<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> Leon de Kock, *Losing the Plot: Crime, Reality and Fiction in Postapartheid Writing* (Wits University Press: Johannesburg, 2016), p. 17-18.

<sup>277</sup> Meyer, *Devil's Peak*, p. 221.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid, p. 221.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid, p. 14.

<sup>280</sup> The definition of "struggle" during this period is shown to be a complex but ultimately subjective understanding in the novel. As an apartheid-era policeman, Griessel believed that he too was a "soldier" (239). In the "dark days of the eighties", being a cop was considered "as low as you could go" and you "[w]orked like slaves while the whole world shat on" you (287, 270). If these quotes were put into a different context, they could be attributed to Mpayipheli's experiences as a black man fighting the powerful apartheid regime and this ambiguity adds to the complicated doubling between the men while also speaking to the idea of who possesses moral authority in post-apartheid society.

<sup>281</sup> Meyer, *Devil's Peak*, p. 80.



Mpayipheli's pursuit of retributive justice is not the first time that he has been at odds with the post-apartheid government. In *Heart of the Hunter*, Mpayipheli is tasked with delivering a portable hard drive to Zambia in order to save a former comrade's life. The hard drive allegedly contains details of criminal acts committed by state officials and the government agents who pursue Mpayipheli have been ordered to retrieve it at any cost. While Meyer details the crimes of these officials and their efforts to keep them secret, the book also portrays the struggle of the new government to create an intelligence service that incorporates the resources of the apartheid regime. The conflicts that result from this project can be seen to represent many competing factions in the country's post-apartheid narrative – black versus white, communist against anti-communists – as they wrestle for power. But Mpayipheli is depicted as above such motives. His devotion to his friend, and the idea of his mission as a worthy cause, places Mpayipheli as the book's (and the country's) moral compass; his decisions are not based on race or desire for power but what he believes is right for South Africa.

In *Devil's Peak*, Meyer situates Mpayipheli in a similarly conflicted position but with more complicated results, both politically and personally. His first victim is a man who was allowed to walk free from a baby rape charge. The crime is a possible reference to the Baby Tshepang case, where in October 2001 an eight-month-old girl in South Africa was raped by her mother's boyfriend in the belief that it would cure him of AIDS, however, there have been many other rapes committed in the country because of the belief in the "virgin cleansing myth".<sup>282</sup> While the perpetrator in the Baby Tshepang case was found guilty and sentenced to life in prison, Meyer's

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<sup>282</sup> Suzanne Leclerc-Madlal, 'On the Virgin Cleansing Myth: Gendered Bodies, AIDS and Ethnomedicine', *African Journal of AIDS Research*, 1:2 (2002), 87-95 (p. 87).

character is paroled when the police misplace the file. The hunt for this man requires Mpayipheli to visit old haunts and rekindle old relationships. When he finally finds him, Mpayipheli stabs the man in the heart with an assegai but not before letting him defend himself. This provides Mpayipheli with the moral high ground by posing the confrontation as a “war” between a “soldier” and his enemy while also allowing him to reconnect with a particular kind of masculinity.<sup>283</sup>

Punishing child abusers rids Mpayipheli of the “impotent[ence]” that he felt after his son’s murder and the number of victims begins to grow.<sup>284</sup> Mpayipheli’s chooses his targets regardless of race; they are black, white and coloured and he finds them by reading newspaper articles about their crimes. The media can be seen to play an important role in the book, not only by providing Mpayipheli with targets, but by shaping the revenge narrative and influencing public opinion. Media speculation about the killer’s gender is based on stereotypes about mothers as both nurturing and vengeful. One newspaper reports that mothers “are ruthless when it comes to protecting [their] kids” and examples can be found of them “committing serious crimes, even murder, to avenge acts against their children.”<sup>285</sup> Based on this belief, the media dub the killer “Artemis” –the female protector of children in Greek mythology – “who would punish injustice” with her bow and arrow.<sup>286</sup> As the killings increase, press reports such as “VIGILANTE KILLER TARGETS CHILD MOLESTERS” position Artemis’s actions as justifiable and public approval for these crimes increases but they also attract copycats.<sup>287</sup> After a man is found stabbed to death by an assegai,

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<sup>283</sup> Meyer, *Devil’s Peak*, p. 81.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid*, p. 67.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid*, p. 141.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid*, p. 141.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid*, p. 140.

“Artemis” confesses to the crime, however, it is not Mpayipheli but an imitator; the victim’s teenage daughter. She states that the inspiration to kill her molester came from the media (“I saw it on TV. Then I knew. It’s me”) but refuses to cite gender as the reason for her crime: “It’s not a man. It’s not a woman. It’s me.”<sup>288</sup> In this instance, the victim/killer disrupts the typical “rape and revenge” scenario by rejecting gender, moving the trope away from the male/female binary understandings that inform it and allow its replication, but also by focusing on her subjectivity as a means to define her trauma. This understanding differs from the other demonstrations of “rape and revenge” in the novel; the real ‘Artemis’ is motivated by a particular view of masculinity, as is Griessel in his acts of vengeance at the end of the novel.

After the loss of his wife and son, Mpayipheli reconnected with his “very nature” as a warrior and this provided him with a “way forward,” however, this direction is based on ideas from his past that conflict with the post-apartheid realities that he encounters in his mission.<sup>289</sup> During the Struggle, Mpayipheli did not kill women because he considered the “war” to be only “against men,” but when he reads about a female child abuser, he must decide between his commitment to avenging the children of the country or his views on gender.<sup>290</sup> Mpayipheli confronts the woman and then kills her but, unlike his previous killings where he was “detached” and “mechanical,” this deed troubles him because he only wants to “make war with honour” and there was no “honour in the execution of a woman.”<sup>291</sup> Reverting to the thinking of his apartheid-era past by declaring that a “war against women was not a

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<sup>288</sup> Meyer, *Devil’s Peak*, pp. 255, 256.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid*, p. 69.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid*, p. 156.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 126, 370, 276.

war,” Mpayipheli decides not to punish any more female child abusers.<sup>292</sup> Instead, he consigns them to the system of law that he is fighting against: “Let the courts... take responsibility for the women.”<sup>293</sup> This exclusion, however, produces a contradiction; by deciding not to punish female child abusers, Mpayipheli disrupts the “absolute conviction” of his mission by leaving their victims vulnerable to further mistreatment while also perpetuating the idea of women as unequal to men.<sup>294</sup>

Mpayipheli’s embrace of his “Struggle” views on gender can be seen as similar to those that still persist with Griessel and the police. During the interview of a witness, for example, Griessel mistakenly refers to the woman as “Mrs. Kleyn,” and is quickly corrected, “*Ms*,” she says (original emphasis).<sup>295</sup> “As in neither Mrs or Miss. It’s a modern form of address which probably hasn’t yet penetrated the police.”<sup>296</sup> After the interview, Griessel exclaims: “What does she want to be a *Ms* for? What for? What is wrong with Mrs? Or Miss. It was good enough for six thousand years and now she wants to be a fucking *Ms*.”<sup>297</sup> A believer in order, intolerant of dissent, uninclined to critical questioning, for Griessel patriarchy as an institution is “good enough” just as the legal system “created order and that was good.”<sup>298</sup> In order to maintain legal order, Griessel asserts, a “line had to be drawn.”<sup>299</sup> A “collective” (the police force) had to be in charge and no dissent could be tolerated because “no one was objective,” “[y]ou couldn’t trust an individual to determine justice and apply it,”

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<sup>292</sup> Meyer, *Devil’s Peak*, p. 276.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid, p. 277-278.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid, p. 80.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid, p. 138.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid, p. 138.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid, p. 143.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid. p. 205.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid, p. 204.

otherwise there would be “[o]rder, not chaos” in society.<sup>300</sup> And yet, after learning that his daughter, Carla, has been kidnapped, Griessel becomes just that individual claiming to be able to “determine justice and apply it”, violating the order he has long believed in.

Christine’s connection to the competing storylines is her client, Carlos Sangrenegra, a Colombian drug cartel boss who operates in Cape Town. His physical and verbal abuse of Christine reads as a clichéd-version of South American *machismo*; he is quick-tempered, possessive of women, and punctuates his imperfect language usage with diminutive terms such as “conchita,” Spanish slang for female genitalia. However, this hackneyed behaviour has a purpose; the sexism of Griessel and Mpayipheli can be seen as innocuous in comparison to Carlos’s misogyny and he serves as an example of who the “real problem” is in South African society. Carlos’s treatment of Christine compels her to save herself and her daughter, Sonia, from further harm. To escape, she fakes an abduction of Sonia and blames it on Carlos, later colluding with Griessel to place a story in the newspaper that would attract Artemis’s attention. The plan works and Mpayipheli kills Carlos but, despite being watched closely by police, he is able to escape. The story is pushed forward by the appearance of Carlos’s brother, César, who wants revenge for the killing and kidnaps Carla (later gang raping her with his henchmen) in order to hold her as “ransom” for Mpayipheli.

While Griessel has pursued the figure of Artemis throughout the novel, this search has been secondary to his fight to remain sober. He often suffers from the desire to drink and continues to experience withdrawal symptoms, the tremors,

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<sup>300</sup> Meyer, *Devil’s Peak*, p. 204.

anxiety and irritability affecting his work, and he blames his chauvinistic comments about “Mrs. Kleyn” on this condition: “I am a complete bastard” without alcohol, he says.<sup>301</sup> Instead of drinking, however, Griessel focuses on work, embracing his identity as a police officer, but remaining a “bastard,” a dynamic that is challenged by Carla’s kidnapping. When Griessel captures Mpayipheli, he is forced to choose between holding the man legally accountable for his crimes or handing him over to César, a decision that also means choosing between old and new identities. To turn Mpayipheli over to the country’s legal system would mean maintaining his current identity as a policeman, however, to follow César’s instructions would mean a return, at least symbolically, to the domestic roles that contributed to his alcoholism. Instead of relying on the “order” imposed by the legal system that he avows, Griessel decides on fatherhood and “chaos.” At the meeting with César, Griessel exchanges Mpayipheli for his daughter but a confrontation ensues and, after disarming César and his men, Griessel executes them.

These actions, however, shouldn’t be read in isolation; Griessel’s forsaking of his identity as a policeman can also be read as an attempt to return to an old model of masculinity, one that entails the use of retributive violence while speaking to past abuses of power. With the end of apartheid, the changing focus of the police is embodied in its new name. No longer the “South African Police Force,” it is the now the Police “Service,” and this change renounces connotations of aggression and intimidation for assistance to the community.<sup>302</sup> However, this new focus is translated into gender terms; the police have become “emasculated and disempowered,” according to Griessel, and he blames this condition on the country’s new approach to

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<sup>301</sup> Meyer, *Devil’s Peak*, p. 143.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid*, p. 291.

law and order.<sup>303</sup> While the methodology is based on the protection of rights for all South Africans (and the rejection of apartheid-era abusive practices), Griessel views the legal system as overly pedantic, where if “you didn’t read a scumbag his rights before you arrested him they threw the fucking case out of court,” and his vigilantism speaks to his view of the system’s shortcomings.<sup>304</sup> However, Griessel’s murder of the men contradicts his idea of the legal system as being “good,” and that “[y]ou couldn’t trust an individual to determine justice and apply it.” The reason for this change can be seen to come from the past: “It’s the results that count,” said Griessel’s apartheid-era C.O. Willie Theal, and, believing that he would be unable to get them as a policeman now, Griessel chooses to do so as a father.<sup>305</sup>

The author’s reconnection of Griessel with his former model of masculinity relies on his daughter’s exploitation, including the rape and kidnapping that allow him to reengage with this model, but also by denying her agency and a narrative voice. While Griessel is able to rescue Carla, her subjectivity is almost entirely elided from the story; she is not allowed access to her account of events but, instead, has them dictated by others. When her father learns about her rape, it is not from his daughter but from César and, during the passage where Griessel confronts the men, Carla remains silent throughout, denying her the opportunity to select her punishment for the men. Instead of deciding between vigilante justice or the country’s legal system (or another option), Carla is forced to comply with her father’s decision and access to her narrative is only granted when she is told to identify her rapists with a nod before Griessel shoots them in the head. Carla’s exploitation can be seen not only as a

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<sup>303</sup> Meyer, *Devil’s Peak*, p. 291.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid, p. 205.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid, p. 205.

demonstration of male authority, but as a crime-fiction cliché, one where the male hero “is premised on a dead or silenced woman.”<sup>306</sup> A contrast can be seen between the Carla, who is largely silenced in the book, and Christine, who gives voice to her own story, however, both remain secondary to the male narrative of masculinity construction and its accompanying portrayals of female exploitation.

The framing device for Christine’s narrative is the confessional; she visits a clergyman at the opening of the novel to tell him the account of her life. In this setting, Christine’s “sins” are recounted in an expository manner, detailing her formative years, her burgeoning sexuality, how she become a prostitute, and the birth of her daughter at nineteen, but the retelling is also meant to challenge readers’ assumptions about her character; Christine is not to be seen as a typical prostitute. Similar to the comparison of Griessel (and, to a lesser extent, Mpayipheli) to Carlos, Christine’s behaviour is also mitigated by her comparison to others. Unlike the other prostitutes depicted in the novel, she isn’t a drug addict, a nymphomaniac or a victim of sexual abuse (“Lots of call girls say” they have been, Christine reports).<sup>307</sup> This difference is also meant to be recognized by Christine’s admission that she became a prostitute out of economic necessity; as a waitress, she wasn’t able to make enough money to provide for her and Sonia. The idea that other women engage in sex work because of financial need isn’t addressed and allows Christine to be portrayed as unique for selling her body for money. However, Christine’s overriding concern for her daughter’s welfare, and her lack of conformity to the stereotype of the prostitute, positions her character as a different cliché: “the whore with the golden heart.”<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> Orford, ‘The Grammar of Violence, Writing Crime as Fiction’, p. 225.

<sup>307</sup> Meyer, *Devil’s Peak*, p. 47.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid*, p. 50.



While Meyer pre-empts this reading by including it in Christine's "confession," making the character self-aware of how she could be viewed, the portrayal remains exploitative because of its reliance on salaciousness to demonstrate her sense of empowerment.

Christine's various sexual encounters are well-detailed, both with her clients and other sexual partners, along with the moment when she realized the "power" of her sexuality. While attending a party as a teenager, Christine was asked by a male classmate to expose her breasts. Other girls had either laughed or expressed indignance at the request but Christine complied, flashing her "big boobs" to the partygoers and feeling the "power" behind the "jaw-dropping weakness of lust."<sup>309</sup> While Christine's actions can be read as asserting control over her body through the contesting of social expectations, the equating of lust to power is complicated by her transition to sex work; she became a prostitute, not only out of concern for her child, but because she viewed her sexual power as a "weapon" and believed that she could control what happened during these encounters.<sup>310</sup> However, there is no consideration of the circumstances that led to this need to be empowered: the authority that accompanies male desire, a history of patriarchal exploitation or even how her control of a sexual encounter could be superseded by a man (or men's) sexual aggression. Christine's entanglement with Carlos is informed by these ideas; while their dynamic remains client/prostitute, he becomes jealous and sexually abusive and Christine must find a way to extricate herself from this relationship. Her plan to frame Carlos for an abduction of Sonia is complex and innovative, demonstrating Christine's intelligence and perspicacity for the weaknesses of the male ego, but it also includes a measure of

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<sup>309</sup> Meyer, *Devil's Peak*, p. 60.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid*, p. 60.

opportunism that benefits from Carlos's exploitation of others. After telling her story to the clergyman, Christine doesn't ask him for absolution but, instead, wants to tithe: 400,000 rand. It is ten percent of the drug money she stole from Carlos, however, the problematic morality associated with this theft, or Christine's role in his death, is consistent with the treatment of other select crimes in the novel, regardless of gender.

After learning about the stolen money, Griessel allows Christine to flee, effectively pardoning her of her crimes; absolution, it seems, comes from Griessel, not God, and not the policeman, but the father figure. This placement speaks to Warnes' assertion that the detective in Meyer's novels is the "antidote to disorder, violence and uncertainty".<sup>311</sup> By letting Christine abscond with the drug money and, therefore, profit from Carlos's death, Griessel does not act in his capacity as a policeman but as a figure of paternal authority. The "white saviour complex" can be added to this representation when Griessel allows Mpayipheli to avoid punishment for his murders. After he helps rescue Carla, Mpayipheli is permitted to escape and he "disappears" to his Xhosa homeland despite the possibility of more violence if he returns to killing child abusers. Griessel also allows himself to avoid accountability for his execution of the rapists, an act of self-absolution that crosses the "line" preserving social order, but lets him combine his identity as a father with that of a policeman. This conflation is made possible by the country's evolving understandings of justice and legality. In South Africa, "[d]isorder, rule-breaking and malfeasance have saturated the private and public spheres to such an extent that virtuous conduct and wrongdoing are frequently blurred" and the country's authors, including Meyer, have represented this idea in their works.<sup>312</sup> "For writers in the postapartheid period, the easier-to-define

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<sup>311</sup> Warnes, 'Writing Crime in the New South Africa: Negotiating Threat in the Novels of Deon Meyer and Margie Orford', p. 986.

<sup>312</sup> De Kock, *Losing the Plot: Crime, Reality and Fiction in Postapartheid Writing*, p. 42.

moral order of anti-apartheid or struggle literature has disappeared,” writes de Kock, and been replaced by a “reconfigured contest over law and order in which the borderlines of legitimate and illegitimate” measures “are...under erasure.”<sup>313</sup> For Griessel, the changing understanding of good and bad conduct allows for the creation of a new model of masculinity, however, the reliance on gender binaries and patriarchal authority for its construction complicates its break with the past.

## Conclusion

Like the novels I have examined in this chapter, the great majority of crime fiction has been the purview of male characters, often to the diminishment or omission of female perspectives. Pim Higginson writes that crime fiction either “tends to exclude the feminine entirely” or “deploy it as a decorative asset placed alongside the other acquisitions of male capital accumulation,” as is the case with Griessel and his newly acquired sobriety.<sup>314</sup> In South Africa, the treatment of women is more severe and repressive but these portrayals can be found in its version of the genre. According to crime fiction novelist Margie Orford, South Africa is a place “where a form of hyper-masculinity –brutal and domineering–is tolerated” and “violence against women can come to seem as normal as breathing.”<sup>315</sup> If “the post-apartheid crime thriller should be read as negotiating...the threat and uncertainty that many feel to be a part of South African life,” as Warnes suggests, then for women it is an especially perilous

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<sup>313</sup> De Kock, *Losing the Plot: Crime, Reality and Fiction in Postapartheid Writing*, p. 42.

<sup>314</sup> Pim Higginson, ‘Tortured Bodies, Loved Bodies: Gendering African Popular Fiction’, *Research in African Literatures*, 39:4 (2008), 133-146 (p. 143).

<sup>315</sup> Orford, ‘The Grammar of Violence, Writing Crime as Fiction’, p. 227.

existence.<sup>316</sup> Crimes of sexual assault have reached epidemic proportions in the country and, because of this frequency, it is common to find them depicted in its fiction.<sup>317</sup> However, despite the violence and trauma that accompany rape, Orford writes, these representations are frequently “mesmerizing” to the reader because they are rendered as “highly sexualized” portrayals.<sup>318</sup> In her *Clare Hart* series of novels, Orford often depicts cases of sexual violence and murder but elides the sexually explicit in these descriptions. In *Daddy’s Girl*, young girls are kidnapped, raped and killed and, in *Like Clockwork*, the bodies of murdered women are detailed in the narration but these portrayals can be seen to focus more on the suffering of the deceased (and on Hart) than the titillation of the reader:

“The dead girl iced the blood in Clare’s veins. A lock of the girl’s black hair drifted in the wind then settled onto a thin brown shoulder. Clare was slipping back into her nightmare. It took an immense exercise of will to bring herself back to the present. To this body. Here. Today. Then her mind made the switch to trained observer and all emotion was gone. She scanned the placement of the body, logging each detail with forensic precision.

She noted the faint marks on the bare arms, bruises that had not had time to bloom. The girl’s right hand was bound, transformed into a bizarre fetish. It has been placed coquettishly on her hip. Something protruded from the girl’s hand, glinting in the low-angled sunlight. Her boots were so high that she

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<sup>316</sup> Warnes, ‘Writing Crime in the New South Africa: Negotiating Threat in the Novels of Deon Meyer and Margie Orford’, p. 991.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid, p. 984.

<sup>318</sup> Margie Orford, ‘Writing Crime’, *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa*, 22:2 (2010), 184-197 (p. 187).

would have struggled to walk. But she was not going anywhere: not with her slender throat severed”<sup>319</sup>

While Hart undertakes the solving of crime in these books, she is not a detective but a journalist and film documentarian and focuses her attentions on the plight of women and children in her work. In *Like Clockwork*, the reader is told that her doctoral thesis was entitled “Crimes against Women in Post-Apartheid South Africa” and it proposes that because a civil war was averted in the country that the “unspent violence was sublimated into a war against women. A war in which there are no rules and no limits.”<sup>320</sup> While the truth of this argument is debatable, the connection between fiction and reality is deliberate; Orford writes that “all my novels have their origins in my responses to particular, real crimes”<sup>321</sup> and that crime fiction “is a way of interpreting the society upon which it focuses its lens.”<sup>322</sup> In these works, Orford also “attempts to understand what men do, and why they do it,” an endeavour that can be seen as similar to Meyer’s efforts to render men’s complex motivations for their actions in his novels.<sup>323</sup> These efforts, however, can be seen to differ greatly considering that Meyer’s depictions often include explicit acts of sexual violence and objectified representations of women’s bodies. In her book *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film (1993)*, Carol Clover writes about rape and masculinity in the 1978 movie *I Spit on Your Grave* and the way that sexual violence in it is portrayed:

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<sup>319</sup> Margie Orford, *Like Clockwork* (Cape Town: Oshun Books, 2006), pp. 6-7.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid, p. 17.

<sup>321</sup> Orford, ‘Writing Crime’, p. 187.

<sup>322</sup> Orford, ‘The Grammar of Violence, Writing Crime as Fiction’, p. 225.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid, p. 225.

“...gang rape has first and foremost to do with male sport and male pecking order and only secondarily to do with sex, the implication being that team sport and gang rape are displaced versions of one another, male sorting devices both, and both driven by male spectatorship.”<sup>324</sup>

This point is important because it acknowledges the motivations of the rapists and how masculinity is informed in this film but it also raises the question of the portrayer’s intention for the scene: is it to depict the horrors of the crime and do so without exploitation or elide the victim’s subjectivity and acquiesce to the perceived desire of the viewer (or reader) for highly sexualized content? In her works, Orford can be seen to accomplish what Meyer’s work doesn’t: it represents the country’s rape epidemic and misogynistic behaviour in a manner that doesn’t exploit the victims while still conveying the severity of these problems. For Meyer, the focus is more on the character development of his detectives than the crimes they investigate and comes at the expense of the victims. While Joubert and Griessel can be seen to find “rehabilitation through the processes of detection,” the victims of these crimes must suffer for the men’s recovery.<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>324</sup> Carol Clover, *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1993), p. 122.

<sup>325</sup> Warnes, ‘Writing Crime in the New South Africa: Negotiating Threat in the Novels of Deon Meyer and Margie Orford’, p. 987.

**Life is to “be lived”: Black Economic Empowerment and the Trouble with Prosperity in two South African novels**

The 2006 publication of Kgebetli Moele’s debut novel, *Room 207*, provoked a contentious debate on the condition of post-apartheid fiction. While the book was critically lauded upon its release, winning the Herman Charles Bosman Prize for Literature and the University of Johannesburg Debut Fiction Prize, it also received a measure of opprobrium. Academic Kopano Ratele and Solani Ngobeni, Director of Publications at the Africa Institute of South Africa, took specific aim at the book’s content and literary form. Writing for the *Mail & Guardian*, they classified the story of six young black men living together in the Johannesburg neighbourhood of Hillbrow as little more than “misogyny and ethnic drivel”.<sup>326</sup> Ratele and Ngobeni also castigated the book’s publishers as blatant economic opportunists due to their perceived intention to reap financial rewards by injecting more “colour” into the industry.<sup>327</sup> Criticism of both author and publisher also appeared in the 25 March 2007 edition of *The Sunday Times*. In an article entitled “The Pitfalls of the Literary Debut,” academic Michael Titlestad proffered a curt and derisive assessment of the country’s current literature in general, and Moele’s novel in particular. Titlestad castigated new authors for their literary shortcomings while criticizing the publishers of their books for a lack of diligence in the editing process. According to Titlestad, *Room 207* was a “shapeless textual pastiche” consisting of “seemingly random

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<sup>326</sup> Sam Raditlhalo, ‘A Proletarian Novel of the City Streets’, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 44:1 (2008), p. 93.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid*, p. 93.

encounters and loosely related narrative lines” that were “fundamentally unsatisfying”.<sup>328</sup>

A similar lack of narrative direction has also been attributed to Niq Mhlongo’s first novel. Writing in the *New Statesman*, Jastinder Khera was of the opinion that *Dog Eat Dog* (2004) “suffers most of all from a sense of aimlessness, with no narrative or tension of sufficient strength to hold the reader’s interest.”<sup>329</sup> Khera’s evaluation of the novel, however, might be regarded as unfair. *Dog Eat Dog* is narrated by Dingamanzi “Dingz” Makhedama Njomane, a college student at the University of the Witwatersrand, who spends most of his time drinking, trying to meet girls, and neglecting his studies. While the novel builds on these adventures to offer moments of dark humour, it does so against the background of a description of South Africa’s first democratic elections, adding a layer of sombre implied analysis to the discussions that Dingz has with his friends about history, racism, and politics. Khera demonstrates her lack of understanding of these characters and their conversations by questioning the reason for the exchanges to be conducted in English *and* Zulu, failing to recognize the code switching as an aspect of culture rather than a reflection of and comment on linguistic identity-making in contemporary South Africa.

While writers like Moele and Mhlongo may not have written books with the precise command of English or the narrative fluidity that critics such as Titlestad, Khera, and others would have liked, they have produced works that contribute in other ways to literary discourse and such critics can be seen to have missed the significance of these works. In their novels, Marzia Milazzo writes, Moele and Mhlongo “attempt to capture the changing reality of everyday life in the aftermath of apartheid without

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<sup>328</sup> Raditlhalo, ‘A Proletarian Novel of the City Streets’, p. 93.

<sup>329</sup> 14 January 2008 issue of the *New Statesman*.



recoiling from complexity and ambiguity”.<sup>330</sup> It is a contribution based on the change in the country’s government, its governing laws and its evolving approach to social issues and these novelists are “experimenting with the self-regulating subject and with narratives of free will” that define the post-apartheid period and the forces acting on their characters’ lives.<sup>331</sup>

The “regulating” of one’s self can be seen as difficult when the opportunities for wealth and prosperity are presented to the country’s black citizens after apartheid. Former president Thabo Mbeki declared that the “objective of creating a black bourgeoisie” was integral to the success of the country and, with its ascension, the group would “become the vanguard of black integration into the economic mainstream”.<sup>332</sup> However, the ambitions of the “Black Economic Empowerment” legislation would compromise the hard-won goal of social equality; ambitious black men and women would have to use their race to their advantage by taking jobs that had quotas guaranteed by affirmative action. This legislation has also offered entrepreneurial opportunities for black business men and women who have received contracts for governmental services, manufacturing, construction and other areas but also in the lucrative mining industry, giving rise to the moniker “Black diamond” for those who became rich in this field. The term is often used as a pejorative and alludes to those of the country’s *nouveau riche* class who demonstrate their wealth through conspicuous consumption.

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<sup>330</sup> Marzia Milazzo, ‘Racial Power and Colorblindness: The “Sad Black Stories” of Kgebetli Moele’s *Room 207* and Twenty-First Century Black South African Fiction’, in *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies*, 1:1 (2013), p. 38

<sup>331</sup> Milazzo, ‘Racial Power and Colorblindness: The “Sad Black Stories” of Kgebetli Moele’s *Room 207* and Twenty-First Century Black South African Fiction’, p. 38.

<sup>332</sup> Okechukwu C. Iheduru, ‘Black Economic Power and Nation-Building in Post-Apartheid South Africa’, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 42:1 (2004), pp. 1, 2

The term, however, can also be seen to reference a gender model that commodifies masculinity by basing its fulfilment on the exploitation of these opportunities. Zakes Mda's novel *Black Diamond* (2014) depicts the pressure on men to attain wealth and social status in the post-apartheid dispensation. His protagonist, Don Mateza, is a former guerrilla fighter turned security consultant living in late 2000s Johannesburg. After growing up in nearby Soweto, Mateza fought against apartheid forces in Mozambique and Botswana but, twenty years after the change to democratic governance, he finds himself back where he began, adrift and struggling to find work. He is also becoming increasingly disillusioned by the realization that the push to achieve equal rights has been replaced by the drive for wealth; his former comrades-in-arms are finding financial success and Mateza's fiancée, Tumi, compels him to use his "Struggle" credentials to secure lucrative contracts, her ambitions for him representing the social and personal burden to succeed but is inhibited by his morality:

Whereas Don long accepted his menial status, Tumi has never forgiven any of his former comrades for being successful beneficiaries of the government's Black Economic Empowerment policy, while her fiancée has to work for a security company. It is a sore point with her that Don's comrades forgot about him when they reached Paradise, after he sacrificed so much in exile fighting for the overthrow of the apartheid state . . . She vowed to herself that one day Don would show everybody what he was really made of: he was going to be a Black Diamond in his own right.<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> Zakes Mda, *Black Diamond* (London: Seagull Books, 2014), p. 77.

The 2014 hardback edition offers a front cover image of a tuxedo, complimented by shiny black shoes and a red rose boutonniere, but it is disembodied; there is no man wearing the suit. Instead, paper lapels sprout from the shoulders and legs and the tuxedo is meant to be seen as an overlay for a doll, a “one-size-fits-all” that can be applied to any man but represents a type of masculinity that fails to consider subjective difference in its model criteria.

The expectations of this version of post-apartheid manhood are also examined in works by both Moele and Mhlongo. In Moele’s second novel *The Book of the Dead* (2009) the story follows Khutso from his boyhood in rural Masakeng to university, then to his life as husband, father, and a successful lawyer. The prosperity that Khutso comes to enjoy, however, is unfulfilling and, while his goals of education, family, and wealth have been met, a greater sense of accomplishment eludes him and his inability to locate a more significant meaning to his life results in a bout of psychosis that proves to be destructive both personally and for other characters in the novel. Niq Mhlongo’s *Way Back Home* (2013) addresses similar issues, along with ideas of exile, place, and the difficulty of reconciling with one’s past. In this novel, we find Kimathi, a child of the revolution, born in a guerrilla camp in Angola. He serves as a commander in “The Movement” before returning to his father’s native South Africa in 1991 to seek his fortune. Here he acquires wealth (a mansion; expensive cars, clothes and whiskey), but is unable to escape his misdeeds while serving as a “revolutionary”, most egregiously of torture and rape. His personal crisis results in an episode of psychosis that can be seen to reveal the dangerous combination of wealth and patriarchy to certain men in South African society and shows how Kimathi relies on his lavish lifestyle to suppress his hallucinations and stymie his accounting with the past. While the new government’s BEE policies were meant to rectify generations of

inequality, the novels portray the effects of economic prosperity when combined with modes of masculinity informed by patriarchal and misogynistic ideas and reveal how this dynamic can result in a sense of mental/emotional disquiet that is destructive to the men and their families.

### **Book of the Living, *The Book of the Dead*: Kgebetli Moele, Economics, and HIV**

In Moele's *The Book of the Dead*, there is a distinct shift in narrative voice near the middle of the novel. While the first half offers the perspective of a third-person narration, recounting the details of Khutso's life up to his wife's suicide, the latter part is told by the *doppelganger* figure of the HIV. Infected by his wife, Khutso's subjectivity is overtaken by the virus, taking over the carrier's life but also seizing control of the narration. Formerly a faithful husband and devoted father, Khutso/HIV sends his son to boarding school after his wife's death and proceeds to spend his money on expensive cars, houses and clothes in an effort for life to finally "be lived."<sup>334</sup> However, it is not Khutso's life but the virus's that is meant to be lived; the reason for the profligate spending is to attract women in order to infect them with HIV through unprotected sex, taking advantage of understandings of gender, patriarchy and the emphasis on wealth accumulation for the virus to sustain its life in the post-apartheid society of the novel.

The conflation of these understandings has its basis in Khutso's formative years and his understandings of money and success. Growing up poor, there were few

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<sup>334</sup> Kgebetli Moele, *The Book of the Dead* (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2009), p.80.

economic opportunities in Masakeng and many men went to work in Johannesburg, returning to the village only to demonstrate the fortunes they had made in the “City of Gold.” To have wealth as a man is to be both successful and desirable and these demonstrations took the form of community parties, the events ostentatious displays where people danced, drank and ate and at one of these gatherings, a young Khutso learns the value of money, social status and their connection to the opposite sex. After impressing a girl from a well-off family with his dancing skills, Khutso tries to kiss her but he is reminded of his place in the village’s class hierarchy: “Look at me and then at yourself,” she said, after slapping him. “Who do you think you are?”<sup>335</sup> In the novel, self-identity is often established by comparisons of social class and wealth (the have and the have-nots) or processed through the perspective of others that result in feelings of inadequacy. For Khutso, his dancing skills are meaningless without money or social status to accompany them and the incident at the party has a lasting impression on his understanding of the self and how it is informed by prosperity.

Attending university is offered as a way out of poverty by Khutso’s mother but her understanding of “education” is based more on accumulating wealth (and showing it off) than erudition. This complex dynamic is more clearly elucidated during an exchange between her and her son after he receives his matric certificate:

“They say that I should go to teacher-training college.”

“What are you saying?”

“I want to go to college.”

“Do they produce doctors at college?”

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<sup>335</sup> Moele, *The Book of the Dead*, p. 12.

“No, they only produce teachers.”

“And where do they produce doctors.”

“University.”

“Khutso, I want you to be a doctor...I am asking you to go to university and be a doctor.”<sup>336</sup>

According to Khutso’s mother becoming a doctor symbolizes the attainment of an education (neither she nor her dead husband, Khutso’s father, ever attended school) but when Khutso becomes a lawyer instead, his mother does not lament the change of profession but believes them to be interchangeable based on their ability to make him wealthy. According to her, Khutso’s possession of a university degree has provided him with an “education” (and prosperity to come) and because of this “she was really happy”.<sup>337</sup> However, the relationship between education, wealth, and happiness is not to be read as autonomous but as a way to contribute to the larger goal of masculinity attainment. When Khutso becomes wealthy, he will be a “man,” according to his mother, and he must perform his manhood by buying “cars, and throw[ing] parties, and have a wardrobe so big you don’t have to wash your clothes for a whole year.”<sup>338</sup> Later in the novel, a masculinity model informed by ostentatious displays of wealth is shown to be personally and socially destructive when Khutso’s *doppelganger* manipulates understandings of manhood and money to infect women with the virus through sexual intercourse.

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<sup>336</sup> Moele, *The Book of the Dead*, p. 28.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid, p. 28.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid, p. 14.

The rampant sexual behaviour of the virus contrasts with Khutso's earlier vows of abstinence. At university, Khutso chooses not to have a girlfriend in order to focus on his studies, however, his roommate, Tshepo, is fixated on his sexual pursuits and voices misogynistic views based on ideas of male supremacy and influence. He believes that women have "an inferiority complex" that makes them susceptible to men's advances and he intends to "engage on full power" in order "to fuck'em all."<sup>339</sup> Tshepo's views establish a narrative basis for HIV's behaviour by portraying it as an extension of society's already distorted gender dynamics and its concomitant values. However, the damaging effects of misogyny is revealed much earlier in the novel through the depiction of Pretty, a character who will later become Khutso's wife, but whose existence is defined by her worth to men. From an early age, Pretty is taught to view herself only as an object of men's desire and learns that her beauty is to be commodified. This understanding begins in primary school when she kisses a boy after he shares his lunch with her, establishing a "foundation of what she knew her beauty could do for her," but turns into sexual exploitation later when men begin to give her money or gifts in exchange for sex.<sup>340</sup> When Pretty is a Standard Four student, she is raped by her teacher and he gives her some money so she does not tell her parents. While Pretty remains quiet about the rape, it is not because of the money but that she is too traumatized to speak. Overwhelmed by the trauma of the attack, Pretty is rendered voiceless; she declares that she doesn't know "how to start telling or to whom she would tell it," and her teacher reads her silence as a sign of consent.<sup>341</sup> He continues to rape Pretty and giving her gifts of expensive clothes and shoes and the dynamic results in a change to how she views herself. While wearing these

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<sup>339</sup> Moele, *The Book of the Dead*, p. 50.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid, p. 32.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid, p. 33.

clothes, Pretty can no longer see herself subjectively but only from a man's viewpoint, a perspective where she is "overwhelmed by her own beauty," recognizing its effect on men and concomitant value, however, she feels helpless to contest these understandings, both socially and personally.<sup>342</sup>

In Moele's novel, a woman's beauty is not a reflection of herself but is based on what she can do for men; if this beauty is excessive or uncontrollable, however, it is seen as dangerous because it can drive a man "insane."<sup>343</sup> The toxic connection can be read as an excuse for her teacher's misogynistic treatment but it also carries wider social significance when its understanding is shared by other men. After Pretty started wearing the expensive clothes, she attracted even more attention but also a reputation. Being from an impoverished family, the community presumed they had been gifted for sex. For a poor girl, it was assumed that "the currency was what mattered" and this understanding about Pretty spread, by the time she had reached secondary school, she had been "forced down naked by many [men] she knew in the community."<sup>344</sup> Rape and money are conflated for Pretty; when she attempts to say "no" to the gifts men give her, she is attempting to deny them access to her body, however, the men refuse to listen. She has learned to see her beauty through the eyes of men but internalizes this view of the self as damaging: "I don't like to reflect on what I am. I don't like what I am," she states.<sup>345</sup> Khutso expresses understanding and sympathy for Pretty and her situation and can be seen to recognize the dynamics in society that place her in this position: "how could a girl like her...not have a past like she has," he asks

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<sup>342</sup> Moele, *The Book of the Dead*, p. 33.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid, p. 33.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid, p. 34.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid, p. 37.



himself.<sup>346</sup> Khutso claims not to understand male heterosexual promiscuity (“he had always wondered why men wanted to bed everything that had breasts”) but the reason was not sexual, it merely clashed with his goals, and he saw trying to have sex with numerous women as a “waste of time and energy”.<sup>347</sup>

Although Khutso’s attitude to women can be seen to differ from Tshepo’s approach, that the former’s view looks at first glance more progressive than the latter, they can both ultimately be seen to instrumentalize women. While Khutso does not exploit Pretty for her beauty, he can be seen to use her to fulfil his model of masculinity. After they finish university, they get married, buy a house and have a son, Thapelo. These actions are part of a plan for masculinity established by Khutso’s mother but is based on patriarchal history: Get an education, then a wife and kids. “Your father said men marry because it is a vital part of manhood,” she said, along with having children.<sup>348</sup> However, attaining these goals ultimately excludes Pretty; after giving Khutso a son, he professes not to need her anymore. For Khutso, being a father meets a criterion of his masculinity but it also means passing down its tenets to his son by teaching him how to drive, to handle money, and to fight. These lessons are distinctly gendered, excluding Pretty because it is a “man thing... a father and son thing,” Khutso tells her.<sup>349</sup> This dismissal recalls Pretty’s past treatment by men: when they are finished with her, they “move on to someone else,” however, instead of sex, it is procreation for Khutso, another goal for him to attain.<sup>350</sup> Rejected by her son and husband, Pretty has an affair and contracts HIV. After learning that she is infected,

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<sup>346</sup> Moele, *The Book of the Dead*, p. 48.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid, p. 48.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid, p. 51.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid, p. 36.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid, p. 37.

Pretty kills herself, leaving her test results for Khutso to find. When he finds out that he also has been infected, he falls into a hallucinatory state where he imagines Pretty standing in front of him. Khutso realizes that achieving his goals has failed to deliver its promised “happiness” (“What the fuck was I thinking?”) and blames this situation on his dead wife.<sup>351</sup> He begins to punch the image, his anger erupting in a fit of misogynistic violence (“Pretty! Fuck you, bitch! I will kill you!”) that speaks to the transformation to come.<sup>352</sup>

When Khutso faints from his exertion, the act is portrayed theatrically – “lights out” – in order to signal a change in subjectivity.<sup>353</sup> The next passage begins with “Lights up” and Khutso regaining consciousness, however, he is now “possessed” by HIV.<sup>354</sup> The virus is no longer restricted to the body but has spread to Khutso’s mind and begins to direct his actions. For Khutso’s *doppelganger*, assuming control of the mind is imperative for survival. The body is ephemeral; the virus knows that Khutso will eventually die of AIDS-related causes and, in order to “live,” it must be transmitted to others. With this change in narration, Moele is able to show the insatiableness of HIV and the black bourgeoisie’s susceptibility to its transmission. The virus’s biological imperative is demonstrated through the narrative voice, revealing an unrelenting pursuit for survival that takes advantage of the bourgeoisie’s emphasis on wealth and materialism. In the novel, survival for the virus is dependent on heterosexual intercourse and Khutso/HIV adopts a profligate lifestyle, spending lavishly on clothes, cars and homes in order to attract women for sex. According to the virus, money is the “key to any woman’s heart” but wealth is also important for

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<sup>351</sup> Moele, *The Book of the Dead*, p. 80.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid*, p. 80.

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid*, p. 80.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid*, p. 80.

what it represents to these women.<sup>355</sup> Since Khutso/HIV's ultimate goal is infection, these women must be dissuaded from using condoms and being rich conveys a form of assurance; unable to identify the infected by appearance, displays of wealth mitigate this concern. When Khutso/HIV starts a sexual relationship with a woman named Jarush, she insists on using condoms. This resolve, however, vanishes when she sees Khutso's mansion and then she "forget[s] about safe sex," a scenario that occurs frequently in the latter half of the novel.<sup>356</sup>

The names of the infected are recorded in a journal, *The Book of the Dead*, and Jarush is the second entry (after Khutso's), a tally that will eventually reach into the hundreds. While a connection is made between the high number of victims and the bourgeoisie's emphasis on wealth, the class's lack of morality is also cited for the proliferation of the virus. The next entry in the journal is Thabiso, a rich married woman with children, and is described by the narrator as having "no morals and no respect for her husband" because she has unprotected sex with Khutso.<sup>357</sup> While Thabiso is a member of the black bourgeoisie, this condemnation is not based on class but gender and evinces a double-standard: wives must have the "power to resist" sexual temptation while their husbands have the right to pursue extramarital relationships, an understanding held by the men that speaks to how their gender models are informed and sustained in this community.<sup>358</sup>

While in a Johannesburg restaurant one evening, Khutso/HIV spies five men having dinner together, recognizing one as a fellow student from university, and he ingratiates himself into the group. The men are professionals with wives and young

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<sup>355</sup> Moele, *The Book of the Dead*, p. 101.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid, p. 98.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid, p. 90.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid, p. 34.

children and are members of the country's black bourgeoisie. Although they have joined this new social class, the men's gender model is informed by past understandings, basing their masculinity on ideas of ancestral tradition ("Our forefathers enjoyed their women freely") and a belief in a man's essentiality ("[A] s a man...you have a man's needs"), ideas they use to justify their extra-marital affairs.<sup>359</sup> "Making love to your wife and fucking a woman are two different things," one of the group members explains to Khutso/HIV, the differentiation another attempt to validate their sexual pursuits.<sup>360</sup> While these statements reveal the men's thinking as casuistic, this line of thought is integral to maintaining their belief system. "What the boundary means to people, or, more precisely, about the meanings they give to it" is what it is most important to the group, writes Anthony Cohen.<sup>361</sup> In addition to the semantic boundary the men establish between themselves and being accountable to their wives, they create a physical boundary between themselves and the virus by using condoms. The use of prophylactics demonstrates the men's capacity to make rational decisions about personal safety while also acknowledging the dangers of a new social reality. However, the men's concession to HIV is complicated by their flawed ideology; they invest condoms with the power of divine protection. The "god-condom" is expected to protect the men from contracting HIV but this conviction also prompts a question: if god is protecting you, then why is condom usage necessary?<sup>362</sup> The men's certainty can be attributed to their sense of class entitlement; being a

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<sup>359</sup> Moele, *The Book of the Dead*, p. 93.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid*, p. 93-4.

<sup>361</sup> Anthony Cohen, *Symbolic Construction of Community* (London: Routledge, 1985), p. 12.

<sup>362</sup> Moele, *The Book of the Dead*, p. 94.

member of the bourgeoisie includes god's protection. They view HIV as a "disease from the street" and it will not be introduced into their community.<sup>363</sup>

The men's arguments for a model of masculinity informed by sexual liaisons have been directed at Khutso/HIV during the dinner in order to convert him to their belief system and, after leaving the restaurant, he is given a pack of condoms. The action is seen by Khutso/HIV as an investiture: "It felt like I was being initiated into the group," he reports.<sup>364</sup> In addition to representing Khutso/HIV's agreement with the men's gender model, the ceremony is also meant to signify his compliance to their class-based ideology, a demonstration of how the men's views on gender and class are meant to maintain their social position and power. This type of understanding shows "how patriarchal power justifies its will to power and control as an intervention to establish order," writes Thabo Tsehloane. "[B]lind obedience is required and demanded as the natural order of things in the name of avoiding chaos and disorder" in society.<sup>365</sup> For these men, "chaos" would mean the introduction of HIV into their community and the thoroughness of their efforts to convert Khutso/HIV to this thinking speaks to the extent of their fear. The men attempt to persuade him by preying on his perceived sensibilities; one of the group, Mahlale, targets Khutso/HIV's understandings of brotherhood and kinship ("You are valuable to us and to your family and relatives") and aligns them with notions of broader importance ("You are a vital part of the nation") before arriving at a blunt reaffirmation of his gendered identity ("In short, you are a man").<sup>366</sup> While the men succeed in convincing

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<sup>363</sup> Moele, *The Book of the Dead*, p. 94.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid, p. 94.

<sup>365</sup> Thabo Tsehloane, 'The Tragic and the Comic: Sello Duiker's and Niq Mhlongo's Contrasting Visions of Post-Apartheid Society', *English Studies in Africa*, 53: 1 (2010), 79-90, p. 82.

<sup>366</sup> Moele, *The Book of the Dead*, p. 94.

Khutso/HIV to join their group, they aren't successful in converting him to use the god-condom, a failure that will eventually destroy the group's bond and its belief in its class-based superiority.

After leaving the restaurant, the men travel to Durban, where the city's vibrant nightlife offers them the opportunity to pursue women in a prescribed space and time. The most important aspect of these excursions is the hundreds of kilometres between the two cities, the distance serving as another boundary between the men and their wives. Every month, they take a "sex vacation" to the coast where the men's affairs can be conducted in relative secrecy and outside of their larger social circle. Khutso/HIV sees the excursion as an opportunity to convert the men away from their "god-condom" (and for them to contract the virus) and his attempt manipulates the men's understandings of gender and wealth that inform their group identity. Instead of driving to Durban as planned, Khutso/HIV pays for them to fly. The intention is to show the men that they are still "boys" and to establish himself at the top of the group hierarchy.<sup>367</sup> Khutso/HIV's display of wealth can be seen as an example of what Kopano Ratele calls "ruling masculinities," where one version of masculinity attempts to overcome another and take its place of power in the gender dynamic.<sup>368</sup> While Khutso/HIV spends liberally on this trip and subsequent outings, he is unable to convince the group members to adopt his practice of having unprotected sex. However, Khutso/HIV is undeterred; having no success with the men, he decides to pursue their wives. He chooses Mahlale's wife, Matimba, and seduces her with compliments and expensive clothes. When Khutso/HIV has sex with Matimba, he does so without a condom and infects her with the virus. The revelation of their affair,

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<sup>367</sup> Moele, *The Book of the Dead*, p. 93.

<sup>368</sup> Kopano Ratele, 'Ruling Masculinity and Sexuality', *Feminist Africa*, (6) 2006, p. 50.

and of her infection, causes a succession of disasters; Matimba commits suicide and Mahlale is arrested after trying to shoot Khutso. The group dynamic collapses under the weight of the tragedy but Khutso/HIV emerges unscathed and moves on to infect others.

One of Khutso/HIV's last victims is Nonkululeko, a twenty-three-year old associate in a law firm, who breaks with the gender understandings of the novel's middle-class. She rejects binary thinking by viewing men as "fellow human beings" and refuses to base their worth on money and success.<sup>369</sup> Also, she is a fervent believer in condom usage due to the death of her brother, Nkululeko, from AIDS. Nkululeko is to be seen as an example of bourgeois success, however, this success didn't prevent him from contracting HIV. For Nkululeko's mother, his class ascension produced in her a sense of pride but also denial; when she is told her son's diagnosis, she rejects it based on his accomplishments: he "can't die...he has a degree...he has money...he has everything".<sup>370</sup> Because of her brother's death, Nonkululeko refuses to risk her life by having unprotected sex, however, her resistance to Khutso's attempts only further motivates him. She "became an experiment" for him and, instead of flattery and gifts, he gives her attention and romance while not pressing her to have unprotected sex.<sup>371</sup> In a novel populated by characters whose protective health behaviour can be readily manipulated by wealth and class status, Nonkululeko's decision to eventually have unprotected sex is unique. Her choice is based on love; Khutso/HIV has promised her marriage and children. However, when Nonkululeko finally has sex without a condom, her infection is portrayed as inevitable; even the

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<sup>369</sup> Moele, *The Book of the Dead*, p. 137.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid, p. 140.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid, p. 147.

most diligent policing of one's emotions will eventually yield to the power of the virus. This pessimism is also voiced by Khutso's son Thapelo, who comes to visit his father on a break from boarding school. Although he is only a teenager, Thapelo demonstrates an astute understanding of the relationship between sexual desire and HIV. When asked by his father why he broke up with his girlfriend, Thapelo states that it was his refusal to sleep with her; he is afraid of contracting HIV. Despite his fear, Thapelo knows that he won't be able to refuse his sexual urges forever and, when he eventually acquiesces to these desires, he knows he "will be putting (his) head in the hangman's noose".<sup>372</sup> The inevitability of contracting the virus offers a pessimistic view of the country's future; even the resistance of people like Nonkululeko and Thapelo will eventually falter, an understanding recognized in Khutso/HIV's declaration that his son would one day "make a formidable soldier in my legion," and no one is immune, regardless of class status or wealth.<sup>373</sup>

**"Our struggle has been sold to the highest bidder": Greed and revolution in Niq Mhlongo's *Way Back Home***

In a 2006 *New York Times* article about young black writers in South Africa, Niq Mhlongo is described as "one of the most high-spirited and irreverent new voices" of the post-apartheid literary scene, alongside K. Sello Duiker and Phaswane Mpe (who both died in the early 2000s), and Zakes Mda, associating these writers' work with issues including homelessness, xenophobia, AIDS, and corruption.<sup>374</sup> As Mhlongo

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<sup>372</sup> Moele, *The Book of the Dead*, p. 163.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid, p. 164.

<sup>374</sup> Rachel Donadio, *Post-Apartheid Fiction*, 3 December 2006 issue of the *New York Times*.



comments in the article, such a reputation brings with it certain kinds of publishing expectations: after the success of *Dog Eat Dog*, he felt constricted in his choice of subject matter for his next novel. “I got this name tag of being the ‘voice of the kwaito generation’ in writing,” he says, the moniker deemed as comparable to the U.S.’s hip-hop generation. “This sometimes is a bit harmful to my performance, because I always have to behave in a certain way, or write in a certain way that is associated with this generation”.<sup>375</sup>

While Mhlongo addresses similar territory of the “kwaito generation” in his second book *After Tears*, a novel about a university dropout who is forced to become his family’s sole means of financial support, his third deviates from this subject matter to address another generation’s struggle in post-apartheid society. In *Way Back Home*, the protagonist is Kimathi Fezile Tito, born in 1969 to a South African father and a Tanzanian mother, and named for the guerrilla leader Dedan Kimathi who fought British forces during the Mau Mau uprising and was hanged for his “crimes.” Kimathi’s father was “in exile” for his political affiliations and passed down his radicalization to his son, who joins “The Movement,” after his death. While most of the novel is set in late 2000s Johannesburg, the chapters are interspaced with flashbacks to 1988 and “The Movement’s” Amilcar Cabral camp in Angola’s Kwanza Norte province. Parts of Angola and modern-day Namibia were sites of the South African Border War, a conflict between the South African military and anti-apartheid forces that lasted from 1966 to 1989, and included atrocities committed on both sides, not always against the enemy.

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<sup>375</sup> Donadio, *Post-Apartheid Fiction*, 3 December 2006 issue of the *New York Times*.

The opening passage details Comrade Pilate and his subordinate's efforts to find which member of their unit provided the camp's location to the enemy. Beatings and torture are shown to be unsuccessful on their suspect, however, after being threatened with castration, he (falsely) names Lady Comrade Mkabayi as the traitor. The scene then cuts to the present, where it is revealed that Kimathi's flashback is a nightmare and he wakes up screaming on the floor of his mansion. There is an obvious contrast between the world of the border struggle and the life of the *nouveau riche* but they are also shown to be indelibly connected; Kimathi and several of his fellow members of "The Movement" have become wealthy due to their connections to the former revolutionaries who run the post-apartheid government. While Kimathi is haunted by his actions in Angola, he believes that prosperity can save him from his past: "Money is on the way," he reminds himself in order to forget about the nightmare.<sup>376</sup> In the country's neo-liberal environment, the accumulation of wealth is a revolutionary endeavour and capitalism has not replaced "The Movement's" ideology but can be seen as the continuation of guerrilla warfare.

Kimathi and his former comrades/business partners are on the verge of winning a nine-hundred-million-rand mining contract to add to their already substantial fortunes and they are the same tactics as their fight in Angola to secure it. The men who ran the Amilcar Cabral camps were brutal, torturing suspected traitors, leaving them naked in filthy prison cells, and, in one instance, burying a pair of men in the ground up to their necks. A similar ruthlessness is seen as expedient for survival; according to Kimathi, backstabbing was the norm in "The Movement" and is to be expected in the present as well. While Kimathi and his partners are businessmen,

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<sup>376</sup> Niq Mhlongo, *Way Back Home* (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2013), p. 13.

they continue to use their shared history as the basis for their relationship. When one of his partners, Ganyani, talks about leaving their mining venture, Kimathi extols him to “Show your loyalty to the struggle.”<sup>377</sup> The declaration of another man that “I didn’t go into exile to be poor when liberation came” demonstrates a new understanding of the country’s revolutionary past.<sup>378</sup>

The incestuous nature of the post-apartheid government and its reliance on “Struggle” bona fides to demonstrate worthiness to lead the country’s revitalization is heavily criticized in the novel. Mhlongo delineates how the BEE aids in the economic recovery by bestowing contracts on small black-owned businesses, however, these entrepreneurs are only fronts for large foreign companies to exploit the system. Neither Kimathi or his partners care about this exploitation as long as they get their share of the contracts. “Greed” in the novel is a distinctively masculine quality – greed for money, for power, for alcohol and sex – which serves as a coping mechanism in the suppression of traumatic/guilty memories. Or, put another way, the brutality of the past, portrayed as violent excesses of the liberation struggle, are replayed a different way in the brutality of the current exploitative neoliberal order – and literally, in the person and the psyche of Kimathi. “Sex is a basic need of life” for men, Kimathi states and women’s bodies are his self-declared obsession.<sup>379</sup> His frequenting of prostitutes and his excessive drinking help to suppress his memories but these coping strategies also ended his marriage to Anele, who now lives with their six-year-old daughter, Zanu, outside of Johannesburg. What remains of Kimathi’s humanity can be seen in his interactions with Zanu, his role as the doting father

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<sup>377</sup> Mhlongo, *Way Back Home*, p. 107.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid, p. 39.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid, p. 22.

offering his only demonstration of kindness in the novel, but it contrasts with his misogyny and commodification of women. He classifies one prostitute's body as a "twenty-seven carat diamond" that "awakens his lust:"

With a wave of his hand, Kimathi invited the lady inside his BMW. As she opened the car door, he noticed that she had huge eyelashes and thick make-up. She was the perfect shape for his desire. Her breasts were like the halves of watermelons, and she smelled of musk. *That's it, she mine tonight*, he thought [emphasis original].<sup>380</sup>

Women as possession also speaks to the men's misogyny and what constitutes the "real." Kimathi's business partner, Sechaba, derides women for their "falseness" in appearance while also faulting them for their expectations for men: "They wear fake hair, false nails and fake lashes, and buy fake tits, fake lips and get Botox...and they want a 'real' man," he states.<sup>381</sup> What constitutes a "real man" isn't explained and, instead, another analogy between women and money is offered as explanation why men can only "coexist with [women's] dreams:" their "G-spot is located at the end of the word 'shopping'".<sup>382</sup> Money is seen as a way to explain or "solve" problems that are otherwise beyond the men's spectrum of comprehension or sense of accountability. When Kimathi attempts to "understand women," he does by looking at Anele's G-string underwear, processing his ideas of gender dynamics through sex and money while being unable, or unwilling, to recognize how his ideas are informed.<sup>383</sup>

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<sup>380</sup> Mhlongo, *Way Back Home*, p. 22.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid*, p. 141.

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid*, p. 141.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid*, p. 141.

The social dynamic of female sexuality and its focus on fulfilling male desire does not occur to Kimathi, either in post-apartheid society or when he was a member of “The Movement.” There is a relationship/continuity that the novel suggests between the liberation struggle and the neoliberal order of the “new” South Africa, and the way this is played out in its particular imagining of an aggressive, un-self-reflexive masculinity. When Kimathi begins to hallucinate, the visions are attributed to his treatment of Lady Comrade Mkabayi, the violent and exploitative excesses of his past recurring spectrally in his present, a haunting that can also be seen as the betrayed promises of genuine revolutionary change and also suggest the failings of masculine power-play and self-interest. In this passage, Kimathi is revealed to be Comrade Pilate, an apparent reference to Pontius Pilate, and his treatment of Mkabayi, a devoted revolutionary, can also be seen as the torture of an innocent, absolute believer. Comrade Pilate offers to absolve Mkabayi of her crimes if she has sex with him, an agreement refused by her and punctuated by her fervent declarations that she would never betray the cause. When Pilate attempts to bribe her with contraband food and alcohol, he is again refused, leading to him and his subordinate, Comrade Idi, attempting to rape her and, during a struggle, stabbing her to death. One night, Kimathi encounters Senami, a young woman, on the road and offers her a ride. He tries to impress her with his wealth, government contacts and flattery, “the world would not go round without beautiful women,” he tells her, but Senami is unimpressed, calling politicians greedy thieves.<sup>384</sup> But “I’m a good man and I’ll take care of you,” Kimathi declares, and, his fawning over her can be seen to work when Senami agrees to a lunch date with him.<sup>385</sup> However, when Kimathi drives to her

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<sup>384</sup> Mhlongo, *Way Back Home*, p. 49.

<sup>385</sup> *Ibid*, p. 52.

house to pick her up, he is met by her parents who inform them that their daughter had disappeared decades before while fighting for “The Movement.” According to Mhlongo, the apparition was inspired by a township woman named Vera who had been raped and killed but whose ghost continued to haunt her attackers since she was unable to break with the living world and enter the afterlife. In the novel, she takes the form of Senami, a reappearance by Lady Comrade Mkabayi who has returned to haunt Kimathi for his treatment of her. When he learns that Senami is a hallucination, he has a blackout and wakes up in her bedroom. Her parents have made it into a shrine and left it untouched since her disappearance. The walls are covered with photos of revolutionary leaders such as Patrice Lumumba, Nelson Mandela, Robert Sobukwe, and Steve Biko, making the connection between Senami and Mkabayi even more apparent to the reader, although the link is one that Kimathi is unable or unwilling to make. Being treated for bi-polar disorder, he attributes the blackout to this condition, however, the failure of his medication speaks more to his inability to escape from his past misdeeds and his conscience.

After his doctor’s recommendation that he undergo talk therapy, Kimathi shifts the blame to Westernized medicine. The doctor’s diagnosis for his blackouts are the “suffering from the aftereffects of some kind of trauma,” a claim that Kimathi rejects as “a white man’s disease,” and rather than search his past for answers, he agrees to visit a *sagoma*, a traditional healer, to rid him of his fainting spells.<sup>386</sup> The *sagoma*’s ceremony takes on elements of magical realism; a large white python speaks to Kimathi, telling him that he is haunted by the spirit of a dead woman, and to remove the curse, the body of the woman must be returned home and reburied on the

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<sup>386</sup> Mhlongo, *Way Back Home*, p. 143.

land of her ancestors. In the country's neo-liberal economy, Kimathi thinks that even his soul can be purchased and pays a million rand in an attempt to rid himself of the past. The amount includes transportation for himself and Senami's parents to Angola but most of the payment is to bribe officials from both countries to transport her remains and Kimathi curses governmental corruption without noting the irony of his rant.

Kimathi's lack of recognition can be explained as psychosis; during his blackouts he has been killing those whom he believes have betrayed him. During Kimathi's trip to Angola, the narration is interrupted by flashbacks of a kind other than the guerrilla camp. While reading the newspaper on the airplane to Luanda, Kimathi finds that his former business partner, Ganyani, has been killed. The news is a surprise to Kimathi and results in a fright that has him clench his fists as if "squeezing the panic out of his body."<sup>387</sup>

A subsequent flashback details how Kimathi poisoned Ganyani after his decision to back out of their business partnership and then killed another former comrade turned government official, Ludwe, who refused to honour a business agreement. The revelation of these killings during the trip to Angola represents Kimathi's prevailing constancy; his treatment of his enemies, either real or imagined, remains the same, and, his return to Amilcar Cabral shows that "nothing has changed" for him.<sup>388</sup> Kimathi's trip does bring him closure, only the reckoning that has pursued him since the end of the border war. After showing Senami's parents to her grave, Kimathi returns to the prison cell where she was murdered and hangs himself.

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<sup>387</sup> Mhlongo, *Way Back Home*, p. 179.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid*, p. 202.

The portrayal of Kimathi's death by hanging is not only a reference to Dedan Kimathi but his fictional portrayal in Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Githae Mugo's play, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. A highly controversial character, Kimathi's life was subject to intense propaganda by the British government, who saw him as a vicious terrorist, and Kenyan nationalists, who viewed him as a man of great courage and commitment. Ngugi's play speaks to the colonial depiction of Kimathi as a mentally unbalanced extremist by portraying him as a man of unshakable ideals and demonstrates this resilience in the four trials he endures in the work. The Kimathi of Mhlongo's novel can be seen as a possible "what might have been;" if Dedan Kimathi had lived, would he have been able to maintain his principles after independence? Or would he have acquiesced to the spoils of Kenya's economic recovery, possibly suffering the same mental and emotional breakdown? Mhlongo's Kimathi is a sell-out who turns his back on his revolutionary ideals and has more in common with imperialist forces than his namesake, but both men eventually met the same fate. While Mhlongo's Kimathi was death by suicide, Dedan Kimathi was hanged for his fight against British forces, however, both can be seen as casualties of colonial rule.

## **Conclusion**

In "The Pitfalls of the Literary Debut," Titlestad alludes to the literary haste associated with young authorship. He writes that Moele "eschews the niceties of novelistic prose and the formal criteria of plot and character development in favour of immediacy".<sup>389</sup> It is an alacrity that has not only a deleterious effect on the novel's form and style, he

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<sup>389</sup> Raditlhalo, 'A Proletarian Novel of the City Streets', p. 94.



declares, but its overall composition. *Room 207* cannot be seen as a fully-formed literary entity but must be classified as an “unfinished work”.<sup>390</sup> While Titlestad ultimately classifies *Room 207* as an “unfinished work,” this designation can also be applied to one of the contentious issues addressed in the novel. The notion of the “unfinished” describes the nation itself; South Africa in an evolving state and the authors that Titlestad criticises can be seen to reflect this condition in their work. Both Moele and Mhlongo offer visions of a nation still transforming itself after a brutal history but to be held accountable for its current state.

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<sup>390</sup> Raditlhalo, ‘A Proletarian Novel of the City Streets’, p. 94

**Money, Masculinity and Heteronormativity: the “Future” of Queer Identities in Post-Apartheid Fiction**

*Men with men. Nothing special about that, nothing to be ashamed of, condemned, these days—the new Constitution recognizes their right of preference. That is so. That’s the law.*<sup>391</sup>

The inclusion of the equality clause in the 1996 South African constitution was a significant victory in the fight for LGBTQ rights. It banned discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, marital status, age and other issues but it also abrogated laws intended to repress non-heterosexual behaviour. Once categorized as “crimes against nature” in the 1969 amendment to the Immorality Act,<sup>392</sup> the legalization of homosexuality was viewed as a sea change for the country that was only matched by the swiftness with which further recognition was given to the LGBTQ community. In less than three decades South Africa had changed from a nation that persecuted and arrested individuals with same-sex desire to giving all the right to marry and adopt children.<sup>393</sup> The evolution from a nation of oppression and racial division to one of cross-cultural inclusion was only fully realized by the recognition of LGBTQ rights and their addition to list of those legally protected by the constitution can be considered an important part of South Africa’s remaking itself after apartheid.<sup>394</sup>

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<sup>391</sup> Nadine Gordimer, *The House Gun* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998), p. 116.

<sup>392</sup> Brenna M. Munro, *South Africa and the Dream of Love to Come: Queer Sexuality and the Struggle for Freedom* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), p. xxiii.

<sup>393</sup> Andrew Tucker, *Queer Visibilities: Space, Identity and Interaction in Cape Town* (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2009), p. 1.

<sup>394</sup> Tim Trengove Jones, ‘Fiction and the Law: Recent Inscriptions of Gayness in South Africa’, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 46:1 (2000), 114-136 (p. 117).

However, a division persists between these legal advances and social acceptance for members of the LGBTQ community; homophobia remains prevalent and is demonstrated not only in employment, housing, and education discrimination, for example, but is often manifested in acts of violence. An especially vicious attack occurred in June of 2012, when Thapelo Makutle, a twenty-three-year old gay man, was murdered in the Northern Cape town of Kuruman by two men who had confronted him about his sexuality; his throat was cut and he was nearly decapitated, he was dismembered, his penis and testicles stuffed into his mouth. The brutality of the assault speaks to the ongoing hostility toward LGBTQ individuals in the country.

Acts of discrimination and homophobic violence have produced a reengagement with an apartheid-era understanding of the “future,” a notion informed by political, social and economic equality that would be realized in a post-apartheid world, and now represents a “hoped-for” time decades after the transition. In K. Sello Duiker’s *Thirteen Cents* (2000) and Eben Venter’s *Wolf, Wolf* (2013), the “future” functions to critique the disjunction between the laws of equality guaranteed by the constitution and social attitudes towards the LGBTQ community, specifically gay men. The novels portray the “future” as something not simply to be hoped for but capable of being realized in the post-apartheid present by the “queering” of domestic spaces, a means of transformation where the country’s overriding social views are aligned with legal parity to create an environment where same-sex identities can be freely accessed. However, these spaces are often heteronormative constructions and any transformations are temporary. Though its influence lies in its ideology, heteronormativity is reliant on other structures in society for its power.<sup>395</sup> In these

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<sup>395</sup> Tucker, *Queer Visibilities: Space, Identity and Interaction in Cape Town*, p. 3.

novels, money and masculinity inform heteronormativity but also inform each another, combining the overriding social emphasis on a singular, heteronormative definition of masculinity with the importance of wealth accumulation in the country's neo-liberal economy. Although earning money serves as a means for masculinity construction, it remains a heteronormative concept, denying admission to gay men and portraying any attempts to move beyond the spatial and temporal limits of "queered" domestic spaces as futile to the overwhelming power of heteronormativity, a situation that not only conflicts with present expectations of equality but complicates any lasting future for the characters in the works.

### **On the Streets of Cape Town, "Money is Everything"**

K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* is narrated by a twelve-year-old orphan named Azure, who navigates the perilous street life of late 1990s Cape Town while attempting to come to terms with new understandings of race, gender, and sexuality. While this bald description may suggest a triumphal story, one that extols the virtues of the new constitution through a coming-of-age tale, such an impression would be misguided. Instead, the book can be seen as a kind of "*anti-Bildungsroman*," a work where the author inhibits the moral and psychological growth of the main character in favour of correcting the perception of South Africa as a place of transformative change.<sup>396</sup> Published in 2000, Duiker's text serves as what Brenna Munro terms "a riposte to the triumphalist tendencies of 'rainbow' nationalism" by offering depictions

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<sup>396</sup> Lucy Valerie Graham, *State of Peril: Race and Rape in South African Literature* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2012), p. 175.

of violence, rape, and other acts of mistreatment which demonstrate the chasm between the country's venerated constitutional ideals and its social realities.<sup>397</sup>

Among the reasons for this division are the country's apartheid legacy of racial classification and the contemporary role of identity politics in shaping subjectivities. The harmful effect of these practices can be seen through the portrayal of characters that do not fit social expectations of race. Azure's "blue eyes and...dark skin" suggest a racial hybridity that combines white and black ancestry, however, a closer analysis of this declaration complicates this reading.<sup>398</sup> The indeterminacy of "a dark skin" can be seen to upset accepted racial classifications (black, coloured, etc.) for the book's characters (and readers) and results in a focus on Azure's eyes to determine his race, an emphasis that attracts both danger and admiration, while also complicating the character's own understanding of his sexuality. Azure declares that in Cape Town he is surrounded by "grown-ups", but the drug dealers, gangsters, and pimps he encounters on its streets are not responsible adults and often view his appearance with a mixture of provocation and jealousy. Gerald is a coloured drug dealer and gang leader whose light skin and straight hair make him "think he's white," but he harbours insecurities about his race, revealing them through his animosity toward Azure.<sup>399</sup> After mistakenly calling Gerald by the name "Sealy," the name of his black henchman, Azure is given a harsh beating. The reason for Gerald's ire is a combination of racism and racial envy: not only does Gerald "hate black people" but he covets Azure's blue eyes; they serve to challenge his belief in his own putative

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<sup>397</sup> Munro, *South Africa and the Dream of Love to Come: Queer Sexuality and the Struggle for Freedom*, p. 199.

<sup>398</sup> K. Sello Duiker, *Thirteen Cents* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2000), p. 1.

<sup>399</sup> *Ibid*, p. 39.

whiteness.<sup>400</sup> Gerald's complicated response—desire and aversion—speaks to the overvaluation of white racial traits, while also demonstrating the power of a racial assessment system to unsettle those who fail to meet, but have internalised, its criteria.<sup>401</sup>

The racial politics that inform Gerald's animosity is shared by Allen, a coloured Cape Town pimp. While he also views himself as white, the reader learns that "if you look at him closely you can see some coloured blood," and the slight racial difference "eats him up" because "he's not all white," ("I mean, imagine being nearly white but not quite" states Azure's friend, Vincent. "That's why he's an asshole"),<sup>402</sup> contributing to his violent outbursts: Azure, for example, witnesses Allen viciously beating one of his white prostitutes, an act of racially-motivated retributive violence. These reactions speak to Freud's notion of the narcissism of small differences, in which minor differences in appearance by communities of shared ethnic heritage provoke hostility because of oversensitivity to such details.<sup>403</sup> In this case, if envy and violence are the result of the focus on the liminal difference between races, then they are, in large part, engendered by history. For Allen and Gerald, the origin of their race and its social valuation can be found in South Africa's colonial past. For the country's coloured population, it is an ethnic heritage that "lie[s] within a discourse of 'race,' concupiscence, and degeneracy," writes Zoe Wicomb, a reference

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<sup>400</sup> Sello Duiker, *Thirteen Cents*, p. 39.

<sup>401</sup> For Gerald, much like Pecola in Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye*, racial wish fulfilment leads to self-hatred and madness. Pecola is a young black girl living in the United States just after the Great Depression, and to escape from her "ugly" features, she yearns to have white skin and blue eyes. This desire is an attempt to escape from the smothering effects of racial discrimination in a society where the structures of power are built on such differences and Pecola's fixation on altering her racial composition (along with being raped by her father) contributes to her eventual insanity.

<sup>402</sup> Sello Duiker, *Thirteen Cents*, pp. 41, 42.

<sup>403</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Civilization, Society and Religion* (London: Penguin, 1987).

to the sexual exploitation of the native population by the white colonizers that resulted in a racial identity for their descendants that can be seen as “bound up with shame.”<sup>404</sup> While shame can explain the oscillation between envy and rage that afflicts Gerald and Allen, Azure rejects this understanding: “I wear my blue eyes with fear because fear is deeper than shame.”<sup>405</sup> Eve Sedgwick claims that shame “attaches to and sharpens what one is” and this acuteness forces Azure to reject shame as a means of self-preservation; both Gerald and Allen are strong and their feelings of racial shame can be exorcised through violence on those weaker than them.<sup>406</sup> However, shame is also “considered the affect that most defines the space wherein a sense of self will develop” and “where the question of identity arises” and, for Azure, the idea of shame can be read as something other than race.<sup>407</sup> Shame can also be “linked to sexuality-to queer identities,” another target of a historically informed social valuation system that disparages non-conformity, and, like Azure’s provocative racial construction, one that requires careful navigation in order to survive on the Cape Town streets.<sup>408</sup> I read Azure’s choice of fear over shame as a focus on the present, a necessity that arises from his day-to-day, sometimes moment-to-moment, search for sustenance and safety in this precarious environment but also one that allows him to ignore other issues, such as his sexuality, that would complicate this focus.

Azure does not approve of Allen and Gerald’s means of subsistence (“In town there are many pimps and gangsters. I don’t want to make my money like them”),

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<sup>404</sup> Zoe Wicomb, ‘Shame and Identity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa’, in *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid, and Democracy, 1970-1995*, ed. by Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 92.

<sup>405</sup> Sello Duiker, *Thirteen Cents*, p. 21.

<sup>406</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 37.

<sup>407</sup> *Ibid*, p. 37.

<sup>408</sup> Caitlin Charos, ‘States of Shame: South African Writing after Apartheid’, *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies*, 10:3 (2009), p. 283.

instead prostituting himself to men despite his claims that he is not a “moffie” (homosexual), a protest that I will investigate in more depth later.<sup>409</sup> In the novel, money and its institutions are often associated with heteronormativity. One of Azure’s clients, Mr. Lebowitz, works in banking but keeps his sexuality a secret. As a husband and father, his investment in preserving this separation speaks beyond his job but these roles can be seen to contribute to his work-related pressures to order to maintain it. When his wife and children are out of town for the weekend, Lebowitz brings Azure to his flat and the boy queries him about his work:

“So what do you do?” I ask him. “If you don’t mind.”

“I’m an investment banker.”

“But what do you do?”

“I work with lots of money.”

“It must be a hard job,” I say.

“It is.”<sup>410</sup>

Lebowitz’s responses are short but not evasive; their context reveals more. With his wife and children gone, Lebowitz is able to engage openly with his sexual identity: he and Azure shower together, have sex and walk naked in the flat, actions providing a sense of freedom from heteronormative expectations that is disrupted when Azure asks about Lebowitz’s job. As they both stand naked in the kitchen, a contrast between Lebowitz’s job and his sexuality is made apparent and his comments about

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<sup>409</sup> Sello Duiker, *Thirteen Cents*, p. 3.

<sup>410</sup> *Ibid*, p. 102.



the difficulty of his work and its responsibilities (“I work with lots of money”) suggest the pressure of maintaining the division between his professional/domestic identity and his sexuality.

For Azure, banks are an exclusionary institution like the policing of boundaries of gender performance. While he earns money from prostitution, Azure is not allowed to keep any savings in the bank because he fails to conform to expected social conventions: “I have forgotten even how to hold a pen, so how can I go to the bank myself? ...You must remember when you were born and exactly how old you are. You must have an address and it must be one that doesn’t keep changing.”<sup>411</sup> According to his social position, Azure’s lack of “identity traits” such as precise knowledge (and proof) of age and date of birth, contribute to his marginalization and he compares banks to “gangsters,” creating a connection between Gerald’s hatred of his racial non-conformity and the banks’ exclusionary practices to further ostracise him from society.<sup>412</sup>

Unable to place his money in a bank, Azure entrusts his savings to Joyce, a woman he knows from his life on the Cape Town streets. At first, she appears to be a maternal substitute; in addition to safeguarding Azure’s earnings, Joyce gives him food and stresses the value of cleanliness, however, she is later revealed to be exploitative and judgemental. When Azure asks Joyce for his savings, she assumes the role of institutional authority: “You’re in trouble with the bank” she states, “you’re in trouble because you’re a naughty boy.”<sup>413</sup> The condemnation is based on Azure’s means of earning money, a disapproval not of prostitution (Azure has stated

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<sup>411</sup> Sello Duiker, *Thirteen Cents*, p. 12.

<sup>412</sup> *Ibid*, p. 13.

<sup>413</sup> *Ibid*, p. 88.

that Joyce “works nights”) but the gender of his clients and Joyce’s self-identification as the “bank” speaks to her homophobia and Azure’s ongoing marginalization.<sup>414</sup>

Azure’s social marginalization (and the lack of conformity that engenders it) aids in his survival in a similar manner as does his choice of fear over shame. While he avoids looking at his blue eyes, Azure’s clients are “drawn by [them]”.<sup>415</sup> The fact that these men are white speaks to the elision of racial animosity or envy (or the historical conditions that inform them) that Azure encounters with Allen or Gerald, but it does not shield him from violence or exploitation, and the aggressive behaviour of his clients can be seen as internalized homophobia. According to Azure, the “married ones are always the horniest and by far the roughest.”<sup>416</sup> In one encounter, Azure is “oil[ed]...with cooking oil before” he is taken “like a beast,” a dehumanizing experience that can be seen to influence Azure’s derisive view of the married men who proposition him.<sup>417</sup> After being solicited by a man on the beach, Azure eyes his wedding ring with disdain.

“Does your wife know you do this?”

“No. She’s away on holiday,” he says, looking a little nervous.

“Well, take off your wedding ring. I don’t want to see it,” I almost shout at him.

“Done,” he says and pulls it off.

“Why do you wear it?”

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<sup>414</sup> Sello Duiker, *Thirteen Cents*, p. 12.

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid*, p. 8.

<sup>416</sup> *Ibid*, p. 33.

<sup>417</sup> *Ibid*, p. 33.

“Because I’m married.”

“No, I mean...”

“Oh, I don’t know. Habit, I guess. Also, I don’t want to lose it.”

You’ve lost your mind, I say to myself.<sup>418</sup>

While the wedding ring suggests an encounter that potentially involves rough sex, its removal carries symbolic value and mollifies Azure enough to accompany the man, Mr. Lebowitz, to his home. Azure understands the power of habit as a necessity for survival (“I know how to please a man...I’ve done this a thousand times”) but a move away from the focus on survival (and its relationship with the present) during this encounter will prompt an examination of the issues of pleasure and knowledge of self that inform Azure’s nascent sexuality while introducing him to its significance as a representation of the “future.”<sup>419</sup>

This examination is made possible by the reconfiguration of the family home as a queer domestic space. When Mr. Lebowitz takes Azure to his flat in a tall building near the beach, the absence of his wife and children allows for this temporary change: he makes food for them both and Azure spends the night, in addition to them having sex. The establishment of a stable environment, one separated from the harsh street life below, allows Azure to “feel calm.”<sup>420</sup> While Azure’s time with Lebowitz is about making money, the isolation of the flat from the rigid social expectations of his daily life allows for a temporary shift in focus from the present to an imagined future.

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<sup>418</sup> Sello Duiker, *Thirteen Cents*, p. 94.

<sup>419</sup> *Ibid*, p. 98.

<sup>420</sup> *Ibid*. P. 96.

In the passage, Lebowitz plays Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana* as he and Azure sit on the sofa. The cantata is based on a collection of thirteenth-century poems that praises the wide variety of human emotion and experiences.<sup>421</sup> The poems are believed to have been written by the Goliards, a group of German clerics who satirized the Church's teachings in their works and include the line: "Non est crimen amor, quia, si scelus esset amare, /Nollet amore Deus etiam divina ligare." Translated from Latin, the passage states that love cannot be considered a crime because it counters God's divine authority, the relationship of subordination established between He and man, and a queer reading would find the passage to include same-sex love in its message.<sup>422</sup> The verse speaks to notions of equality and social recognition of queer sexualities that are centuries old but are consistent with the promise of a post-apartheid "future."

While inclusivity aligns with the goals of "rainbow nationalism," this idea of the future becomes more complicated when considered in relation to recent queer discourse. For Duiker's novel, I focus on the arguments of Lee Edelman and José Esteban Muñoz to examine the idea of the post-apartheid future in relation to Azure's queer identity. Although both Edelman and Muñoz view society as overwhelmingly heteronormative, they differ in their views about "antisocial" queer theory. Lee Edelman, in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, writes that members of the LGBTQ community should reject the future and the "hope of forging...some more perfect social order" in heteronormative society.<sup>423</sup> Instead, he advocates the embrace of "queer negativity," an idea that denies the reinforcement of "positive" social values

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<sup>421</sup> Carl Orff, *Carmina Burana: Cantiones Profanae* (Wauconda, Illinois: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 1999), back cover.

<sup>422</sup> Ralph Hexter, 'Gay and Lesbian Poetry: An Anthology from Sappho to Michelangelo' by J.J. Wilhelm', Book Review, *The Medieval Review*, October 1996.

<sup>423</sup> Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 4.

of heteronormativity, while serving as a challenge to the “very value of the social itself.”<sup>424</sup> This view might be read as antithetical to the ethos of rainbow nationalism in South Africa. In the passage referred to immediately above, Duiker offers a portrayal of the future that involves the realization of social equality for race, class, and sexuality, and is more consistent with the views of José Esteban Muñoz, who suggests by contrast that “queers have nothing but a future.”<sup>425</sup> According to Muñoz, queerness is a “mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present,” breaking from the “prison house” of the “here and now” in order to focus on the “potentiality or concrete possibility for another world” that might counter the capitalist, heteronormative present.<sup>426</sup> In the queer domestic space of Liebowitz’s flat, Azure is able to move beyond this “quagmire” by inverting the prostitute/client dynamic, a change that includes the disruption of class and racial barriers, and is realized by a sex act that embodies these transfigured expectations while also speaking to the future. Taking my direction from the works of Edelman and Muñoz, I will offer a further reading of this scene using Freudian and Lacanian ideas to examine how understandings of pleasure and sadness are tied to notions of the future and the present.

Azure’s feeling of “calm” can be attributed to the Freudian definition of the pleasure principle. Freud states that a “course taken by mental events is automatically regulated” by the desire to avoid pain and is “set in motion by an unpleasurable tension,” in this instance, Azure’s experience with the married man in the family minibus, and “takes a direction” that results in the “lowering of that tension” – the

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<sup>424</sup> Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, p. 6.

<sup>425</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, ‘The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory’, *PMLA*, 121:3 (2006), 819-828 (p. 825).

<sup>426</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: NYU Press, 2009), pp. 1, 22.

“calm” established in the queer domestic space.<sup>427</sup> However, Azure’s experience goes beyond Freud’s understanding. While Freud states this mental event will produce “an avoidance of unpleasure or a production of pleasure,” it results instead in something better classified as *jouissance*.<sup>428</sup> Lacan’s usage of this term is well known for its multiple meanings and restrictions, but it is explained in one way as “enjoyment beyond the pleasure principle.” The “body is the locus...of *jouissance*,” Lacan writes,<sup>429</sup> ferrying an intense experience that “begins with a tickle and ends with a blast of petrol.”<sup>430</sup> When he is being fellated for the first time, Azure starts to giggle, reminding the reader of his youthfulness, but also offering it as a sign of new possibilities. “Sorry, I’ve never had this,” Azure declares, a statement that speaks beyond the reception of the sexual act to an existence outside his understanding of the present.<sup>431</sup> In addition to reaching beyond the pleasure principle, *jouissance* is a movement “beyond the distinctions of pleasure and pain...beyond the bounds of identity, meaning and law,” and for Azure receiving sexual gratification not only challenges his understanding of his sexuality but disrupts his connection to the present and its repressive race and class expectations while offering a vision of the future where these classifications are elided in favour of uncompromising social equality.<sup>432</sup> But, *jouissance* is also paradoxical. While it can be a “fantasmatic escape from the alienation intrinsic to meaning,” it “lodges itself in a given object,” in this instance

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<sup>427</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961), p. 3.

<sup>428</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3.

<sup>429</sup> Juan-David Nasio, *Five Lessons on the Psychoanalytic Theory of Jacques Lacan* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 106.

<sup>430</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis (Book XVII)*, trans. by Russell Grigg (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), p. 72.

<sup>431</sup> Sello Duiker, *Thirteen Cents*, p. 100.

<sup>432</sup> Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, p. 25.

Azure's experiencing of a queer futurity, "on which identity comes to depend."<sup>433</sup> Azure's orgasm signals an end to the vision, the "pleasure turn[ing] to sadness," a transition serving as an indicator of a return to the present but also an altered understanding of his "present" self.<sup>434</sup> If "queerness undoes the identities through which we experience ourselves as subjects," as Edelman contends, then Azure's time in the Lebowitz flat unsettles his relationship to his race and class understandings, shattering the mirror that reminds him of his unconventional appearance by shifting the focus of identity construction to sexuality, a reconsideration that complicates his heteronormative understanding of masculinity and triggers a mental and emotional crisis that diverges from a focus on the present but also speaks to the impossibility of a better future.<sup>435</sup>

The complicated connection between pleasure and sadness speaks to the paradox of masculinity construction in the novel. Despite constitutional laws of protection, the streets of Cape Town "belong to real men with no time for the delicacies of legislative rhetoric."<sup>436</sup> Removed from these restrictions, the "street" version of masculinity portrayed in the novel is a complicated and contradictory construct based on heteronormative expectations, homophobia, and the denial of any considerations beyond the present. It is a construct where the body is prostituted for survival and the endurance of gay sex is used as a means of establishing masculinity. This version of manhood is also dependent on the rejection of pleasure during these encounters for fear that enjoyment of sexual relations with a man would imply

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<sup>433</sup> Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, p. 25.

<sup>434</sup> Sello Duiker, *Thirteen Cents*, p. 100.

<sup>435</sup> Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, p. 25.

<sup>436</sup> Timothy Johns, 'The Price of Pleasure: K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* and the Economics of Homosexuality in South Africa', in *Masculinities in African Literary and Cultural Texts*, ed. by Helen Nabasuta Mugambi and Tuzyline Jita Allan (Banbury: Ayebia Clarke Publishing, 2010), 250-269 (p. 254).

homosexuality and, therefore, weakness. In the Lebowitz apartment scene, pleasure is connected to sadness and, for Azure, when sadness is present, “tears are not far off.”<sup>437</sup> Crying, however, is not acceptable: it shows weakness and is therefore emasculating according to Azure’s understanding of male gender constructs (“I must be strong. I must be a man; that is what men do. They don’t cry”).<sup>438</sup> To survive on the streets, Azure must be a “man,” and therefore be strong and the only way to accomplish this is to repress his sexuality. In this framework, masculinity is based not only on denying the body sexual pleasure but also on the body’s ability to endure pain. When Azure is sodomized by the man in the back of the family minibus, he must “bite the seat in front of” him because of the pain and continue to tolerate it for more than an hour before the man orgasms.<sup>439</sup> Afterward, Azure retreats to the ocean and “let[s] the cool water cover [him] up to[his] waist.”<sup>440</sup> While the act can be seen to ameliorate the pain, Azure doesn’t emerge from the surf until his “bum feels numb,” an indication of the body attempting to mimic the emotional and mental sedation that he must adopt in order to survive.<sup>441</sup> For Azure, the connection between the pain caused by the sex act and resistance to it as a sign of strength is also demonstrated when he is sexually assaulted. As punishment for calling Gerald by the name of one of his black lackeys, Azure is savagely beaten and later forced to fellate five gang members as punishment. This event is narrated in the same detached manner as Azure’s “tricks,” drawing a connection once more between the detached psyche and the body (one that counters the construction in the flat that engendered the jouissance), while the relationship between the endurance of sexual acts and

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<sup>437</sup> Sello Duiker, *Thirteen Cents*, p. 26.

<sup>438</sup> *Ibid*, p. 26.

<sup>439</sup> *Ibid*, p. 33.

<sup>440</sup> *Ibid*, p. 33.

<sup>441</sup> *Ibid*, p. 33.



masculinity is established by his declaration after the assault that he's "getting stronger."<sup>442</sup> This statement can be read that by gaining strength Azure is closer to manhood and, therefore, beyond emotional suffering. For street masculinity, the "repression of the male body...is necessary [for] that construction," a subdual of physical pain that is also suppressed emotionally, and is typified by Allen:<sup>443</sup> "Men don't cry," Azure declares. "When have I ever seen Allen cry?"<sup>444</sup>

Azure's acceptance of this version of masculinity offers a troubled positioning between being a boy and a man. He has seen the horrors of street life, detailing scenes of policemen raping a woman, a car striking a child without stopping, a woman giving birth at the beach and then throwing the baby into the sea, but for witnessing all of these experiences, Azure can only state "I'm not a boy," not "I'm a man."<sup>445</sup> This interval in Azure's transition to manhood is explained by his repeated dictum, "I'm getting stronger," a phrase he utters several times in the novel to bolster his spirits about the difficulties of coping with street life but also to remind him of his transitional state. However, Azure cannot reach the point where he is "strong enough" to be considered a man according to street understandings because he is unable to fully reject his sexuality. During Azure's second sexual encounter with Mr. Lebowitz that night at the flat, he is asked why he doesn't have an erection. In order to achieve tumescence, Azure thinks of American pop singer, Toni Braxton, despite his lack of heterosexual feelings:

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<sup>442</sup> Sello Duiker, *Thirteen Cents*, p. 64.

<sup>443</sup> Thomas Calvin, *Male Matters: Masculinity, Anxiety, and the Male Body on the Line* (Urban, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1996), p. 2.

<sup>444</sup> Sello Duiker, *Thirteen Cents*, p. 26.

<sup>445</sup> *Ibid*, p. 166.

I never dream of doing it with a woman. I'm not a moffie. One of the bastards once asked me if I was a moffie. And I told him that I'm not a moffie. But it's strange that I never dream of doing it with a woman, not even beautiful Toni Braxton. And the other guys are always saying that it happens to them. I just lie about it and say that it happens to me too even though it never has. But this doesn't worry me too much. It worries me that I have never done it with a woman and that I've only been doing it with men even though I don't like them.<sup>446</sup>

Azure's statement that he doesn't like men is rational considering his treatment by his clients and Sealy and others who have exploited and abused him, however his concern that he has "never done it with a woman" can be based on the social expectations of heteronormativity. This attribution is seconded by the other boy prostitutes declaring that they "dream of doing it with a woman" but Azure lies, saying that he has had the same dream even though he hasn't, a fabrication that can be read as an acquiescence to heteronormative peer pressure. While Timothy Johns writes that Azure's "sexual orientation appears arbitrary" and is "dependent on the whims of the market" for the gender of his clientele, I disagree with this portrayal of "situational homosexuality" and read Azure's view of women as the manifestation of internalized homophobia.<sup>447</sup> While he achieves an erection thinking of Toni Braxton, it is not due to sexual desire but the overwhelming pressure of heteronormative thinking on his psyche. While Azure does not embrace heteronormativity, he abides by its monetary requirements in

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<sup>446</sup> Sello Duiker, *Thirteen Cents*, pp. 171-172.

<sup>447</sup> Johns, 'The Price of Pleasure: K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* and the Economics of Homosexuality in South Africa', p. 252.

order to survive and the erection can be viewed as a product of society's expectations of sexuality and performativity and is realized only by the victory of masculine strength over weakness that defines Azure's street existence while also being indicative of the relationship between money and survival that hinders realization of his queer identity.

Duiker led a peripatetic and varied life before finding success as an author. Raised in the Johannesburg township of Soweto, he also lived in Britain and France as a teenager before returning to South Africa to study journalism and art history at Rhodes University. After university, he worked in several jobs, as an editor at the South African Broadcasting Company and in advertising, before publishing *Thirteen Cents*. This novel was influenced by Duiker's interactions with people who lived on the streets of Cape Town; he spent months talking to them and recording the details of conversations in order to offer an accurate portrayal of street life. *Thirteen Cents* should be considered in relation to Duiker's second novel *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2001) due to the similarity between their protagonists and depictions of post-apartheid life (and because Duiker was writing them simultaneously). Tshepo, narrator of the second novel, is also a male prostitute who struggles to resolve the issue of sexual identity while being subjected to physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. During his time as a sex worker Tshepo is not only able to earn money to survive but is also able embrace his sexuality more freely in the social microcosm of the massage parlour without fear of reprobation.<sup>448</sup> There, Tshepo encounters men who view their sexuality as a part of their identity but also as a rejection of

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<sup>448</sup> This vision of sex work as a means to process the issue of sexuality contrasts with more dangerous social realities. The 2003 murder of nine men at Sizzlers, a gay massage parlour in Cape Town, is more reminiscent of Azure's experience, a crime that invokes the ongoing peril for those in the country who dare live outside the heteronormative framework.

heteronormative social pressures. One of his co-workers, West, says that he became a sex worker because he “wasn’t prepared to be a casualty of mediocre,” a classification he equates with getting married and having children.<sup>449</sup> The embrace of one’s sexuality speaks beyond the present and its heteronormative understandings by serving as a “blueprint...for building a new civilization, a new way of life,” that speaks to a hopeful future and the novel ends with Tshepo’s claim of self-acceptance, “I know where my greatest treasures lie. They are within me.”<sup>450</sup>

The conclusion of *Thirteen Cents* is more complicated than that of *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*, ending not with personal resolution or self-definition but with Azure envisioning the obliteration of Cape Town by tsunami and conflagration. After his night with Mr. Lebowitz, Azure does not look for any more clients and instead climbs Table Mountain, where, in a marijuana-induced fantasy, he attempts to construct the “future” in his own queer domestic space. Much like the flat in the high rise building, Azure is safely removed from the hazards of city life and he builds a bonfire in a cave, burning tree branches and needles as effigies of Gerald, Lebowitz, and others who have mistreated him, a deed that also acts as a symbolic destruction of race and other repressive constructions with Azure “watch[ing] the flames play with all the colours of the rainbow.”<sup>451</sup> Soon, a “big explosion happens. *Boomda!*” and a man appears at the entrance to the cave, an act of theatricality that suggests it might in fact be fantasy.<sup>452</sup> The man can be seen as a kind of rustic *flâneur*, dressed in sandals, shorts and a vest, but aside from his brown hair, no other physical traits are mentioned. Outside society, Azure is able to create a queer domestic space where he

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<sup>449</sup> K. Sello Duiker, *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2001), p. 295.

<sup>450</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 455, 457.

<sup>451</sup> Sello Duiker, *Thirteen Cents*, p. 129.

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.*, p.130.

and the man eat, talk, smoke, and bed down for the night, but in which there is no sex or other physical intimacy between them, his internalized homophobia not only affecting his reality but his fantasies. While Tshepo is able to find acceptance of his sexual identity through his time in the brothel in *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*, Azure's work as a prostitute only impedes this search by forcing him to choose between masculinity and his sexuality, and instead of finding his "greatest treasures" lying in himself, it is "madness" that he finds.<sup>453</sup> His inability to reconcile the conflicting notions of gender and sexuality that inform post-apartheid identities provoke a dream of Cape Town's destruction. From the top of Table Mountain, Azure watches as "a hellish explosion comes from the sky" and animals scabble safety but "nothing seems to escape".<sup>454</sup> It is a nihilistic vision that complicates any hope for a better future, marking Muñoz's endorsement of the "not yet here" as insufficient to produce not only sexual freedom but also race and class equality. Instead, Duiker's "solution" can be read in conjunction with Edelman's idea that queers must "refuse the insistence of hope itself," a refusal that is "unthinkable, irresponsible, [and] inhumane" but begs the inevitable question: "If not this, what?"<sup>455</sup>

Despite the apocalyptic imagery, the conclusion of the novel is open ended; Azure doesn't panic, observing and recounting what he sees, but fails to offer any of his usual reflections on the events taking place around him. The ending contrasts with that of another novel with dystopian visions of South Africa, J.M Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K* (1983), where the titular character is a forty-year-old coloured man attempting to survive a nascent civil war in the country. Like Azure, Michael has

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<sup>453</sup> Sello Duiker, *Thirteen Cents*, p. 122.

<sup>454</sup> Ibid, p. 190.

<sup>455</sup> Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, p. 4.

characteristics complicate his participation in society; his cleft lip ostracizes him and, after his mother dies early in the book, he is left with no family. He also is destitute and in search of a place where he can live without judgement or exploitation by others. The end of Coetzee's novel also finds Michael alone and isolated but he imagines a future for himself that is more optimistic. It doesn't speak to destruction like Azure's but reconciliation; Michael envisions living quietly with a "little old man with a stoop," an understanding that counters the race war taking place, and the two sharing a bed; "it has been done before," he reports.<sup>456</sup> The statement is opaque, not only open to a queer reading of Michael's meaning, but also whether he is referring to his history or society's. Either can be seen as a precedent and offers an optimistic reading of the future for Michael, if not necessarily the country.

### **"A Man is a Strange Thing": The Decline of (Gay) White Privilege**

In Eben Venter's *Wolf, Wolf*, the condemnation of homosexuality voiced by some characters can be seen as informed by the country's history of religious and legal repression. In 1966, the vice squad of the South African police raided a house party in Forest Town, an upscale suburb of Johannesburg. With over three hundred guests, the event was not only well attended but decidedly exclusive, attracting "doctors, lawyers and company directors, many of whom had travelled a long way to attend the gathering."<sup>457</sup> It was not the social class of the attendees or their distances covered that alarmed the police, it was that these men (all the guests were men and all of them

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<sup>456</sup> J.M. Coetzee, *Life & Times of Michael K* (New York: Penguin Group, 1983), p. 183.

<sup>457</sup> Rand Daily Mail, 'Five Pay "Men Only" Party Fine', January 24, 1966.

white) were “in various stages of undress and behaving in a ‘grossly obscene’ manner.”<sup>458</sup> Word of the party’s salaciousness immediately drew rapid media attention. Newspapers such as the *Rand Daily Mail* and *The Star* sensationalized the vice squad’s findings in multiple articles and these pieces attracted the concern of the nation’s lawmakers. Due to the Forest Town raid, a law was passed that made “a criminal of any man who commits with another male person... ‘any act which is calculated to stimulate sexual passion or to give sexual gratification.’”<sup>459</sup> The reason for this legislation was a perceived threat to the country’s social mores, a code influenced by the Dutch Reformed Church’s homophobia, and its stability as a nation. Homosexuality was considered a threat to “the very existence of a patriarchal apartheid system” and constituted a “conspiratorial intent to overthrow the ‘moral order’ of the apartheid” government.<sup>460</sup> However, this corruption of the “moral order” was not seen to come from the country’s black majority but from within its ruling power structure by members who would otherwise go undetected. “The challenge that white middle-class men practicing homosexuality posed to the apartheid state was their seemingly undefinable character,” writes Glen Elder in *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities*, “white male homosexuals had no outward signifiers, and thus could invisibly infiltrate the comforts of white middle-class suburbia.”<sup>461</sup> To counter this threat, the apartheid state deployed more legal restrictions (accompanied by public opprobrium of homosexuality) and, from the late 1960s to the 1980s, life for many gay South Africans was “one of severe state censure and social

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<sup>458</sup> *The Star*, ‘Vice Squad Find 350 Men in One House’, January 22, 1966.

<sup>459</sup> Edwin Cameron, ‘Unapprehended Felons: Gays and Lesbians and the Law in South Africa’, in *Defiant Desires*, ed. by Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 92.

<sup>460</sup> Glen Elder, ‘Of Maffies, Kaffirs and Perverts’, in *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities*, ed. by David Bell and Gill Valentine (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 62.

<sup>461</sup> *Ibid*, p. 64.

stigmatization.”<sup>462</sup> While the fight for recognition and inclusion in society continued during this period, it was not until the apartheid regime began to falter that “white queer men went from inhabiting a social and political position based on secrecy and the real threat of persecution, to existing in a society where they could slowly begin publicly and visibly expressing their identities.”<sup>463</sup>

Eben Venter’s novel portrays the ongoing struggle of white gay men to navigate post-apartheid South African life. The author grew up on a sheep farm in Eastern Cape, read philosophy at university, and later served in the South African Air Force for two years before emigrating to Australia. Since 1986, he has published nine works of fiction, including six novels and two collections of short stories, along with a column and recipe book. *Wolf, Wolf* addresses similar issues of queer visibilities and domestic spaces that affected the men of the Forest Town raid. Translated from Afrikaans by Michiel Heyns, the novel provides what Hedley Twidle calls “a textured, slow-burning portrait of suburbia in transition,” a place where heteronormativity continues to dominate, while contrasting this depiction with De Waterkant, a gay-friendly neighbourhood in Cape Town.<sup>464</sup> If, as Dennis Altman writes, homosexual identity was constructed in resistance to the dominance of heterosexuality, then De Waterkant can be seen as created in resistance to the heteronormative spaces that otherwise define the city.<sup>465</sup> De Waterkant is called the “Gay Village” not only because of the high concentration of gay and lesbian people who live and/or frequent the area but to the “almost mythic space of freedom” it

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<sup>462</sup> Tucker, *Queer Visibilities: Space, Identity and Interaction in Cape Town*, p. 43.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid, p. 43.

<sup>464</sup> Hedley Twidle, Review of *Wolf, Wolf*. *Financial Times*, March 13, 2015.

<sup>465</sup> Dennis Altman, *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation* (London: Outerbridge & Dienstfrey, 1971).



allows them.<sup>466</sup> The district is viewed as a haven for the city's queer population and, despite its proximity to the Central Business District, the overwhelming purpose of the gay village is "leisure."<sup>467</sup> Removed from areas with overwhelmingly heterosexual populations, the neighbourhood allows for gays and lesbians to "socialise, shop, eat and enjoy a vibrant nightlife" unencumbered by expectations of heteronormativity.<sup>468</sup> In *Wolf, Wolf*, the emphasis on "leisure" allows for a focus on the present and De Waterkant is the place where Afrikaner Mattheüs Duiker, the novel's protagonist, goes to socialize. He frequents *Carlucci's*, an Italian restaurant where its "rainbow customers eat and drink and chatter," the relaxed environment demonstrating the sense of inclusivity and equality that the neighbourhood embodies.<sup>469</sup> Matt is often accompanied by his partner, Jack, a fellow Afrikaner who is a high-school teacher and housemaster, and together they enjoy their relationship in social circumstances without fear of homophobic judgement or reprimand.

The bonhomie of the Gay Village contrasts with the reactionary environment of the suburban Duiker home. The space is dominated by Benjamin Duiker, Matt's father, despite being terminally ill with Non-Hodgkin lymphoma. Bed-ridden and almost blind, the family patriarch has been so ravaged by the disease that Matt can "smell [it] emanating from his body."<sup>470</sup> This type of cancer erodes one's ability to fight infection and Venter's inclusion of this affliction could easily be read as the waning power of white Afrikaners in post-apartheid society. However, conflating the decay of the "old dogmatist[']s" body, as Matt calls his father, with a weakening of

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<sup>466</sup> Tucker, *Queer Visibilities: Space, Identity and Interaction in Cape Town*, p. 50.

<sup>467</sup> Ibid, p. 50.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid, p. 50.

<sup>469</sup> Eben Venter, *Wolf, Wolf* (London: Scribe Publications, 2013), p. 22.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

his social views, and its continued influence in the country, is presumptuous.<sup>471</sup> Pa Duiker made his fortune by selling Mercedes to white South African plutocrats during apartheid and while his physical capabilities are diminished, he still maintains the “authority of a man who in his prime had everyone at his beck and call.”<sup>472</sup> The ersatz Cape Dutch house, protected by private security guards constantly on patrol, is the “container of Benjamin Duiker's values and prejudices.”<sup>473</sup> These views can be ascribed to Pa’s Christian beliefs (“If I didn’t have my faith, I wouldn’t have made it” through the cancer treatment, he declares)<sup>474</sup> and he asks God to intervene in his son’s romantic relationship: “If only Providence would make him end this thing with Jack.”<sup>475</sup> The connection between these views can be attributed to traditional Afrikaner culture, which “is perceived by many as holding largely negative views of homosexuality,” and is based on the influence of the Dutch Reformed Church, continuing a view of the “moral order” that was used to justify the 1966 Forest Town raid but still maintains strong support even without legislative backing to validate it.<sup>476</sup>

Due to the influence of Christian beliefs, the nuclear family in the book remains the model for domesticity in the country.<sup>477</sup> The Duiker home once consisted of Pa, his now-deceased wife, Matt, and his sister, Sissy (who now lives with her husband and children in the Karoo), but the expectations of this heteronormative

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<sup>471</sup> Venter, *Wolf, Wolf*, p. 205.

<sup>472</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4.

<sup>473</sup> Christine Emmett, ‘When the Safety Net is Removed’. Review of *Wolf, Wolf, The Sunday Independent Books*. January 16, 2014.

<sup>474</sup> Venter, *Wolf, Wolf*, p. 28.

<sup>475</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 28, 34.

<sup>476</sup> Marius Crous, “‘En eks’ dis ‘n trassie” - Perspectives on Afrikaner Homosexual Identity’, *Agenda*, 67 (2006), 48-56 (p. 49).

<sup>477</sup> Pierre de Vos, ‘Same-sex Sexual Desire and the Re-imagining of the South African Family’, *South African Journal on Human Rights*, 20:2 (2004), 179-206 (p. 190).

structure remain strong in the household. When Pa wishes that his son would “find someone to share his life and set up home and settle down,”<sup>478</sup> he can be seen to refer to the family “in the narrow sense, as a man his wife and their children.”<sup>479</sup> Before he dies Pa “just wants to know that something of him survives on this earth... That’s how people throughout the ages have thought and lived.”<sup>480</sup> Matt is the heir and his father’s “only hope of continuing the family line.”<sup>481</sup> However, these expectations carry negative connotations for him. According to Matt, he is “the only heir, a total loser” – a connection being made between the importance of the son in the heteronormative family dynamic and his own failure to continue the Duiker patriarchal line.<sup>482</sup> While Matt has adopted this view of homophobic thinking, he can be seen to protest the valuation of familial lineage by engaging in an ongoing refusal of access to his reproductive material; he masturbates rather than having procreative sex. This action can be seen as an example of what Edelman has deemed “reproductive futurism,” a concept that not only emphasizes reproduction but also preserves “the absolute privilege of heteronormativity.”<sup>483</sup> Dissolution of this thinking and its practices will not come from its heterosexual followers but lies in the “capacity of queer sexualities to figure the radical dissolution of the contract.”<sup>484</sup> According to Edelman, the “efficacy of queerness lies in its very willingness to embrace this refusal of the social and political order” and Matt’s masturbation sessions refuse procreation while demonstrating how his relationship with porn is about the virtual and not the real.<sup>485</sup>

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<sup>478</sup> Venter, *Wolf, Wolf*, pp. 34, 34-5.

<sup>479</sup> De Vos, ‘Same-sex Sexual Desire and the Re-imagining of the South African Family’, p. 188.

<sup>480</sup> Venter, *Wolf, Wolf*, p. 41.

<sup>481</sup> *Ibid*, p. 41.

<sup>482</sup> *Ibid*, p. 86.

<sup>483</sup> Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, p. 2.

<sup>484</sup> *Ibid*, p.16.

<sup>485</sup> *Ibid*, back cover.

While Pa retains ownership of the house, Matt has taken full possession of his bedroom. It is a “Matt-created space,” “queered” to his specifications, where the “future” can be readily accessed.<sup>486</sup> For Matt, this involves indulging his sexual desires by masturbating to internet pornography but it can also be seen as a form of transgression against his father’s entreaties. When he climaxes, Matt “comes into his left hand and lets it dam up there. Only he, his body, knows it. Nobody else has ever seen it or ever will.”<sup>487</sup> It is an act controlled by him, in a space that he has constructed, and Matt asserts his right to his body’s functions while also defying the procreative expectations of heteronormativity. But these acts can also be seen as detrimental; Matt’s relationship with porn has become a compulsion, not only serving as a preference over having sex with Jack but causing him to reject Jack’s intimations to move into the Duiker home because it might infringe upon this habit.

Matt’s porn addiction, however, is not the greatest impediment to Jack joining the household. In addition to its role in the composition of the family, heterosexuality “is a concept used to delineate, and so regulate, the nature of contemporary sexual relations”<sup>488</sup> and Pa employs this construction to restrict Jack’s access to the Duiker home: “[N]ot in my house. I won’t allow it. It flies in the face of my principles.”<sup>489</sup> The constitutional laws of equality aren’t recognized in the Duiker house and inclusion of Pa’s homophobic directive allows Venter to challenge the circumscribed notion of the “family” in post-apartheid discourse. Jack wants a place where he and Matt “can be a family, just the two of them,” a desire that contests social and cultural

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<sup>486</sup> Venter, *Wolf, Wolf*, p. 118.

<sup>487</sup> *Ibid*, p. 73.

<sup>488</sup> Anne Cranny-Francis, Wendy Waring, Pam Stavropoulos, and Joan Kirkby, *Gender Studies: Terms and Debates* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 20.

<sup>489</sup> Venter, *Wolf, Wolf*, p. 43.

expectations by removing the heterosexist component that acts as its foundation.<sup>490</sup> While Jack's relationship with Matt breaks with the traditional composition of the family, his expectations retain a measure of conventionality. For Jack, his idea of "home" would include a "house and a garden," with "cool sheets" and "food and things in the cupboards," aspects that mimic the Duiker residence.<sup>491</sup> These criteria are not an assent to heteronormative social customs but a demonstration of Jack's desire for social recognition; he can be seen to merely want the constitutional right of equal standards to be put into practice. For Jack, queer access to hetero domestic traits would include having a home with a "security you can believe in."<sup>492</sup> In this sense, "security" for Jack can be seen to refer to guards on bicycles but it would also entail the type of spatial refuge found in the Gay Village where the couple would be safely removed from the threat of homophobia. However, the establishment of a kind of "queer suburban sanctuary" can be seen to inhibit queer social progression. While "political conservatism" could be excluded from this space, it demonstrates its ongoing power by reducing queer visibility, the isolation of Matt and Jack reducing the threat to heteronormativity while also demonstrating their lack of engagement with social issues that don't fit their priorities.

The realization of Jack's wish depends on the Duiker son inheriting the family home upon his father's death. Matt has ambitions to permanently transform the domestic space and his top priority is his father's study. The room is a "symbolically imbued space" that "epitomizes the Afrikaner patriarch, Benjamin Duiker" and contains many cultural items (and ideas) that Matt abhors, including the historical

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<sup>490</sup> Venter, *Wolf, Wolf*, p. 209.

<sup>491</sup> *Ibid*, p. 209.

<sup>492</sup> *Ibid*, p. 209.

painting of the Battle of Blood River.<sup>493</sup> This highly romantic portrayal that combines notions of Afrikaner destiny, Christian beliefs, and racial superiority, depicts the encounter that took place on 16 December 1838 between a group of vastly outnumbered Afrikaner *voortrekkers* (pioneers) and an army of Zulu warriors. The battle is mythologized not only because of the pioneers' triumph over apparently insurmountable odds (though this account omits the *voortrekkers*' possession of guns), but the belief that Sarel Cilliers, the group's Calvinist minister, had made a covenant with God to secure victory. The conquest gave credence to the notion that Afrikaners were divinely ordained to rule over the land that became South Africa while demonstrating the power of the church to influence social thought. For Matt, the painting will be the first thing "chucked out" but removing it from the room will be easier than clearing out the orthodox heritage that it represents and that continues to dominate the space.<sup>494</sup> The story of victories such as that at Blood River often included the representation of the "heroic warrior [as] a prominent metaphor of Afrikaner masculinity," a cultural concept that elevates a type of gender construction while excluding others, and the study carries an understanding of "manhood" based on Pa Duiker's expectations.<sup>495</sup> According to Pa, the archetype of a "real man" was Errol Flynn, the gallant film star from the 1930s and 40s, and the décor of his study is a nod to classic cinema; its velvet curtains and furniture are reminiscent of the movie *High Society* with Frank Sinatra and Bing Crosby and gives the space its "masculine atmosphere."<sup>496</sup>

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<sup>493</sup> Emmett, 'When the Safety Net is Removed'.

<sup>494</sup> Venter, *Wolf, Wolf*, p. 7.

<sup>495</sup> Kobus Du Pisani, 'Puritanism Transformed: Afrikaner Masculinities in the Apartheid and Post-Apartheid Period', in *Changing Men in Southern Africa*, ed. by Robert Morrell (Scottsville, South Africa: University of Natal Press, 2001), p. 165.

<sup>496</sup> Venter, *Wolf, Wolf*, pp. 38, 5.

While the references may be outdated, at least one of Pa's gender expectations remains firmly extant and that qualification is "[t]o be a real man...is to be a straight man."<sup>497</sup> Matt recalls his father often talking about women in the study with Diek Smuts, a fellow car salesman, the two of them "regaling each other with lecherous tidbits, their ties loosened, sleeves rolled up over hairy forearms," the chummy ambience accentuated by glass after glass of high-priced scotch.<sup>498</sup> If manhood is defined "in ways that conform to the economic and social possibilities of that group," as Michael Kaufman avers, then this gendered code is embodied by the study.<sup>499</sup> According to Pa, the room is "where you can think like a man," however, it only recognizes one type of masculinity and this circumscribed understanding continues to inform Matt's own gender expectations.<sup>500</sup> While Matt embraces his sexuality, he has adopted aspects of his father's heteronormative thinking. This internalization extends to Pa's version of masculinity and the connection between these two constructs deny Matt access to his gender identity while also denying him the opportunity to reconfigure the study to fit queer specifications. In order to circumvent this problem, Matt must utilize a different precept of the study. He remarks that his father used to make "deals in there" and "[m]oved huge sums of money around" and by establishing a connection between the space and money, Matt attempts to evade the issue of compulsory heterosexuality to access his masculinity.<sup>501</sup> Pa has stated that "[f]or a man who earns money, nothing can come in his way," and this connection allows for

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<sup>497</sup> Rachel Alsop, Annette Fitzsimons and Kathleen Lennon, *Theorizing Gender* (Malden, Massachusetts: Polity Press, 2002), p. 147.

<sup>498</sup> Venter, *Wolf, Wolf*, p. 6.

<sup>499</sup> Michael Kaufman, 'Men, Feminism and Men's Contradictory Experiences of Power', in *Theorizing Masculinities*, ed. by Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), p. 145

<sup>500</sup> Venter, *Wolf, Wolf*, p. 6.

<sup>501</sup> *Ibid*, p. 6.

the possibility of the study (and Matt's masculinity) to be accessed through financial success.<sup>502</sup> But, the Duiker son is more adept at spending money than making it. The previous four years were spent in Europe, a sojourn devoid of work and devoted to leisure, and that included the ability to live the life of a "free" gay man, albeit one paid for with his father's money. The return of the son (or daughter) to South Africa from a time abroad has been the subject of other works such as Mark Behr's *Kings of the Water* (2009) and S.J. Naude's *The Alphabet of Birds* (2015),<sup>503</sup> and, like Venter's novel, they question what has changed about the country and themselves during their absence. In *Wolf, Wolf*, the answer to that question, at least for the Duiker family, is very little and the author extends the period beyond the years of Matt's absence to decades before, an addition that allows for a cross-generational depiction of the power of heteronormativity to inhibit the embrace of queer identities in the country.

With his death growing closer, Pa asks Matt to take him for a last visit to the Duiker family farm. The land where he was raised is now owned by his daughter, Sissy, and her husband, who live there with their two daughters, but it retains his reactionary views. While Sissy is more accepting of her brother's sexuality, her husband, Marko, is a homophobic racist who views the "Western Cape as the only place where a white man can still survive."<sup>504</sup> There is another resident of the farm, Pa's brother, Hannes, who lives alone in a *rondavel* (a rustic, round cottage) with his dogs, an isolation that speaks to a history of social and familial homophobia. Long before the passing of the constitution, Hannes had a lover named Paul who fled the stifling sexual confines of the country for the freedom of Europe. In his letters, he

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<sup>502</sup> Venter, *Wolf, Wolf*, p. 104.

<sup>503</sup> Andrew van der Vlies, 'Dried Blood'. Book Review: Eben Venter's *Wolf, Wolf*. *Times Literary Supplement*, April 24, 2015, p. 20.

<sup>504</sup> Venter, *Wolf, Wolf*, p. 121.



wrote enthusiastically about a kind of life that was not available to them in South Africa, one where they could be together free of cultural and legal constraints, and invited Hannes to join him. However, Hannes had no money for the trip and the thought of asking his conservative father was “out of the question”<sup>505</sup>. The influence on Pa’s views by his father are clear; “Grandpa Ben” was a taciturn religious man who focused on his sons’ spiritual well-being by making sure they lived “righteously” and followed the Church’s teachings so they “would experience eternal life,” an emphasis on a promised future in heaven rather than the type of life in the present offered by Paul.<sup>506</sup> Matt’s overseas trip is the escape Hannes was never able to make and he returns to South Africa with the expectations of sexual freedom and social equality indicative of the same “very, very rosy picture” that Paul painted in his letters of life in Europe.<sup>507</sup> Venter offers Europe as a haven of sexual freedom in the novel (now as much as in the period represented for Hannes and Paul), but supplements this notion with his contrasting portrayal of South Africa upon Matt’s return. While Matt is able to maintain a life of quasi-sexual freedom in post-apartheid society, it is only due to his father’s wealth and a break from this dependence can be achieved only through money earned, not bestowed. In the novel, money is aligned with heteronormative thought, a connection for Matt that maintains ties with his father’s homophobic belief system while also adhering to the man’s understanding of work and masculinity: “Being thirty-two and never having a proper job,” Matt states. “[W]hat kind of a man is that?”<sup>508</sup> According to Pa’s criteria, the question answers itself: when compared to his father, Matt cannot be considered a “man.” Fulfilling

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<sup>505</sup> Venter, *Wolf, Wolf*, p. 134.

<sup>506</sup> *Ibid*, p. 75.

<sup>507</sup> *Ibid*, p. 134.

<sup>508</sup> *Ibid*, p. 93.

these standards is difficult when everything about Pa is considered masculine and Matt feels that he is a failure whenever he is unable to replicate it. This includes the wealthy man's "muscular" signature, one Matt needs on a cheque to start his own take-away restaurant, an endeavour that would establish both his financial dependence and his manhood and allow him to have a future beyond the "present."<sup>509</sup> However, much like Uncle Hannes and his father, Matt is too intimidated by Pa's rigid views to ask him for a loan. Instead, he tries to forge his father's name on a cheque but fails because "[i]t is masculinity, the essence of it, that engenders such a signature" and Matt does not qualify according to his father's understanding of masculinity.<sup>510</sup>

Matt's internalization extends to his father's business views and practices despite their supposed conflict with his social conscience. His hope that the takeaway will be a "place where [people] want to buy food on their way home" in order to "get the wife out of the kitchen for the evening" is a tacit endorsement of heteronormativity.<sup>511</sup> The statement not only contradicts Matt's rejection of heterosexist thinking but it can also be read as a willingness to compartmentalization his social views for the sake of profit. Even though Matt envisions his take-away restaurant to be a "thoroughly ethical undertaking," a business that will "do something for the poor people of Cape Town," his intentions clash with his father's unscrupulous business tactics.<sup>512</sup> While he is setting up the business, Matt withholds twenty-five percent of a supplier's payment until he is "absolutely sure that everything is in order" even though the man has completed his service.<sup>513</sup> It is a lesson that he learned from

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<sup>509</sup> Venter, *Wolf, Wolf*, p. 10.

<sup>510</sup> *Ibid*, p. 10.

<sup>511</sup> *Ibid*, p. 95.

<sup>512</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 49, 128.

<sup>513</sup> *Ibid*, p. 95.

his father, Matt explains, but instead of doing “something for the poor people of Cape Town,” he can be seen to exploit them. The supplier, Sam de Beer, does not drive a Mercedes, as Matt does, but leaves the restaurant in a “dilapidated bakkie.”<sup>514</sup> By withholding full payment, Matt rejects any loyalty based on race between himself and a fellow Afrikaner (a denial of his father’s sense of heritage) but he is willing to assert his class privilege by using economic power dynamics to his favour (a construct only engendered by his father’s wealth and success).

Any of Matt’s positions on these issues can be reconsidered, and despite dismissing his father’s version of Afrikaner nationalism, he embraces this cultural connection when it benefits him. Before he eventually receives money for the restaurant from his father, Matt seeks a loan from the Capital Bank. Although he classified the institution as one for “losers” and whose clients are “single parents come to beg for a microloan,” it doesn’t prevent him from asking the bank for financial assistance.<sup>515</sup> He does so not only because it offers “the lowest service charges in Africa” but because it has the “willingness to take risks and to recruit men and women that other banks wouldn’t look at twice,” a proposition that is seemingly not focused on the sons of wealthy white businessmen.<sup>516</sup> But, this “willingness” applies to Matt because he lacks any collateral for a loan. In place of surety, Matt relies on his “upbringing” and Afrikaner identity to warrant favouritism. It is a choice that speaks to the uncertain position of white privilege in a country that is still transitioning from previous understandings of racial and economic power. In “insecure environments” such as post-apartheid South Africa, “[a]lienated and

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<sup>514</sup> Venter, *Wolf, Wolf*, p. 95.

<sup>515</sup> *Ibid*, p. 45.

<sup>516</sup> *Ibid*, p. 46.

isolated individuals crave belonging,” the allure of “racial scripts enjoy[ing] a magnetic pull”,<sup>517</sup> and when Matt begins to speak to Mrs Botha, the loan officer, in Afrikaans, it is “make sure she knows he’s one of her lot.”<sup>518</sup> The bank, however, abides by the constitutional laws of equality, rules that benefit Matt by outlawing discrimination according to sexual orientation but that prevent preferential treatment because of his Afrikaner identity. The loan officer adheres to these rules— “Capital must at all times be assured...[t]hat’s how it works with us”—and ends any hope of preference based on this notion of privilege.<sup>519</sup> In desperation, Matt offers his father’s car as security for the loan. By mentioning the Mercedes, Matt is attempting once more to invoke privilege to gain favour but, on this occasion, he pushes beyond the shared traits of language and ethnicity<sup>520</sup> to reference class. Matt is no longer trying to establish a cultural connection with the loan officer but to indicate his membership in a restricted club. It is an inclusion based on wealth but also an understanding of social superiority, and Matt recalls that affiliation was demonstrated during apartheid when two Mercedes “passing each other would flash their headlights to affirm their exclusive camaraderie.”<sup>521</sup> However, appearance alone no longer ensures advantage in the country and mere possession does not equate to substance; ownership must be established, not inferred, and Matt cannot merely “flash the lights” of the Mercedes to signify inclusion in the qualifying class any longer. For the bank, he must legitimate it

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<sup>517</sup> Richard Thompson Ford, ‘What’s Queer About Race?’ in *After Sex? On Writing Since Queer Theory*, ed. by Janet Halley and Andrew Parker (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 125.

<sup>518</sup> Venter, *Wolf, Wolf*, p. 49.

<sup>519</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>520</sup> I recognize that the term “ethnicity” can be regarded as problematic due to its historical usage as a means of economic, cultural and racial classification and have endeavoured to use it sparingly in my thesis.

<sup>521</sup> Venter, *Wolf, Wolf*, pp. 113-114.

and when Mrs. Botha asks for ownership papers Matt is forced to admit that the car is not his to offer.

Rejecting Matt's loan request is a rejection of the idea of his social privilege and, without it, he has trouble navigating post-apartheid life. He has no business experience, restaurant or otherwise. Instead, Matt relies on his father's money to sustain him, along with his white male identity, and is interested in social equality only when it doesn't inconvenience him. Near the end of the interview, Mrs Botha declares that Matt is the "type who'll go far one day" and shows him a photo of her daughter, a "girl with a small pinched face and a bushy mop of blonde hair."<sup>522</sup> While the loan officer rejects favouritism based on race or ethnicity there is an allusion to a compromise of bank policy based on expectations of heteronormativity. Her tacit invitation for Matt to engage in a romantic relationship with her daughter, however, forces him to flee to the water fountain, the thought of repressing his queer identity for a loan making him "feel like vomiting."<sup>523</sup> Matt's physical revulsion can be viewed as his inability to see beyond his own subjective social lens. He expects homophobia to be removed from the country's post-apartheid consciousness but not his white entitlement and this focus on sexuality omits other aspects of social equality, namely class and race, that deserve his equal consideration.

Matt's views on race and class exclusivity are revealed on the day of Pa's funeral. As he and Jack are traveling to the cemetery, the Mercedes is delayed by police: the king of Swaziland's motorcade is given priority to pass. The idea of this

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<sup>522</sup> Venter, *Wolf, Wolf*, p. 51.

<sup>523</sup> *Ibid*, p. 51.

preference sends Matt and Jack into a racist diatribe that demonstrates their thinking of privilege:

“Little palace stoep-shitter!”

“Tramples his people into the mud. Mud fuckhead!”

“Fucking pap-guzzler.”

“Virgin fucker. Slave-girl fucker. Fifty weddings or more. Twenty Mercedes S600s in his garage. If my father had to know this,” says Matt, “that his son would be late for his funeral because some tinpot king claims the whole of De Wall Drive for himself. If he had to know that!”<sup>524</sup>

According to their reactions, privilege should be for white Afrikaners, not black monarchs. However, since these issues do not infringe upon Matt or Jack’s subjectivities they remained unexamined and this type of solipsistic thinking is mimetic of Pa’s belief system, excluding the consideration of others outside one’s circumscribed purview, while also demonstrating the extent of the man’s influence on his son in areas aside from sexuality.

Jack also demonstrates his blinkered social perspective through his understanding of what the constitution “does” for the people of the country. While he correctly understands its protection of sexual orientation as a legal right, Jack fails to recognize the constitution’s limited influence on social thought. Zilverbosch Boys’ High is a prestigious Cape Town boarding school and Jack’s position there not only provides him with a livelihood but a sense of acceptance. He relishes the school’s

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<sup>524</sup> Venter, *Wolf, Wolf*, p. 199.

traditions (the uniforms, sports and its emphasis on pastoral care), however, his claims that everyone at the school knows his sexual orientation and “it’s not a problem...ever!” should be read with scepticism.<sup>525</sup> During a rowing trip that Jack chaperones, an initiation ceremony among the team members involves one of the senior boys hazing a black underclassman by urinating on him.<sup>526</sup> Jack is told about the episode shortly afterward but dismisses it as a part of Zilverbosch tradition, failing to question the type of abusive and degrading system of “manhood” that the school endorses, a tradition that extends back to the apartheid era and serves as more than a passing imitation of that morally corrupt system. But Jack fails to recognize this similarity or its abuses because they do not infringe upon his sensibilities. As long as the school “accepts” his sexuality and provides him with a sense of social inclusion, any other indication of mistreatment can be overlooked. When Jack fails to report the incident to the principal he not only demonstrates his selfishness but his naivety. The mother of the hazed boy is livid when she finds out about the event and demands accountability from the school’s administration. Instead of the rich white senior boy being punished for urinating on the black Muslim underclassman (and confronting the system that enabled his actions), Jack is found to be the more expedient choice and, when he is asked to resign, his sexuality can be seen as the factor behind this decision. While gayness is “aligned with our current governing narrative of human rights, pluralism, and constitutionalism,” writes South African academic Tim Trengove Jones, the “de facto reality of abiding prejudice” against homosexuality remains present in post-apartheid society and the principal’s decision is meant to be read as an

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<sup>525</sup> Venter, *Wolf, Wolf*, p. 58.

<sup>526</sup> Duiker makes a transgenerational connection between the humiliation involving urine and masculinity when Pa recounts an episode between he and Hannes that involved a “pissing contest”. The winner was the one with the highest arching stream, and Pa, sixteen years old and already with a “bull of a prick”, soundly defeated his brother (34).

indication of the boarding school system's emphasis on maintaining tradition over meeting the country's standards of equality.<sup>527</sup> When Jack interviewed for a teaching position at another school, the first question he was asked concerned his marital status, the author indicating ongoing institutional thinking that is consistent with social views. Jack's indignant response to the question, "Hello? This is the twenty-first century! Check your constitution, people" is a cry for equal recognition of his sexuality in the workplace, a demand similar to the one he makes for the Duiker house, however, the expectation of it being considered, or, even acknowledged, shows his lack of understanding of heteronormativity's ongoing place of power in post-apartheid society.<sup>528</sup>

The degree of Jack and Matt's myopia to the remaining power of heteronormativity is demonstrated when the former is surreptitiously moved into the Duiker house. In addition to losing his job, Jack has been forced to vacate the housemaster's residence and his intrusion is couched as a financial necessity: once a heavy drug user, he is still paying off a substantial debt to his dealer. After Jack loses his job, and with no family to help him, Matt feels obligated to let Jack stay in the house. He believes that the decline of his father's faculties will elide recognition of Jack's presence but Pa eventually notices and his reaction to his son's defiance results in a public reaffirmation of the man's principals.<sup>529</sup> After he dies and the will is about to be read, Matt learns that a codicil had been added. Instead of him being left the house (as Matt had been told by his father), it is to be sold and the proceeds given to those who shared the man's beliefs. One part will go to Sissy to sustain the farm and

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<sup>527</sup> Trengove Jones, 'Fiction and the Law: Recent Inscriptions of Gayness in South Africa', pp. 117-118.

<sup>528</sup> Venter, *Wolf, Wolf*, p. 77.

<sup>529</sup> According to Matt, Pa believes that "two men fucking leads to the portal of hell" and the act is something "that he will never allow under his roof" (88).



her nuclear family, the second to the Church and the last portion to their neighbour, Sannie, on behalf of the Silver Cloud Christian Fellowship.<sup>530</sup> “Aunt” Sannie is a long-time neighbour of the Duikers and regularly visited Pa during his illness, bringing him food and providing him company. Her compassion, however, does not prevent her from ingratiating herself into the dying man’s good graces. Sannie shilled for the Silver Cloud Christian Fellowship, a charity established to help poor Afrikaners, and based her plea for donations on class loss and racial vulnerability. She invoked images of poor Afrikaners forced to “make do with tents and caravans” and stated that “[i]f we from down here don't help them, they'll all go under" while failing to extend Christian charity to other races who are also impoverished in the country.<sup>531</sup> According to Sannie, with the loss of a government to sustain them, the “poor Afrikaners” are at the risk of falling into abject poverty and, for Matt, the loss of the house portends a similar social collapse. By allowing Jack to stay, he forfeited his right to the house, choosing his relationship and his sexuality over his father’s bigoted views. For Matt, the “burden of queerness” has been monetized and resulted not only in the financial loss associated with the house but the opportunity to reconfigure it as a queer family space.<sup>532</sup>

After his father’s dead, Matt’s life goes into a steep decline. With the selling of the house, he and Jack are forced to live in Pa’s Mercedes on the edge of Rondebosch Common. Jack playfully states that he and Matt are “white tramps, bergies” (a derogatory term for homeless people) but “with a Merc.”<sup>533</sup> However, what they fail to realize is the car, like their white privilege, is a rapidly depreciating

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<sup>530</sup> Venter, *Wolf, Wolf*, p. 212.

<sup>531</sup> *Ibid*, p. 54.

<sup>532</sup> Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, p. 17.

<sup>533</sup> Venter, *Wolf, Wolf*, p. 238.

asset and, with Pa's death, "the safety nets disappear."<sup>534</sup> For Matt, the demands of the restaurant reinforce his father's version of masculinity. It is a lesson that is transmitted through the body by the pain and exhaustion of physical labour and has soon transformed Matt into a "machine just made for work."<sup>535</sup> In *Thinking Through the Body*, Jane Gallop writes that "men have their masculine identity to gain by being estranged from their bodies" but Matt is unable to sustain this work regime.<sup>536</sup> Unlike his father, for whom business was always the priority ("cars came first, then your family" he told his son) and who only acknowledged pain if it were "wise," the bar of masculinity is set too high for Matt to reach.<sup>537</sup> Instead of having a family, Matt's intended legacy is his restaurant, symbolized by the name "Duiker's Takeaway" and the expensive metal gate with the large "D" at the entrance. While the business carries the Duiker name, it will not continue to be Matt's possession and he eventually loses control of it to a man who more closely fits Pa's version of masculinity. Emile is a Congolese refugee who enters the restaurant one day and asks for a job. Initially, he works just for food but, with a wife and children to provide for, he soon requests a wage and justifies it by being a tireless worker. Matt's hiring of Emile can be seen as doing something positive for Cape Town's less fortunate, however, his benevolence extends only to when it doesn't inconvenience him. When Emile asks for a ride to the airport to pick up his son, Matt obliges but he is unable to hide his aggravation and Emile notices: "You are not my friend. You do not like me. There is nothing," between us, he says to Matt.<sup>538</sup> The remark is the culmination of several weeks of animosity between them. Claiming that he used to own a restaurant in his country,

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<sup>534</sup> Venter, *Wolf, Wolf*, p. 166.

<sup>535</sup> *Ibid*, p. 168.

<sup>536</sup> Jane Gallop, *Thinking Through the Body* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 7.

<sup>537</sup> Venter, *Wolf, Wolf*, p. 142.

<sup>538</sup> *Ibid*, p. 241.

Emile suggests changes to the food but Matt dismisses them. Resentful at the man's ingenuity and hard work, Matt begins to talk down to him, commenting derisively about Emile's choice in clothing and his personal hygiene, and, at one point, he remarks to himself that he doesn't want to work any longer with a "sub-human."<sup>539</sup> But, before he can fire Emile, the restaurant is taken from him. Tired of Matt's condescending treatment, Emile demonstrates that he is not only a hard worker but possesses the guile to succeed in the "new South Africa." One morning, Matt arrives to find that Emile has somehow gotten his name on the restaurant's business license and managed to change the locks. However, when he confronts Emile, Matt does not see the man he knows. Instead, Emile "looks manlier, bigger, than he's ever seen him" and the change can be seen as a realization of his loss of white privilege.<sup>540</sup> Emile did not act alone; he is accompanied by three other Congolese men and Matt views being physically outnumbered in historical terms: "he's up against superior numbers, like the enemy at the Battle of Blood River, only more cunning."<sup>541</sup> But, this time, there will be no miracle and Matt is forced to accept defeat and that his privilege is gone.

After their eviction, Matt and Jack return to the former Duiker house to play "Wolf, Wolf." It is a children's game where one person plays the wolf and the others the prey and the intention is to taunt the new owners but they only succeed in demonstrating their new marginalization. The game is antiphonic, a style that carries overtones of absolute power, the wolf controlling the action through a "call-and-response" style of play while also holding dominion over the "lives" of the other

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<sup>539</sup> Venter, *Wolf, Wolf*, p. 194.

<sup>540</sup> *Ibid*, p. 254.

<sup>541</sup> *Ibid*, p. 256.

players. However, this power can change hands quickly, turning the prey into the wolf, and vice versa. Inclusion of the game in the novel can be read as a metaphor for the change in South Africa's racial power dynamics but it also addresses other issues that speak to the country's post-apartheid condition. The new owners of the house are a black family, a sign not only of the change in economic power but a sign of heteronormativity's continued dominance in society. During the game, Jack wears a wolf mask, however, its power is a façade. No longer can he be a "wolf" only because of his white skin and the mask, the appearance of power, won't save him from this new reality. He goes one night without Matt to play the game and enters the front garden of the house. Jack's intrusion on the heteronormative space does not mean expulsion this time, unlike when he and Matt live there with Pa, but elimination. The long barrel of a rifle emerges from an upstairs window, focusing on the back of Jack's neck, and a shot is understood to follow.

The ending of the passage is ominous and vague; it is not Jack but his mobile phone that falls to the ground and shatters, a possible indication of his lost privilege. But, the reason for the crime is also unclear; it can be read as an indication of homophobia or race-based revenge, the gun man intimidated as the new owner who is clearing the "trash around the house...once and for all."<sup>542</sup> While Jack is playing "Wolf, Wolf," Matt is drinking heavily, trying to forget about the loss of his restaurant while also thinking about how he can make a life now. A duiker is a small antelope known for its evasive movements and, as van der Vlies writes, it is a fitting surname for Matt and his family in a novel that addresses the "difficulties of communication between parent and child, between lovers, and across racial and class divides".<sup>543</sup> This

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<sup>542</sup> Venter, *Wolf, Wolf*, p. 262.

<sup>543</sup> Van der Vlies, 'Dried Blood'. Book Review: Eben Venter's *Wolf, Wolf*, p. 20.

trouble between father and son speaks to Matt's difficulty navigating a changed society. "You have to be able to make you own way in life," Pa tells him, "I've always believed that".<sup>544</sup> But, Pa fails to notice the contradictory nature of this statement; while he wants his son to "make [his] own way," he impedes this development by sustaining him financially. Matt's reliance on his race and class privilege has compromised his ability to see that the world that is changing around him. In his drunken state, Matt is able to admit his limitations; what he can do about his porn addiction and his relationship with Jack, but also what he can't give or rely on, an important realization as the country moves forward.

## Conclusion

Brenna Munro writes that in the days just after the country's constitution was passed, there was an "(unspoken) national pride being generated about South Africa's comparatively progressive position on gay rights."<sup>545</sup> Accompanied by the anti-apartheid struggle, the fight for gay rights had made many "South Africans feel modern and magnanimous" since they helped shape a new and distinctly different nation.<sup>546</sup> But, Munro writes, there is no sign of this "new national order" in *Thirteen Cents* and, instead of sexual liberation, there is only sexual exploitation to be found in the novel.<sup>547</sup> Azure is not concerned about his lack of sexual freedom because his encounters with his clients are about money; for him, money equals survival. This

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<sup>544</sup> Venter, *Wolf, Wolf*, p. 54.

<sup>545</sup> Munro, *South Africa and the Dream of Love to Come: Queer Sexuality and the Struggle for Freedom*, p. 256.

<sup>546</sup> *Ibid*, p. xxiv.

<sup>547</sup> *Ibid*, p. 200.

connection was established at an early age: when Azure was ten years old, his parents were murdered and the exclamation that “Papa was bad with money” is tacitly offered as the reason for their deaths.<sup>548</sup> While Azure believes that “money is everything,” it does not allow for sexual desire because he must repress it to survive on the streets.<sup>549</sup> According to Muñoz, queerness is a “mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present” but, aside from being fellated by Lebowitz, Azure is unable to allow himself to feel desire and this prevents him from being able to imagine a future.<sup>550</sup> When he is climbing Table Mountain, Azure reaches into his pocket and pulls out thirteen cents; it is all the money he has left and his destructive vision of Cape Town can be seen as a result of his desolate circumstances. “My mother is dead. My father is dead,” are the final words of the novel, and, without money or a future, Azure can only see one way forward.<sup>551</sup> Even with a father who was “good” with money like Pa Duiker, queer identifies have trouble being fully realized when confronted by the power of heteronormativity. In *Wolf, Wolf*, Matt has no trouble embracing his desire but he doesn’t know how to survive in post-apartheid society and the end of his privilege is the end of his world. Munro declares that the “figure of the young gay person” disrupting heteronormative expectations of marriage and procreation is a “trope that generates utopian possibility.”<sup>552</sup> However, in *Wolf, Wolf* and *Thirteen Cents*, the “utopic” spaces created in these novels were constructed on heteronormative understandings and the dependence on these constructions for survival inhibited realization of queer futures.

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<sup>548</sup> Sello Duiker, *Thirteen Cents*, p. 2.

<sup>549</sup> *Ibid*, p. 18.

<sup>550</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, p. 1.

<sup>551</sup> Sello Duiker, *Thirteen Cents*, p. 190.

<sup>552</sup> Munro, *South Africa and the Dream of Love to Come: Queer Sexuality and the Struggle for Freedom*, p. 187.

## Conclusion

Nadine Gordimer's *The House Gun*, from which the epigraph for chapter four was taken, focuses on the killing of a white gay man in a domestic space and addresses how the action and its repercussions are informed by changing attitudes toward race and sexuality in post-apartheid society. The novel follows Harald Lindgard and his wife, Claudia, as they struggle to comprehend their son's murder of a man. Duncan Lindgard lived with his girlfriend, Natalie, in the guest house of a residence shared by three gay men (two white and one black) and the setting seemingly embodies the post-apartheid ethos of equality, a multi-racial, mix gender, mix sexuality environment that breaks with the country's troubled social and political past. This idyll, however, is disrupted by Duncan's act of violence; one of the men, Carl Jespersen, is Duncan's former lover and when Duncan discovers Natalie having sex with Carl, he shoots and kills him with the "house gun," a weapon intended to be used by the residents against intruders, not each other. The events that Gordimer depicts (a love triangle, sexual jealousy and murder) negate the easy vision of post-apartheid harmony by constructing a space where society's troubles can be played out to the end. This conflation is not surprising for Gordimer's works; the author often addresses the relationship between the "personal and political, the private and public" and the epigraph speaks to this duality.<sup>553</sup> While it is the "right of preference" that directs the law, extending it to include same-sex desire, it also references the restriction of this desire, speaking to another "preference," the one of heterosexuality, that continues to

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<sup>553</sup> David Medalie, 'The Context of the Awful Event: Nadine Gordimer's *The House Gun*', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 25:4 (1999), 633-644 (p. 633).

hold social power and restricts the realization of the “future” that the constitution was intended to bestow on the country.

The topics that Gordimer addresses in *The House Gun* speak to many of the same issues that I address in this thesis. Race, class, violence, and sexuality pervade these novels and my project contributes to South African literary studies by examining how these issues (and others) inform the different masculinities portrayed in the works. This contribution is unique for its emphasis on masculinity, an underrepresented means of critical analysis, but also for the readings that emerge from my gendered approach to the texts. The intention was not to focus on gender theory and its application in this project but to find wider meanings of the texts through an analysis of how gender construction influences and is influenced, often complicated ways, by the issues that continue to trouble South Africa decades after the end of apartheid.

In chapter one, I examined masculinities informed by sexual relations with women and showed how this apartheid-era understanding of gender construction remains extant in post-apartheid society through the advocacy of maintaining a woman’s “honour.” In *Disgrace*, an examination of David Lurie’s masculinity model reveals how his sexual relationships with women have dominated his identity but it also shows how his apartheid-era understandings of race, gender and sexuality are connected to this model. After decades of rampant sexual activity which he credits to his appearance, the white 52-year old college professor claims to have lost his “magnetism.” This loss, however, doesn’t prevent him from continuing to use women’s bodies to fulfil his masculinity and he focuses on his daughter, Lucy, to sustain this dynamic; after she is raped by a group of men, Lurie vows to protect Lucy’s “honour” from future attacks. When he discovers one of his daughter’s rapists



spying on her through the bathroom window of her home, Lurie assaults the man, demonstrating how he uses Lucy's body to sustain his masculinity through violence instead of sexual intercourse, while also revealing in a verbal tirade the racist and homophobic views that inform his identity and perpetuate apartheid-era perspectives of these issues. In *Bitter Fruit*, the connection between masculinity and honour inhibits reconciliation with the past. Silas Ali, a coloured, middle-age lawyer, has renounced a version of masculinity informed by women's bodies but a chance meeting with his wife's rapist troubles this new model. After learning of the encounter, Lydia challenges Silas's manhood because he didn't defend her honour by killing Francois Du Boise, a white former apartheid-era policeman, when he had the opportunity. For Silas, murdering his wife's rapist would mean a return to apartheid-era understandings of masculinity he rejected in favour of reconciliation. When their son, Mikey, avenges his mother's rape, his killing of Du Boise demonstrates an atavistic version of masculinity that endorses retributive violence over reconciliation and is aligned with the country's destructive past.

In chapter two, I considered the different masculinities that crime fiction writer Deon Meyer portrays in his novels. Christopher Warnes writes that the author is moving "away from inherited, macho codes of identity" with his characters but an examination of these portrayals revealed they are informed by outmoded means of masculinity construction.<sup>554</sup> In *Dead Before Dying*, detective Mat Joubert is offered as a contrast to his deceased father, a racist, sexist police sergeant, by his embrace of post-apartheid ideals of gender and racial equality. However, Joubert's adoption of these ideas is aided by the trope of female sexual assault. In his therapy sessions with

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<sup>554</sup> Christopher Warnes, 'Writing Crime in the New South Africa: Negotiating Threat in the Novels of Deon Meyer and Margie Orford', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 38:4 (2012), 981-991 (p. 987).

Dr Hanna Nortier, Joubert is able to emotionally heal from the death of his wife and, with his recovery, he adopts a version of masculinity that breaks with past ideas. However, Joubert's healing (and his new identity) is possible only because of Nortier's rape and her quest for vengeance against her attackers, the search for these men leading her to take the detective as a patient in order to find information about her rapists. The "rape and revenge" trope is also used by Meyer in *Devil's Peak*. In this novel, Benny Griessel moves away from the genre stereotype of the alcoholic detective and the clichéd role of the family "breadwinner"/protector to find a new gender model based on sobriety and a break with domestic gender expectations. Griessel's abstinence from alcohol allows him to reconnect with his identity as a police officer by revealing that the reason for his drinking is the socially-constructed pressure to fulfil the roles of husband and father. However, when Griessel is told about the kidnapping and rape of his daughter, Carla, he abandons this new identity in favour of past understandings. Griessel gets drunk during the search for his daughter and, when he finally confronts her attackers, he relinquishes his role as a policeman by executing the men. While Meyer shows the difficulty Griessel has breaking with old identities, this new version is based on female victimization. Carla's kidnapping and rape is integral to the demonstration of Griessel's struggle with his post-apartheid roles but her subjectivity is elided from the story; like Hanna Nortier, she functions mainly as a plot point and her trauma is given little attention in comparison to the personal development of the male characters' identities.

In chapter three, my examination of the masculinities portrayed in Kgebetli Moele's *The Book of the Dead* and Niq Mhlongo's *Way Back Home* revealed the destructive effects of the emphasis on wealth acquisition and social status in South Africa's neoliberal environment. In Moele's novel, Khutso fails to find happiness

despite achieving his goals of earning a university degree, having a wife and child, and being financially prosperous. The disappointment caused by this failed masculinity model is exacerbated by the suicide of his wife, Pretty, and Khutso learning he is HIV positive and causes his mental and physical collapse. Khutso's breakdown results in a change of subjectivity; when he returns to consciousness, the reader learns his identity has been assumed by HIV. The change allows for the virus's rapaciousness to "live" to be portrayed anthropomorphically and demonstrates its intentions through the narrative voice: it aims to infect as many women as possible through sexual intercourse. To achieve this goal, the virus utilizes bourgeois social expectations, partaking in the ancestral tradition of men "freely" having sexual affairs while manipulating the class's valuation on wealth and status by convincing women to have unprotected sex by buying them expensive gifts and making promises of marriage and children. By exploiting these precepts, Khutso/HIV is able to infect hundreds of women with the virus and the results make an argument for which is more dangerous to South African society: HIV or the bourgeois values that enable its proliferation.

The detrimental effects of these values are also addressed in Mhlongo's novel. For Kimathi Tito, his drive to acquire massive wealth mirrors his former zeal for social revolution. As a soldier for the "Movement" in the 1980s, Kimathi fought ardently to overthrow the apartheid regime. Twenty years later, he applies the same devotion to earning money and social status, however, his revolutionary past comes back to haunt him. During his time fighting the South African Defence Force, Kimathi tortured fellow soldiers he believed to be spies and raped and killed a female comrade who refused his sexual advances. The closer Kimathi gets to winning a 900-million-rand contract (and becoming extraordinarily wealthy), the more these crimes haunt

him, resulting in bouts of psychosis where he sees the ghosts of those he has killed and also suffers from blackouts. During these periods of unconsciousness, Kimathi returns to his revolutionary means of punishing traitors; he tortures and then murders the business partners he suspects of jeopardizing his opportunity to win the contract. The killing of these (innocent) men highlights the damage of the struggle against the apartheid regime and its effect on post-apartheid society, the results compounded by the focus on money and manifested psychologically in Kimathi's distress; when he learns he hasn't been awarded the contract, Kimathi commits suicide, a death that can be credited as much present expectations for success as to his past crimes.

In chapter four, I examined the representations of masculinities in a pair of post-apartheid novels and demonstrated how the heteronormative expectations associated with money in these works hinders the realization of queer identities. For Azure, the dark-skinned, blue-eyed narrator of K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents*, life on the streets of Cape Town is dominated by ambiguity. Unable to conform to black or white racial characteristics, Azure also fails to adhere to stratified ideas of sexuality. In order to survive, Azure prostitutes himself to men. Although earning money is considered a means of masculinity construction in this environment, it is a decidedly heteronormative concept; Azure is paid for having sex but he is refused access to this gender identity because of the homosexual nature of these encounters. Azure attempts to deny his emerging recognition of his queerness in favour of a heteronormatively-informed version of masculinity, however, his inability to fully suppress his sexuality results in flight to Table Mountain. Safely isolated from the dangers of the city streets, Azure can indulge his fantasies; he interacts with dinosaurs, creates a queer domestic space, and envisions the destruction of Cape

Town by fire and flood, these ideas an escape from his failure to reconcile his sexuality and racial difference with the expectations of street life.

In Eben Venter's *Wolf, Wolf*, the privileged suburban life of Afrikaner Mattheüs Duiker is a stark contrast to Azure's perilous existence, however, the pressure to conform to heteronormative expectations is equally demanding. The Duiker family home is ruled by Matt's father, Benjamin, a wealthy former Mercedes dealer, who wishes his son would marry a woman and have a family. While Matt has embraced his queerness, he remains susceptible to Pa Duiker's expectations for his gender identity. Unwilling to conform to his father's domestic wishes, Matt attempts to "earn" his masculinity by opening a takeaway restaurant; by having a successful business and making money, Matt believes he can circumvent his father's heteronormative expectations for him and still receive the man's approval. However, Matt's restaurant is a failure and, when his father dies, he is left homeless. Pa Duiker has left the family home to a Christian charity that rejects homosexuality and this donation reaffirms the connection between heteronormativity, masculinity and money that he openly avowed.

In this thesis, I have put into conversation various ways that masculinities are informed in the post-apartheid novel and demonstrated the value of examining texts from the perspective of male gender identity. The readings that emerged from these examinations show the importance of masculinity to the issues that continue to engage literary discourse and draw attention to the critical potential to be found in future investigations.

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