Apartheid Legacies and Identity Politics in Kopano Matlwa’s *Coconut*, Zoë Wicomb’s *Playing in the Light* and Jacques Pauw’s *Little Ice Cream Boy*.

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i. Acknowledgements

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ii. Abstract

An analysis of the preoccupation writers of South African fiction display after the process started by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is vital in post-apartheid South African writing. It becomes clear that a fascination with the past is not bound to any one specific racial or gender group within post-apartheid South Africa. Authors can therefore be said to continue the excavation work that the TRC started many years ago. The severe impact that the rigid classification of human beings into different groups based on race had, and continues to have, becomes evident in contemporary South African writing. The fact that white privilege always comes at a cost for those wanting to attain or maintain it cannot be overlooked and whiteness as a construct is examined.

iii. Keywords:

Kopano Matlwa, Zoë Wicomb, Jacques Pauw, TRC, whiteache, whiteness, apartheid, identity
1. Introduction

i. The TRC and Post-Apartheid Writing, a Brief Overview

South Africans in the post-apartheid phase appear to be coming to grips with the consequences of the apartheid regime of difference. After the fall of apartheid the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was set up because, as Justice at the time Minister Dullah Omar stated “a commission is a necessary exercise to enable South Africans to come to terms with their past on a morally accepted basis and to advance the cause of reconciliation” (www.justice.gov.za/trc). The process of exploring the trauma experienced by various members of South African society was therefore set in motion in order to facilitate reconciliation. It appears that some contemporary South African novels continue to exhibit a preoccupation with the past, and in particular the ways in which the past impacts the country’s present. Literature scholar Chris N van der Merwe and psychologist Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela explore the relevance of the TRC process in *Narrating our Healing Perspectives on Working Through Trauma* (2008). They acknowledge that they “feel privileged to have witnessed the working of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and to be able to draw from the insights of that important historical moment in South Africa” (2008:vi). Additionally Gododo-Madikizela and Van der Merwe argue that to “remember, to narrate trauma, even individual trauma, means to honour one’s own memory. It also honours silenced voices from the past and beckons us to a future where we will no longer be silent” (2008:33). The therapeutic value inherent in narrating past trauma is evident in this statement. In addition they acknowledge the value that literature can have in relation to experiencing and overcoming past trauma as they believe that literary “narratives can help us to confront our traumas, to bring to light what has been suppressed; it also imagines new possibilities of living meaningfully in a changed world” (2008:ix). Ewald Mengel, Michela Borzaga and Karin Orantes conducted interviews with various South African authors to explore the relationship between narrative and trauma in South African fiction in *Trauma, Memory, and Narrative in South Africa* (2010). They conclude:

Trauma, memory and narrative are closely interrelated, because one way of coming to terms with a person’s and/or a nation’s past is by transforming
traumatic memory (hot memory) into narrative memory (cool memory) through the telling of a story. (2010:vii)

It is therefore possible that literature can play a role in helping South Africans come to terms with the traumatic past lived under apartheid rule. Many South African authors have in effect continued the excavation process started by the TRC. Paul Gready analyses the state of South African literature in “Novel Truths: Literature and Truth Commissions” (2009) and finds that one “outcome of the presence of the past has been an outpouring of autobiographical and historical fiction, autobiographies and memoirs, and generically hybrid texts; and one key trigger was the TRC” (2009:11). Gready believes that the exploration of the past by novelists is particularly valuable as novels have not simply “duplicated the TRC’s dominant discourse of ‘speaking truth to reconciliation,’ but also unpacked the silences and ‘unfinished business’ of apartheid and the TRC” (2009:1). I have selected three South African narratives that in one way or another take up the task of speaking truth to reconciliation. These texts raise the question of how the racialised history of this country continues to affect social and political realities for ordinary South Africans. In the case of all three texts, there is a manifest preoccupation with race and racial identity.

ii. The Continued Preoccupation With Race in South African Life and Writing

The issue of race is central in all of the narratives examined in this dissertation. This is to be expected in a country with a history of racial oppression. In particular the issue of blackness versus whiteness is apparent as is the issue of the distinctly South African category of colouredness. In order to gauge the extent of the preoccupation with race however one needs to look at the colonial project in a wider context as well. According to American anthropologist Audrey Smedley the concept of race “developed in the minds of some Europeans as a way to rationalize the conquest and brutal treatment of Native American populations, and especially the retention and perpetuation of slavery for imported Africans” (1998:694). Smedley’s work demonstrates that the category of race is not an innocent one. According to French scholar Tzvetan Todorov “there are a great number of physical differences among human groups, but these differences cannot be superimposed; we obtain

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1 I recognise that the word race is a loaded concept but as it is unfortunately still in common usage I am dispensing with the fussiness of scare quoting around each citation of the word. The same policy will apply to the names for racial categories like coloured, black and white.

2 Translated from French to English by Loulou Mack.
completely divergent subdivisions of the human species according to whether we base our
description of the ‘races’ on analysis of their epidermis or their blood types, their genetic
heritages or their bone structures” (1986:171-172). This results in Todorov’s theory that for
“contemporary Biology ‘race’ is therefore useless” (1086:172) and leads him to exclaim that
“‘race’ itself does not exist!” (1986:171) The concept of race as we understand it is therefore
a social construction, a “racial fabrication” (2004:969) but Todorov also makes it clear that
though “biological race is an illusion…[s]ocial race … is not” (2004:972). Those in power
therefore took it upon themselves to assign certain characteristics to groups of people based
on physiological signs. Along with this came the privileging of certain groups over others;
and the naming of those groups considered to be inferior due to their racial characteristics, by
those who considered themselves to be superior due to their racial characteristics. This is
referred to as racism and what Todorov defines as the “name given to a type of behaviour
which consists in the display of contempt or aggressiveness toward other people on account
of physical differences (other than those of sex) between them and oneself” (1986:171).
However much the category of race has been invalidated the problem of racism has not been
overcome. This mode of classification played a huge role in the past of South Africa, and in
the lives of the characters explored in this dissertation. As Zimitri Erasmus argues in
Coloured by History Shaped by Place (2001) that by “insisting, simplistically, that we
should be blind to ‘race’, it makes it more difficult to name and recognize the importance of
articulating and working through antagonisms and conflict” (2001:20). It is therefore
important to acknowledge the influence of racial classification on post-apartheid South
African communities.

Various scholars have studied the concept referred to by Ruth Frankenberg as
“whiteness” (1993:1). According to Frankenberg whiteness provides a kind of perspective or
vantage point from which to view the world and the people in it. She theorises that it also
appears to be coupled with a set of behaviours that are traditionally unmarked. It therefore
seems that whiteness has traditionally been considered normative, and that it offers a stable
identity to those considered white. This form of identity has however not left individuals
unmarked. Frankenberg argues that “any system of differentiation shapes those on whom it
bestows privilege as well as those it oppresses” (1993:1). In the South African context the
study of whiteness is particularly pertinent as, in the words of Njabulo Ndebele “there is a
multiplicity of whitenesses”\(^3\) (2010:117). Ndebele states in an interview with Mary West that it has become clear to him that there are different experiences of whiteness and that “these differences have been papered over by the official whiteness of apartheid, in the same way that apartheid papered over everyone who was black” (2010:117). The focus on racial difference in the past has therefore been instrumental in ensuring that there are different experiences of whiteness in South Africa. Melissa Steyn’s 2001 study of whiteness in South Africa, “Whiteness Just Isn’t What It Used to Be”: White Identity in a Changing South Africa, demonstrates the necessity of the continued research needed, as “new studies challenge the assertion that whiteness is still invisible, and call for more nuanced analyses of whiteness” (2001:xxix). The South African policy of nonracialism has not necessarily helped in deconstructing the category of whiteness. Indeed Steyn claims that to “name race is taken to be racist” (2001:xxxi). However she believes that “if the structures of feeling that informed the old South African institutions are to be dismantled, an approach that takes cognizance of the long-term effects of colonialism and the concomitant processes of racialization is essential” (2001:xxxii). Steyn’s argument corroborates with Zimitri Erasmus’s in arguing that the effects of racial classification still need to be interrogated if the hope of reconciliation is to be achieved. Helene Strauss explores white identity in South Africa with specific reference to Antjie Krog’s A Change of Tongue. In her article entitled “From Afrikaner to African: Whiteness and the Politics of Translation in Antjie Krog’s A Change of Tongue” (2006) she explores how Krog’s text communicates the need for a change in white Afrikaner identity. Strauss states that the “process of opening white Afrikaans identity to previously suppressed and unacknowledged racial and cultural interdependencies is, of course, necessary in undoing the excesses of domination that myths about racial superiority generated in South Africa” (2006:181). Strauss therefore further emphasises the need to interrogate white identity within South Africa, in particular white Afrikaner identity, due to the country’s complex history. This could possibly be due to the extreme role Afrikaner ideology played during the apartheid years. Johan Kinghorn examines Afrikaner ideology in “Social Cosmology, Religion and Afrikaner Ethnicity” (1994) and states that the only reason necessary to argue “in favour of the social separation of races…is ‘the traditional fear among the Afrikaner of equalisation of black and white’”\(^4\)

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\(^3\) Ndebele states that the “Afrikaner experience of whiteness is not the same as the English experience of whiteness; the Portuguese South African experience of whiteness is not the same as the other two. Likewise, the South African Greek experience is unique” (2010:117).

\(^4\) Kinghorn cites F.A. van Jaarsveld’s Die Evolusie van Apartheid (Cape Town, 1979) as the original source of this quote.
Despite there being different experiences of white identity, as Ndebele argues, all white South Africans in the country enjoyed (and continue to enjoy) privileges that other racial groupings were excluded from, thereby creating a distinct difference between the various white experiences and the experience of all other racial groups in the country. The privileging of white individuals over all others resulted in what Ngugi wa Thiong'o refers to as “whiteache”. Ukwanyi ‘Dele Maxwell quotes him as describing it in the following manner in an interview with Kwadwo Osei-Nyame:

> Regarding ‘white-ache’ my view was that the African bourgeoisie as a whole suffers from white-ache as described by Fanon in his *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon sees the African bourgeoisie as having a kind of incurable wish for identification with the worst aspects of the Western bourgeoisie, or the decadent ways of the Western bourgeoisie. That is how I saw white-ache. In those terms of a class that identifies with the Western bourgeoisie but with the worst aspects of the bourgeoisie. (2011:241)

In “An Indefensible Obscenity: Fundamental Questions of ‘Be’-ing in Kopano Matlwa’s ‘Coconut’” (2010) Tlhalo Radithalo describes it as a “debilitating sickness…in which they do not wish to pass for white but to be white” (2010:21). Ndebele would advance this perspective in recognising that whiteache also affects white South Africans in a post-apartheid context. He defines it as “the longing for a world that has passed, and which is triggered by an experience of the loss of convenience and privilege associated with a disappearing white world with its familiar comfort zones” (2010:119). Thus it may be argued that the history of racial polarisation has in effect created whiteache and a longing and a desire for the life of white privilege. The three texts examined in this dissertation have this yearning for white privilege in common. I aim to explore what whiteness has come to signify to black South Africans, coloured South Africans and white South Africans respectively. I believe that the texts chosen suggest that whiteache is often linked to financial wellbeing, thereby making it a desirable state, yet that the act of procuring white privilege will always come at a cost.

**iii. “Rediscovering the Ordinary”**

Whereas much of the protest literature of the apartheid period was characterised by resistance, the question of what post-apartheid literature would look like and address has been
a subject of interest for literary critics. In 2005 Leon de Kock posed this question in the title of his article: “Does South African Literature Still Exist? Or: South African Literature is Dead, Long Live Literature in South Africa.” He suggests that the country needed a new kind of literature after the fall of apartheid that was no longer focussed on the struggle against apartheid but which instead could focus on a range of different local and worldwide issues. He acknowledges the fear of Ashraf Jamal that “‘the post-anti-apartheid scene contains the striking danger of ennui where our oneness takes on the hue of indifference, of letting it all go, so to speak, now that the big and exhausting struggles have been settled’” (2005:78). De Kock does however appear hopeful about the climate of South African writing if writers are able to explore two different directions: “going more specifically local, getting more irreverently local, without apology . . . while also feeling utterly free to ride the big transnational waves wherever they may take you” (2005:81). Jennifer Delisle in “Finding the Future in the Past: Nostalgia and Community-Building in Mhlope’s Have You Seen Zandile?” (2006) argues for the exploration of the lives of ordinary South Africans based on Njabulo S. Ndebele’s The Rediscovery of the Ordinary. Delisle states that

For Ndebele, ‘ordinary’ stories are just as political as spectacular stories. They ‘constitute the very content of the struggle, for the struggle involves people not abstractions. If it is a new society we seek to bring about in South Africa then the newness will be based on a direct concern with the way people actually live’. For Ndebele ‘the way people actually live’ does include moments of violence and oppression, but these moments are mediated by personal reflection. (Emphasis in the original, 2006:390)

Delisle’s analysis suggests that Ndebele’s call for ‘ordinary’ stories is important, especially in considering what kinds of narratives are emerging or have emerged in recent years. Ndebele’s suggestion in “The Rediscovery of the Ordinary” (1986) is that “the ordinary day-to-day lives of people” (1986:156) provide much-needed evidence of how politics inflicts violence upon ordinary citizens. It is clear from this that, despite the fact that the struggle against apartheid is now in the past, Ndebele believes that the personal and political are always inextricably linked. It may be argued that the new crop of South African writers are concerned as much with rediscovering the ordinary as with the continued affects of apartheid legislated racial categories. The three narratives under scrutiny in this study demonstrate the violence of race bequeathed to post-apartheid generations. Each is a study in the ‘irreverently local’ and uniquely South African. Kopano Matlwa’s Coconut grapples with issues of identity and belonging in a post-apartheid South Africa where technically all South Africans, irrespective of their racial background, have access to the same opportunities. The text
exposes the whiteache amongst a new generation of “coconuts”. Zoë Wicomb’s *Playing in
the Light* examines the legacy of apartheid’s rigid racial classification system especially in
terms of how it affects those who are not black enough or white enough, namely coloured.
The whiteache in this case results in an exploration of betrayal. The strong link between a
person’s race and the opportunities available to them in apartheid South Africa is explored as
well as the impact that internalised racial shaming continues to have in a post-apartheid
context. Jacques Pauw’s *Little Ice Cream Boy* focuses one of the most notorious perpetrators
of apartheid. The text explores the sense of entitlement evident in the emergence of this kind
of racist being and on how his identity begins to undergo some kind of transformation when
white privilege begins to dissipate. Strauss cautions against giving “any one text coming out
of South Africa too much airtime, particularly given the diversity of cultural perspectives and
voices echoing through the contemporary artistic landscapes” (2006:181). I have
endeavoured in this dissertation to examine narratives from different cultural backgrounds in
an attempt to more fully examine the price attached to white privilege. In effect I show how
prominent the phenomenon of whiteache is in contemporary South African narratives.

iv. Coconuts, Play-whites and Ice Cream Boys: Identity Politics

Chapter One explores the identity crises of a range of young black South Africans as depicted
in Kopano Matlwa’s *Coconut*. The basis of the identity crises experienced by the characters
appears to be the fact that they have internalised Western values and norms. The text
examines the responses of members of society from both privileged and underprivileged
communities. In this chapter I demonstrate that issues of belonging and identity plague the
black characters in the text, with particular reference to the Tlou siblings, Fikile and the
anonymous commuter who enters the narrative towards the end. The text focuses on
different responses to whiteache. The first being an experience of the new emerging upper
middle class black communities and their access to white privilege, the second being the
response of a deprived individual attempting to escape the poverty of the township.

The experience of the Tlou siblings is the first under consideration. They have access to
material wealth and opportunity, but also exhibit displacement in that they inhabit the
formerly white suburban space of Johannesburg in an uneasy manner. They are never able to
fully integrate with the other members of the “white” neighbourhood. Next, Fikile Twala’s
experience is examined. Fikile seeks to escape the township at every turn, resulting in a deep sense of displacement and identity crisis. *Coconut* therefore exposes the sense of unbelonging that young black members of South African society are likely to experience.

Chapter Two explores one of the seminal texts examining the construction of coloured identity in South Africa, Zoë Wicomb’s *Playing in the Light*. In particular the constructed binary between dark and light comes into focus in this text. In this chapter I show that whiteness in itself is an unstable category and that attaining it comes at great personal cost. The character Marion Campbell comes to embody the loss involved in assuming white identity in the life of the individual. Marion’s worldview and her opinion about herself shift once she learns that she is actually coloured and not white, as her parents led her to believe. This chapter involves a consideration of the constructed dualism between black and white and the implications of “playing in the light”, “passing for white”, ‘whiteache”. It becomes apparent in a careful reading of this novel that the history of racial segregation and oppression filters down into the ordinary experiences of “everyday South Africans” like Marion. The significance of the TRC, its failure in particular to get to the truth is a major preoccupation in *Playing in the Light*. Wicomb’s text can therefore be said to be carrying on the excavation work started by the TRC in exploring the issue of racial passing in greater depth in this work of fiction.

Chapter Three focuses on the perpetrators of apartheid. With reference to Jacques Pauw’s *Little Ice Cream Boy*, the consequences of white supremacy are explored. The book offers a fictionalised account of the life of Ferdi Barnard in the character of Gideon Goosen. In this chapter I argue that the text suggests that Afrikaner identity appears to be unstable and defensive. Additionally I suggest that the narrative indicates that a few representative Afrikaners were scapegoated in the service of all white South Africans, English- or Afrikaans-speaking. The character Gideon Goosen might be read as exhibiting the crisis of Afrikaner masculinity as exemplified in one who acts on behalf of Afrikanerdom. Goosen’s thoughts and actions, often of a violent nature, are explored with specific reference to the ideology he was exposed to from a young age as a result of the rise of Afrikaner nationalism. The text does not shy away from violent representations of what took place during apartheid. Pauw makes use of a first person narrator and therefore the reader has direct access to the reasoning of a character such as Goosen. *Little Ice Cream Boy* therefore exposes the mindset of entitlement that goes along with racial oppression. The text’s unfailing engagement with uncomfortable subject matter ensures that a sense of awareness of the crimes and misdeeds
committed under apartheid rule are acknowledged. The whiteache evidenced in this text is for a lost world of insulated privilege and the comfort of white supremacy.

In effect this dissertation examines the preoccupation with race amongst a new generation of South African writers specifically in relation to the notion of whiteache in post-apartheid South Africa. These three narratives suggest that despite attempts to rediscover the ordinary, and despite attempts at truth and reconciliation, writers have not moved beyond race and the violence of apartheid categorisations inflicted upon all South Africans. In each case the aspiration to whiteness is explicit. The damaging consequences of having internalised the desire to attain white privilege are evident, despite differing perspectives and settings. The authors can consequently be seen to continue the work of excavating the effects of the apartheid system that was initiated by the TRC. Following André Brink’s argument David Attwell and Kai Easton suggest that “in the wake of the TRC … imaginative writers should seek to go ‘beyond facts’ in order to open up the recesses of history as it has been lived and felt”. This, they say, “could facilitate the inquiry into the lesser-known regions, both historical and psychological, of the South African past” (2010:521). Matlwa, Wicomb and Pauw certainly present narratives that testify to the necessity of continued efforts to expose the devastating effects of the past on the present. Each is a contribution to the kind of truth and reconciliation that the TRC did not manage to achieve
2. Chapter One - ‘An exile of the self’: An Examination of Alienation in Kopano Matlwa’s Coconut

In Kopano Matlwa’s Coconut the continued importance of race as signifier in post-apartheid South Africa is evident. This despite the fact that race is no longer considered a valid form of biological identification. Coconut depicts a range of different possible responses of a younger generation of black South Africans living in the country at least a decade into democracy. This is therefore the response of a generation that was possibly not exposed to apartheid rule directly, yet it becomes evident through the course of the narrative that the impact of apartheid still affects their daily lives. There is a sense of displacement evident in the way that the protagonists relate to themselves and others within their social scope. The text seems to suggest that the unequal opportunities of the past resulted in a drive to attain white privilege and to be accepted into middle class and upper middle class society which Coconut exposes to be predominantly white in contemporary South Africa. The desire mentioned above appears to go further than the need to attain the same kind of lifestyle that the middle and upper classes enjoy. The text suggests that there is a tendency for some black South Africans to attempt to attain what Ruth Frankenberg refers to in The Social Construction of Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism (1993) as “whiteness” (1993:1). She defines this as “the cumulative name that [she has] given to the shape that is whiteness” (1993:1). Significantly there seems to be a difference between the way in which the female and male characters in the text experience their social surroundings. This suggests that there is a difference between the way in which men and women experience their positions in post-apartheid South Africa. The younger male characters appear to be more critical and have a greater awareness of the cost it could have to them personally, should they choose to fit into the various racial groups within their society as is evident in Tshepo, Ayanda and the anonymous commuter’s actions and opinions. It is apparent that all of the characters in the text are experiencing a form of identity crisis. However they are not all experiencing it in the same way or to the same degree. Coconut does not seem to suggest any easy answers to the issue of displacement it explores, yet it reveals the distressing consequences for a society that was segregated along racial lines.

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5 Lynda Spencer describes Ofilwe’s experience as “an exile of the self as she comes to feel alienated in both worlds” (2009:74) in “Young, Black and Female in Post-apartheid South Africa”.

6 As discussed in the Introduction with specific reference made to the arguments of Audrey Smedley and Tzvetan Todorov
Coconut was well-received as popular fiction and was awarded the European Union Literary Award. Matlwa was also awarded the Wole Soyinka prize for literature for Coconut along with Wale Okediran. Significantly she is the first author not of Nigerian descent to be awarded this prestigious prize, according to a report in the Daily Sun (2010:8). Coconut was therefore recognized for its noteworthy contribution to the world of literature. Lynda Spencer in “Young, black and female in post-apartheid South Africa” (2006) recognises the contribution Coconut makes to post-apartheid literature:

Coconut interrogates the various ways in which cultural tensions created by the historical legacies of apartheid, conjoined with American global power, produce a cultural hegemony that privileges ‘whiteness’ over ‘blackness’ and results in ‘whiteness’ becoming a new form of aspirational identity. (2009:68)

Coconut therefore investigates the way that this generation of young black South Africans relate to themselves and others as a result of the influences they have been exposed to growing up. Matlwa attempts to show how far-reaching the effects of this form of “aspirational identity” (2009:68) are by having two narrators “providing the different perspectives of two characters located on each side of the socio-economic fence while struggling to negotiate self-identity in post-apartheid South Africa” (2009:68). Zoë Wicomb’s Playing in the Light suggests that the aspiration to white privilege is not a new phenomenon. Yet the fact that new legislation post-apartheid allows for people from any racial grouping within the country to attain the same kind of privilege formerly available only to white South Africans is new. The Tlou family are now able to move into an area formerly reserved for white families yet in order to truly procure the same privilege a white family would experience in their position, they experience pressure to conform to the customs, values and standards of beauty of those around them. This manifests itself in various ways in their family life. Every Sunday the family have an English breakfast at the upmarket Silver Spoon coffee shop. They “are regulars here at Silver Spoon, but are not chummy with Miss Becky, the owner, like the other regulars are” (2007:30) indicating that they do not truly fit in at Silver Spoon quite like the other regulars do. The Tlou family therefore inhabit their new space in a rather uneasy fashion. They clearly have the financial ability to live the kind of lifestyle formerly exclusively linked to white privilege yet in order to truly have access to this world of privilege it does appear to result in ‘whiteness becoming a form of aspirational identity’ as Spencer asserts.
Njabulo S. Ndebele explains that “‘coconuts’ are those from black communities who have betrayed their roots by becoming ‘white’” (2010:119). He then comments on the fact that in Coconut “the old theme has taken on a new dimension, the ‘coconut’ does not apologise for that condition [and how in] not apologising the ‘coconut’ asserts the notion that there are not only multiple ‘whitenesses’, but also multiple “blacknesses”” (2010:119). It may be argued that Matlwa’s narrative explores the possibilities relating to identity that are available in post-apartheid South Africa. Lynda Spencer asserts that in “the South African context, the derogatory term ‘coconut’ is commonly used in popular discourse to refer to a person who is black but who speaks like ‘a white person’ . . . and who is considered to ‘act white’” (2009:67). Natasha Distiller reinforces the suggestion that the term is critical of those it is applied to and states that “the term has derogatory implications of inauthenticity, artificiality and, sometimes, shameful or shameless aspiration” (2009:212). Matlwa admits to the Daily Sun that she chose to use the term coconut deliberately because she “knew people would pick up the book quickly at bookshops” (2010:8). The power ‘coconut’ has as a signifier becomes evident in Matlwa’s awareness of what a controversial and loaded term it is in the post-apartheid South African context. The text explores the lives of two such ‘coconuts’: Fikile and Ofilwe. Fikile most overtly strives to be accepted as part of the community by the white people within which she operates. She needs to find a way to justify this to herself and attempts to create a space for herself despite the judgement of those around her. She makes a conscious decision and purposefully isolates herself from people she does not wish to be associated with as she “will not be living in this dingy township forever” so she cannot see the point of building relationships with people she has “no intention of ever

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7 Ndebele’s statement can be related to the work done on gender politics by theorists such as, Julia Kristeva in “Women’s Time” published in New Maladies of the Soul (1993), Luce Irigaray in The Sex which is not One (1977) and An Ethics of Sexual Difference (1984) and Judith Butler in Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (1990). The work of these theorists communicates that there is not only one category available that can account for gender experience.

8 This term is applied to suggest ‘inauthenticity’ as Distiller claims (2009:212) and can therefore be used to disqualify someone as not being authentically black. According to Marianne Merten of The Sunday Independent Lindiwe Mazibuko who is “the first black woman and youngest MP to be elected as the leader of the opposition in Parliament” (http://www.iol.co.za) has already been accused of being a coconut by Higher Education Minister Blade Nzimande. This implies that she is not qualified to comment on the situations her fellow black South Africans face as she is so different from them. Mazibuko has however not let this deter her stating: “I’m very determined not to allow people to make me feel ashamed of where I come from. I am proud of where I come from” (http://www.iol.co.za). Mazibuko is therefore unapologetically determined to make her mark on South African politics as a young black woman despite being accused of being a coconut. It can be argued that as she does not ‘act black’ it is easier for the DA to include her in their, predominantly white, ranks. According to Verashni Pillay for Mail & Guardian: “That she is the great black hope of a largely white party fighting for relevance in South Africa is obvious” (http://mg.co.za/article/2012-02-09:09:19/11/2012). Pillay however critiques Mazibuko and the DA for their attempt at being “post-race” when the country still needs the issues related to race to be addressed. This brings into question whether Mazibuko is better off not ‘acting black’ in her current role.
seeing again” (2007:129). Ofilwe, conversely, is initially unaware that she has internalised the belief that Western ways are superior and, as she becomes aware of this, of the “agony playing a role you would never dream of auditioning for” (2007:48) she feels increasingly displaced in her social circles and ends her friendship with one of her best friends, a white girl named Belinda. Ofilwe’s cultural displacement and consequent isolation appear to be a result of the environment she grew up in and it becomes a cause of personal sadness. Tlhalo Raditlhalo comments on Matlwa’s use of two female protagonists from vastly different backgrounds in “An indefensible obscenity: fundamental questions of ‘be’-ing in Kopano Matlwa’s ‘Coconut’” (2010) and notes that the socialisation of the two female characters “lies in an agency that sells physical beauty as an attainable commodity, and the unintended result of which is a terrible sense of alienation” (2010:9). Raditlhalo also comments on how Tshepo is the one who makes Ofilwe aware of what she had become and as Raditlhalo argues:

Given his education in the real world of downtrodden workers, Tshepo uses his knowledge to attempt to rescue his infatuated sister. It is clear that his criticism, flowing from his probing questions, allows for Ofilwe to grow as a person, as much as her experiences provide unsettling moments of anguish (2010:15).

This is significant because just as Tshepo alerts Ofilwe to the change in her, Ayanda, Fikile’s colleague, tries to make her aware that even though she can act like one of Silver Spoon’s customers they will not accept her. Fikile however chooses to remain blind to Ayanda’s comments and attempts to advance in social status by holding on to the belief that she has held since she was a child: that being white is better. Fikile even goes so far as to consider “that perhaps God made some races as superior, as an example for other races to follow” (2007:156). It is interesting to note that the female characters in the text are the ones who are most significantly impacted by the desire to be accepted by the white South Africans around them whereas the male characters are critical of this notion. This suggests that the female subjects are more susceptible to being influenced by the dominant culture surrounding them. This could perhaps be due to the fact that the male characters are more secure in their masculinity and do not feel the need to seek external sources of identity quite so readily. Wamui Mbao believes that Coconut does not simply write into the interstices. Rather, it challenges the centring of society on white people whose attitudes and values are not changing, even as new and previously barred individuals entreat entry to that society or construct their own ways of resisting their assignation to the margins by a society whose power base has not changed, nor in its ideology (2009:23).
In *Coconut* Mbao’s statement rings true as white characters do not exhibit a change in their thinking. The inability of the Tlou family to be truly accepted by others in their social circle suggests this. Additionally characters like Miss Becky at Silver Spoon who threatens Fikile with dismissal if she does not wear the correct pair of jeans despite her work ethic and Isabella, the owner of Instant Fried Chicken, who accuses Tshepo of having “only a crèche-school level education” (2007:27) where in truth he was Dux Scholar of his junior school, display mindsets influenced by racial prejudice. This implies that it is not necessary for Miss Becky and Isabella to interrogate their beliefs or the way in which they treat their staff due to their superior position as they can dismiss and appoint new staff members quite easily. It comes across that the white characters in the text feel secure in their place in South African society. However, despite their stable position within society the white characters in *Coconut* are not the protagonists. These characters rather serve as catalysts that result in thoughts or actions by the protagonists. The narrative utilises them instead of centring on them. The stability of whiteness as a category that the text exposes is not unexpected as according to Frankenberg whiteness has a number of dimensions that she identifies:

First whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a “standpoint”, a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third “whiteness” refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed (1993:1).

The fact that whiteness functions as a standpoint is communicated in *Coconut* as the white characters in the text do not suffer the need to interrogate their beliefs or relationships in the same way the black characters in the text do. The relationship between Fikile’s uncle and his boss illustrates an instance where power is abused without concern. Uncle is used as a figurehead in that his boss claims that he is one of the partners in the business to meet with BEE requirements. This is untrue yet Uncle does not betray his white boss and the boss does not appear to have any qualms about this, whereas Uncle agonises over the role he has been chosen to play. These careless actions on the part of the white characters in the text bring about crises in the lives of the black characters in *Coconut* indicating a lack of consideration on the part of the white characters in terms of how their actions will affect those around them. It is therefore clear that *Coconut* exposes the ongoing stability of white South African identity and the insidious belief that to be, not only accepted into white society, but, in a sense, to become white, in terms of appearance, speech and action, is something to be desired. The text also appears to suggest that female subjects are more susceptible to this belief, although
they are not the only ones to subscribe to it, as Ofilwe’s father and Fikile’s Uncle admire and desire to be accepted by the white South Africans surrounding them.

There are two parts to the narrative and the lives, thoughts and actions of three characters specifically are explored: the more financially privileged Tlou siblings (Ofilwe and Tshepo) and Fikile, who can be classified as underprivileged, but who is desperately trying to change this. The importance of identity and the way in which it is experienced, perhaps even created, comes across in the actions and thoughts of the protagonists. It appears that all of the characters are attempting to negotiate their place as young members of society within post-apartheid South Africa and that the narrative does not only outline the “young women’s searches for identities” (2009:213) as Distiller states but it becomes apparent that the males around them are also searching to find their identities. The Tlou siblings battle to relate to each other as well as to those around them, whether they be upper-middle class like themselves or those less fortunate. Fikile too experiences displacement as she appears to disengage with those in the same economic situation she finds herself in but instead aspires to befriend people she perceives as successful. She therefore deliberately isolates herself in some social situations but actively attempts to be accepted in others. As a young girl Fikile decides to leave school as she felt like she “was a puzzle-piece, pulled out of the puzzle and bent and now [she] could never fit back in” (2009:168). Her solution to remedy the change that took place in her thinking while she was on holiday was to disengage with those around her and she “walked out of the school gates and never went back” (2009:168). However Fikile chooses to go and work at Silver Spoon coffee shop and there she strives to be accepted in these surroundings even though it “isn’t exactly spectacular living but it is a stepping stone which allows [her] to mingle with the A-list, who will some day be friends and neighbours” (2009:176). Her school friends are not the kinds of connections she wishes to make as they will not be able to help her advance in terms of class. There is an overall impression of unease in the interactions the protagonists find themselves in respectively. It becomes clear as the narrative progresses that perceptions of what race is meant to signify play a significant role in creating this sense of unease. This importance of race is significant despite the fact that the rigid apartheid system in which people were classified according to their race had been done away with by this point.

The Tlou siblings and Fikile are clearly the main characters in the text but their responses to the world around them are informed by other characters with whom they interact. A character that has been largely overlooked by critics analysing Coconut, but that
is perhaps one of the most significant characters, is not one of the protagonists. He is an
unnamed commuter who enters the narrative towards the end of the text.\(^9\) He comes to play a
significant role as he presents an alternative view to Fikile regarding the way that black South
Africans fit into society. He articulates his concerns relating to the assimilation of Western
practices and language and offers quite a different view on black subjectivity when compared
to the other characters in \textit{Coconut}, specifically the two female protagonists. It is important to
note that he remains anonymous and thus may be representative of a larger set of concerns.
The important role of this character also comes across in that he is placed at the very end of
the narrative so that his voice is one of the last voices heard in the text. He challenges
Fikile’s beliefs, without challenging her directly, and as she never formulates a response to
his musings but escapes from the train as soon as it arrives at its destination, his thoughts and
questions are the final impression the reader is left with.

It is significant to note the fact that the protagonists in \textit{Coconut} are all young adults.
This is of interest as it suggests that they did not live under the rule of the apartheid regime
for a prolonged period. Ofilwe most probably has the fewest memories from this time in
South African history as she is still in school. Fikile and Tshepo are young adults, which
suggests that they were children when the apartheid era ended. The issues relating to identity
that these characters have to face indicate the great impact that apartheid made on South
African society. Apartheid ideology continues to exert some measure of influence upon
subsequent generations despite the new democratic legislation in the country.

\section*{2.1 Ofilwe - There is More Than One Side to Denial}

“I do not know how to fix you little black girl, so I will shut my eyes as tight as I
can.” (2007:61)

Ofilwe is the first character that the reader is introduced to in the narrative. She is part of a
privileged family which brings many advantages with it. Yet despite the privileged lifestyle
Ofilwe is able to lead, her life is not uncomplicated and money and opportunity do not save
her from a sense of isolation or brokenness as she admits to not knowing “how to fix”
(2007:61) herself. This inability to ‘fix’ herself appears to lead to denial in that she ‘will shut

\footnote{Neither Distiller, Flockemann, Hunter, Mbao, Radilhalo or Spencer examine his observations in their critical
examinations of the text.}
her eyes as tight as she can’ (2007:61) thereby cutting herself off from those around her in addition to not being able to see herself. It appears that she sometimes finds it easier not to face the problem than to keep trying to fix it. Her initial desire to ‘fix’ herself manifests itself in various ways, such as in a preoccupation with physical appearance as well as in her attempts to fit in by speaking like those around her. Regardless of all of these attempts Ofilwe does not manage to truly fit in with her white classmates, her black classmates or her family members. She sees her problem as “a parasitic disease, seizing the mind for its own usage” (2007:93) and comes to a place where “it is no longer a goal of [hers] to find answers” (2007:93), where she is “done” (2009:93) trying to find answers.

Ofilwe initially appears to be fixated on being beautiful. However, her version of beauty seems to be determined by others in her social milieu as she compares herself to those around her. Ofilwe is first introduced in church and direct insight into her thoughts brings across her preoccupation with physical beauty. She becomes bored during the service and admits to being “easily distracted by anything that is willing” (2007:1). Her distraction in this case is a little girl named Sponono. Ofilwe remembers an incident from school, while staring at Sponono, who is seated in front of her. Sponono’s hair in which an “old tattered woollen hair-band makes shapes of eight into and out of the blackness” (2007:1) reminds her of another incident related to hair when a white girl at school named Kate asked Ofilwe to braid her hair.

_I still do not know whether it was earnest, malicious, or out of some sort of contorted curiosity but Kate asked me one day, during Music, if I could plait her hair into thin plaits like the braids that adorned my head. She said my braids were pretty and that she wished she could have hair just like mine so she could be as beautiful as I was. Flabbergasted, I smiled a very broad smile, endeavouring to process the words. I immediately got to work, little hands moving swiftly, but not too swiftly, careful to make every one look exact._

_The bell rang. Kate abruptly stood up to leave, and then caught her reflection._

_But I was not finished yet!_

_First tears, then heads turning, then silence, then more tears, then shouting._

_“My hair!”_

_But I am not finished yet!_

_“What is the matter, dear Kate?”_

_But Mrs Reed, I am not finished yet!_
"My hair!" (2007:1)

The fact that Sponono’s hair reminds Ofilwe of this incident with Kate suggests that she compares the two girls’ hairstyles to one another. This could also imply that she is attempting to find her place in relation to both these girls. The fact that immediately after dwelling on this incident with Kate, Ofilwe reminisces about her experiences at Ous Beauty’s Salon reinforces this. The incident with Kate evidently impacted Ofilwe as she analyses what happened again after the fact and admits to still not being certain of Kate’s motives. The moment appears to have left an impression on her as she seems to remain mute during the altercation and does not defend herself. This is implied in the lack of inverted commas suggesting that insight into her thoughts is provided however these thoughts are never voiced and Kate is allowed the final say on the matter of her hairstyle. Ofilwe is therefore reprimanded by her teacher and referred to as “insolent” (2007:1) despite the fact that Kate was the one who asked Ofilwe to braid her hair. Ofilwe’s inability to defend herself in this instance suggests that she does not feel comfortable explaining herself to her teacher. The teacher does not interrogate the instance but simply takes Kate’s side. This instance suggests that although the education system has changed in post-apartheid South Africa and black South Africans are now allowed access to the same education as white South Africans, some difficulty could be faced in relation to cultural expression. S.M Ntuli states in “The life-world of the Black child in ex-Model ‘C’ Schools” (1998) that:

There are very controversial issues that tend to hamper the orientation of the black child in “ex – Model ‘C’ schools”, namely language and religion. Some of “ex – Model ‘C’ schools” persist to discriminate on the ground of language proficiency, and they try very hard to conceal the reality that they are discriminating on the basis of cultural differences. It is a reality that the black child is deprived with regard to his proficiency in English and Afrikaans, which are presently accepted in “ex – Model ‘C’ schools” as languages for communication and medium of instruction. (1998:10)

Ntuli addresses the difficulty and disadvantage students who battle with the two dominant languages in these former Model C schools experience. The concern is raised that students may battle to receive quality education due to not being proficient enough in these languages to understand the material being communicated. Yet the fact that these students will have to adapt to their new environment in terms of language and religion indicates that it could be

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10 Italics in the original.
difficult for them to retain their own language, religion and culture. Ntuli also speaks of the dilemma a black learner faces “with regard to the maintenance and appreciation of his cultural heritage” (1998:15). The question of what options remain available to the black learner is raised and Ntuli asks whether the black learner should “be denuded of all his cultural traits in order to be adopted or assimilated into a dominant white culture?” (1998:15) This clearly does not seem to be the ideal solution yet it appears to be what is taking place, albeit to different degrees, in the lives of the Tlou siblings. The education system can be seen to fail Ofilwe as she is not able to work towards becoming proficient in an African language but instead her life at school reinforces the superiority of English and Western perceptions of beauty.

The fact that Kate asks Ofilwe to braid her hair is significant because it suggests that Ofilwe’s appearance is accepted by Kate. It is interesting that Ofilwe is not certain of Kate’s motives and that she presently does not know whether it “was earnest, malicious, or out of some sort of contorted curiosity” (2007:1) that Kate makes the request. Yet she complies and starts to braid Kate’s hair. This encounter is noteworthy as it communicates the ability of this little girl to influence those around her. The power the little white girl’s desire has in influencing Ofilwe is evident in this moment as Ofilwe feels honoured to be asked to perform this task as she smiles “a broad smile” (2007:1) and battles to “process the words” (2007:1) of the compliment Kate gives her. The fact that Ofilwe is simply reprimanded without question is also a testament to Kate’s influence on those around her. In addition to that, it communicates that Kate’s belief about what is beautiful is considered to be significant by both herself and those around her, like their teacher. This encounter implies that Ofilwe desires to be accepted by others and that she will go some way in order to achieve this as she initially works very hard to comply with Kate’s request. Her recollection of the hair straightening process she normally undergoes indicates that she has internalized Western standards of beauty. She remembers the pain that goes along with this straightening process but she admits that she “was not bothered by the tenderness of [her] scalp that sent quivers down [her] neck as the teeth of the comb slid past it. No, [she] was just delighted to be beautiful again” (2007:4). This clearly communicates that the prize of straight hair is admired above physical discomfort or pain. Raditlhalo comments on how in Coconut the “uncritical obsession with beauty” (2010:26) is dealt with “in a subtle and telling manner” (2010:26) in the text, by focussing on the role fashion magazines play in the lives of Ofilwe and Fikile. Ofilwe stops at a newsstand to inspect the cover of “Fresh Magazine” (2007:55) and notes how a black actress from “South Africa’s oldest black soapie” (2007:55) is used to
sell the magazine. Ofilwe describes this actress as being “dressed in a Vanguard Creation” (2007:55) and the magazine outlines a lifestyle where the actress enjoys “as many equestrian weekends with her husband Tom at their farm in the north as possible” (2007:55). Hence according to Radithlalo “the life of a glamorous star is equated with a particular view of life: horses and weekend retreats” (2010:27) and Ofilwe “thus reads glamour magazines to reiterate for herself the normative lifestyle to which she aspires” (2010:27). In addition the statements this actress makes regarding her lifestyle suggest that should a young black woman desire to be successful in South African society she needs to live and endorse the kind of lifestyle that white South Africans can relate to. This magazine therefore clearly endorses the normative lifestyle that the Tlou family aspire to live. Yet more than lifestyle is being sold on the magazine cover. A certain physical appearance is also sold on this magazine cover as this actress is dressed in high fashion. Ofilwe is therefore exposed to expectations regarding her physical appearance on two levels: she has to contend with what is considered acceptable in society in terms of Western ideals of beauty, for example having straight hair, and she also has to contend with global standards of femininity as portrayed in the media. She has clearly internalised this belief as she does not appear to even consider the possibility that anything other than straight hair can be beautiful.

The belief that straight hair is superior is not exclusive to South Africa. Research has been done in other countries like the United States of America and in the Dominican Republic where there is a history of slavery, and oppression based on racial difference. Whitney Bellinger explores the phenomenon of hair straightening in “Why African American Women Try to Obtain ‘Good Hair’” (2007). According to Bellinger hair has been very significant in the American context as it was used in the 1850s by a scientist named Peter A Browne to argue that white men and African men were from different species as “African Americans have wool and not hair on their heads” (2007:64). This suggests that straight hair is associated with Western ideals of normatively or beauty. Sander L. Gilman explores the different perceptions held of black and white women in terms of their sexuality in “Black Bodies, White Bodies” (1985). He comments on how the sexuality of black individuals was seen as more provocative than that of white individuals and how naturalist and encyclopaedia author “Buffon commented on the lascivious, apelike sexual appetite of the black, introducing a commonplace of early travel literature into a ‘scientific’ context” (1985:212). Gilman also asserts that “a scale was employed to indicate the innate difference between the races: in this view of mankind, the black occupied the antithetical position to the white on the scale of humanity” (1985:212). This view indicates that a difference in physical appearance
in terms of skin colour and hair indicated a difference in how ‘humane’ a person would have been considered. Gilman also notes how according to British psychologist and physician Havelock Ellis author of *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1905) Western perceptions of beauty were used to judge people with a white individual being considered the most beautiful on the “absolute scale of beauty…which ranges from the European to the black” (1985:218). Consequently it was impossible for a black person to be considered as beautiful as a white person. The meaning of untamed hair did however change as hair later came to be significant in the Black Empowerment movement. According to Bellinger “hair was used as a resistant strategy [against] White beauty standards as women such as Angela Davis became embodiments of power and the struggle to overcome racism and challenge white supremacy” (2007:65). This again communicates the powerful meaning hair and the way that a person chooses to wear it holds in society.\(^\text{11}\) When women stop straightening their hair it can be seen as a rebellious act. This reinforces what a significant symbol hair is in this Caribbean society as well. The same is clearly true of some spheres of South African society as Ofilwe experiences this desire to have straight hair despite it causing her discomfort. Sociologist Zimitri Erasmus examines the significance of hair and why it is important in “most black cultures” (1997:12) in “‘Oe! My Hare Gaan Huistoe’: Hair Styling as Black Cultural Practice” (1997). She posits that black “hair is politicised by class and gender. It is also racialised. The vocabularies of hair in black discourses are rich, indicating both the importance of hair and its complex politics” (1997:12). It becomes evident that hair in itself has no meaning but meaning is ascribed to it, and in the case of the Tlous if they want to fit in in the upper middle class society they inhabit, straight hair appears to be the standard. Mbao finds it peculiar that Matlwa chooses to invoke the trope of hair-straightening as an attempt to escape/exceed Blackness and enter whiteness (3-4). As Kobena Mercer (99-100) and Zimitri Erasmus (“Hair Styling 14-15), argue the myth that the straightening of curly hair is an attempt by Black people to simply ape whiteness or ‘become white’ has been dispelled as illusory in nature”.

Hair straightening in itself is therefore not necessarily simply aping whiteness. Yet in the case of Ofilwe this in conjunction with her attempts to change her accent and her admiration

\(^{11}\) In a study conducted in the Dominican Republic by Casandra Badillo (2001) the significance of the way women choose to wear their hair is clear and it is evident that “hairstyle has class-based implications” (2201:36). Badillo believes hair “straightening is a sign of docility and subjection to painful acts, such as the application of lye and other chemicals. It is a ritual of humiliation, yet also a double game of rejection and reward, since those who resist such norms receive punishment and rejection” (2001:36).
of white celebrities, communicated when she hangs only posters of white South Africans in her room, suggests that whiteness has become her concept of normal. The implication is that she is not simply aping a form of whiteness but that she is not initially cognisant of the fact that she has internalised Western standards of beauty. According to sociologist Rose Weitz who conducted research on the power women’s hairstyles connoted in “Women and Their Hair: Seeking Power through Resistance and Accommodation” (2001) ideas “about attractiveness, of course, vary both regionally and by social class” (2001:672). She goes on to state that ideas “about attractive hair also vary by ethnicity and age of both viewer and wearer; Latino and African American men, for example, seem more often than white men to link long hair with attractiveness for women of all ages” (2001:672). The fact that it appears to be generally accepted that hair has to be styled and that according to Weitz there seems to be an agreement “that women should spend time, effort and money on making their hair attractive” (2001:672) indicate the importance of hair as a symbol within society. It also connotes that an individual has to conform to the beauty standards of the society she finds herself in to facilitate acceptance.

In the social milieu Ofilwe finds herself in, straight hair is equated with beauty rather than curly or untamed hair.\(^{12}\) It comes across how significantly she has been influenced by Western standards of beauty when Tshepo walks into her room and tells her to take all of the posters of white people she stuck on her wall down. She refuses to do so and Tshepo chastises her for the fact that there is “not a single face of colour on the wall” (2007:92). Ofilwe had not noticed this until her brother pointed it out and it was then that she saw in his eyes “that Tshepo saw [her] for what [she] was” (2007:93). The fact that she refers to him seeing her ‘for what she is’ conveys that his perception of her is not positive as this expression is normally used to indicate that an unfavourable truth about someone has come to light. This indicates that Tshepo does not like what he sees in this instance and the language Ofilwe uses suggests that she agrees with him. She expresses her wish to have seen herself in that way too as if she had come to the same conclusion as Tshepo earlier “maybe things would have worked out differently” (2007:93). These reflections suggest that she has not unselfconsciously absorbed Western culture practises and aspirations to whiteness but that she is experiencing an identity crisis because of the conflict within herself. Ofilwe cannot

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\(^{12}\) In a public lecture bell hooks acknowledges the complicated relationship between black women and their hair due to the meaning society ascribes to black hair. Hooks says : “That’s again when we talk about the continued devaluation of black women. If we wear our hair natural we are treated like alien species, we are more militant we are more dangerous. If we process our hair we are treated like poor little self-hating black women that can’t even understand what they are doing to themselves. And their children.”
help but reflect on Tshepo’s judgement of her admiration of the white celebrities on the posters she hangs in her room indicating the burden of guilt she carries for what she believed to be an innocent activity when she was younger and did not fully realise what this admiration suggests. Now as a teenager she carries the burden of guilt along with the awareness that she could be judged by those around her with regard to how well she absorbs Western practices, in terms of the white community, and how well she imbibes African practices by the black community.

Ofilwe’s relationships at school appear to be just as problematic, as is suggested by her estranged relationship with Belinda Johnson. After she encounters her old friend Belinda in town she remembers how Belinda tried to teach her how to change her accent and encouraged her to “learn how to speak properly” thereby implying that Ofilwe’s accent is not proper or correct (2007: 49). Ofilwe however believes that she is able to speak properly but Belinda warns her of the possibility of social ostracism if she does not speak like everyone else in her class. This suggests that Ofilwe does not believe her accent to be inferior until Belinda makes her aware that it is considered inferior. The social circle Ofilwe finds herself in therefore polices behaviour and there is an expectation that everyone who wants to be part of the circle must uphold a particular standard. Belinda makes sure that Fifi is aware of the fact that she could “be laughed at again” (2007:49) because of her accent. Belinda defines herself in opposition to Ofilwe, as the other, and the same can be said to be true for Ofilwe as she allows Belinda to teach her. It appears that both girls measure themselves against one another with Belinda being the one Ofilwe is meant to strive to be like. Oyekan Owomoyela comments on how one language can become dominant over others and that:

[i]n situations where language use determines social status, the language habitat of the dominant class becomes “standard” or “unmarked”, and any deviation from it is regarded as substandard or “marked”. Since power is associated with unmarkedness, members of subordinate groups feel pressured to breach the boundary between them and the “ingroup”, for doing so constitutes their only hope for obtaining advancement and acquiring a share in power. (1996:7)

This pressure that Ofilwe is made to feel to speak English ‘properly’ lest she be marginalized is therefore an indication of the fact that she does not belong to ‘ingroup’ but that Belinda, a white South African, does. Different accents also serve to indicate racial difference. It becomes clear that Ofilwe wishes to belong to the ‘ingroup’ as she allows herself to be taught in order to avoid being mocked by her peers. Andrew C. Billings conducted research on different dialects in the American context and found that people can be described as
“sounding Black” (2005:69) and “sounding White” (2005:69) and that this influenced the way that a person is perceived. Billings found that “sounding Black caused White participants to describe the speaker in stereotypical terms” (2005:70). This indicates the influence accent, coupled with a person’s race, has on the way they can be perceived by others. Linguist Myra M. Goldschmidt conducted a study entitled “Identifying Labels among University Students in the New South Africa: A Retrospective Study” (2003) at the Rand University in an attempt to gauge whether any change had occurred in reference to the way students identify themselves in post-apartheid South Africa. The findings suggest that “language is, indeed, very important to people in South Africa and that people may alter their language in various setting to be perceived in a certain way” (2003:213). Goldschmidt found that at this particular university “language was the most important characteristic in defining oneself” (2003:213). Although this study cannot speak for the experience of the entire country it exhibits the continued importance of language in relation to identity. Similarly language is of great importance in Ofilwe’s world in terms of identity and her inability to speak Sepedi contributes to her identity confusion as she can identify herself exclusively as an English speaking South African in terms of language. It could be potentially damaging should Ofilwe internalise the importance of speaking in an English accent that is acceptable to her white friends as an important truth in relation to her self-worth. If Ofilwe internalises this belief it could bring about rejection of certain aspects of herself.

Throughout the text her brother Tshepo is deeply critical of Ofilwe’s friends and believes that true friends “appreciate your customs, friends accept you for who you really are” (2007:43). He is critical of Ofilwe’s friends for not knowing which language she speaks and for shortening her name to Fifi and not calling her by her full name Ofilwe. He communicates these opinions to her which suggests that he is attempting to create an awareness in her of how she has come to value both these friends and western ideals. She does not initially feel this way but when she sees Belinda again she acknowledges to herself that “after a while it is agony playing a role you would never dream of auditioning for” (2007:48). Judith Butler explores the formation of a gendered identity and suggests that it is not a stable identity but that it in fact relies on the repetition of behaviours and can be seen as a kind of role an individual is taught to play.

Significantly, if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience,
including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief. (1988:520)

A constant repetition of gendered acts therefore becomes the very substance of what makes a person either male or female suggesting that a person is not born with an awareness of what behaviour is acceptable to either a male or female subject. Butler therefore suggests that society coaches individuals in how to play the role that is expected of them based on physical appearance. Similarly Ofilwe plays a role in her relationship with Brenda albeit the role she plays in relation to Brenda is related to a racial identity instead of a gendered identity. She is expected to act in a certain way in order to be accepted into this upper middle class society. There is not space for a different kind of accent if she wishes to earn the acceptance of those living in her neighbourhood. The expectations that are placed on Ofilwe are therefore not based exclusively on physical appearance but on the speech and behaviour that can be considered the norm by those around her. She admits that she never felt that she fitted in because she always had to explain her family’s ways to her friends. She presently prefers to spend time with “the only other girl of African descent in [her] grade, and the three brown kids in the younger years [even if] they treat [her] like the scum they believe they are, at least [they are all the same and] they don’t stare or question or misunderstand” (2007:49). This statement indicates that Ofilwe is not treated with respect by either her black or white classmates. Her white classmates appear to attempt to change her whereas her black classmates appear to treat her badly based on the racial shame they feel towards themselves and others. Ofilwe’s inability to completely get rid of her accent and her former friend’s expectation that she should do this drives a wedge between them. Yet racial perceptions even manage to come between those that face similar prejudices, as internalised racial shame brings about a lack of respect in their interactions with one another.

Ofilwe’s discomfort extends beyond her classmates to her familial relationships as these relationship are challenging and she also experiences some degree of isolation in these relationships. She concedes that her extended family treat her differently, but this time ironically due to the fact that she has such a good command of the English language. When she spends time with them she is not allowed to dish up for herself as she “must save all [her] strength for [her] books” (2007:54) according to her family members. She tells her cousins that one day when her schooling is over she “will come back and teach them English and they will be special too” (2007:54). This statement clearly indicates that she believes the ability to speak the English language to be of greater significance than the ability to speak Sepedi, in
keeping with what Belinda was imparting to her. It also implies that she believes her ability to speak English makes her somehow special and better than her family members, implying that Ofilwe has internalised what Belinda was attempting to impart to her: that English is superior to other languages. Her arrogance could be partly responsible for her isolation, as her family members may not be able to relate to her because of her condescending attitude. Yet the fact that she is different from the rest of her family could also be the reason for this condescension.

As Ofilwe is different, and therefore treated differently this could be a defence in order to keep her from feeling inferior to the rest of the family. Despite the fact that her ability to speak English is admired by her family members she feels left out when a friend of hers, Siphokazi, speaks of the importance of African languages. She is not able to fully follow the conversation between Tshepo and Siphokazi and admits that she became angry “at Siphokazi for shattering [her] night and at Tshepo for always having an answer for everything and at [herself]” (2007:59). Her inability to understand and converse in an African language is to her disadvantage in this instance as it results in Ofilwe feeling excluded at this time. Her night is ‘shattered’ as she realizes that she is not able to fully engage with her friends; indicating how damaging a reverence of English can be. Ofilwe becomes aware that she has betrayed a part of herself in this moment where she is not able to communicate effectively with her brother and friends. The distressing consequences of not being proficient in an African language conveyed here as an inability to communicate, is in large part responsible for the loneliness Ofilwe experiences amongst friends and family. The times that her inability to speak Sepedi bothers her most appear to be linked to a feeling of isolation or unbelonging as she regrets it when she is made to feel different from those around her. She wishes to belong somewhere but due to her particular English accent she does not belong with Belinda and the other white girls in her class and due to her inability to speak an African language she is not able to interact with her family members. Her brother is ashamed of her because he considers her to be a sell-out and he tells her that because of this she “mustn’t ever come near him when his friends are around” (2007:60) this fuels her desire to learn to speak Sepedi. However, Ofilwe battles to learn this language and feels that each “word ended in a shudder, a cringe” (2007:61). Her description of this instance indicates that her inability to speak Sepedi brings about a physical reaction in her body. The fact that she is so proud of her ability to speak the ‘TV language’ becomes ironic in the light of her desire to communicate in Sepedi. This leads her to despair. She admits to hating various parts of her
body and targets her ears in specific as she considers them to be thieves because as “soon as [she] speaks a word they play it back to [her] in an accent that is not [her] own” (2007:61). Ofilwe’s inability to converse easily with those around her, whether it be in English or Sepedi, clearly results in a sense of isolation and self-loathing, even to the extent that she dislikes her physical body. This is not altogether surprising according to Weitz as social practices and expectations “have made the body a site for power struggles and, potentially, for resistance, as individual choices about the body become laden with political meanings” (2001:668). Consequently Weitz concludes, that the body therefore becomes “an especially important site for power struggles between men and women” (2001:668). In the case of Ofilwe her body is not exclusively a site for the power struggle between men and women but it also becomes a site for the power struggle in relation to racial identity.

It is apparent that Ofilwe is a lonely character in terms of all of her relationships as she does not have friends or family members that she can truly relate to. The relationship between mother and daughter is particularly complicated. There is a rift between Ofilwe and Mrs Tlou as she is “uncomfortable being alone with Mama” (2007:50) which could be partly due to personality and partly due to the normal process of feeling alienated from one’s parents as you mature. This discomfort could however also be attributed to the fact that in her relationship with her mother the cultural conflict within herself comes across very clearly. It is in the difficulty she has in relating to her mother that Ofilwe’s shame for not fitting in with the inhabitants of their white neighbourhood becomes apparent. As she is not able to fully fit in with their white neighbours or to feel comfortable alone with her own mother it becomes clear just how isolated Ofilwe is. She is cut off from her mother because of the feelings of superiority and shame that spending time with her mother brings about. Ofilwe initially sees herself as better adjusted to the white people in their social circle, which leads to feelings of superiority over her mother. She recalls that it “has not always been like this” (2007:55) and remembers how her mother used to know all of her childhood dreams and the names she had made up for her future children. This suggests that the rift between them was due to Ofilwe taking on a culture that her mother was not able to fully understand or be part of. Ofilwe admits that she does not tell her mother about the parents’ evenings that are held at school. She rationalises this by claiming that her mother “would not understand”

13 Additional examples include when she admits to being embarrassed by her mother when her friends come to stay over. Part of her embarrassment seems to stem from her perception that her mother is not able to behave in a manner that will be acceptable to the children that she associates with at school. She is even embarrassed by the fact that her mother ran a bath for the little girls the next morning as she seems to think it is common knowledge
what is taking place at the parents evening and that she is sparing her this because she cares about her and that is why she doesn’t “want to put her through all of that” (2007:51). This suggests that Ofilwe does not trust that her mother will have the ability to interact with the other parents on the same level. Lynda Spencer argues that when Ofilwe makes this decision it is evidence that “she is effectively still being controlled by others’ use of the language: she is forced to disavow her mother and thus to deny a part of herself” (2009:70). However it may be argued that this action also appears to suggest that Ofilwe considers her command of the English language as sufficient to assign herself a position of power over her mother. By withholding this information from Mrs Tlou, Ofilwe becomes the one who controls the situation and the fact that she believes she deserves this power of control seems to be largely thanks to her superior ability to speak English. She is therefore controlled by the way that others use the language yet she has become complicit by using it to ‘control’ her mother.

Her relationship with both her parents is problematic as her parents do not appear to value the same things she does. Whereas they continue to place some value on tradition Ofilwe does not feel the same way. Ofilwe recalls traditional ceremonies she has found herself attending where she did not know what to do “feeling most inadequate amongst a group of people who all seem to know exactly what roles they play in the age-old Pedi rituals” (2007:8). It becomes also clear that even though she can be forced to attend these important ceremonies she does not feel comfortable when she is ordered to attend. Even though she is in attendance that does not make her truly part of it. She appears to feel distant from her family during these times as she does not understand the importance of what is taking place. Her confusion with regards to which cultural practices she values personally clearly creates tension in her close relationships, whether it be with her family members or that “white people only bathe at night” (2007:53). Her mother’s “broken English” (2007:53) also adds to the embarrassment she experienced in this instance. This suggests that Ofilwe believes herself to be better adapted to the culture of the white girls who came to visit her and it serves to display the rift between mother and daughter due to Ofilwe’s adaptation to the culture around her. She appears to consider herself to be of greater intelligence than her mother as she believes her mother’s behaviour means that “Mama is dumb” (2007:53) and she goes on to inform her mother of this when her friends leave.

This is further evidenced by her feelings regarding having to miss a sleepover in order to attend the funeral of an acquaintance of her parents. Mrs Tlou explains to Ofilwe that their whole family should go because these “things are of immense importance” (2007:7) and that they will also need to be supported should misfortune befall their family. Ofilwe scoffs at the importance her parents place on funerals thinking that she does “not want a bunch of strangers at [her] funeral pretending to care when all they are there for is the food” (2007:8). She clearly feels very differently to her parents about this ritual and she does not appear to see the importance or value of community. This could be as she no longer lives in an environment where the value of community would be instilled in her. Ofilwe is mainly exposed to the Western lifestyle of the gated complex the Tlous reside in and the school she attends instead. The environment that the Tlous reside in does not facilitate interaction as everyone is independent.
her friends. Ofilwe appears to live her life in a more individualistic sense rather than being integrated into a community. As Bobby Jordan of the Sunday Times comments upon reading Coconut: “Yes, whiteness may be less about skin colour and more to do with the march towards a global monoculture called individualism” (2007:17).

Ofilwe is therefore clearly a lonely character. The loneliness she experiences in her daily life can be attributed to her fractured sense of self. Ofilwe’s inability to relate to others seems to stem from the fact that she is not able to fully accept herself. Ofilwe’s self-rejection is clearly communicated in the hatred she feels for her physical body. She recalls how close she was to her brother Tshepo when they were younger and they used to play together. This is before he becomes critical of her for admiring white South Africans and wanting to be accepted by them, before he warns her that one day she “will turn back, but there too [she] will find no acceptance, for those [she] once rejected will no longer recognize the thing [she has] become” (2007:93). She is no longer able to admire her parents as a child would without being critical and her assimilation of Western culture appears to have driven a wedge between herself and her entire family. However, Tshepo’s warning appears to have been rather astute as she chooses to stop associating with her white friends. She reaches a point where she becomes highly uncomfortable having to play a role, having to learn how to speak the way her white friends would and undergoing painful processes to attain a Western ideal of beauty. However there is no-one to turn back to as she is no longer comfortable with her white friends nor is she fully comfortable with her black classmates, not to mention her family members. This all results in an acute sense of loneliness. Raditlhalo comments on how Coconut exposes that South Africa has arrived “at a situation where young South Africans suffer from a debilitating sickness of whiteache\textsuperscript{15}, in which they do not wish to ‘pass for white’ but to ‘be white’ (2010:21). Ofilwe, though initially unaware of what her admiration of Western culture indicates, becomes increasingly aware thanks to Tshepo’s comments and to her own feeling of displacement amongst both white and black South Africans. Tshepo therefore goes before her in this journey and as Raditlhalo states “Tshepo uses his knowledge to attempt to rescue his infatuated sister” (2010:33). He therefore acts as a counterpart to Ofilwe as he is much more aware of the ‘whiteache’ that surrounds him although this awareness does not indicate that Tshepo has managed to escape Western influence. Even as he attempts to rescue his sister he also attempts to rescue himself.

\textsuperscript{15} Ngugi wa Thiong’o labels the desire to become white as ‘whiteache’ in Wizard of the Crow and Raditlhalo makes use of this term in his examination of Coconut.
2.2. Tshepo – Awareness Breeds Loneliness

“I am certain they will catch me out as soon as I open my mouth.” (2007:26)

“Tshepo is not here.” (2007:32)

The largest part of the history of what takes place in Tshepo’s life is recounted by his sister Ofilwe. The reader is therefore presented with only certain of Tshepo’s opinions and experiences that Ofilwe compares herself to. He serves as the one to educate his sister as he is the older sibling and he has had more experience with how much race still serves to influence contemporary South Africa. When Tshepo works at Instant Fried Chicken he expresses his fear that the other black South Africans he works with ‘will catch him out as soon as he opens his mouth’. This fear exposes his suspicion that he will betray himself in some way in his interactions with working class black South Africans as he knows that he is different. He is acutely aware that he reeks of “KTV, IEB, MTV and ICC, although [he has] tried to mask it behind All Stars sneakers and a free Youth League election T-shirt” (2007:26). Tshepo can therefore attempt to cover up his privilege in the clothing he chooses to wear but he fears that his speech, his language will betray him. Tshepo finds the most convenient way to deal with his identity problems within his nuclear family is to disappear. Tlhalo Raditlhalo refers to the fact that Tshepo “develops a remarkable skill of vapourising himself from the family” (2010:32) as a way to deal with the conflict that arises in his family when he chooses a controversial field of study that his father does not approve of. Tshepo therefore does not fight John Tlou head-on after this but retaliates by disappearing from the family unit suggesting an avoidance of the problem. Disappearance could be his most feasible defence if he believes his father is not likely to listen to his reasoning.

Tshepo’s best efforts at attaining some kind of authentic African culture, however admirable, end in disappearance from his family bringing into question whether he achieved any part of what he set out to achieve. As Spencer states: “Matlwa skilfully includes Tshepo as a foil to Fifi, since they have both been raised in the same estranging conditions, he empathises with the cultural tensions that she experiences, but takes a different path in response to them” (2009:74). Tshepo most certainly has the ability to empathise with his sister’s situation as he faces the same expectations from their neighbours and family yet he does not share his own fears or feelings of displacement with her. Ofilwe has access to his
own fears of unbelonging at work only through reading his journal. In the speeches he makes to his sister he asks probing questions, as he did with challenging her to take down the posters of white people she admires and criticizing her friends for anglicizing her name. He therefore has the ability to empathise but he chooses to educate and as Raditlhalo argues it “is clear that his criticism flowing from his probing questions allows for Ofilwe to grow as a person” (2010:33). He chooses to keep his own struggles in relation to his fear of not being considered authentically black to himself and eventually to disappear from the Tlou family. He therefore does not overtly empathise with his sister by discussing the matter with her when she is facing her own displacement. Ofilwe appears to remember how he lives his life and what he says to her in relation to herself. She does this in an attempt to negotiate how she will set about processing her own beliefs about what impact racial perceptions will have on her life. Ofilwe recalls how her brother Tshepo opposes Christianity, how he sees it as being contrary to himself because his “skin is black” (2007:5). Ofilwe disagrees with this and terms it ‘Africanism’. This sets up what will become clear in their subsequent interactions, that Ofilwe is more comfortable assimilating the ways of the white neighbourhood and school that they find themselves living in when compared to her brother. Tshepo is far more critical of everything that he perceives as being associated with Western culture. Ofilwe later admits that she goes to church because she feels that she belongs there, that the “traditions of the church are [her] own [and that she does] not have any others” (2007:10). This implies that Ofilwe has started to assimilate the religion and the cultural practices of the environment she currently finds herself in. She is not looking to the past to find traditions that she is comfortable with, as her brother chooses to do. Ofilwe is satisfied being an Anglican because that is what she knows; she does not see it as a white religion as her brother does. This suggests that she believes that this way of life can become her own personal way of life and need not be connected solely with a Western value system. Her beliefs are therefore unlike those of Tshepo. Ofilwe has come to believe in the significance of this church. She feels that this is her own belief and becomes uncomfortable when her brother challenges her. This could be said to be an example of the effect of cultural hegemony.

Augustí Nieto-Galan explores hegemony, a term coined by Antonio Gramsci, that can be defined as “a ruling tool for any class or group, an instrument for cultural, moral, ideological leadership over subordinated groups, a prestige language, for example, that reinforced cultural influence over weaker linguistic communities” (2011:456). According to
Nieto-Galan the use of force to control a society is not sufficient to account for social stability and other factors play a role like “institutions ranging from education, religion, and family to the microstructures of everyday practices, contributed to the production of meaning and values which direct and maintain the spontaneous consent of the various strata of society” (2011:456). Tshepo is critical of Christianity as he sees it as a system of control. Ofilwe appears to solidify her opinion on the matter of attending church when she compares her beliefs to those of her brother. This suggests that Tshepo’s criticism of the importance of church serves only to cement her belief in its importance. Her need to keep these traditions signifies her deeply rooted need for acceptance and therefore outweighs her brother’s critical thinking on the matter. This Western religious practice becomes part of the distance that grows between brother and sister. According to Nieto-Galan for “Gramsci only a progressive construction of cultural counter hegemony could act as a cultural weapon against that subaltern tacit and passive consent” (2011:456). It is therefore only through awareness and “through an ambitious process of democratization” (2011: 457) that hegemony can be countered within a society. Tshepo’s awareness of the fact that the Christian church is not part of his cultural heritage appears to result in action on his part in that he no longer attends church and does so against the wishes of his family members. In an interview with Alex Smith, Matlwa admits that she “admire[s] Tshepo . . .the most because he makes an attempt to reclaim what he believes to be lost, although it is a weak attempt, it is an attempt all the same and that is much more than most people do” (www.african-writing.com). Despite this Tshepo does appear to be displaced as he appears to be constantly isolating himself from his family whilst not having found a niche in society he does want to be a part of.

It is evident that Tshepo is quite different from his sister Ofilwe in that he is critical of the social milieu he finds himself in and the role he is expected to play in it. In contrast to the way that his sister initially relates to the world around her by assimilating Western cultural practices he desperately attempts to hold on to some form of African culture. Through the course of the narrative there are occasions where Tshepo’s rejection of Western cultural practices and values is marked, for instance his desire to wear traditional African garments and to study African Literature which is explored at a later stage. He is mainly presented to the reader through the memories of his sister Ofilwe, yet there is a brief section in the narrative where Tshepo’s own memories are explored when Ofilwe reads one of his journal entries. The fact that he is mainly represented by Ofilwe communicates the influence he has had on his sister in terms of making her more aware of who she becomes.
The diary entry focuses on his experience of working at a restaurant and how he was treated as if he had no intellectual abilities. He was made to clean the floor and he becomes offended when the proprietor accuses the entire staff of having only a “crèche-school level education” (2007:27). Despite the fact that Tshepo himself “in fact graduated as Dux Scholar from [his] junior school” (2007:27) he is not able to stand up to this woman. When he starts working as a waiter, he encounters the prejudices of his white customers: they do not greet him and he can’t help but think that he will change their perceptions if he were to “quote our democratic Constitution” (2007:39) to them. Tshepo wishes to “remind them that it is now, and not then” (2007:29) in the hopes that he will change their perceptions. However, all the other staff members laugh away his commitment to social justice and tell him that it is good for him to learn the ways of the white person.

This instance clearly suggests that in certain areas of South African society, like the working world that Tshepo finds himself in, the ‘us’ and ‘them’ distinction is still very much alive. Additionally it indicates that there is a high degree of polarisation in South African society in terms of race and class. The legacy of apartheid therefore continues to live on. It is evident that certain beliefs about a person are still attached to him or her because of the colour of their skin. The construct of race and the fact that certain character traits can be attributed to a person due to their skin colour seems to be very alive in this world that Tshepo finds himself in. The fact that Tshepo is a Dux Scholar does nothing to improve his situation or standing in the eyes of his customers. It also does nothing to ingratiate him with his fellow employees. They laugh at him and perceive him as different from themselves. It appears that his naivety about the way the working world actually functions serves to entertain them. His belief that they “cannot be expected to serve such offensive people” (2007:29) indicates that he believes South African society is meant to be different in the post-apartheid phase yet the other staff members are amused as their lived experience proves this to be untrue. His diary entry confirms that he is not certain “what [he is] trying to prove, why [he] must prove it and to whom” (2007:30). This admission confirms how misplaced Tshepo feels in contemporary South African society as he experiences a need to prove himself. Tshepo remains lonely at Instant Fried Chicken. This suggests that Tshepo suffers from the same internalised shame that Ofilwe does. His inability to find a place in society indicates, not only that members of society find it hard to accept Tshepo, but also that Tshepo finds it hard to accept himself and those around him. His increasingly strange behaviour, explored below, and his difficult relationship with the sister he was once close to suggest that Tshepo’s lack of insight into his
own internal conflict relating to Western values serves to separate him even more from himself and others.

Tshepo’s need to hold onto some aspects of his traditions or culture results in arguments between himself and his parents as he wishes to study African Literature and Languages instead of his father’s choice of Agricultural Science. Mrs Tlou defends him but his father calls him “a disgrace to our name” and “a lazy little bugger” (2007:80) when he learns of Tshepo’s intended study plans. The argument that ensues between his parents when his mother attempts to stand up for him is what causes the final rift between Tshepo and his parents. It is after this that Ofilwe observes that “Tshepo slipped between the panels of wood on the floor and disappeared’ (2007:81). He consequently distances himself from his whole family including Ofilwe. Raditlhalo believes that “Tshepo is given a precociousness with which he begins to undercut the family values of John Tlou” (2010:32). It is apparent that Tshepo and John do not hold the same values evidenced by John’s reaction when he realizes that his son does not want to follow the path John chose for him. Tshepo’s career choice disappoints his father who can be considered a successful man in financial terms. John Tlou wields a kind of power over his family in that he is the provider and father figure. He can be regarded as an example of what Robert Morrell refers to as “hegemonic masculinity – the form of masculinity that is most dominant in society” (1998:607). John Tlou appears to believe that his opinion regarding his son’s life choices is more important than the opinion of his wife and that his word on the matter is the final word. John’s desire to influence the way his children live their lives also comes across in his continued belief that Ofilwe should remain friends with Belinda Johnson despite Ofilwe’s decision to distance herself from Belinda. According to Morrell this form of hegemonic masculinity does not only oppress women but in addition to

oppressing women, hegemonic masculinity silences and subordinates other masculinities, positioning these in relation to itself such that the values expressed by these other masculinities are not those that have currency or legitimacy. In turn, it presents its own version of masculinity, of how men should behave and how putative ‘real men’ do behave, as the cultural ideal. (1998:608)

Tshepo’s choices are not in line with what is expected of him as he chooses not to follow the norm thereby not behaving like a ‘real man’. His desires however come second to those of his father indicating that John will attempt to force him to fall in line with the expectation placed on him. It appears that he will likely be forced to conform to the masculine ideal upheld by his father. Tshepo’s disappearance appears to be his form of resisting his father’s
domination over his life choices. He is not able to keep voicing his opinions yet his disengagement with the family does serve to communicate that he holds different values compared to the rest of the Tlous. There had been a time when Tshepo was close to his mother and Ofilwe remembers how he had been “Mama’s Tshepi” when he had taken ballet lessons. He was very good at his ballet lessons and she remembers how he looked when he performed and how “Tshepo had everything that made Mama beautiful and the one thing that would have made her perfect: Daddy’s fair skin” (2007:66). The fact that Tshepo and Mrs Tlou were very close at an earlier stage is apparent. He also appears to be quite effeminate in Ofilwe’s description of him as he seems to be elegant and good at ballet which could serve to further alienate him from his father. Tshepo is clearly not upholding the same form of masculinity John Tlou does. Additionally Tshepo is the first member of the Tlou family who becomes critical of the need to be accepted into upper middle class white society. This results in his estrangement from them.

Tshepo, in his attempt to hold on to African culture, becomes increasingly eccentric. He starts to dress in his mother’s old clothes and wears her old Kaftan that he dyed. This instance suggests that Tshepo’s gendered identity is fluid, especially when read in conjunction with his talent at ballet and the fact that he was seen as “Mama’s Tshepi” (2007:66) communicating that he identified with his mother rather than his father. African identity becomes feminized in this instance as it is only in this feminine attire that he feels comfortable to live out his African identity. Tshepo’s chosen attire serves to suggest that it is only through this form of fantasized African identity that he feels he is able to subvert the expectations placed on him and able to live out certain aspects of his personality. The act of wearing this dyed Kaftan could again be indicative of Tshepo’s need to define himself in relation to the Other as he needs to find some way to set himself apart from those around him. This is not unexpected as according to Sunanda Pal the “tendency of the colonised to imitate the colonisers and to evaluate themselves from the colonisers’ viewpoint seems to last much after attaining freedom. The inclination to validate our thoughts and ideas with reference to Western ideology reveals a need to reassess ourselves and to reclaim our own heritage and culture” (1994:2439). Tshepo’s need to affiliate himself with a form of African identify by deliberately setting himself apart from Western culture serves to suggest that the perceived other is able to exert a powerful influence on him. This need to define the self in relation to the other appears to be true in the case of all of the characters in Coconut to some degree.
Significantly Tshepo’s participation in ballet indicates that he has not managed to escape assimilating Western culture as this is a Western form of dance he excels at.

The truth of the powerful influence Western ideology is able to hold within a society comes across here as well. This is clear as, even though Tshepo is not threatened in terms of safety or future prospects inasmuch as he is living in a post-apartheid democratic South Africa, the issues of belonging and identity he grapples with due to the past valorisation of the cultural practices of white members of society in his surrounds are clear. Ofilwe thinks that he looks ‘increasingly feminine and odd in the clashing blue, yellow and orange paints he must have used’ (2007:84). He also sits around writing poetry and ignores his mother when she calls for him. Spencer argues that while Ofilwe “aspires towards a global culture of ‘whiteness’, [Tshepo] unreservedly embraced a ‘romanticized African identity’” (2009:74). He therefore effectively serves as an example of a person who takes an oppositional stance to that of Ofilwe yet Tshepo’s acts of trying to hold on to his traditions, to his past, look slightly ridiculous. This can be ascribed to the fact that his decision to dress in indigenous attire comes across as outdated and absurd, especially in the act of cross dressing. Even though he was the one who was significant in instigating Ofilwe’s increasingly critical attitude to assimilating Western cultural practices he is unavailable to assist her in further thinking through the implications as he isolates himself. This suggests that simply holding on to the past is not enough in itself as Tshepo does not appear to be more successful at fitting into his surroundings than Ofilwe is.

Both of these unsuccessful responses communicate the tragic consequences of the trauma of unbelonging. The fact that he pointedly ignores and therefore disrespects his mother also suggests that he wishes to choose which of the cultural practices and beliefs he wants to adhere to. The clear difference between Tshepo and Ofilwe however is that Tshepo does not seem to want to fit into the white upper-middle class society surrounding him. Instead he is searching for a way to hold on to the values that have always been important to his people and he values this more than successfully integrating into the society his parents have chosen to be a part of. Tshepo and Ofilwe seem to be rather estranged from one another at the present time. It becomes clear that she is not able to understand what he is going through as she perceives him to be rather strange when she does spend time with him. Tshepo appears to be a lonesome character, in part thanks to the insights he has gained regarding cultural assimilation.
2.3. Fikile – Project Infinity: The Pursuit of Upper-middle Class Comfort


Fikile is the character who most overtly opts pursuing acceptance by white members of South African society as she perceives a link between the colour of a person’s skin and their standing in society. She is characterised by her relentless attempts to escape her current circumstances that she links to living in ‘dirt’. She does not waver in this pursuit and this results in her being a very misunderstood and lonely character. The reader is given access to Fikile’s thought life as she goes about her daily tasks. As she makes her way to work, and even while she is at work, she dwells on memories of her personal past. She appears to make use of these memories in an attempt to negotiate her own identity. It becomes evident that she has decided to affiliate herself with Western cultural beliefs and norms of beauty in an attempt to change her circumstances. Her personal memories of the past are not positive as they are mostly related to being sexually abused by her uncle who was depressed due to his job situation. She also recalls with anger the lack of material possessions and opportunities she experienced in general while growing up.

It is therefore clear that there was no support system for Fikile growing up without parental support and at the mercy of an abusive uncle. She only becomes aware of the abuse after a presentation at school which results in her taking to sleeping on the floor so as to avoid her uncle’s abuse. Fikile is orphaned at a young age which results in her uncle becoming her primary care-giver with her grandmother occasionally offering support during holidays. This young girl is therefore left at the mercy of her uncle and is initially unaware that the way he chooses to have her comfort him after a bad day at work is abusive. This is a slight on both the education system and the community at large as this abuse went on for quite some time before Fikile was made aware of the fact that she is actually being abused. Her uncle’s situation in life has therefore had direct bearing on Fikile’s situation in life because as he is not able to advance in his company he takes this out on her in the form of sexual abuse. This in conjunction with the fact that their living conditions are such that she is not able to have her own room in the house serves to motivate Fikile to pursue a different way of living. As Michael Ryan states ethnic “difference persists most palpably as economic difference, since race was often connected in the past to the economic exploitation of one group by another” (1999:179). The strong link between a person’s perceived racial identity and their economic situation can therefore not be ignored.
This link is further evidenced by Fikile’s knowledge of her uncle’s privileged childhood spent with a white family. She “would page through photo albums of Uncle growing up at the Kinsleys” (2007:123) during her holidays and spend hours staring at these photographs of her uncle’s childhood birthday parties. These were stereotypical childhood party images that any privileged member of South African society would have been afforded the opportunity to enjoy. Fikile describes the images in detail and her mention of “Fizzers and Cheese Curls and Smarties and little round colourful chewing gums and paper cups filled with Coke and Fanta” (2007:123) do indeed fit the stereotype of the kind of children’s party a financially secure family would organize. The colourfulness and abundance of her uncle’s childhood surrounded by white children serves as a stark contrast to Fikile’s own childhood where she “never had a birthday party in [her] life” (2007:123). These nostalgic images from Uncle’s past serve to enhance the difference that opportunity and finance could make to a person’s life. Fikile’s uncle only has these memories due to the fact that a white family took him in. Fikile would therefore have come to associate being white with having access to money and internalised this belief from a young age. The financial difficulty that Fikile’s family found themselves in would be largely due to lack of opportunity. This was due to the way in which South Africa was divided along racial lines during apartheid. Black South Africans were not afforded the opportunities white South Africans were and Fikile is still suffering the consequences of this in post-apartheid South Africa. This is why Fikile is so angry at her uncle for wasting his opportunity with the Kinsleys as a child. This nostalgic image of her uncle’s childhood not only serves as a contrast to her own childhood but Fikile also appears to use this as motivation to change her current circumstances.

Fikile does not appear to be very close to her family members. This is not surprising due to the sexual abuse she was made to suffer by her uncle when she was younger. Fikile does however still live with her uncle as an adult but maintains a careful distance from him and does not allow him to abuse her anymore. This suggests that even though she is a powerful character that is able to protect herself, to some extent at least, she does not have the independence money could afford her as she is not able to move out of Uncle’s house. She also clearly considers herself to be better than her uncle and lays the blame of his failure at university wholly on him. She believes that “Uncle was an idiot and got what idiots got” (2007:127). She sees herself as being different from the rest of her family. She also thinks radically differently about the world than her Gogo does. She grew up praying with her Gogo during holidays but now she ascribes to a belief system that is radically different from
her Gogo’s, something her Gogo would not even have considered ‘that perhaps God made some races superior, as an example for other races to follow’ (2007:157). This appears to be Fikile’s way of coming to terms with her situation in life, she does not spend time attempting to pray her way out of the situation she is in, but instead attempts to change the situation by changing herself.

The financial difficulties her family faced and continue to face due to apartheid influence her perception of her neighbours and the area she lives in. There is no mention of her childhood friends which suggests that she was not part of a tight-knit community. It could partly be due to the fact that from a very young age she decided that she wanted to be white and distanced herself from the other members of her community. This dream of being white took root in her mind partly because of the fashion magazines she started reading during her school holidays. She preferred spending her time indoors with her Gogo rather than playing outside with the other children. She recalls the list of magazines she read while she spent her holidays at her Gogo’s house and admits that she “lived in those magazines, and the more [she] read, the more assured [she] was that the life in pages was the one [she] was born to live” (2007:167). Her Gogo encouraged her to go and play outside with the other children in the neighbourhood but Fikile refused to do so wanting to stay indoors because it’s “hot outside and [her] skin will go dark” (2007:131).

Later in her life she takes this one step further when she transforms herself from “the naïve orphan child living in a one-bedroom house with her incompetent Uncle in another family’s back-yard in yet another decrepit township to the charming young waitress with pretty green eyes and soft, blow-in-the-wind, caramel-blond hair . . . working at the classiest coffee shop this side of the equator” (2007:117). The fact that she desires to change her eye colour and actually does so, referring to her contact lenses as “green gems” (2007:117), is reminiscent of Toni Morrison’s character, from *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola Breedlove. There are other similar elements between the lives of Fikile and Pecola as Pecola was also sexually abused by a family member. In her case it was her father and the abuse resulted in pregnancy. Despite her horrible circumstances Pecola idealistically kept holding on to her dream of having blue eyes. Fikile, similarly is abused by her uncle yet uses her desire to be accepted into white society and to be considered beautiful by their standards as the dream that keeps her motivated in her daily life. Morrison explores this desire to be beautiful, according to Western standards and argues that implicit “in her [Pecola’s] desire was racial self-loathing” (1970:167). The same can be said for Fikile who is unable to see the self-loathing
implicit in her actions but instead chooses to focus on fulfilling her future dream of “Project Infinity” (2007:119). She possibly even sees her actions as motivated by self-love as she does this in part for economic advancement. She could therefore perceive it as a way of taking care of herself. Pecola’s desire to have blue eyes comes across as peculiar compared with the other problems she faces as the desire for blue eyes does not compare with the problem of being impregnated by your own father. Yet in Pecola’s mind eye colour is of paramount importance. This serves to emphasise what a powerful signifier of beauty blue eyes are to Pecola. Morrison explores how “something as grotesque as the demonization of an entire race could take root inside the most delicate member of society: a child; the most vulnerable member; a female” (1970:168). In this statement Morrison suggests that being female puts an individual in a more vulnerable position in terms of identity in society. Fikile is no less pitiable in that she strives to be considered beautiful based on a Western perception of beauty, she does seem more powerful than Pecola in that she is no longer a child, but Fikile comes to embody the tragedy of an adult woman who rejects herself based on these standards. She is the child who desired to be white but is now grown up. The fact that she remains unaware of the self-rejection implicit in her pursuit of what she considers to be beautiful further serves to emphasise how tragic her adherence to Western perceptions of beauty is.

Her fascination with fashion magazines that contributed to her desire to be white therefore robs her of childhood friendships. Fikile recalls being asked at school what she wants to be when she grows up and answering that her greatest desire is to be white. She is ridiculed for this and told that “she’s going to be as black as dirt forever” (2007:135). She is therefore not encouraged to change her circumstances by those around her, this suggests that she is misunderstood by her community and also failed by them as she is simply mocked but there are no alternatives suggested to her. She is not encouraged to see her black skin in a positive light but the derisive statement made to her, in fact reinforces her belief that being black somehow equates a person with dirt. The ‘advice’ given to her in this instance could also be attributed to the fact that by stating that she wishes to be white she communicates a rejection of her black skin, and by implication their black skins too. Their response can therefore be seen in a defensive light as well. However the fact remains that this statement serves to further alienate Fikile from the rest of the community and this slight by the members of her community does not serve to deter her but if anything it serves to strengthen her resolve. As she is not presented with an alternative to her belief that light skin, and all
that she associates with it, is superior she carries on pursuing those things associated with whiteness that she believes will bring her a better life. Spencer claims that what

Fiks’s story suggests is that, for the majority of black people, especially those living in appalling conditions in the townships and rural areas, the demise of apartheid has not translated beyond political freedom: for them, it may be regarded as a failed revolution. (2009:69)

However, the difference between what Fikile has to face and what those in generations before her had to face is that she has “the opportunity to remake herself” (2009:70) which was not available to them. This brings about what she refers to as Project Infinity. Despite the potential for change that exists, however this is ironic because “as shown by the novel, this is impossible in a post-apartheid era” (2009:70). This communicates how cruel the position that Fikile finds herself in actually is, as she theoretically has access to many options and she dreams of a potentially different future but for her to actually realize her dreams from the position she is in seems virtually impossible.

Fikile chooses to share a fictionalized account of her past with the people she encounters during her work day instead of being herself. She elects to introduce herself to her customers as Fiks instead “because many find it too difficult to pronounce” (2007:146) her given name. She goes on to recount an invented past where she “lived in England for a while [and] Mummy and Daddy still lecture there” (2007:146). She sets herself apart from other black South Africans as she claims that she “never could relate to other black South Africans” (2007:146) and she goes on to complain about the crime and corruption in South Africa but claims to have chosen to live in the country as it is “home” (2007:146). Fikile therefore does not share any true account of her past with those around her that she wishes to be accepted by. She clearly would have preferred to have had her uncle’s childhood and romanticises his childhood instead of her own. She decides that this invented version of the past is not “all lies” (2007:146) as she has “never been able to relate to other blacks, that is the honest to God truth” (2007:146). She does not seem to have qualms about the fact that she feels that she has to invent a different past in order to stand a chance of being accepted by the patrons of Silver Spoon. Her colleague Ayanda attempts to point this out to her but she is unable to see it. Ayanda persists in calling her Fikile to her great chagrin and reminds Fikile that the patrons of Silver Spoon are not her friends and that they would not recognize her if she were to walk past them on the street. Fikile becomes very annoyed with him during this conversation and insists that she is not trying to make friends, but only to do her job. The
irony in this is evident as it is clear to the reader and to the other characters within the text that Fikile’s motivation for working at Silver Spoon is the desire to form valuable associations.

A lot of tension exists between Ayanda and Fikile due to their different beliefs about the place of black South Africans in post-apartheid society. Ayanda’s beliefs contrast with Fikile’s and this comes across in interactions between the two of them as well as in their dealings with the others surrounding them. Fikile is deeply critical of Ayanda’s political beliefs that he was sharing with the kitchen staff. Fikile sees it as Ayanda “gone barking mad, talking all sorts of revolution shit, scaring the poor kitchen staff” (2007:152) when he had become upset about a racist comment one of the patrons had made. Fikile does not see the comment as racist but falls over herself in order to help the woman and even though she recognizes that this particular customer was “a little demanding at first” (2007:151). Fikile justifies her judgement of Ayanda because of the fact that Ayanda’s parents bought him a loft in Morningside and that he has many white friends and went to a white school, thereby separating him from the plight of the rest of the people he was upset about. The fact that Miss Becky believes Ayanda’s excuse of a taxi strike when Fikile knows it to be a lie and that she later admits that Ayanda is her favourite because he works hard, frustrates Fikile. It also serves to highlight the fact that Ayanda manages to be accepted by Miss Becky much more easily than Fiks does. Miss Becky accepts him despite his earlier rant to the kitchen staff about the inequality in the country and the privileges that white people have taken for themselves. This could suggest that Miss Becky is more comfortable with Ayanda due to the fact that he is not trying to cross over into her world in the same way Fikile does. Miss Becky could therefore find it easier to like him as he could be perceived as being better at playing the role Miss Becky believes his race requires of him, whereas Fikile refuses to do so by anglicising her name and lying about her past. It is ironic that Miss Becky is more accepting of him than of Fikile who is making every effort to fit in. Fikile goes to steal a pair of black jeans from a shop when Miss Becky informs her that she cannot continue working at Silver Spoon if she does not dress in the required manner, even despite Fikile’s work ethic. The fact that not everybody appreciates Fikile’s efforts to fit in is further highlighted by Ofilwe’s critical take on Fikile’s interaction with the older male patron Paul, as well as by the feelings of the fellow commuters on her journey to work (this will be explored at a later stage).
Fikile’s displacement becomes particularly evident on her commute to work. It is in this in-between space, where she travels from the home that she wishes to escape from to the work where she wishes to be accepted, that she encounters many other commuters. It becomes clear that she wishes to place distance between herself and the other people who are using this mode of transport to travel between similar geographical locations. While she rides by train and taxi to work she chooses to be on her own thinking of her fellow passengers as “black people” (2007:134) thereby clearly setting herself apart from them and not classifying herself as a black person. Fikile clearly chooses to be isolated on this journey as she recalls how one of the Wimpy waitresses tried to befriend her until she “put her straight” (2007:130). The girl then warns her that “some day the men would grow fed up with [her] samaaks-ness and [she] would be made to regret it” (2007:130). Fikile does not see this as a great loss as she does not want to live in the township and build relationships with people she does not intend to see again. Her internalization of the belief that she does not have anything in common with her fellow passengers on the journey to work stems from the belief that she is not one of them because they “are poor and black and [she] is rich and brown” (2007:140). This belief serves to isolate her completely. It is also symbolic that it is on her commute to work that her beliefs are challenged most often and this suggests that Fikile is in transition in more ways than one.

Fikile associates with a rich white customer, Paul, who she believes may very well be her way into the life she really wants to live. The fact that this is unlikely becomes clear in that Paul’s friends would not be willing to accept her into their circle. They tease Paul because of his obvious attraction to her and refer to it as “Jungle fever” (2007:175). Paul’s only defence is to say that she must ignore them and to offer her double, even triple, of what she is making at Silver Spoon. This communicates that Paul does not see Fikile as his equal but as someone that he can purchase. Ofilwe’s take on Fikile’s friendly interaction with Paul communicates that her actions are not only judged by Paul’s white friends but can be judged by black South Africans as well. Ofilwe is disgusted by Fikile’s attention to Paul who she refers to as an “Oupa” (2007:22) and she wonders is “a lack of melanin her only criterion?” (2007:22). Fikile’s interest in, and potential relationship with, Paul is therefore frowned upon by his white friends and by one of the Tlous - one of the few black families who are patrons of Silver Spoon.

Fikile’s later encounter with Sky, another patron of Silver Spoon, reinforces the fact that she is judged based on her skin colour. This, despite her attempts to control the way in
which people perceive her, and in doing so, her attempt to affiliate herself with another racial group. Sky expresses interest in Fikile and invites her to have a drink with him sometime but one of his friends, much like Paul’s friends, makes a racist remark and complains that he did not “come here to watch [Sky] run after every black chick that walks past” (2007:184). This suggests that a relationship with Sky would be fraught with difficulties due to his friend’s racist perceptions. Additionally it also suggests that his friend does not accept that Sky could be interested in Fikile for any other reason than the colour of her skin. Fikile is therefore never able to escape what her dark skin signifies to others. Even though she sees herself as different from all the other “black people” (2007:134) she distances herself from so willingly, the rest of the world does not perceive her in the same way. Fikile therefore does not fit in with people who have had a similar upbringing in terms of language and schooling or those who face a similar living and economic situation as herself, which becomes evident in her relationship with her fellow commuters. Yet she also does not fit in with the group she is trying so desperately to be a part of. Fikile’s world is determined by race as she makes her decisions based on race and attempts to restrict her actions and associations to those that will help her quest to be accepted by white South Africans. In order to do this she avoids acting ‘black’ at all costs because, as Raditlhalo states, Coconut shows up how to “‘act black’ in contemporary South Africa is a great mistake” (2010:18).

The desire to be white was built into Fikile from a young age by her exposure to white privilege because of elements like Uncle’s childhood photographs of privileged parties amongst white children and the magazines she read growing up. However the experiences of those around her could further strengthen her perceptions. Uncle’s experiences at work also serve to further strengthen her resolve, as he is sometimes called on to act the part of the fake black CEO of Lentso Communications in order to ‘prove’ that they are complying with BEE requirements. He is assigned this role thanks to his command of the English language. Uncle comes home weeping after these encounters with just “another radio and a pat on the back” (2007:107) to show for his effort. This infuriates Fikile as she believes that he should be grateful for “such an opportunity” (2007:109) and she sees it as his ‘second shot at the good life’ (2007:109) that he does not manage to exploit fully. As Distiller notes it “is not Uncle’s aspiration that disgusts Fikile [but it] is his failed aspiration” (2009:215). It is also significant, as Distiller notes that Uncle’s English indicates “his ability to perform a proficiency that does not in fact result in anything” (2009:214). This serves to suggest that though language proficiency does afford some extra chances in life it is not enough to truly change a person’s circumstances. This casts a different light on the attempts both Fikile and
Ofilwe make to be skilled at speaking English. Will their ability to speak the English language to the admiration of those around them really change their circumstances? Or is there more to changing one’s circumstances than being well-spoken? Uncle’s story seems to suggest that more is required from an English speaker to affect change. Fikile, in contrast to her Uncle, does attempt to change her circumstances by endeavouring to integrate fully into upper middle class white society and in so doing fulfil her childhood ambition that she admitted to her teacher Zola. As examined earlier she does this in many ways: she Anglicizes her name, she stays out of the sun in order to keep her skin as light as possible, she practises her English accent, she creates a fictional past where she has ties to England and she attempts to form romantic relationships with one of the wealthy white patrons of Silver Spoon. This suggests her belief that she needs to perform a role to be accepted into the society she wishes to be part of. This is not a dilemma that the white characters Miss Becky, Sky or Paul would be likely to face. These characters all share a space with Fikile yet it is clear that they are accepted by the others they spend their time with. As Mbao asserts, they are “white people whose attitudes and values are not changing” (Emphasis in the original, 2009:23) which suggests that society does not require them to change. They are comfortable and accepted in the space they inhabit. They are accepted by those who are of the same race and admired by Fikile as she wishes to become one of them. As Monica McDermott and Frank L. Samson state: “sociologists of race and ethnicity have rightfully criticized the almost exclusive focus on non-whites in studies of racial identity, implying that whites have no racial identity but are instead treated as the base group to which others are compared” (2005:245). McDermott and Samson posit that there is a deeply embedded belief that white people are the benchmark group that other cultures should compare themselves to. McDermott and Samson go on to say, after further examination that:

[i]instead, whiteness is normative (Hyde 1995), an unexamined default racial category. Although many nonwhites, especially African Americans, are confronted with their race on a daily basis (Feagin & Sikes 1994), many whites do not think of themselves as really having a race at all. In this respect, white is an unmarked identity, such as heterosexual or middle-aged. (Brekhus 1998) (2005:248)

Fikile’s desire to conform to what she believes the white South Africans around her will find acceptable communicates that she perceives them and their situation in life to be superior to her own. This could be partly because it has been linked to economic well-being in her world as she has been made aware of the privilege that being white could afford. As Spencer states
“Fiks begins to associate ‘whiteness’ with material success and ‘blackness’ with inferiority” (2009:76).

It is clear that Fikile is not truly accepted anywhere; not at her home, her workplace or on the commute between these two vastly different spaces she inhabits. She appears to be caught in an in-between space somewhere between being white and being black and there does not seem to be place for anyone else here. Ofilwe, who suffers from a similar condition, though it manifests differently, is not even able to relate to Fikile. She has also assimilated Western ideals and values yet she is not able to see similarities between herself and Fikile but instead judges her from afar. It becomes clear that Fikile is trying to negotiate a position for herself in post-apartheid South Africa that she is comfortable in. She does this by vigorously pursuing acceptance from the white South Africans she has surrounded herself with despite the cost this has to her personally as her beliefs do not allow for her to relate to those in a similar position to herself.

2.4. Anonymous Commuter – A Voice in Transit

“I couldn’t shake the feeling that they were only happy because they didn’t know.” (2007:188)

The final character that is introduced in Coconut is a commuter that Fikile encounters both on her way to work and on her way home. This character serves as a sharp contrast to Fikile, and in fact to all of the other characters described in detail in the text. In the morning on the way to work he already makes his position clear regarding people “who are always wishing to be something they ain’t never gonna be” (2007:133) by laughing when he sums her up in this manner. Fikile manages to put him in his place by, in turn, also making assumptions about him because of his expensive briefcase that bears the name Mr K.J. Fishwick and accuses him of being a thief. In so doing she manages to end the conversation as she was attempting to do. The presence of the very same character on her journey home from work is very significant. It suggests that Fikile is not able to escape the truth of her situation. It also suggests that there is the potential for change to take place in a space of transition. This was a very stressful day in Fikile’s life as Miss Becky asked her to leave work, she was faced with Paul’s romantic attention, and his friends’ judgement of that, as well as Sky’s attention, and his friend’s judgement of it. The fact that Fikile has not managed to fit into the social circle
that she has been desperately trying to fit into has become particularly clear by the end of this
day, creating a very good platform from which to question her devotion to “Project Infinity”
(2007:119). The commuter is very likeable in contrast with the people she left behind at
Silver Spoon and Fikile finds herself drawn to him as he is very nice to her despite her earlier
behaviour. She observes that he “is a very handsome man, handsome and kind” (2007:187)
and finds herself drawn into conversation with him. Fikile comes to regret this decision later
as he laments the fact that his daughter refuses to speak her native language of Xhosa because
of “the influence of that school” (2007:188). This could strike a chord with Fikile as she has
spent her energy on perfecting her English accent and getting rid of all traces of her original
accent. He is, in contrast to her, very saddened by the fact that when he went to pick up his
daughter from school he had to listen to “all those little black faces yelping away in English,
unaware that they have a beautiful language at home that they will one day long for”
(2007:189). He also notes the enthusiasm with which the children relinquish their home
language and how well they seem to fit in with their fellow white scholars. He is however not
certain whether the happiness that the children are experiencing now at their togetherness is
worth them losing their heritage. This echoes what Tshepo was attempting to bring across to
Ofilwe earlier in the text in relation to her inability to speak Sepedi. This clearly suggests
that the sense of displacement that cultural abandonment as well as cultural assimilation
brings about, and that this commuter is worried about, is a reality. The character is portrayed
in an appealing manner due to his laughter, his friendliness in the face of Fikile’s
unfriendliness and the way in which he does not discuss his concerns in an accusing or
defensive manner but simply seems to be wondering aloud about them. He remains an
anonymous character that becomes the voice that challenges Fikile in the transitory space she
finds herself in. Fikile’s situation also proves his concern to be valid as she is clearly
misunderstood by her fellow commuters and by her family and she has no friends in her
neighbourhood, or at work, even though she desperately tries to fit in at work. This again
serves to add validity to the commuter’s concerns in relation to individuals who relinquish
their culture in order to fit in.

The commuter is the only character to describe the past of Africa, and not his own
individual or personal past. His musings therefore contrast with those of the other characters
in this respect. He describes that which Africans have lost, in nostalgic terms and refers to
the loss of “the red soil, the mud huts and the glistening stone beads that they once loved”
(2007:190). Even though he only enters the text for a short period of time, his presence is
very powerful. He serves to highlight the fact that Fikile is not truly comfortable assuming a white identity. He also appears to be most concerned about his daughter and others like her, the future generation, who could forget their own language due to being required to fit into white society. His take on the loss his daughter and many others are experiencing could become the opinion that is most easily ingested as he is so likeable and inoffensive. Fikile’s need to run away from him and his opinions at the end of the text again highlights the fact that she cannot be fully comfortable with herself or her belief system as she is not able to face him and present her counter-argument in a rational manner.

The information communicated about the commuter suggests that he is an all-round likeable character, not only in relation to Fikile, but also to those in his social circle. The briefcase that Fikile had accused him of stealing was not a stolen item but in fact a gift from his boss. It is clear that Fikile admires this briefcase as it is a quality item. The commuter’s boss gave him the briefcase and he remembers how everybody “at the office made such a fuss about the whole thing, you’d think he’d bought me a house or something” (2007:186). This briefcase therefore serves as a symbol. The monetary value attached to this briefcase lends it a certain prestige, this is evident as Fikile cannot help but admire it and make assumptions about it. The briefcase can therefore be linked both to approval as well as to economic wellbeing. This suggests that the position of the boss is something to be strived for. In this instance being accepted by white South Africans is again linked to the idea that this could hold economic implications and lead to financial well-being. He himself sees the briefcase “to be such a nuisance” (2007:186) and does not understand why this was made into such a special event. Fikile attempts to explain to him that the fuss was justified as this is a very expensive item, yet this man is not moved by the revelation of the briefcase’s monetary value suggesting that money is not of foremost importance to him. It is interesting that he is accepted and even well-liked by those at work when he does not appear to attempt to understand why things are considered important or special by them. This echoes what Fikile experienced earlier that day where Miss Becky chose to believe Ayanda’s lies over her truth and where it became clear that he was her favourite and Fikile was not. Again, this could suggest that this commuter manages to be accepted in his work environment precisely because he does not try to be white but chooses to hold on to his own culture and language instead.

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2.5. Conclusion

It is clear that all of the characters in *Coconut* are attempting to negotiate a space for themselves in post-apartheid South Africa. This chapter has analysed how the young black characters in *Coconut* have gone about this with specific reference to the young black characters have handled this. It is evident that the politics of identity are directly related to the history of the country and the significance of race in the past. Lynda Spencer is right to suggest that by” having two narrators the author succeeds in providing the different perspectives of two characters located on each side of the socio-economic fence while struggling to negotiate self-identity in post-apartheid South Africa” (2009:68). In doing this Matlwa not only illustrates how far-reaching the influence of Western society is but also how lonely the condition is, as sadly these two characters do not express tolerance for one another when their lives intersect.

It appears that the female characters, in particular, battle more with the desire to be accepted by white members of South African society and as Raditlhalo states these “girls, rich and poor, separate and (un?)equal, are stuck in an interregnum not of their choosing or making” (2010:35). Even though these girls do not believe that they have much in common they do have in common this desire to be considered beautiful and accepted according standards of white South Africa in common. As Natasha Distiller asks when examining what she refers to as “coconut logic”: “is there a kind of artificiality, an inauthenticity, a hollowness at the core of such a display, which is activated because of the ongoing valency of a pernicious but, in real terms, ongoing binary?” (2009:212) This seems to suggest that this artificiality brought on by striving to be accepted by white members of South African society results in emptiness and cannot be truly satisfying and it can be seen as a hollow performance. Matlwa’s project exposes how the identity crises of young South African characters leave them disconnected from others. This indicates how far-reaching the influence of the apartheid system is and that the act of allowing for equal opportunities has not reversed the harm that was done. This comes across in Belinda’s attempt to coach Ofilwe into speaking unaccented English. It also comes across in Miss Becky’s strict dress code at Silver Spoon. The great pains both Ofilwe and Fikile go to in order to have straight hair, again suggests that they need to look a certain way in order to be perceived as beautiful. That they have to conceal aspects of their physiology is a tragedy. *Coconut* demonstrates the devastating price of isolation brought about by aspiring to whiteness. In the following
chapter the price of this aspiration will be examined in relation to coloured identity and Wicomb’s exploration of “playing in the light”.
3. Chapter Two – Bargaining with History: The Construction of Coloured Identity in Zoë Wicomb’s Playing in the Light

In Zoë Wicomb’s Playing in the Light issues of racial categorization, identity and betrayal are addressed. She examines the occurrence of ‘playing white’ by exploring the narrative of a family who managed to be re-classified from coloured to white in apartheid South Africa. In doing so she manages to question the stability of ‘whiteness’ as a category by exposing how this family managed to become white in the eyes of the law and the community they were a part of. Wicomb examines the way in which “the racist complicity of an older generation is addressed from the point of view of their children” (2009:149) which bears some similarity to Matlwa’s project in Coconut. In addition to that, similarly to Matlwa, Wicomb also explores the price paid to attain white privilege. Miki Flockemann acknowledges that it “is useful to compare Wicomb’s writerly explorations of identity with other recent . . . texts on being young, black and female in South Africa such as Kopano Matlwa’s Coconut” (2010:21). This suggests that Wicomb’s work was seminal and functions as a standard from which other authors are subsequently able to depart in their exploration of South African identity.

Playing in the Light focuses on the Campbell family that set out to be re-classified as white during the apartheid years due to the opportunities, specifically economic opportunities, such classification would afford them. As political scientist Thiven Reddy argues in “The politics of Naming: The constitution of Coloured Subjects in South Africa” (2001) racially segregated apartheid society resulted in a person’s racial identity being the most significant aspect about them. This means that all “other identities were subordinate to the racial/ethnic political categorization of the person” (2001:77). This “racial identity determined the ‘lifeworld’ of the Apartheid subject” (2001:77). It is therefore not surprising that the Campbells would wish to be classified as white instead of coloured under the former government as this would change their ‘lifeworld’ significantly in terms of opportunity. Wicomb herself writes for the Vrye Weekblad in 1992 that despite the fact that the category of race is considered obsolete “race does acquire meaning through signification or the process of representation, meanings which are tailored according to ideological needs” (1992:33). A person’s race therefore comes to communicate something about their identity due to the meanings ascribed to race by those in power. John and Helen Campbell succeed in being reclassified yet it comes at a great cost to them personally in that they have to dissociate from their coloured friends and family members in order to carry out their deception. John and
Helen make this sacrifice in order to attain a place of privilege in South African society; being classified as white would not only afford them financial prospects but it would also give them a voice in apartheid society. Rahul Gairola studies the various possible sources that could provide personal agency in “Burning with Shame: Desire and South Asian Patriarchy, from Gayatri Spivak’s ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ to Deepa Mehta’s ‘Fire’” (2002). Gairola argues that “disenfranchised persons may exchange one facet of identity for another facet of identity: people of colour may pass as white if their skin tone permits, queers may pass for “straight” etc. The relationship between agency and subjectivity is inextricable; our identities are functions of the ways in which others construct us” (2002:308). The Campbells therefore wish to change the way that they are defined by the society they are part of in order to have access to different personal power. Their daughter Marion is unaware of their decision and only discovers it much later when she sees an image of a woman in the newspaper that looks vaguely familiar. Marion asks her employee Brenda for assistance with regard to finding Tokkie. The two women go on a journey to Wuppertal, a small town in the Western Cape to enquire about Tokkie. This journey results in their discovery that this coloured woman from the newspaper is one of Marion’s family members. Marion therefore unearths her parents’ secret on this journey with her colleague and it creates turmoil in her personal life.

*Playing in the Light* was published in 2006 but is set in the 1990s shortly after the fall of apartheid. It was well received with most critics praising it for its attempt to expose a different side of South African history by focussing on the marginalized coloured identity. Marion is not able to escape the impact that the act of narrating the history of apartheid has on her personal history as it is the press coverage of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that unlocks memories of her childhood past. As Jane Rosenthal for the *Mail and Guardian* asserts, Marion “finds herself strangely moved by a victim’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission photograph in a newspaper” (2006:7) and it is this newspaper that results in her feeling “compelled to explore” (2006:7) the Campbell family secrets. According to Rosenthal it is when Marion confronts the past that “it becomes clear that the damage done to families and individuals by apartheid is far from over” (2006:7). Marion’s personal journey cannot be extricated from the history of racial categorization in South Africa and her story comes to represent something of the legacy of the damage caused by apartheid legislation. Her personal life has been directly impacted by its history of racial categorization. Karina Magdalena Szczurek, on reviewing *Playing in the Light* for *The
Sunday Independent states that the novel “carefully and at the same time forcefully examines what it means to be both, the subject and object, of racism” (2006:18). This is an astute observation as the Campbell family is sometimes subjected to racism by those around them, thereby making them the object of racism. In other instances the family exhibits racist behaviour towards others; in these instances they can be said to be the subjects of racism. Szczurek also credits the novel as it “may very well be the first of its kind to address the issue of passing to such an extent” (2006:18). Similarly Jennifer Crocker writes for the Cape Times that “Wicomb draws on her intimate knowledge of place and soul to tell a story that has been undertold, on the whole, in this country” (2006:12). Playing in the Light therefore goes some way towards exploring an issue that is relevant to the post-apartheid South African condition. The text is also credited for its attempt to negotiate coloured identity and as JU Jacobs states in Current Writing: Text and Reception in South Africa (2008) that the “notion of an essential cultural identity – white, black or coloured – Wicomb’s novel shows, is a strategic fiction; the reality is much more cluttered, garrulous, ambiguous, and contradictory’ (2008:14). Playing in the Light can be said to successfully interrogate the significance of race in terms of identity. The fact that Marion is considered a white South African despite the fact that she is not white brings into question the validity of these categories. Zimitri Erasmus examines the construction of coloured identity within the South African context and she asserts that “coloured identities are not about ‘race mixture’” (2001:16). Additionally, she states that “at the heart of this particular process” it was evident that there was “a colonial racial hierarchy which positioned coloured identities as midway between ‘white’ and ‘African’” (2001:16). Playing in the Light interrogates this notion of coloured identity being “midway between ‘white’ and ‘African’” (2001:16) as Marion is considered white and affiliates herself with white South Africans. Marion is clearly considered white by those around her and the man she is involved with, Geoff, sees “a hint of Italian perhaps” (2006:41) when he looks at her. Marion’s apparent whiteness results in the racial identity of all the subjects within the text being questionable, especially the white subjects as it is later communicated that the Boshoff family in Marion’s neighbourhood also passed for white.

It is evident that racial re-classification did occur during apartheid and it is therefore important to bring to the fore the history of racial passing as well as the impact it had on the country. Erasmus argues that there is a “need for remembering and acknowledging the past – colonialism, slavery, segregation and apartheid – with its wounds and contradictions, and acknowledging its power in shaping the present” (2001:17). Wicomb’s attempt to explore the
effect of racial passing on South African subjects, both during and after apartheid, certainly does explore the effect of the country’s past on the present. Erasmus further asserts that by “insisting, simplistically, that we should be blind to ‘race’ is what makes it more difficult to name and recognize the importance of articulating and working through antagonisms and conflict” (2001:20). Playing in the Light does not shy away from exploring issues related to race and the text examines varying responses to race in the personal histories of the characters and in their inter-racial interactions in the new South Africa. As Sue Kossew argues in “Repositioning the Borderlines of Race: A Reading of Zoë Wicomb’s Novel Playing in the Light” (2006) it “is important to remember, of course, that the imposition of a coloured identity in apartheid South Africa was a deliberate strategy of marginalisation” (2006:204). In this statement the fact that this form of identity was created to serve a purpose during apartheid becomes evident. Reddy agrees with the fact that the category coloured was made to play a role in apartheid society. He argues that for the main racial categories “to assume an unquestioned and taken-for-granted status, rely on some notion of a category denoting ‘mixed’ and Other” (2001:65). This is reminiscent of Toni Morrison’s argument in Playing in the Dark that will be examined at a later stage. It is therefore not surprising that individuals, who are considered coloured like the Campbells, would choose to be re-classified as this would open up many opportunities for them. Additionally this re-classification would open up a whole new sense of self where they are no longer positioned as the Other. Even though it exposes the instability of race Playing in the Light also brings across the power of race, in relation to identity in the South African context. The constructedness of coloured identity comes across in Erasmus’ statements as well as the fact that the ‘substance’ of coloured identity should not be based on what it is not. In addition it should not be viewed as a mixture of something else. Playing in the Light is able to show up the constructedness of racial identity as the Campbells were able to change their racial status. In showing that whiteness can be mimicked and faked the text interrogates what whiteness as a racial category is made up of and whether it has any substance.

Wicomb’s work on racial identity creates the opportunity for further explorations of the issue thereby opening the way for other authors, like Matlwa, to explore race and its impact on identity in post-apartheid South Africa. The text exposes the personal trauma of the legacy of rigid racial categorisation by examining Marion’s response to discovering her parents’, and therefore her own, racial identity. Dorothy Driver, upon scrutinizing recent South African fiction, notes the importance of Wicomb’s work in relation to exploring
subjectivity. Driver states “that one can see the development of a new mode in South African writing, steadfastly insisting on creating more complex subject positions than those of the past, with new subjectivities continually emerging at the critical point between stereotype and representation, and between one discursive subject position and the other” (1996:52). Driver’s statement highlights the significance of texts that are critical of the way that subjects have been represented, and that find new and different ways to represent them. *Playing in the Light* is important in terms of communicating something of the history of South Africa, by focussing on the Campbells’ story, in addition to exposing the instability of the racial categories that were imposed. The text exposes that these seemingly concrete subject positions were not stable during apartheid and are not stable post-apartheid. However the great value that was ascribed to racial categories, and that these categories continue to hold even into the post-apartheid era, is exposed in Marion’s distressed response to discovering that she is not white. As Wicomb herself states:

Our new society remains umbilically linked to the matrix of apartheid so that parturition is a slow affair. Since we are shaped by race-specific conditions, the protracted and bewildering weaning from the old is radically different for different racial groups. (1993:28)

This statement communicates that, even though these categories are now given much less credence than during apartheid, they were so influential in South Africa’s past that they still have bearing on the way the past is remembered. They therefore, to some measure, also influence how the present is experienced. The impact of these racial categories can therefore not be ignored and, as Erasmus argues, the past needs to be scrutinized and not ignored. *Playing in the Light* deals with unearthing something of the past traumas apartheid allowed in that it examines the complexity of identity as created and experienced under the racial classification system. David Attwell and Kai Easton comment on the import of “Wicomb’s focus on traditions and identities that receive comparatively little attention among the bolder narratives of nationhood: the complexity of discussions around coloured identity and the social dynamics of the northern region of the Western Cape and Griqua history” (2010:520). The exploration of marginalized identities are therefore of great significance in her oeuvre. In *Playing in the Light* the plight of a group of South Africans, coloured subjects, that battle to find their place within the country is brought to the fore. Significantly Wicomb explores the plight of the coloured community. Wicomb chooses to examine this marginalized identity and to place this at the centre of her text. In so doing the text shows up the constructedness of this form of identity based on racial classification.
Toni Morrison’s *Playing in the Dark* serves as a central intertext to Wicomb’s *Playing in the Light*. *Playing in the Dark* is a collection of essays focussing on exploring the importance of the virtually silent black characters that have populated literature throughout history. Morrison argues for the importance of not ignoring the influence race has had within the United States of America. She argues that to “enforce its invisibility through silence is to allow the black body a shadowless participation in the dominant cultural body” (1992:10). The importance of acknowledging the significance race has carried comes across in this statement in that an examination of race, and how it has influenced black subjects, can be said to restore some form of agency to these subjects. Gayatri Spivak focuses on the individual agency of marginalised subjects in her seminal work “Can The Subaltern Speak?” (1988) This question evokes various reactions and Ilan Kapoor closely examines it in relation to the practical field of development in “Hyper-Self-Reflexive Development? Spivak on Representing the Third World ‘Other’” (2004). Kapoor asserts that Spivak was criticised as “she has been interpreted as saying that the subaltern cannot speak and has no agency” (2004:639). However Kapoor has examined critical responses to Spivak’s argument and “has countered that, on the contrary, her argument is that elite or hegemonic discourses are deaf to the subaltern, even when s/he does speak or resist (1996: 289; 1999: 308) (2004:630).” This suggests that a subject’s ability to speak does not depend only on whether the subject speaks but on whether the subject is heard. In terms of the representation of black characters in literature Morrison refuses “to allow the black body a shadowless participation” (1992:10) and argues that it is imperative to examine the black subjects that have previously been rendered from a white imagination in literature. This can therefore be seen as an attempt to ensure that these characters are heard. Cheryl Hendricks and Desiree Lewis examine how race influences all other forms of expression which results in different kinds of struggles in terms of feminism in “Voices from the Margins” (1994). Lewis and Hendricks state that in “South Africa ‘defining’ and ‘naming’ has usually meant black women questioning their representation by white feminists, white monopolisation of academic, research and financial resources, and the domination of whites in feminist politics” (1994:62).

Wicomb problematises the distinction between black and white dualisms as laid out by Lewis by deliberately representing as the protagonist a character who attains all the privilege of whiteness and then has to recognize the betrayal that went into sustaining the performance. It demonstrates this particular subject position and the power that that whiteness has to render other subject positions or alternative identities as invisible. In the
character Marion the fact that whiteness is a performance is shown up and it reinforces the performative nature of racial identity. The lives of the various members of the Campbell family demonstrate what an enormous amount of effort goes into maintaining racial identity. In order to better examine the complicated racial relationships found in literature, Morrison believes that it is necessary to examine the impact race has had on those in the dominant position and she states that there is value in “a serious intellectual effort to see what racial ideology does to the mind, imagination, and behaviour of masters” (1992:12). Wicomb, like Morrison, destabilises the symbolic logic that light and dark have come to signify. The binary of light versus dark is challenged by both Morrison in her essays and by Wicomb in this work of fiction. Morrison also argues that Others are established in order to define the Self against. She believes that there is a “process by which it is made possible to explore and penetrate one’s own body in the guise of the sexuality, vulnerability, and anarchy of the other” (1992:53). In order for whiteness to remain a stable category it needs to set up blackness as its opposite, its Other. In the character of Marion, Wicomb probes the notion of the Other. Marion is forced to re-evaluate her relationships and perceptions when she realises that her racial identity was fictitious. She now becomes the Other she was defining herself against. The fact that Marion was raised as a “South African white madam” (2006:202), as Kossew describes her, serves to suggest that the text does interrogate the place of the ‘master’. The master in any narrative is not able to function without servants, yet in many earlier narratives the servants were not central to the text. Marion’s role as madam changes once she learns the truth about her racial identity. She remains the boss, in terms of business and with regard to her domestic servant, but she comes to think differently about her role and to relate differently to those around her. Marion becomes an example of exactly how fictitious the category white is. The word ‘playing’ that can be found in both titles also connotes the idea of performance and that racial identity is linked to performance. Wicomb conveys this effectively in relation to the Campbell family as they were able to perform whiteness and be accepted as white, even though this was not the case.

Coloured subjects are an extremely significant presence in Playing in the Light. It emerges that Marion, who is originally assumed to be a white character, is coloured. Additionally the Campbells’ story of re-classification is central to Marion’s personal identity crisis. However Brenda, in particular, is of great importance to the narrative. This is particularly significant as she is a strong coloured woman from the start of the narrative. Marion perceives Brenda as “soft spoken, soothing even, unless that is just the musical lilt of
her Cape Flats accent, but at times there is something of an ironic edge to her voice that is unnerving” (2006:17). Brenda’s presence is therefore felt by those around her, in particular by Marion, her boss. It appears that Marion is not always able to place the statements Brenda makes as she picks up on “an ironic edge” (2006:17) yet she also admits to being soothed by Brenda’s voice. Brenda therefore comes across as a complex character. Abdulrazak Gurnah believes it to be noteworthy that “this assessment of Brenda comes from the Marion of the early part of the novel. . . [as it] announces Wicomb’s approval of Brenda” (2011:274). In the interaction between Brenda and Boetie van Graan, another of Marion’s employees, Brenda’s strength of conviction comes across. Initially Brenda flatters Boetie by asking him to cast his “expert eye” (2006:20) over one of her documents. She consistently addresses him as Mr van Graan not assuming the familiarity of addressing him by his first name. This indicates Brenda’s awareness of what is expected of her in her role at MC Travel, both as an employee and as a coloured woman in relation to Boetie. Marion watches the interaction between her employees and finds herself wondering how “does the girl manage to tread so delicate a boundary between respect and mockery?” (2006:20) Marion’s analysis of Brenda suggests that Brenda is aware of what is expected of her but that she is able to inhabit this space in an ironic manner as something of her own beliefs is allowed to come across.

Sue Kossew describes Brenda as being “characteristic of the new generation who are more adept at walking the tightrope of new ethno-political boundaries, introducing a political message into their office talk while still knowing ‘where to draw the line’” (2006:202). She challenges Boetie on his opinions regarding the situation in the country when he complains about the crime rate by asking him if he believes that he is free of all responsibility when it comes to the situation the country finds itself in. He is upset by this and by Brenda’s statement that it’s “impossible to find a person in this country who voted for the Nationalist Party” (2006:36) which suggests that he may indeed have to bear some of the blame. Marion has forbidden them to discuss politics in the office and she is the one who intervenes to stop the argument. Brenda is therefore sometimes aware of where to draw the line and sometimes not. She silently berates herself for “rising to the bait” (2006:38) after this argument as she believes that ‘there is no point in talking about these things’ (2006:38). She believes that it “is not possible for people from the different worlds of this country to talk to each other” (2006:38). This suggests that Brenda has resigned herself to difficulties of people from different backgrounds having to relate to each other in a post-apartheid context. Brenda appears to be a realist, possibly as she has become accustomed to being classified as coloured
and therefore not having the voice that someone like Boetie, a white male, would always have had.

It also emerges that Brenda is more qualified than she claimed on her CV when she admits to having been deceptive on her CV a few weeks into her job at MC Travel. She claims that “she hadn’t thought that an Honours degree would stand her in good stead for a clerical job in a travel agency, and so had not mentioned a qualification that could only prevent her from being considered” (2006:27). Marion is confused by this confession and is not sure about Brenda’s motive and wonders whether “Brenda had had a pay rise in mind” (2006:27) when making this confession. However, Marion squashes this possibility and tells Brenda that they will carry on as if nothing happened and that she need not feel guilty any longer. This encounter suggests that Brenda is aware of the fact that the end of apartheid does not communicate the end of racist preconceptions. She experiences the need to make herself seem smaller, less qualified, in order to successfully inhabit this role at MC Travel. Marion’s inability to read Brenda and to communicate with her effectively could be ascribed to the fact that she did not deal with people from different racial backgrounds often in her past, due to apartheid laws. It could also have something to do with her initial distrust of Brenda based on Marion’s racist perceptions. Marion suspects Brenda of theft when someone breaks into MC Travel but feels guilty when she realises that this way of thinking is “the kind of prejudiced stuff her parents were prone to” (2006:17). It appears that the only reason Marion suspects Brenda is because of the colour of her skin. Marion’s inability to place Brenda’s meaning can therefore partly be ascribed to Brenda’s ability to inhabit the space given to her in an ironic manner, and partly to Marion’s racist thinking.

The relationship between Brenda and Marion changes when Brenda becomes Marion’s travel companion and guide. The relationship between these two women progresses from one of initial distrust and, from Marion’s side, feelings of superiority, to a relationship filled with camaraderie and trust. Brenda is an influential character in that she is an unapologetic character who speaks her mind. Even though she is clearly not able to relate to what Marion is going through, she does offer support. It is at the end of the text that it comes across how radically different these two women are in their thinking when they come to heads over Brenda’s use of John Campbell’s story. This serves to suggest that despite all they have shared, and in spite of learning that Marion is also coloured, the past still continues to define the way that they feel about matters in the present. This is true in particular in
relation to Marion. The two women are consequently not able to transcend this and move forward into a relationship. Brenda is not able to understand the trauma Marion undergoes and Marion is not able to understand that Brenda does not see this. It is not clear what the source of Brenda’s confidence is. Brenda does not have access to the same opportunities Marion has access to. Marion travels abroad in an attempt to come to grips with her newfound identity yet the text does not suggest that Brenda has ever travelled across the border. Abdulzarak Gurnah states that “Brenda does not travel abroad, yet not only is she given a greater capacity for understanding than any other figure in the novel, she is also the one who narrates it” (2011:274). There are different opinions regarding whether Brenda does actually narrate Marion’s tale but *Playing in the Light* does not offer any clear answer in this regard. Andrew van der Vlies wonders if Wicomb is “using an omniscient third-person narrator to show how Marion Campbell begins to understand the performative nature of racial identities?” (2010:593) This indicates that he is not as convinced that Brenda narrates Marion’s tale as Gurnah is. Van der Vlies is however aware of the possibility that parts of the narrative that were focalised by John Campbell could have been written by Brenda. Van der Vlies believes that these sections are “open to being read as having been constructed by Brenda after extensive discussions with John Cambpell and his sister, Elsie, all undertaken while Marion is abroad” (2010:594). The possibility that Brenda could have constructed part of the narrative further reinforces her position as a strong, coloured, female subject within the text. It emerges that in spite of the complex relationships she is involved in Brenda does not seem to have internalised a sense of inferiority based on her racial identity and she even goes as far as to question the beliefs of those around her, despite the fact that this is shortly after the fall of apartheid.

### 3.1. The Sins of the Fathers – The Campbell Legacy

Storytelling comes to play an important role in post-apartheid South Africa. There is a collective move to excavate the history of the country shortly after the fall of apartheid in the form of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. One of the narratives exposed by the TRC has direct bearing on Marion’s life as she learns of her parents’ deception of the government due to the report on Patricia Williams she sees in the paper. This is what triggers a faint memory and results in Marion and Brenda’s investigation. The reason her parents
discover the option of being re-classified is because the government imposed racial classification under the Population Registration Amendment Act of 1962 which meant that all South Africans had to be registered as being part of a certain racial group. This act defines a white person as:

a person who (a) in appearance obviously is a white person and who is not generally accepted as a coloured person; or (b) is generally accepted as a white person and is in appearance obviously not a white person, but does not include any person who for the purposes of classification under this Act, freely and voluntarily admits that he is by descent a native or coloured person unless it is proved that the admission is not based on fact. (2006:121)

Those who were classified as being ‘white’ South Africans had more economic and social privileges afforded to them. The Campbells are aware of this and Helen cannot allow this chance to better their financial situation pass them by. No matter what the cost to her and John’s personal life the prospect of white privilege is too alluring. Government legislation and the later change in legislation directly impacted the lives of this specific family. Erasmus believes that the Act suggests that closely “linked to ‘race mixture’ is the conceptualisation of colouredness as a residual identity” (2001:18). The notion of coloured identity being a mixed racial identity therefore gives it the status as a “residual identity” (2001:15) as this form of identity is not defined by what it is, but it is defined against what other racial identities, like white, are.

These past conceptions of racial identity have evidently impacted the present circumstances of the various characters. The TRC’s project of unearthing the past is examined in the narrative as the TRC is mentioned quite a few times in the text. As mentioned earlier a TRC report is what initiates Marion’s discovery. She sees a picture on the cover of the newspaper and assumes that it is another “TRC story: that’s all the newspapers have to say these days” (2006:49). This communicates that her original attitude to this process appears to be one of disinterest. At first Marion tosses the newspaper aside and it is only after she realizes that this face looks familiar that she puts the paper in her bag to look at it again carefully later. It is clear that the TRC only comes to have meaning to Marion when she realises that this particular story may have involved someone familiar to her. A few days later she chooses to read an article in The Cape Times about Patricia Williams “because the Williams image has detached itself from the page and has taken to persecuting her” (2006:73). Again, it becomes clear that Marion is only interested in the reports on the TRC insofar as it has direct bearing on her own life. It is because Patricia
Williams is ‘persecuting her’ that she chooses to take an interest in this particular case. The narrative suggests the importance of examining the past before being able to move on into the future in terms of an individual’s personal life on this occasion. However Marion’s ability to distance herself from the proceedings until she is personally affected serves to question how effective the TRC process was. Marion finds herself drawn to the disturbing accounts on television even if she does not want to be, now that she has found a personal link to the process. She admits to watching these “television proceedings of the TRC, in the hope of catching a glimpse of the torturer [Williams]” (2006:74). Her initial ability to be detached about the proceedings communicates something about white insularity. Marion therefore takes on the victim role in relation to Williams as she describes Williams as ‘a torturer’ who is ‘persecuting’ her, instead of being able to sympathise with her as a tortured subject. Her inability to relate to those from backgrounds different from her own is suggested in her inability to sympathise with Williams. The concept that Marion is insulated in her white identity is echoed by Stéphane Robolin who examines the different identities in South Africa pre- and post-apartheid in “Properties of Whiteness: (Post)Apartheid Geographies in Zoë Wicomb’s Playing in the Light” (2011). Robolin argues that “the combination of high security measures of Marion’s apartment, its Home-and-Garden gloss, and the virtually invisible ‘cleaning girl’ all signal a preference for a luxurious insulation from the grit and grime of the world beyond it” (2011:352). It becomes apparent that Marion is insulated from the concerns of others before she learns of her parents’ true racial identity and Robolin believes that in her physical surroundings “Marion has reconstructed a cocoon largely impenetrable to the sight and presence of others, a space of almost complete seclusion” (2011:352). It appears however that this seclusion Marion lives in extends beyond just her physical surrounds.

Her parents’ reclassification notably affected Marion’s life in terms of finances, due to the fact that as a white South African there were more opportunities available to her. It clearly also affected the way she relates to others in that she inhabits this space “of almost complete seclusion” (2011:35) Robolin refers to. Although Marion is not the reason for her parents’ re-classification she is meant to benefit from it. She was raised to believe herself to be a white South African and her parents went to great pains to ensure that she will be secure in her whiteness so that “she would hold the world in the palm of her pretty hand” (2006:114). It is clear that the Campbells expected her whiteness to afford her many opportunities. However, if Marion is meant to embody what John and Helen Campbell
consider to be a secure white individual she does so rather incongruously. This comes across in that, at the outset, Marion appears to be lonely character. Marion ponders on the insight an “intimate friend” (2006:3) would have to offer about her life but then admits that “she has no such friend” (2006:3). She attributes this to the way that she was raised believing “that her mother, like all mothers, was responsible for her insecurity” (2006:3). She maintains a relationship with her father but it is not necessarily a close one. Even though she dutifully goes to visit her elderly father to bring him food, and even though John appreciates her efforts, he cannot help but be rather resentful about it and see it as a “reversal is what it all boils down to . . . you insist that the child should eat the right food and then, before you know it, the years have flashed by and the child in turn, believing that she knows better, invents a diet for you” (2006:12). Although father and daughter love one another it is clear that the relationship can become functional for both parties and that they occasionally find it hard to know how to relate to one another.

In addition to the fact that Marion does not appear to have any close friends at the start of the narrative she admits to having “dreams of a green Jaguar or a boyfriend, although she has her doubts about the latter” (2006:29). Her dreams convey that she is not comfortable in this lonely space yet she does not seem to know how to escape it. She is dating Geoff Geldenhuys but their relationship is not an easy one because of her reluctance to discuss anything personal and her aversion to travel, whereas Geoff enjoys it. Despite the fact that they go out together a lot “it doesn’t amount to what nowadays is known as seeing each other” (2006:43). This is largely because Marion ensures that the “parting at the end of a date is friendly but swift” (2006:43). This again communicates that even though she does not want to be completely alone she prefers to keep a distance between herself and others, perhaps because of a sense of distrust. Their relationship does become more intimate eventually and she even introduces Geoff to her father yet she prefers not to share her discoveries about her parents with him for quite some time, again suggesting a sense of distrust. Marion’s loneliness at the start of the narrative is therefore apparent. This implies that even though she is initially secure in her whiteness, and she has been afforded many opportunities she would never have had if her parents had not succeeded in their deception of the apartheid government, this does not mean that she is a true success. She may have access to everything her parents could have dreamt of to bring about economic success yet her loneliness implies that she is not truly happy. It later becomes evident that this is in part thanks to her parents’ betrayal of their family and friends. Maria Olaussen believes that for
the Campbells “whiteness is a dead end and a failed exit. Marion is presented as the child
who was to benefit from their sacrifices but ends up with a legacy of confusion and shame
which she finds hard to deal with”” (2009:152). Marion’s inability to form personal
relationships communicates that she is not successful in her personal life despite the fact that
she is successful in business.

As Marion herself posits, her lack of meaningful attachments could have something to
do with her mother’s inability to truly connect with her. What she is not initially aware of
however, is that Helen’s fear stems from producing a dark-skinned child that would alert
those around them of their deception of the government. Marion could therefore be
unconsciously mimicking her mother’s aloof attitude in personal relationships. Helen’s
aloofness was a direct result of her paranoia regarding their re-classification communicating
that this re-classification brought an unwanted inheritance with it as well. Significantly it is
at the start of the narrative when Marion is not aware of the choice her parents made that she
appears to be most lonely. This despite the great pains her parents went to to ensure she
would be secure in her whiteness. Her legacy of solitude could be partly because her
whiteness was not ‘authentic’. Marion recalls how her father used to call her a mermaid as a
child and how this irked her mother who believed that mermaids should be ashamed “of
being neither one thing nor another” (2006:47). In this the conflict within Helen herself
becomes apparent and it is clear that she hates anything in-between but wishes for her
daughter to be either one thing or another. Helen manages to communicate this belief to
Marion who as an adult wonders whether she could now change from being one thing and to
being another after she learns of her parents’ reclassification. Helen’s attitude toward the
fictional mermaid is suggestive of how much she has internalised the beliefs of the racialised
society that she finds herself living in. In order to fit in, Helen polices her family and
consequently Marion was robbed of both her extended family and her childhood friend Annie
Boshoff. Marion remembers her childhood as a series of “tightly wrapped days that did not
admit friendship” (2006:61). In retrospect, after her discovery, she comes to realise that she
betrayed her childhood friend by turning her back on Annie when her father was arrested
because of the Immorality Act. This broken relationship, that she now comes to see as a
betrayal, haunts her even into her adult life, Marion carries this burden of guilt and often
finds herself wondering what had become of Annie Boshoff. This isolation that she
continues to live in, even into her adult life was created all thanks to the ‘whiteness’ she was
made to be a part of. Significantly Marion’s feelings towards the incident with Annie only
appear to change after learning her true racial identity. This again reinforces that whiteness affords a kind of safety from the concerns of others.

Despite the lack of meaningful relationships in her life, Marion Campbell is successful in a financial sense. She is the owner of a travel agency called MC Travel. The name MC Travel in itself exhibits the security that Marion previously felt in her identity as she feels confident enough to name her business after herself. It also carries with it the connotation of Master of Ceremonies implying that she is a figure that is in control of her own destiny and those of others. This is true to some extent as she assists people in planning their holidays and she is in charge of who is hired and fired at MC Travel. Adult Marion consequently has come to resemble her mother to some degree, as she is maintaining a tight sense of control over situations in her professional and personal life. Yet Marion is initially unaware of what motivates Helen’s actions which further serves to keep her unconsciously acting out the role her parents made her play. It is interesting to note that though Marion has access to a life of opportunity she does not necessarily make use of it. For example she sells travel as a product yet she herself does not initially believe in the value of it. Gurnah argues that “Marion’s travel aversion is not contentment with her circumstances or with her landscape but a shrivelling up; an avoidance” (2011:272). This seems to be symptomatic of the legacy her parents imparted to her as Marion appears to have become accustomed to avoidance in her way of life. She avoids intimate relationships in her personal life due to her past and she also originally avoids hearing the painful accounts the TRC hearings are bringing to light. This suggests she is not able to participate in or enjoy activities that she is not in control of. The aversion she has to travel evidences her stagnation in the position John and Helen created for themselves and consequently for Marion. Upon her discovery however Marion becomes more open to engaging in new and different activities and relationships. She makes new friends and goes travelling.

Gurnah notes “the tension in [Wicomb’s] writing between the value of travel and the value of rootedness” (2011:261). This comes across in Playing in the Light as Marion does overcome her travel aversion and travels both locally and internationally. Yet she chooses to come back to Cape Town and settle down with her father. That travel is an important value in the text is communicated in that other characters like Brenda, John Campbell and Outa Lappies all appear to travel locally and that characters like Geoff and Vumi greatly value the idea of travelling abroad. The ‘tension’ Gurnah refers to suggests that although travel is important it is not implied to be the supreme, or only, route to self-discovery and acceptance.
It is important to note that in terms of this specific character, Marion, who has never enjoyed the prospect of travelling, such personal growth is particularly significant. Marion is opening up to various possibilities thanks to the insight she gains about her parents. Significantly the potential for change in her way of life comes only after her discovery. She therefore chooses to engage in activities she would not have chosen to engage in before becoming aware of what her parents’ way of life had robbed her of.

The personal journey these suspicions lead to in Marion’s life is however not without trauma. It is interesting to note that before she has the conversation with Mrs Murray where she learns of Tokkie’s true identity she hurts her foot. A physical trauma therefore incapacitates her and results in her staying in Mrs Murray’s house long enough to discover Tokkie’s true identity. Marion comes to question all of her former belief systems and decisions when she learns that Tokkie was actually her maternal grandmother. This discovery results in a move from a position of security, in fact almost arrogance and ignorance, into a much more unstable position. Although her discovery results in turmoil in her personal life yet it also opens up possibilities for her. Firstly she sets about finding her aunt and she comes to recall time spent with her extended family which her parents’ deception robbed her of. This is because when John and Helen sign the affidavit to swear that they are white South Africans they have to swear that they will no longer have any contact with coloureds. John does this because of the opportunity the act of taking this oath affords him, but he admits that “swearing before God that according to the laws of the land he no longer had brothers and sisters had been the very worst thing, a shooting pain through his heart and nothing short of a sin” (2006:157 – 158). A sin that he and Helen do not pay for alone and as Olaussen argues it appears that Playing in the Light sets out to explore the “conflict between generations where the racist complicity of an older generation is addressed from the point of view of their children” (2009:149). As an adult Marion therefore comes to realize that she has family members that she does not know and this opens up new relational possibilities for her. There is irony inherent in the Campbells’ assumed whiteness and as Olaussen states “Marion is expected to ‘grow up in ignorance a perfectly ordinary child’… [but] instead she is deprived of relatives and family, unable to make sense of her parents’ behaviour, their loathing of each other, their fear of strangers and their obsession with race” (2009:154). Additionally Olaussen comments on the fact that “Marion keeps up a dutiful relationship with her father and does not question his version of their family history” (2009:157) and she believes that this “lack of questioning her father’s version of their family
history is paralleled by a similar approach to South African history” (2009:157). This is certainly true of the Marion at the start of the narrative when there is nothing in her surrounds that challenges her father’s version of their family history. However her lack of questioning history changes once she sees the face of Patricia Williams.

Her initial unquestioning acceptance of the narratives around her could be due to the fact that she was so secure in her subject position and relationship to the world around her that she did not experience the need to question these narratives. This suggest that the Campbells succeeded to some extent in raising Marion to be secure in her whiteness yet her loneliness and inability to relate to those around her indicate what an empty victory it actually is. After her discovery she questions John about it but as Van der Vlies argues she “confronts her father, wanting to impose a narrative on his memories” (2010:594) which communicates both her need to understand what took place and her need to control the narrative. Her need to control the narrative, and if or how it is is re-told, also comes across in her outburst to Brenda at the end of the text where she challenges Brenda to “write [her] own fucking story” (2006:217) instead of using her father’s. Brenda challenges her as she ‘suspects that Marion doesn’t know her father’s story. It appears that also John experiences Marion’s need to impose her view on his life story as when John and Marion discuss her parents’ racial reclassification for the first time he finds that “it is not his story; rather, it is her constructed version, so that he must correct the details” (2006:117). She has clearly made assumptions about what took place and attempts to understand John and Helen from her own perspective instead of allowing John to speak for himself and share his story with her. Her perspective in a post-apartheid society would be radically different from John and Helen’s which could be a contributing factor in her inability to make sense of what they did. It seems that Marion never felt very close to her parents as it is evident that she never feels truly comfortable in her family growing up. Marion believes that her “parents may have hated each other, but they had connived, conspired against her in the whispering that stopped when she entered the room” (2006:60). Their attempts at protecting her therefore only served to alienate her further from them and contributed to the loneliness she experienced in her childhood. The fact that she was not a part of the secret they shared may not only alienate her from those around her but it could also contribute to her inability to understand their actions.

Marion was raised to keep up appearances even though she was unaware of the true reason behind this. The extreme way in which Helen watches the actions of herself and her family communicates that certain behavioural expectations were placed upon people from
different racial backgrounds. Consequently the Campbells had to make a lot of changes in terms of their lifestyle, mannerisms and who they associated with. If they were successfully considered white it would in turn determine the options available to them in terms of the jobs they could have or the areas they could inhabit in apartheid South Africa. What started out as “a happy case of mistaken identity” (2006:126) at the traffic department thanks to Campbell’s light skin becomes a science once Helen becomes aware of it. Helen does not even want to have children because reproduction “was too risky a business” (2006:130) as they had no way of knowing whether the child would have a light skin like their own. The importance of appearance is therefore paramount to Helen, over and above any other need she or John may have. She thinks of small details that will help them pass as white citizens like having “a big garden and a coloured boy called Hans to mow the lawn” (2006:130). This is also the only way that her mother Tokkie is permitted to come and see her grandchild.

Tokkie comes to work for her own daughter as the domestic servant. She therefore has to behave like a servant in apartheid South Africa would and has to use the back gate as an entrance, wear a wrap-around apron that a servant would normally wear and drink out of an enamel mug as a servant normally would. This is the only way in which Tokkie would be able to fit in with the new life that the Campbells had created for themselves as her skin was too dark for her to be a visitor to the house. Tokkie is in fact the one who comes up with this plan to stay in touch with her daughter and because of her plan to work for her daughter as a domestic servant “she could visit every week and at the same time provide a history of an old family retainer, which the types who were working their way up in that part of Observatory could not boast of” (2006:132). Her presence in the role of a servant lends authenticity to the role that John and Helen are playing. Tokkie clearly encourages her daughter to carry on with this deception and “insisted that one could not be too careful with the neighbours” (2006:132). The paranoia that Helen inherits appears to stem from her mother who is defending her daughter’s new status attained by her light skin. It becomes clear that Tokkie is also willing to pay the price of whiteness in order for her child to advance economically. Helen was proud of their “detached house with a broekielace verandah and a view of the sea . . . until she suspected the neighbours of being coloured” (2006:131). This results in Helen refusing to socialize with their neighbours as they “could not keep their bargain with history” (2006:131).

It is therefore clear that to Helen being considered white is paramount and she chooses to distance herself from anyone who does not pursue whiteness with the same
fervour. Helen therefore wishes to set her family apart from the other families in Observatory and in doing so she manages to isolate them from their neighbours. The life of deception that she has chosen subsequently results in isolation. This suggests that in pretending to be white she still did not acquire everything she so desperately desired, she still was not able to get away from other coloured people even in her new neighbourhood. The very fact that Helen and John are able to cross over from being coloured to being white can in itself be seen as a critique of the validity of race as a form of categorisation. As Kossew argues the “porousness of the border between whiteness and “non-whiteness”, and the cultural construction rather than the essential nature of race, is clearly illustrated by this process of reclassification” (2006:201). Robolin shares a similar belief that the successful possession of whiteness, of course, rests upon a careful mimicry of its qualities. And Playing in the Light underscores the ways in which the meticulous performance of white racial identity is underwritten by unyielding adherence to propriety and respectability. (2011:360)

The narrative exposes that whiteness can in fact be performed or mimicked. It also suggests that racial identity can be based on external factors, as the neighbourhood the Campbells live and their servant, lend their whiteness credibility. Robolin firstly highlights the fact that whiteness can be possessed thereby suggesting that it is not innate. Additionally she communicates that possessing whiteness is not simple as it requires ‘meticulous performance’ and ‘unyielding adherence’ conveying that the performance of whiteness does not end if the performers wish to attain it. Despite whiteness being a performance the privileges that came along with being classified as white in apartheid South Africa were very real and served to motivate individuals to cross over the ‘border’ to realize the opportunities now available to them.

The narrative of the Campbell family communicates that however flawed racial categorisation was as a system, it carried meaning within apartheid South Africa and that the effects of it linger even into post-apartheid South Africa. John and Helen live with the consequences of what their re-classification brings about. It not only serves to create distance between Helen and her daughter but it also drives a wedge between the two of them. As an adult Marion believes “that her parents loathed each other” (2006:3). Helen’s constant monitoring of John’s actions from the amount of alcohol he is allowed to drink to discouraging him from spending time with his family and encouraging him to learn to speak English take its toll on their relationship. The new racial identity they acquire that is meant to
bring them freedom ironically does the opposite. The Campbells can only go so far without
the correct documentation and even though they are generally accepted in their social circles
as white South Africans they have need of official documentation to prove their new racial
identity. This suggests that even though whiteness is shown up as a performance it was such
a powerful signifier that some kind of official status was necessary in order to fully live out
the whiteness they possess.

In order to attain these documents Helen has to allow Mr Carter to perform sexual
acts with her, despite the fact that it is against her will. She becomes an object in the hands of
Mr Carter yet she allows this to take place as she “was reminded of her obligation”
(2006:143) and she starts to play an active role in the encounters. Once he has satisfied
himself he hands her the affidavit and Helen “thanked him for the trouble” (2006:144). She
admits that her “gratitude was heartfelt” (2006:144) upon the receipt of these documents.
Olaussen believes that the “fact that Helen has to endure sexual harassment in order to obtain
an affidavit which defines her as a white person places the story of her transformation within
the history of sexual shame that she is trying to escape” (2011:155). Helen therefore
ironically enacts the part that she is trying to escape in order to escape it. Erasmus’ assertion
that being “coloured is about living an identity that is clouded in sexualised shame and
associated with drunkenness and jollity” (2001:14) further serves to reinforce the irony of the
encounter between Helen and Mr Carter. In addition to that there are a few references made
to the occasional episodes when John drinks too much. It is at these times that he almost
gives something away of their true identity and it always results in Helen’s anger. It also
corresponds with Helen’s annoyance with John when he drank too much suggesting that
Helen believed this behaviour to be in line with the racial identity they were trying to remove
themselves from. However after the encounter she feels superior to Mr Carter and notes that
“he never again allowed his eyes to stray below her chin” (2006:145). The fact that the
encounter bothers Helen is evident in that she cuts up the blouse she wore during these
meetings and describes this as “the single indulgence” (2006:145) she allowed herself after
the encounter. Helen is therefore able to rise above Mr Carter after the experience once he
has given her what she needed from him yet she is never able to fully forget what she had to
undergo in order to attain this paperwork. Robolin believes the Campbells “striving for the
white ‘easy life’ paradoxically underscores the acute denial and self-privation at the heart of
their racial refashioning” (2011:359). Living as white South Africans was anything but easy
for them.
The Campbells’ relationship is in dire straits once Helen falls pregnant as “the pregnancy unleashed a hatred she found impossible to hide” (2006:124). In Helen’s mind Campbell is solely to blame and “he was an animal who had ruined their lives” (2006:124). Helen comes to feel differently about Marion thanks to Marion’s light skin and she “would see her project completed in the child” (2006:125). Even though she believes she could expect nothing from Campbell, Helen herself “at least would never let up” (2006:125). It becomes clear that her relationship with Marion takes on an added dimension. She does not only wish to be Marion’s mother but comes to believe that her own transformation will be complete in Marion’s successful attainment of whiteness. Marion appears to become an extension of their project. Helen does her best to perform her role flawlessly and though she expects the same from her husband her disappointment in him estranges them. Helen therefore seems to concentrate her energy instead on raising Marion as a white South African who is unaware of the process her parents went through or the sacrifices they made to achieve this. Instead of bringing the Campbells closer together Marion becomes a bone of contention between them. It is indicated from the very start of Marion’s life that her parents will not agree with the way in which she should be raised as they are not able to agree on her name. John wants to name her Marina but Helen will not hear of it saying that only “hotnots give their children stupid names like that” (2006:125). In this instance it appears that John relates more to Marion as his child and that Helen views her more as the extension of their attempt at re-classification. Marion is therefore caught between her parents without being aware of the reason for this or the reason that her mother keeps her at a distance.

Their daughter certainly benefitted financially from the Campbells’ actions since in terms of material success Marion Campbell is not lacking, as she is a successful entrepreneur who lives in a flat with a view of Robben Island. She is very conscious of what she perceives to be her success and sets herself apart from people who she considers to be different from herself. Whether this difference is exclusively based on economic factors or whether ‘race’ comes into it is not clear from the outset of the novel but that she does perceive herself to not be able to relate to “such people” (2006:1) is clear even in the language she uses. The use of the phrase “such people” (2006:1) communicates that she sets herself apart from those she perceives as others. She has no concept of what the home life of the domestic worker who comes in to clean her flat is like so she leaves her a dead guinea fowl, not knowing “what uses such people might have for a dead guinea fowl” (2006:1). In this statement both her ignorance and her arrogance are communicated. The use of the word ‘such’ in particular
suggests that she distances herself from this woman who cleans her house. As Kossew states “Marion displays the characteristics of speech and attitude of a South African “white madam” (2006:202). This is certainly true of her at the start of the narrative but Marion is later forced to re-evaluate her feelings about her domestic worker Maria when she learns the truth about her parents and she wonders if now “that everything has changed, perhaps Maria too has become a paper-thin, arthritic old woman with snow-white horns of hair peeping from her doek” (2006:178). Her security in terms of feeling entitled to the role she plays is therefore evident at the start of the narrative as is the fact that upon her discovery she is no longer certain how to feel about situations and people she has been dealing with for a long time. Her identity could therefore, to some extent, be seen to have been locked up in her whiteness much as her parents wanted it to be. Robolin states that Marion’s initial attitude to the issues and people surrounding her “communicate a racial politics of resentment and suspicion, underwritten by a whitewashed bourgeois ideology” (2011:355). Initially Marion therefore appears to be a product of the environment she was raised in who does not question her perceptions.

Marion’s prior racial prejudice comes across clearly when she is not able to shake the suspicion that one of her staff members, Brenda, may have had something to do with an attempted break-in at MC Travel. It becomes clear that this suspicion is based solely on the colour of Brenda’s skin as she recalls her mother’s belief that if you give “them a pinkie they’ll grab your whole hand” (2006:17). The use of the word ‘them’ in this instance again implies that Marion distances herself from Brenda based on her racial identity. Marion feels convicted of her own prejudice and attempts to dissociate herself from it by acknowledging that this way of thinking is not the way her generation would look at things but that this was “the kind of prejudiced stuff her parents were prone to” (2006:17). However the fact that Marion had had the thought and had needed to suppress her desire to take action, to search Brenda’s drawers, communicates that some of her parents’ racial prejudices did manage to take root in her mind, at least to some extent. Just as her parents had internalised racial shaming, she has internalised racial prejudice. The text suggests that racism does not always operate on an overt level but in spontaneous reactions or judgements like Marion makes in this instance. It is evident that Marion’s suspicions are based solely on race as she does not suspect any of her other staff members, who for the most part happen to be white. Marion

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16 Wicomb uses the term ‘lexical vigilance’ to refer to this preciousness related to language use. She describes “[l]exical vigilance” as “a matter of mental hygiene: a regular rethinking of words in common use, like cleaning out rotten food from the back of a refrigerator where no one expects food to rot and poison the rest”. (2008:180)
therefore clearly looks at her life and relationships from a very racialised perspective, that she
inherited from her parents and the society she grew up in.

Brenda is one of two coloured women who are employed by MC Travel, the other
being Tiena the tea girl. Marion perceives a special relationship between these two women
and finds it irritating “the way she has that idiotic cleaner and tea-girl, Tiena, eating out of
her hand” (006:17). A large part of this irritation appears to stem from the fact that Tiena
“would serve her [Brenda] immediately after Marion” (2006:17). This suggests that Marion
could feel her role as boss is undermined by Brenda. This instance suggests that Marion
would prefer Tiena to serve the other older, white, staff members before serving Brenda. It
appears that Marion wishes for Brenda and Tiena to know their place in the order of MC
Travel employees. Her ignorance in relation to another of her cleaning staff comes across as
she does not know where Tiena has her lunch as she “disappears over the lunch period to
wherever cleaners and tea ladies go” (2006:34). Again there is distance between Marion and
a person she considers to be her subordinate. Tiena, like Marion’s domestic worker Maria, is
an employee who is not white. The novel is set shortly after the fall of apartheid hence the
effects of the imposed racial segregation would still greatly influence social relationships.
Marion is further annoyed by Brenda’s explanation of what a “geleenheid” (2006:18) is as
she herself is Afrikaans and therefore would know the meaning of the word. The fact that she
is often mistaken to be English speaking also seems to annoy Marion. Brenda is not deterred
by Marion’s admission that she is Afrikaans as she sets about explaining the concept to
Marion. Marion appears to be annoyed in this instance where Brenda is trying to teach her
something. The source of her annoyance could be ascribed to the fact that she is already
aware of what Brenda wishes to communicate to her but her annoyance could also suggest
that she does not believe Brenda could be superior to her, or be more knowledgeable than her,
in a matter. Marion therefore clearly has some deeply ingrained racial perceptions that she
needs to consciously decide not to believe or act on. She looks at people from a racialised
frame of reference and appears to decide how she is should relate to them based on what
racial group they can be classified in. Her belief systems are therefore based on race and
what a person’s race could be seen to suggest or say about them.
3.2. A Changing ‘Lifeworld’

Initially Marion is an isolated character despite spending time with those around her. Subsequent to her discovery there appears to be a change in her and the way she relates to herself and others. In her relationship with Vumi, a black South African whose car she damages, it becomes clear that her thinking is changing. Whereas before she would have been disparaging about the BEE movement she now appears to have a more relaxed attitude about it, thanks to the discovery she made. Marion finds that she is able to speak with him about his business without resentment even though not “so long ago, Marion would have resented Vumi for being at the receiving end of what’s known as fast-tracked black economic empowerment” (2006:200). The change in Marion after her discovery also comes across in her attitude to Brenda. She changes from being quite critical and suspicious of Brenda to eventually appointing her as the person who is to run MC Travel while she goes on her overseas trip. The fact that Marion and Brenda share Marion’s initial journey of discovery also serves to create a bond between them. Marion appears to change from a rather lonely character into someone who is open to the possibility of true friendship towards the end of the narrative.

It appears that Marion is more willing to engage in relationships upon her discovery. It also becomes clear that no-one is able to fully understand what she is going through as both Geoff, the white man she is dating at the time she makes her discovery, and Brenda, the coloured girl who becomes one of her closest friends, make light of her feelings of displacement. Geoff groups her with all of the other “play-whites” (2006:106) and says “that he along with the entire country has got beyond all that stuff about race, and that she too should put it behind her” (2006:105). He does not appear to consider how this discovery would affect Marion personally, perhaps because he is secure as his racial identity has never been brought into question. Brenda’s reaction to Marion’s identity crisis is also not sympathetic but in fact exposes her views regarding what constitutes coloured identity.

So it turns out you’re coloured, from a play-white family, Brenda says. So what? Haven’t you heard how many white people, or rather Afrikaners of the more-indigenous-than-thou brigade, are claiming mixed blood these days? It’s not such a tragedy being black, you know, at least you’re authentic. And just think of the other benefits: you need no longer speak in hushed tones – you’re

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free to be noisy, free to eat a peach, a juicy ripe one, and free of the burdens of nation and tradition. (2006:102)

Brenda displays an inability to relate to Marion’s very personal experience in this instance. Despite the fact that other Afrikaners have now started to claim mixed blood Marion did not choose to do so with some kind of political motive like being “free of the burdens of nation and tradition” (2006:102) in mind. Brenda ignores the personal issue that Marion faces related to her identity. Brenda appears to link being coloured to a kind of authenticity and an ability to experience life to the full. Her expectation that comes along with the possibilities that being coloured has opened up to Marion could however be linked to stereotyping, despite the fact that Brenda links it to some kind of ‘true’ coloured identity. Geoff’s statement claiming that the “entire country has got beyond all that stuff about race” is therefore proven to be completely untrue as race clearly remains a powerful signifier to some South Africans. His dismissal of her discovery does not affect his personal identity making it easy for him to brush it off and deny its significance for her. Marion also notes in her father “what in others she calls coloured theatricality” (2006:157) when they finally discuss her discovery. This reinforces the predictability of racial prejudice and the role it plays in the way that the characters assess those around them. As JU Jacobs cautions there is a danger in examining Wicomb’s various texts particularly in relation to the formation of coloured identity. Jacobs notes that the “critic needs to be mindful, however, of the fact that for himself, no less than for the author herself, the challenge is, in the words of Denis-Constant Martin, ‘how to define and recognize communities without perpetuating apartheid categories, attitudes and behaviours’” (2001: 262)” (2008:3). Jacobs therefore recognises the need to avoid propagating the very same racial stereotypes Wicomb is being critical of, by over-emphasising a link between race and behaviour. Marion’s relationship with others around her has to change as she herself changes when she learns that the Campbells are not who they claim to be. She finds that “Geoff too does not seem to be himself” (2006:106) when they go out for dinner after her trip to Wuppertal. This should not be surprising to her however as she “is, after all, not the person she thought she was, let alone the person he thought she was” (2006:106). This suggests how deeply imbedded her beliefs about the importance of racial classification run as she feels completely changed by learning that she belongs to a different racial group. The fact that both Geoff and Brenda do not appear to believe her discovery to be very significant therefore serves to frustrate her and forces her to redefine these relationships.
Vumi is the only person in the text that has a similar tale to share with Marion and he opens up quite easily about his family history. His family lived in a coloured neighbourhood during the apartheid years and went to great pains to fit in and to ignore the mockery they were exposed to, yet at home behind closed doors they were always exposed to Zulu culture. This suggests that he could be sensitive to what she is going through, even though she does not mention sharing her discovery with him so early in their acquaintance. Andrew van der Vlies comments on Vumi’s family history and the fact that he “has his own experience of passing, but it is one that has not affected his sense of identity, his “Zuluness”, which is arguably a cultural rather than a strictly racial identification” (2010:590). This probably has to do with the fact that his parents did not seem to be ashamed of their own race. This is different from what Marion has experienced, being completely unaware of the fact that her parents relinquished their cultural practices and their respective families in order to pass as white South Africans. This corresponds with Van der Vlies’s belief that Marion’s engagement with “these difficult constructions of race, her sense of the significance of performance but inability to shake off the implications of strictly imagined categories, significantly ends with the word ‘shame’” (2010:590). She now has to come to terms with the shame her parents’ secretive way of life has instilled in her in terms of race. Marion however clearly enjoys spending time with Vumi even though she does not immediately share her discovery with him and when they meet up in Glasgow she admits that it “is good to be so far away, to be with someone from home, and she wouldn’t mind if he kissed her goodnight” (2006:200-201). This indicates that she is willing to be vulnerable with Vumi from an early stage in their acquaintance and is rather different from the way she relates to Geoff in the beginning of their relationship. This suggests that Marion has become more willing to allow people into her life subsequent to her discovery.

3.3. Outa Blinkoog, Dougie and the Politics of Colouredness

Marion encounters two significant men in her travel experiences. Jane Rosenthal, reviewer for the Mail & Guardian, believes both these men “seem to have a didactic purpose” (2006:6-7). Firstly, when Marion and Brenda head to Wuppertal to discover Tokkie’s true identity they encounter a man who calls himself Outa Blinkoog. He is a local artist who roams the area and fashions artworks out of the items other people discard. As Van der Vlies notes he is “based on Jan Schoeman, an itinerant storyteller and artist based at
Prince Albert Road in the Great Karoo, who styles himself as Outa Lappies, the cloth man” (2010:586). Wicomb therefore chooses to make use of Schoeman, who has become a symbol of an artist/storyteller to inspire this compelling character. This use of Schoeman ensures that his legacy will not be forgotten as Outa Lappies continues to live on in this narrative. Outa Lappies gives Marion and Brenda a lantern that he made. The two women share this lantern from this moment onwards so it serves to bind them together. It is also interesting to note that Brenda credits this lantern as the inspiration behind her eventual bout of writing. Outa Blinkoog’s creation therefore serves to inspire her to create. Olaussen argues that “Outa Blinkoog with his cart full of Beautiful Things, teaches Marion and Brenda about the importance of light and colour” (2009:154). He therefore serves to impart something to the two women, as at the very least he compels them to pause and observe the beauty around them. Brenda is particularly influenced by him as she feels inspired because of his work. Olaussen also believes that during “the encounter with Outa Blinkoog, Marion finds a new freedom also in respect to words” (2009:154).

It is therefore clear that he exerts an influence over both women and impacts each in their respective personal lives. The fact that Outa Blinkoog calls himself “Outa’ is significant in that it has a different meaning to the two women. As Van der Vlies states “Blinkoog’s use of ‘Outa’ seems to Marion characterised for the reader at this point as a self-conscious, middle class, anglophile Afrikaner to bear none of the burden of the performance of inferiority that Brenda, who identifies herself as coloured, is shown to recognise immediately” (2010:586). Outa Blinkoog therefore serves to expose how different the women are in their thinking at this point in the journey. Yet despite this difference both women find accord with him. Van der Vlies credits the presence of this character as a confirmation of “Wicomb’s interest in visual artists and their creative archival practices” (2010:586) and believes that the fact that he is probably based on Jan Schoeman lends some credence to Geoff Geldenhuys’s predictions for Outa Blinkoog’s future as Schoeman has had his work exhibited a number of times. Geoff warns Marion not to use the word ‘outa’ to describe the artist and believes that probably “next time you see your man he’ll be on stage at the Baxter, performing his tricks, telling his story – terribly in demand” (2006:106). This suggests that Geoff believes that Outa Blinkoog could be used to represent something of the diverse racial groups in post-apartheid South Africa, and also that Outa Blinkoog would be able to make use of the new opportunities available to him in the post-apartheid phase. Gurnah believes this encounter with Outa Blinkoog to be very significant as he sees him as
representing in the novel the “figure of the artist: one who is tied to the land, who is thrifty and selfless, who has no economic function, who has no information to impart” (2011:273). Despite this analysis Gurnah concedes that “the encounter with him leaves a lasting impression on Marion and Brenda” (2011:273). It is evident that Outa Blinkoog may not communicate a lot of useful information to the women as in this encounter he “is unstoppable, barely comprehensible, as he launches into a narrative that has no end, each fragment leading to another” (2006:88). The wealth of information he conveys to them appears to be of a personal nature. His brave storytelling however becomes significant in terms of the women later being able to convert the truth they discover into narrative. Marion may not be willing or ready to write this personal story down but after meeting Outa Blinkoog her newfound perception of words as “fresh, newborn, untainted by history; all is bathed in laughter clean as water” (2006:90) suggests that her relationship with language and narrative could be changing. He can therefore be said to teach these women the importance of self-expression. Attwell and Easton believe that he is a symbolic character who seems to “enact a magically unburdened freedom to narrate” (2010:521). Attwell and Easton also argue that “this kind of achievement is impossible to emulate but it stands as an ideal for the artist-intellectual who wishes to perform and reflect on the multifaceted narratives of the post-apartheid patchwork” (2010:521). Outa Blinkoog is therefore a symbolic character indicating the power of narration.

Outa Blinkoog is not the only storyteller Marion encounters in her travels as in Glasgow she meets an old Scot named Dougie. He acts as a kind of guide to the city she finds herself in and explains the significance of some of the monuments. Dougie appears to be quite opinionated and he seems to harbour a few beliefs based on racial stereotyping yet Marion does not challenge him as she believes “it is not her place to take on benighted Europe” (2006:203). Dougie, like Outa Blinkoog, is a storyteller and “launches into a complicated history of Highland battles and treacherous Campbell murders” (2006:203) when Marion expresses her father’s interest in the history of the Campbell clan. Dougie goes on to relay to Marion the tale of “the Scottish water spirit, the kelpie, that takes particular delight in drowning travellers, and that assumes various shapes” (2006:204). This reminds Marion of the mermaid. This serves to create a link between Dougie and John Campbell as he always called Marion his mermaid. Dougie however exposes the other side of the mermaid figure and exposes that it can hurt those around it. Dougie bestows two presents upon Marion during their last meeting and again a link with John is established in that the one present is a
tie for John in the Campbell tartan. Dougie therefore comes across as a kind of father figure to Marion while she is in this foreign country. This suggests that there is a kind of fluidity in belonging as she is able to feel a sense of belonging in relation to a person that she is not racially or historically linked to. John Campbell does claim some kind of Scottish heritage but this is mainly due to the opinion of others and Helen believes that “Campbell was a respectable English name, or possibly Scottish, as his father seemed to think” (2006:130). Dougie is “pleased to meet a real African” (2006:206) when Marion introduces him to Vumi and the two men “teach each other their folk songs” (2006:206) which implies a willingness to learn about one another and appreciate the other’s culture. Again, this could be because this is not taking place in the South African context. It also suggests that the perception of those outside of South Africa is that black South Africans are the only real Africans and serves to raise questions about how the other racial groups in South Africa are perceived and meant to fit in to the country.

It is interesting to note that both Outa Blinkoog and Dougie can be seen to represent a part of John Campbell’s racial heritage as Outa Blinkoog refers to himself as ‘outa’ thereby implying that he could have been considered coloured. He is described as having a ‘dark face’ (2006:86) yet he had “extraordinary eyes – for they are different, one green and one black” (2006:87). Dougie is of course a Scottish man. John Campbell claims to be from Scottish descent and is initially classified as coloured. Significantly Marion meets both of these men who can be seen to embody something of her father’s heritage yet both of them are very different from Campbell in that they are proud of their individual histories. Both of them tell stories about their pasts and are unashamedly unique. They are not afraid to be themselves in contrast to Marion’s father, and she appears to find it easier to relate to them in these short term encounters than she does to her father. These figures serve to suggest the alternative path that John Campbell could have chosen had he embraced his identity and not shied away from it which would have resulted in him being an authentic character as these two men are. There is also a suggestion that the relationship with Marion would not have become so estranged had he acknowledged who he really was without shame thereby highlighting what he lost in his ironic attempt at gaining privilege. Campbell lacks the pride these men have in their individual pasts or histories due to the legacy of shame he inherited and Helen kept in the foreground as motivation for their reclassification. It becomes clear that even though he did choose to align himself with the Scottish heritage he claims that it “was like turning a knife in his own flesh, his very heart” (2006:157) which suggests that he

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can never fully feel part of it as that would require him to reject such another important part of himself.

Marion’s newfound confidence to forge relationships upon discovering her parents’ racial identity culminates in her welcome home party which is an affair where people from different racial groups mingle and talk together and a sense of camaraderie is experienced without politics being discussed extensively. Robert H McCormick remarks in his review for *World Literature Today* (2007) “Biko is not mentioned. Mandela is praised once at the house-warming party. In the spirit of reconciliation, Marion decides to get a new place and move in with her fast-declining father. Such is Zoë Wicomb's vision of the ‘New South Africa’” (2007:68). Marion appears to be different in that she seems to converse more easily with those around her and she seems to have forgiven her father and to be open to making some changes in her life. This only occurs after she has spent time away from this context in another part of the world where the specific politics of the South African situation would not hold the same kind of meaning. The validity of using the experience of travel to bring about personal growth is therefore particularly relevant to this specific situation. This is highlighted by Vumi when Marion communicates to him that in the past she would have resented him because he is benefitting from the BEE movement. Vumi believes that it is easier for Marion to be happy for him here as he seems to have an expectation that she will resent it again “but only when [she’s] back home” (2006:200). This comment suggests that Vumi believes that if you remove people from the country and its politics there is a possibility that they would be able to move beyond those politics. This instance intimates that the country’s history with its focus on race could be very instrumental in the racist perceptions South Africans have held and that some continue to hold. It is therefore not illogical that Marion would return from her journey with a new perspective on the situation in the country she left.

3.4. Conclusion

Despite the great strides Marion makes towards embracing change near the end of the narrative there is a suggestion that she will remain lonely. Even though she exploring deeper relationships with others, she becomes estranged from Brenda at the end of the narrative. Her anger towards Brenda emerges when she realizes that Brenda has turned her father’s story into a work of fiction. As Brenda says the stories of the coloured people she is surrounded
with daily “are known all too well” (2006: 218) but that the story of John Campbell is
different as “there’s a story – with his pale skin as capital, ripe for investment . . .”
(2006:218). Marion’s anger is partly a result of Brenda using her old and defenceless father.
The idea of her family’s story becoming a work of fiction unsettles her. This could be
because it is her story to tell and not something to be appropriated by others. This is a serious
matter for Marion and not something to be made light of. Robolin believes that it has to do
with the “contestation of authorship and ownership” (2011:363) and that Marion is upset with
Brenda as the story of her parents’ life is “not her [Brenda’s] property in Marion’s view, and
most certainly not property from which Brenda should make a profit” (2011:363). Marion
appears to consider the story to be private rather than public. However, it is also a possibility
that her response could still be linked to racial shaming as she clearly does not wish to have
the story widely told. Sue Kossew reads Brenda’s attempt to turn the Campbells’ story into a
text as positive. According to Kossew the “ending, with Marion’s young coloured
employee/friend, Brenda, being inspired to write the story of Marion’s father’s life, is part of
this positive coming to terms and moving on through the medium of narrative, through telling
stories” (2006:205). Kossew sees this as Wicomb’s larger project and that the “theme of both
acknowledging the wounds of the past and moving beyond them to the construction of new
and more fluid identities, is part of this project of identity formation in a post-apartheid state”
(2006:205). Though this may be true of Playing in the Light itself, this does not appear to be
Marion’s perception of Brenda’s desire to turn her family story into narrative. The reader can
never be certain whether Brenda’s story survives and becomes a published product or
whether the encounter with Marion deters her from publishing her work. Marion is opposed
to it, which suggests that she is not ready for this step. This could indicate that the process of
turning traumatic memory into narrative is not an easy one. It also brings up the question of
who the story belongs to. Playing in the Light poses important questions around identity and
representation. Robolin suggests that the story is “uncontainable – already told and mixed,
conveyed by multiple voices” (2011:364). Robolin states that in this instance the story takes
on a whole new meaning and that “this story is messy, fraught, and unsettled; it is common
property belonging to numerous communities across South Africa’s fragmented geography”
(2011:364). This story therefore negotiates the difficulty of separating the private, intensely
persona, account of trauma and the public responses to the trauma of racial classification.

Marion is in turn judged by Brenda for not really knowing her father’s story.
Brenda’s final remark interrogates Marion’s sense of the consequences of her father’s
deception. She suggests that Marion may know the facts but not the real story. Marion’s reaction indicates that an awareness of what took place in the past does not enable one to understand it or move beyond it. The narrative ends on this note, bringing into question whether Marion will be able to fully engage in a relationship due to the multiple betrayals she experienced growing up. It also suggests that this journey of healing that she is now forced to make will be long and complicated, with no easy solutions. As JU Jacobs argues “Wicomb’s novel cannot, therefore, leave its protagonist with any greater certainty about herself but rather in a state of conflict about the ownership of her own personal narrative and with a dramatically heightened awareness of her identity as fissured and discontinuous: the narrative ends with a confrontation between Marion and Brenda whom she angrily accuses of having appropriated her father’s story” (2008:13). Marion has just begun her journey of processing what her parents’ act means to her, leaving her in an uncertain place, and upon her return to South Africa she can’t help but wonder could “things really be so different, and also be the same?” (2006:212) Playing in the Light shows that whiteness has been an aspirational identity for past generations, particularly coloured South Africans. The following chapter explores how many of those whose whiteness was not in question have had to confront the loss of its guarantee of privilege.
4. Chapter Three - The Face of Apartheid: Apartheid Criminality in Little Ice Cream Boy

The texts examined thus far in this study all appear to suggest that white privilege always comes at a price of some kind. Although the racial groups that were previously oppressed in apartheid South Africa clearly paid a price for the privilege “whites” enjoyed, it is worth examining whether white South Africans also pay a price to attain white privilege, and if so, what kind of price they still pay. Jacques Pauw’s debut novel Little Ice Cream Boy, that is based on the life of a convicted apartheid criminal, seems to suggest that striving for white privilege comes at some kind of price. The protagonist Gideon Goosen is introduced to the reader in jail and it is from jail that he reflects back on his life up to that point. Gideon’s life story is told in a circular narrative starting out with him in jail and ending with him in jail. The rest of the narrative explores his childhood, from when he was a young boy living on a poor side of town and being exposed to his father’s politics, up to his life as a member of the South African Police Service. His father is a member of the SAPS and he is very proud of his white skin and goes about victimizing those he considers to be inferior to himself, including his wife and children. Gideon moves from a youth of violent antics with his friends to becoming a police officer himself. He eventually becomes a corrupt police officer and lands up in jail after committing many crimes, including assassinating an apartheid activist. This chapter will therefore explore the price he personally paid to attain white privilege. The rise of Afrikaner nationalism, which resulted in the sense of entitlement that is at the base of the inhumane actions Gideon and his peers participate in is also examined. In addition to that, the role of the Dutch Reformed Church in the rise of Afrikaner nationalism, as well as the role of women in relation to Afrikanerdom, will be explored. Lastly the new role Gideon as a formerly privileged Afrikaner male is forced to play will be investigated.

Little Ice Cream Boy was generally well received by the media. Pauw is praised by Margaret Von Klemperer from The Witness for knowing ‘how important it is that this kind of obscenity from South Africa’s past should not be forgotten’ (2009:12). Tymon Smith for the Sunday Times credits Little Ice Cream Boy as being one of the books ‘about the dark side of South Africa’s past [that raises] questions about whether reality is sometimes so fantastic that it just cannot be turned into fiction’ (2009:16). The Afrikaans newspaper Rapport also gives Little Ice Cream Boy a positive review and credits Pauw for the fact that he knows what he is talking about in this novel as he has spent a lot of time in the company of apartheid criminals.
in his capacity as a journalist (2009:14). Chris le Roux, reviewer for Rapport states ‘dat Pauw weet waarnvan hy praat, kan dus nie bevaargteken word nie’ (2009:14)\(^{18}\). Le Roux also notes the importance of humorous occasions in the text as ‘[a]an komiese oomblikke ontbreek dit ook nie, maar dit is dikwels meer tragies as snaaks’ (2009:14).\(^{19}\) Mariana Malan, for Die Burger, is particularly shocked at the narrative and states:

> Dat al die dinge gebeur het terwyl die volk geglo het die manne in blou is daar om hulle te besekerm, is een ding. Dat diegene wat betrokke was, dit as so normaal ervaar het, is ‘n ander saak. (2009:13)\(^{20}\)

She believes ‘[d]it is in der waarheid ‘n Engelse boek wat in Afrikaans in jou kop weerklink’ (2009:13).\(^{21}\) This is significant as Pauw is able to represent this perpetrator of apartheid in a believable manner. The use of Afrikaans in the text lends a certain authenticity to the characters and their actions. In the subject matter discussed and in the way the characters speak and interact it comes across clearly that the protagonists are Afrikaners even though the narrative is relayed in English. Pauw himself admits that it should have been an Afrikaans book but he simply found it easier to write in English (2009:13). The fact that it was not written in Afrikaans but instead in English, with a smattering of Afrikaans words translated in the glossary in the back of the book, ensures that the book could be understood by a wider readership. Had it been written in Afrikaans it would have been limited to those who understand this language. Little Ice Cream Boy was also shortlisted for the 2010 M-Net Literary Awards thereby ensuring that there will be a greater awareness of the existence of the book in the public eye.

The narrative is loosely based on the life of Ferdi Barnard, an apartheid assassin who Pauw befriended and interviewed during his time as a journalist. According to Tymon Smith “Pauw has openly admitted that his first novel, Little Ice Cream Boy, is a thinly fictionalised account of the towering and notorious Barnard and his diamond-smuggling gangster friends from Randfontein” (2009:16). Pauw also acknowledges that he discussed the possibility of writing a biography of Barnard’s life with him but that he turned his hand to fiction when he realized that Barnard would not be comfortable with sharing his story with others “while still inside” (www.penguinbooks.co.za). The novel therefore finds itself in an in-between space

\(^{18}\) Chris le Roux, reviewer for Rapport, states “that Pauw knows what he is talking about can therefore not be doubted” (2009:14).

\(^{19}\) Le Roux also notes the importance of humorous occasions in the text as “there is no lack of comical moments in the text but it is often more tragic than humorous” (2009:14).

\(^{20}\) Translated: “That all of these things happened while the people believed that the men in blue are there to protect them, is one thing. That those who were involved experienced it as so normal, is another”.

\(^{21}\) Translated: “It is in truth an English book that resounds in Afrikaans in your head”.

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somewhere between fiction and reality as it is based on true events and as Pauw states “many of the incidents are all too real” (2009:xii) yet he acknowledges that other “characters have been invented in order to fill out the storyline” (2009:xii). Pauw therefore deliberately fictionalises certain aspects of the, predominantly true, narrative. This suggests that the invented aspects of the narrative are significant as they deviate from the original story and could therefore have been included to serve a specific purpose. Pauw admits to Die Burger that he invented the character of Pieter when he says: “Ek weet byvoorbeeld niks van ‘n broer van Ferdi wat selfmoord gepleeg het nie, maar die res is waar” (2009:13). The character Pieter is particularly instrumental in highlighting Hendrink Goosen’s intolerance of men who do not fit the masculine Afrikaner mould. Pauw also chooses to invent a female journalist to bring about the fall of Gidoen Goosen where, in reality, Pauw himself coerced the confession from Barnard that put him in jail. The fact that a woman brings about the fall of Goosen is particularly significant in view of his dominant relationship to women throughout the text. The graphic descriptions of violence and crude language in the novel can therefore be seen as an attempt to remain true to the characters the text is based on. It appears that Pauw’s belief that the story had to be told, no matter in what form it is told, is the reason for his first attempt at fiction, after many years of being a journalist and after the publication of three autobiographies. As Leon de Kock writes for The Sunday Independent:

> It is a story that reopens part of a common heritage – white trash, chronic lawlessness, police criminality, culturally sanctioned patriarchal violence, the drug underworld, Joburg vice, mafia hits and manoeuvres – a dark heritage that needs solid fictional undercarriages. (2009:17)

De Kock notes the importance of Pauw’s project in Little Ice Cream Boy and believes that it “proves that there’s a lot of dirt out there that we need to pick up” (2009:17). Many of Ferdi Barnard’s crimes have become public knowledge due to the process of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. However, the novel is unique in that it focuses on the person and the story behind the violent acts. David Attwell and Kai Easton in the Journal of Southern African Studies (2010) reiterate the importance of André Brink’s argument that “in the wake of the TRC…imaginative writers should seek to go ‘beyond facts’ in order to open the recesses of history as it has been lived and felt” (2010:521). In Little Ice Cream Boy Pauw is attempting to move beyond the facts of what took place in the life of Ferdi Barnard. In so doing he also interrogates the system that enabled a person like Barnard to exist.

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22 Translated: “For example I do not know anything about a brother of Ferdi that committed suicide, but the rest is true.”
The belief, advocated by the TRC, relating to the acknowledgement of the fact that both the stories of the victims and the stories of the perpetrators of apartheid will facilitate the nation’s transition to living in the new post-apartheid South Africa. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela and Chris Van der Merwe acknowledge in *Narrating our Healing: Perspectives on Trauma* that “we need the eyes of victims and perpetrators to be turned to each other as they face each other for the first time” (2008:49) before moving on to the next stage of the healing process. The story of an apartheid criminal like Ferdi Barnard should therefore not be overlooked. It should also be examined in order to assist the process of moving beyond what took place during apartheid. Gobodo-Madikizela and Van der Merwe continue by reflecting on the difference in the experience of the inhabitants of South Africa. This comes across clearly when they state that “we are full of memories that divide, negative associations and stereotypes [but w]e also have different experiences in life – for instance some people may never have left a township, others never entered one” (2008:49). The next stage, according to them, consists of perpetrators and victims doing something together. Consequently there appears to be some value in acknowledging the narratives of the perpetrators of apartheid before moving on to the next phase. It could possibly be argued that it is a necessary step to allow reconciliation. *Little Ice Cream Boy* certainly does its part to expose the past of those that were firm believers in the apartheid system, yet who were also somehow wronged by the apartheid system: the perpetrators. The text suggests that apartheid policies and doctrines instilled sense of entitlement and superiority over others in these characters thereby enabling their licentious and violent behaviour. Pauw’s descriptions of the violent activities Gideon was a part of, certainly go some way to exposing how wrong the system was when examined from the perspective of the perpetrators. The motives for these violent actions are explored and seem to stem from his and his friends’ belief that they are superior to others. This is due to their racist perspective and the narrative clearly communicates their racially based thinking. It also brings to the fore the actions, as well as belief systems, white supremacists would have held during the apartheid years. This goes some way towards exposing what took place under apartheid. The belief that Afrikaners are superior to other groups within South Africa was instilled in the Goosen boys by their parents and society at large.
4.1. The Myth of Afrikanerdon

Gideon is an Afrikaner who, for a large part of the narrative, defends his privileged position in the country’s social order. This position of superiority he enjoyed during apartheid is based on the fact that he is an Afrikaner who subscribes to Afrikaner Nationalism. Nationalism in itself has to come at some kind of cost. As Erik Ringmar posits in “Nationalism: The Idiocy of Intimacy” (1998):

> According to its advocates, the nation gives us a sense of belonging; we feel secure among people who can recognize us as one of them and help us keep identities stable over time. We know who we are since we know who we are like. According to the contrary view, the nation is a prison which never allows us to escape from ourselves. Wherever we go we see only what we already know; we encounter nothing but ourselves infinitely replicated. A nationalist is deprived of a chance to make himself, a chance to change and grow by encountering the unknown and unexpected. (Emphasis in the original, 1998:546)

Ringmar therefore proposes that the sense of belonging that is brought about by being part of a group results in a loss of individuality. The individual therefore loses what makes him or her unique as well as the potential to have different experiences. In order to be part of the group the sacrifice of personal interests and ambition has to take place. The influence of the collective is therefore paramount over the thoughts, desires or actions of the individual. Benedict Anderson examines the phenomenon of nationalism in his seminal work *Imagined Communities Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983). Anderson believes that “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined” (1983:15). Anderson therefore argues that as communities are always imagined they “are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (1983:15). This suggests that a community is constructed in a specific manner and that communities can be constructed in different ways. Steven T. Engel considers the construction and influence of nationalism in “Rousseau and Imagined Communities” (2005) and argues that “while freedom and domestic tranquillity might follow from patriotism in an imagined community, it is [from] how a patriotic community treats its neighbours that the most dangerous problems would arise” (2005:536). In this statement the defensiveness inherent in nationalist identity is brought across. In terms of Afrikaner nationalism the ‘neighbours’ who were mistreated were all the inhabitants of the same

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23 As it is described by Johan Kinghorn in “Social Cosmology, Religion and Afrikaner Ethnicity” (1994:397).
country who were not Afrikaners. Additionally those individuals who did not measure up to the ideals of what an Afrikaner should be were also marginalised and mistreated. This is the result of what David Welsh describes as a “powerfully internalised inferiority complex” brought on by British domination. Johan Kinghorn also examines the reason behind apartheid ideology in “Social Cosmology, Religion and Afrikaner Identity” (1994) and states that “Afrikanerdom grasped at nationalism not because of dogmas of superiority, but because of an insecurity born from exposure to modern plurality and the inadequate means to cope with that experience” (1994:403). The role of the imagination in terms of the construction of nationalist identity is apparent in Engel’s interpretation of Benedict Anderson’s notion of an imagined community. According to Engel “Anderson points out that nationalism replaces earlier social bonds such as religious communities and dynastic bonds” (2005:518) indicating the important role nationalism is able to play. Nationalism therefore serves the very specific purpose of creating social bonds where religion and dynastic influence is no longer able to create social bonds. Engel states that it “is in an individual’s mind that the community exists” (2005:517) and examines the many elements necessary for an imagined community to be created. Engel identifies the importance of language “as it allows for links among people across time, permitting the continued existence of the imagined community” (2005:525). Additionally the law is identified as instrumental in creating an imagined community as the “way to ease the tension between the private will and the general will is to make the laws beloved” (2005:528). Engel’s analysis indicates that imagined communities do not simply come into being without various elements being involved.

In terms of Afrikaner nationalism many vehicles were used in its formation such as the image of the volksmoeder and the endorsement of the Dutch Reformed Church (which will be explored in greater depth). In addition literature was also used to construct Afrikaner nationalism and as J.M. Coetzee writes in White Writing On the Culture of Letters in South Africa (1988) “the task was explicitly laid upon the writer to find evidences of a ‘natural’ bond between volk and land, that is to say, to naturalize the volk’s possession of the land” (1988:61). This suggests how strategic the formation of the ideology of Afrikaner nationalism was. The ideologies Gideon is exposed to during his early life result in a sense of entitlement that he goes to great lengths to protect. Gideon perceives himself as special because he is part of a group, he is an Afrikaner. As a police officer Gideon has to pursue suspects and make arrests and even when these arrests are not legitimate he does not let this deter him. Gideon and his squad pursue a suspected jewel thief yet his colleague Chappies
admits that they “don’t have a case” (2009:229) when they want to arrest a young woman who was found in the room with the suspect. However Gideon does not let this stop him from arresting the young woman who had “a brazen, almost cocky expression on her face” (2009:228). He resents her for this and the basis for his resentment appears to be that he “was white and she was black and she had to understand that she couldn’t fuck with [him] or any member of Brixton Murder and Robbery” (2009:228). The defensiveness evident in Gideon’s behaviour could also, to some extent, be attributed to the fact that he is an Afrikaner and he therefore perceives himself to be superior to her. Gideon seems to believe that this black woman should play the role of a humble servant in relation to himself due to his belief in his own superiority. Her position as both a black South African and as a woman influences his perception of the way she should relate to him. Journalist Max du Preez reflects on the Afrikaner mentality in *Pale Native* (2003). He, like many others, wonders how apartheid came about and states:

> Many learned (and some not so learned) people have tried to explain how it came about that the once oppressed Afrikaners turned into relentless oppressors themselves and embraced a vicious ideology of complete racial separation. I understand the explanations, but I still don’t understand my tribe. (2003:13)

Political scientist David Welsh explores the history of how apartheid came about and examines in particular the rise of Afrikaner nationalism in *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*. Welsh states that:

> After 1902 the Afrikaners of the defeated Trekker republics displayed many of the symptoms of a conquered people: impoverished, defeated, despairing, low in morale, and with a powerfully internalised inferiority complex. They were facing the possible obliteration of their identity by the overwhelming power of their conqueror’s institutions and culture. (2009:10)

Welsh suggests that Afrikaners initially became defensive in order to preserve something of their culture in the face of domination. This form of aggressive defensiveness can therefore be ascribed to the deeply imbedded sense of inferiority brought about by Afrikaners’ own history of oppression. This defensiveness took an interesting turn when it, in turn, manifested in Afrikaners oppressing the other people groups in South Africa. J.M. Coetzee examines Afrikaner identity and what it is made up of in *Stranger Shores*. Coetzee comments on the way Afrikaners used to identify themselves in the past in as “namely, a ‘white’ of north European descent, an ethnic nationalist, a Calvinist, a patriarchalist” (2001:256). This seemingly stable form of
identification therefore appears to be rigidly defined with no room for deviation from the norm.

It is clear that the motivation behind apartheid, or what took place during apartheid, is incomprehensible to onlookers from various racial orientations and backgrounds and even to some Afrikaners. The fact that attempts can be made to explain what took place, thus does not excuse that it did take place. Gideon is however initially not aware of the protectiveness of his people or the injustices done by them as he is raised by a father who believes in apartheid ideology and exposes him to violence from a young age. At a braai he and his brothers see pictures of a black man that his father had tortured to death. These pictures are passed around with pride by his father and all of his friends appear to admire his actions referring to the photographs of this dead man as “a beautiful sight” (2009:34). As a result Gideon and his brothers are exposed to the belief in white superiority, as well as racially motivated violence, from their youth. This, coupled with the admiration this violence brings about, and the ideology the boys are exposed to in the discussions of these older men they admire, provide a basis for racism in the way they live their lives. His father and some of his friends discuss the defeat of the Springboks by New Zealand and this discussion then leads to a discussion on “the international campaign against our country” (2009:32). The boys listen to how their father and his friends speak of how everyone is out to get South Africa and even though Gideon may not fully understand it because of his youth at this stage, his older brother, Karel, attempts to explain to him that it’s “the terrorists and the houtkoppe. They’re part of it” (2009:32). Evidently his older brother has already internalized his father’s belief system and this indicates that it could influence Gideon’s way of thinking too. When Gideon enquires what the derogatory word ‘houtkop’ means, Karel explains to him that these people are referred to as ‘houtkoppe’ because “you have to bash their heads very hard in order to crack them” (2009:26). The loaded words like ‘terrorists’ and ‘houtkoppe’ used in this instance serve to indicate the heightened sense of emotion experienced when having to deal with people who are different from them. This again indicates a defensiveness. Additionally it suggests how deeply rooted these beliefs are in the Karel’s mind and that these strongly worded beliefs are not likely to be interrogated.

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Hendrik Goosen’s hatred for those who are different from himself extends beyond race. He polices his family and determines who his children are allowed to be friends with and spend time with and which activities they are allowed to take part in. He can therefore be seen to be protective of his male Afrikaner identity. Anything Hendrik does not deem to be appropriate because of class or gender expectations he forbids, and should his family disobey him, he becomes violent. His proclivity for violence becomes apparent when Gideon develops a crush on a girl in his class named Linda. Despite his feelings for her he is aware that his father will not approve of this association for several reasons, the first being that “she was a maplotter, an Afrikaans word for a poor white who lived on a smallholding” (2009:44). Secondly, “she looked coloured” (2009:44) and thirdly “Linda and her family were members of the Apostolic Church” (2009:44) and not the Dutch Reformed Church. Linda therefore comes to embody a lot of the characteristics Hendrik is trying to protect his family from. The fact that Gideon is aware of everything that counts against her shows that there are certain criteria that need to be met in order to be accepted as part of the ‘pure’ Afrikaner ‘race’ and that Linda does not meet these criteria. The instability of the Afrikaner ‘race’ is suggested in the fact that Linda ‘looks coloured’ thereby indicating that even though she is generally accepted to be white this is not good enough, thanks to her physical appearance. It is not possible to determine whether she really is white or not. His brother Karel is the one who “gleefully babbled out” (2009:46) Gideon’s secret at the dinner table thereby landing him in trouble with their father. This suggests that Karel is also aware of why Linda is an unacceptable candidate to be his brother’s girlfriend. This incident indicates that anyone who is not of the right financial class, racial group or acceptable religious group is not a good or proper association and should be avoided. The Goosen family therefore have a keen awareness of what can be considered the norm for an Afrikaner family. This list of criteria that Linda fails to meet communicates the rigid policing that went into creating the Afrikaner group. The fact that there is no certain way to dispute her whiteness, despite her many flaws mentioned, indicates how fragile white as a category is. In Pale Native Max du Preez states that “as a concept, pure-white Afrikaners never existed” (2003:25) and he argues that according to the work of Professor JA Heese and Professor HF Heese a long list of Afrikaans names can be made of “white men who married black, Asian or mixed-blood women” (2003:30).²⁵ It is evident that Hendrik feels very protective about his Afrikaner heritage and

²⁵ Du Preez lists the surnames the professors Heese associated with intermarriage. The extensive list contains the following surnames: “Ackerman, Albers, Badenhorst, Basson, Beets, Bester, Beyers, Bezuidenhout, Blom, Bodenstein, Boonzaier, Boshoff, Botha, Brand, Brink, Brits, Buys, Claassen, Coetzee, Comrink, De Bruin, De Jager, De
that he wishes his son to make the appropriate match as he forbids his son to see Linda again and even though Gideon admits he “could feel his heart breaking” (2009:46) he agrees as he knows “it was fatal to argue with Dad” (2009:46). Gideon’s decisions therefore have to be approved of by his father and he has to live up to the standard his father believes Afrikaners need to live up to. Hendrik Goosen’s intolerance of anything he does not deem appropriate for an Afrikaans man to participate in comes across very clearly when his youngest son Pieter is awarded a scholarship to the Drankensberg boys choir. His reaction after his wife informs him of the scholarship is rather telling.

Dad, who hadn’t even looked up from his plate of bobotie, spoke for the first time: ‘Over my fucking dead body!’

Pieter’s grin was wiped off his face and Mom looked perplexed. ‘But Hendrik, why not? It’s a fantastic opportunity.’

‘Over my dead body will any of my children attend that school.’

‘Why not?’ asked Mom again.

‘It’s a nest,’ said Dad.

‘Of what?’

‘Homosexuality,’ he said. ‘And many other unholy things.’

‘What do you mean, Hendrik?’ asked Mom.

‘It’s a well known fact,’ said Dad as he stuffed another forkful of bobotie into his mouth, ‘that the school is full of moffies.’ (2009:52)

Hendrik Goosens’ narrow-mindedness and authority come across in this instance. He is not willing to deviate from his beliefs regarding what can be considered appropriate behaviour for his children even if this could be for their own good. The racist presumptions Hendrik ascribes to opens the way for other presumptions about what can be considered normative. Pieter therefore has to give up this opportunity that will save the Goosen family money, all based on his father’s belief system regarding what can be considered normal. It is also clear that whenever Hendrik’s family disagree with him he settles the disagreement by resorting to physical violence as Hendrik puts an end to
Pieter’s dream by slamming down his cutlery, yelling at his family and ultimately it ends in Gideon hearing “the fracas in the bedroom as dad klapped”\(^{26}\) (2005:52) Pieter. This instance within the text demonstrates that there were certain expectations placed on Afrikaans males and that these expectations were upheld because they were policed by those who firmly believed in them. Hendrik clearly feels that he needs to defend his version of the ideal Afrikaner man. The Goosen children were not exposed to different ways of thinking as whenever their mother stood up to their father it resulted in physical violence so she “learned to keep quiet and didn’t oppose him in any way” (2009:80).

Gideon’s childhood evidently exposed him to a certain belief system and way of life related to Afrikanerdom. Later in his life his tendency towards violence is exacerbated when he makes friends with Jakes Verster and Johnnie Swart, that he refers to as his “riff-raff friends that crawled out of the dungeons of Randfontein” (2009:77). Gideon’s relationship with Jakes and Johnnie is born out of violence. The first time Gideon saw Jakes was in a rugby scrum where he “grinned menacingly, dropped his head and rammed into” him (2009:68). Interestingly it is while playing rugby, a very popular sport considered to be masculine and avidly played and watched by many Afrikaners, that he meets his new best friends. Anthropologists Connie Anderson, Troy Bielert and Ryan Jones in “One Country, One Sport, Endless Knowledge: The Anthropological Study of Sports in South Africa” (2004) conducted a study on the importance of rugby within South Africa and found that the importance of sport in the past can be partly attributed to the fact that white “rule was celebrated through international sport, particularly through rugby, which has been conceptualized as the defining demonstration of White Afrikaner strength and determination” (2004:47). These young boys are taking part in a national pastime, indicating their assimilation of Afrikaner culture and a sense of cultural pride. Gideon describes how “the smell of barbecued boerewors permeated the cool autumn air” (2009:77) when he left the field and that everywhere “husbands huddled around glowing coals while their wives lounged on folding chairs, filling in Huisgenoot’s crossword puzzles or knitting a jersey for winter” (2009:77). The fact that rugby forms part of Afrikaner culture comes across in this description where Gideon takes note of Afrikaans families taking part in activities that can be linked to Afrikaner culture.\(^{27}\) He is aware of the fact that rugby “day at Monument was

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\(^{26}\) Translated: “hit”.

\(^{27}\) Boerewors is particular to South Africa and Huisgenoot is a popular Afrikaans family magazine.
always an important family affair” (2009:77) despite the fact that Hendrik Goosen is absent from this match. This does not indicate that Hendrik does not consider rugby important as he emphasises the significance of rugby when he goes to wish his sons a good night’s rest before a later match. In addition to wishing them a good night he cautions them to keep their “hands above the sheets” (2009:107) otherwise they will “be too weak to play” (2009:107). This warning implies that Hendrik wishes to exert control over even the most personal part of his children’s lives in lieu of public admiration, as the boys would certainly be admired if they are good rugby players. The décor in The Leopard, a disreputable local haunt where men can go to drink and hire prostitutes, also communicates the popularity of rugby amongst Afrikaans men. Hendrik Goosen frequents this establishment and on one occasion his wife goes to find him there. It is also the first time the Goosen boys set foot in The Leopard. Inside The Leopard rugby “jerseys, caps, flags and knickers hovered over the heads of patrons and barflies” (2009:54). Rugby can therefore be seen to be an integral part of the culture of The Leopard’s patrons. Gideon and Jakes become friends on the rugby field despite an initial violent encounter between them where Jakes injures Gideon so much that he has to go to hospital. Jakes however reaches out to Gideon when he sees him drinking Fanta at the side of the rugby field despite his earlier violence towards Gideon. This indicates how he is able to live out his violent behaviour on the field yet still form relationship with his opponent off the field if he is able to gain something from it. The fact that Gideon is open to this relationship also suggests that it is accepted to behave in a violent manner on the field and to be friendly off the field. When Jakes and Johnnie discover that Gideon has no more Fanta to share with them they teach him how to ‘take’ more from “the kaffir who sells it” (2009:73). Once they successfully steal more cooldrink from the vendor Gideon entertains them by bragging that his father killed a black citizen. He recounts “the demise of the houtkop in the finest detail; of him lying on the pavement with his brains next to his skull” (2009:76). Gideon now starts to brag about something that, in the past, had left him “so startled and so scared” that he could hardly breathe (2009:34). His motives for telling this story could be to impress Jakes and Johnnie and to fit in with them as Jakes was telling stories of his brother who “had been in the slammer for a year” (2009:76) indicating that they clearly have an appreciation for violence. This is the start of their antics together which include petty thieving, “kaffir-bashing, gang fighting and hunting” (2009:141). Gideon now moves from being an onlooker to the violence his father practices to becoming a violent young man himself when he spends time with his new friends.
The descriptions of violence as well as the crass language used throughout the text could result in *Little Ice Cream Boy* being uncomfortable to read. Gideon describes the way he tortures and kills those that stand in his way, or offend him, in great detail. Many racial slurs as well as swear words are used in the direct speech between the different characters as well as in Gideon’s thoughts as the reader is given access to his personal thoughts as first person narrator. The fact that the text does not shy away from exploring uncomfortable subject matter lends authenticity to the character of Gideon Goosen and the various police officers and gangsters he is surrounded by.

The human element that comes into play in Gideon’s feelings for his friends Jakes and Johnnie could contribute to creating a more rounded character that may evoke sympathy. His confession that he “grew to love them more than Dad, Mom, Karel or Jesus” (2009:77) exhibits a sense of camaraderie and a strong bond between these young men. Their version of boyish antics is rather violent yet the sense that they need one another also comes across in that all three of the boys come from families where there is some kind of problem in the home. Gideon’s father is initially respected by the others in their social circle yet he dominates his family in a violent manner. Gideon therefore has to live in a violent home where Hendrik attempts to dominate over every decision his family makes. Johnnie is from an extremely poor family and “had sixteen brothers and sisters” (2009:84). All his clothing was passed down from these siblings so by “the time they got to him, they were worn to a frazzle” (2009:84). Johnnie had to sleep on the dirty laundry at night as there was no bed available for him and his “father sent him and his younger brothers to town to steal food for the family” (2009:84) because he knew that they were too young to be sent to prison. Johnnie is therefore also exposed to poor parenting as he grows up as his father has becomes so desperate that he uses the children to fend for the family. Johnnie’s home is consequently not a comfortable place. Jakes “was slightly better off” (2009:85) than Johnnie as there “were fewer mouths to feed and his father had an on-off job while his mother baked koeksisters for the local home bazaar” (2009:85). As a result they had some kind of income but no stable income and Gideon claims that his dad “was a drunk” (2009:85) too, making it clear that he has something in common with Jakes although Jakes appears to be worse off than Johnnie as Gideon states “Johnnie had fuck all and Jakes almost nothing” (2009:85). Gideon is clearly the most privileged member of this group, in terms of finances at least. Hendrik Goosen would certainly not approve of this relationship had he been aware of it as he “had always been vehemently opposed to any contact or friendship with *maplotters* or low
class residents” (2009:77) but he was sent off to go and fight at the border so was not able to keep track of his sons’ movements. Gideon therefore uses his chance at freedom to engage in activities his father would not approve of. The absence of his father lends the family some freedom as they are left to their own devices and become able to make their own decisions. Gideon longs for his time with Jakes and Johnnie when he is in prison, “for the days when [their] love tied [them] together and [they] breathed as one” (2009:82). The depth of their love for one another as well as their circumstances contribute to creating characters that could possibly evoke sympathy as it exposes a more human side of these three violent men. Their friendship appears to offer them the only escape from their awful living conditions. In his relationship with his brother Karel the boyish side of Gideon also comes out. Gideon and Karel grow up reading comic books like many other young boys, suggesting that they are no different from many other young boys. The comic books they read however centre on the adventures of “Captain Caprivi” (2009:28) and they hide this from their parents. This comic book advocates the killing of communists and terrorists and the boys took to “playing Captain Caprivi on an almost daily basis” (2009:29) with Karel playing the role of “Captain Caprivi” (2009:29), Gideon playing “Corporal Strydom” (2009:29) and Pieter having to play the part of the villains “Comrades Boris or Kasparov” (2009:29). The Goosen boys therefore play games based on their heroes like any other children would, their heroes just happen to be based on a Captain whose main purpose is to protect white South Africa. The boys’ regular pastimes therefore also inculcate in them an admiration for violently protecting their interests, or that of their volk.

Despite his upbringing Gideon claims that his ill-treatment of black South Africans does not start out as full blown hatred.

I can’t say that I hated houtkoppe. It wasn’t necessary to despise them; they knew their place, the streets of our suburbs were quiet and safe and they brought the gold to the surface in our mines. They were probably regarded more as a useful nuisance than anything else. (2009:132)

In this statement Gideon may not display open and violent hatred yet it is clear that he feels a sense of superiority over black South Africans. This suggests that his racist perceptions are so deeply imbedded in his mind that he himself is not aware of how deep they run. A feeling of superiority as described above in itself conveys racism; outright hatred is therefore not the only form of racism. There is also a sense of dislike evident in that he refers to black individuals by the derogatory term “houtkoppe” (2009:132) and that he refers to these people
as “a useful nuisance” (2009:132). There is also a sense of entitlement in the use of phrases like “our suburbs” (2009:132) and “our mines” (2009:132) when it is clearly the black workforce that does all the hard work of mining these mines. Benedict Anderson examines both nationalism and racism in *Imagined Communities Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Anderson claims that it is no surprise “that, on the whole, racism and antisemitism manifest themselves, not across national boundaries, but within them. In other words, they justify not so much foreign wars as domestic repression and domination” (1983:136). This comes across in *Little Ice Cream Boy* in Gideon’s entitled attitude and the way that power is divided along racial lines. The black characters are referred to in racist terms and cast in a servant role in relation to Gideon and his peers. It appears that Gideon is attempting to indicate that on an emotional level he did not hate black South Africans as he did not find it “necessary to despise them” (2009:132). Yet he obviously did not like black South Africans and considers himself superior to the other racial groups in the country. It is only later, in his teen years, when he and his friends are heavily involved in the activity of “kaffir-bashing” (2009:132) that he remembers that “Dad knew better” (2009:132). He recalls the beliefs his father communicated to him and he “was still a young boy when he was warned that a sinister force was stirring up anti-white emotions in the townships” (2009:132).

It therefore becomes evident that his father’s politics influenced Gideon to feel justified in being defensive as Hendrik relayed stories and opinions to his children that indicated that there are other racial groups out there that they need to fear. Elsie Cloete explores Afrikaner identity in “Afrikaner Identity: Culture, Tradition and Gender” (1992) and she considers the element of fear instrumental in creating Afrikaner nationalism. She examines how Afrikaners were obedient to their leaders and how the threats, trials and afflictions which the Afrikaner believed threatened him the black ‘hordes’ in the interior, British imperialism, tropical diseases, being the losing party in two wars of independence and alternatively the threats of Roman Catholicism (Roomse gevaar), the blacks (swartgevaar), communism (rooigevaar) etc. were likened to the difficulties the Israelites encountered themselves. (1992:43)

Cloete’s analysis exposes how the Afrikaner felt attacked from various different sources and that fear was therefore instrumental in creating a unified Afrikaner people group. The Afrikaner therefore occupied a tenuous position due to all these threats which resulted in stronger bonds being formed between the people. Hendrik Goosen’s belief system is therefore not unexpected nor is the fact that he imparts this paranoia to his sons. Gideon
believes that his father “was shown to be one hundred percent right when communist agitators were found to be behind the 1976 Soweto uprising” (2009:132). The political paranoia he was exposed to as a child therefore becomes exacerbated in his later life when he is exposed to apartheid politics. This is aided by the activities he participates in with his hoodlum friends. His conscious motives for these actions seem to be mainly to have fun and to fit in. He does not appear to believe that he was mainly motivated by racially based hatred. It appears as if, with hindsight, he wishes to indicate that he simply fell into this way of life when he was younger without much forethought. He remembers how he was reluctant to become involved at first, how he “was the only one not standing up” (2009:134) and ready to take action and that he had “had no particular desire to fuck up a houtkop” (2009:134). Despite his claim of reluctance he is the one who alerts his friends to the fact that there are people in the house they want to go into. This suggests that some part of him was keen to participate, because he had really not wanted to do this he could easily have pretended that he did not see the movement of the curtains that gave this family away. He describes how they yelled at the inhabitants of the house, hauled them around by their necks and how they descended on one of the men “like a pack of wild dogs” (2009:138). This suggests that in addition to motives such as curiosity, or a desire to fit in, he could choose to become involved because of a deeply imbedded anger and an affinity for violence. His motives are not clear; however, the importance of race is communicated in this instance as the fact that he is an Afrikaner is what enables him to enter these people’s houses violently and mistreat them in this manner. Race becomes the excuse for him to act in a certain way as he is allowed to live out a violent lifestyle that is endorsed by his friends and eventually by his colleagues and superiors in the police force because of his white skin. In this his sense of entitlement and superiority over others he considers inferior, born out of his racial and gendered identity is communicated. Gideon’s tendency to marginalise others is therefore enabled by the nationalist apartheid system.

4.2. The Afrikaner Woman – A Unique Species

Afrikaner women occupied a tenuous space in South Africa in that they experienced privilege over other racial groups yet had to be subservient to Afrikaner

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28 This is a reference to a quote by Antjie Krog included in Elsie Cloete’s article Afrikaner Identity: Culture, Tradition and Gender. Krog states: “The Afrikaner woman, in my view, is a privileged species, unique on earth” (1992:53).
men. This is particularly evident when examining the relationship between Maria and Hendrik Goosen as well as the romantic attachments Gideon becomes involved in. Maria Goosen exhibits a deferential attitude in relation to her husband Hendrik. This is not surprising considering the history of patriarchal dominance in the Afrikaner nation. Elsie Cloete addresses the changing role of the Afrikaner woman throughout South African history in “Afrikaner Identity: Culture, Tradition and Gender”. According to Cloete it appears that the role of the Afrikaner woman was mostly determined by Afrikaner men as the women became involved where they were needed. This is evident in that the women fought alongside the men in the South African war because they needed larger numbers and this in turn resulted in Afrikaner women becoming a symbol of the ‘volksmoeder’ (mother of the nation) used to unite the Afrikaner people. The Vrouemonument (Woman’s Monument) was erected to celebrate the Afrikaner women who had died during the war even though that time “the women have been largely stripped of their nineteenth century heroic past as people who fought alongside the men on the battlefield or who had helped push and pull loaded wagons through drifts and over mountain ranges” (1992:48). There are two commemorative brochures published intended to celebrate the Afrikaner woman. The first brochure was written by N.J. van der Merwe and in this brochure Cloete perceives that “there is to be seen in Van der Merwe’s 1926 text the simultaneous convergence of the ideal of the volksmoeder and the rise of Afrikaner nationalism” (1992:48). However the perception and role of women changed after this, depending on the needs of Afrikaner society. Cloete claims that:

By the time the second brochure was published in 1961, the Afrikaners had gained power beyond their wildest expectations. The volk was strong, powerful and rich. The volksmoeder had become redundant and she no longer had such a significant role to play in the upliftment of the Afrikaner. The Afrikaner woman was ripe for a second confinement, this time by the mass media and Western standards of femininity. (1992:48)

As long as the ‘volk’ were strong the Afrikaner woman did not need to be a strong presence. The Afrikaner woman therefore served the purpose that the Afrikaner man needed her to serve in order to promote Afrikaner nationalism. This unstable identity also left Afrikaner women open to being influenced by factors such as “the mass media and Western standards of femininity” (1992:48).
In _Little Ice Cream Boy_ the influence of Western standards of femininity on women becomes apparent. Gideon goes into quite a lot detail about the women he meets later in his life, in terms of their physical appearance. He comments on whether they tend to their physical appearance sufficiently. This can only be based on his personal standards that would have been shaped by the society he was part of. (This will be explored in more detail in relation to Sharné, the mother of his child, and Debbie his partner at the end of the text.) However it does not come across in relation to Maria Goosen to the same extent as Gideon does not describe his mother’s physical appearance in great detail. It is clear though that Maria compares herself favourably to some people in terms of her physical appearance as she had always warned her children “against these ponytailed Zephyrs in their bell-bottoms, sleeveless shirts and platform shoes” (2009:55). There is a sense of superiority communicated here, based on physical appearance. Marijke du Toit explores the changing identity of the Afrikaner woman in her 2003 article “The Domesticity of Afrikaner Nationalism: Volksmoeders and the ACVV, 1904-1929”. She concedes that the needs of the Afrikaner volk were instrumental in the construction of the role the Afrikaner woman played at different times in Afrikaner history. Afrikaner women were only able to express themselves in forums like Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereeniging. Du Toit examines the women who were part of this organisation. She focuses on women like Elizabeth Roos, the first president of the ACVV and subsequent president and divorcée Maria Elizabeth Rothmann who attempted to “blend older notions of maternal piety with ideas about women’s studies as members of a racially, linguistically, and religiously defined volk [this] coincided with (in fact, marginally preceded) both the activities of the cultural nationalist societies in which men took the lead” (2003:175). Du Toit therefore believes that “assertions that Afrikaner nationalism’s ‘hegemonic gender identity’ was ‘male’ must be tempered by considering the impact of the women’s dominion of politicised _vrouesake_” (2003:176). According to Du Toit the Afrikaner woman unmistakably plays a role in the formation of Afrikaner identity and in particular in relation to the identity of the Afrikaner woman. Despite this, these women were only allowed to address the political issues Afrikaner men allowed them to address. The ‘power’ these women had access to in society was consequently still limited by male concerns. This indicates their subservience to Afrikaner men.

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29 Translated: Afrikaans Christian Women’s Society.
Nancy Armstrong scrutinizes the power relationships between men and women along with women’s space in the domestic sphere in “The Rise of Feminine Authority in the Novel” (1982). Armstrong explores the mode of thinking that authority is generated when “the female relinquishes political and economic control to the male in order to acquire exclusive authority over domestic life, the emotions, taste, and morality” (1982:131). This results in a breakdown of “male aristocracy into masculine and feminine powers” (2982:131) thereby suggesting that a different source of power is available to women than to men. However the fact that the sphere of power was limited to domestic concerns and excluded issues of politics and economy serve to indicate that this power was at the mercy of the males within society. Aveen Maguire examines the workings of power in relation to women, specifically in Ireland, in “Power: Now You See it, Now You Don’t. A Woman’s Guide to how Power Works” (1992). Maguire argues that no-one can doubt that the women’s movement “possesses the will to change our society” (1992:18) yet she also concedes that “the successful exercise of our power has been limited” (1992:18). She believes that despite the will of the women’s movement to change society it is necessary to acknowledge that “power is being exercised against” (1992:19) women too. Maguire’s admission that women’s power within society is limited corresponds with both Armstrong and Du Toit’s views that although women were able to exercise power within different societies the power exercised was mediated. In Little Ice Cream Boy Maria Goosen serves as an example of a submissive Afrikaner woman with limited options and power available to her. Hendrik dominates over his wife yet there are instances in the text when Maria does attempt to stand up to her husband in order to defend her children. This always results in violence and on one occasion she even attempts to leave him after a particularly violent episode. She moves out of the house with her youngest son Pieter as Karel and Gideon decide to stay with their father. After she leaves the Goosen “household was in chaos” (2009:39) and they hire a domestic servant, Martha. This despite the fact that “Dad was always vehemently against a servant working in the house” (2009:30). This indicates that Maria Goosen is primarily missed for her domestic abilities, corresponding with the view of the Afrikaner woman being in charge of the household and mainly cast as a mother figure. Hendrik Goosen then started wooing his wife again and he “promised to stop drinking and never to beat her” (2009:40) or their children again. Maria does eventually move back in yet the change in Hendrik’s behaviour did not last very long putting Maria back into the position she attempted to escape. Due to
Maria’s submission to her husband Hendrik, his belief system becomes the predominant influence in his children’s upbringing. The blurb on the back cover of *Little Ice Cream Boy* asks the question: “How is it possible that the son of a decorated, God-fearing security policeman could fall so low?” The text in fact suggests that Hendrik Goosen was very instrumental in his son’s life choices and indicts this “God-fearing security policeman” for the role he played in his son’s later actions.

Gideon appears to inherit Hendrik Goosen’s attitude towards those he considers less significant than himself. In his sessions with the psychologist in prison he admits that he has “run from Hendrik Goosen [his] whole life, but [has] never managed to elude him” (2009:127). His relationships with women run a similar course to his father’s. Gideon’s romantic relationships are complicated and he exhibits a sense of entitlement and violence in his relationships prior to being sent to prison. His first sexual encounters are with a prostitute alongside Barney, Willem, Jakes and Johnnie. He describes the two prostitutes that they hire as “the two tarts” (2009:104) indicating his perception of them as objects. He surveys them critically and remarks on the fact that the one prostitute’s “thighs were covered with unsightly dimples and hollows” (2009:104). These women are hired to have sex with these young boys therefore Gideon could feel entitled to judge them based on their appearance in the manner that he does, because he could equate these two women with products that they purchased. His attitude to the women he dates later in life, is however, not vastly different in that he still judges them on their physical appearance and appears to consider himself to be superior to them. Gideon becomes infatuated with a girl called Maryna who works at the bank. He can’t stop himself from thinking about “her angelic features and her elongated fingers” (2009:196). Her beauty keeps him awake at night and the first time he speaks to her he comments on her physical beauty. She does not respond in a favourable way and challenges Gideon by asking if he’s ‘coming on to her’. This becomes the object of his fantasies and he starts “spying on Maryna” (2009:197) knowing exactly what time she leaves work and following her “to the flat where she lived” (2009:197). He eventually orchestrates an occasion where he “coincidentally bumped into her one afternoon after work” (2009:197) and their relationship develops from this meeting onwards. The relationship is short-lived and Maryna eventually ends it. Despite the fact that the relationship is over Gideon becomes upset when she starts dating a helicopter pilot subsequent to their failed relationship. Gideon initially vents
his “shame and humiliation on a houtkop robber with Mick Jagger lips and a hard-arsed attitude” (2009:199). The suspect would not confess to “where he’d hidden the pistol and money he’d ripped in a hold-up at a business in Florida” (2009:199) so Gideon violently assaults him to the point where one of his colleagues has to stop him. There is clearly a direct relation between this violent outburst and Gideon’s feelings related to the failed relationship with Maryna. His violent treatment of the suspect results in Gideon being admonished by the Major. Yet despite the fact that Gideon was clearly in the wrong in this instance, the Major is upset because this means that the police will “have to get affidavits from policemen stating that the suspect attacked [him] during interrogation and that [he] restrained him and defended [him]self” (2009:201). Although Gideon does not act out violently against Maryna herself his anger nonetheless manifests in violence towards another human being, much like his father’s did towards his mother. This episode also effectively communicates how safe he was in the police force as he was clearly in the wrong yet the other officers lie to keep him from harm. Gideon is evidently in a privileged position partly due to his skin colour and partly due to his profession.

Gideon recovers from his failed relationship with Maryna when he falls in love with a prostitute named Sharné. He is attracted to her from the first moment when he sees her and describes her as “an angel; an alluring young turtle-dove” (2009:213) who took his breath away. His description of Sharné is reminiscent of his earlier description of Maryna’s “angelic features” (2009:196). In his mind he therefore casts both women in the role of an angel; despite Sharné’s profession. Gideon’s description of these women evokes the familiar practice of representing a woman as either an angel or a whore. Roxanne Grimmett examines the stereotypical manner in which female characters were presented in Renaissance tragedy in “‘By heaven and hell’: Re-evaluating Representations of Women and the angel/whore dichotomy in Renaissance Revenge Tragedy” (2005). Grimmett states that the “polarised female paradigm of the angel and the whore [was] an ideological dichotomy that dominated Renaissance constructions of femininity” (2005:31). Interestingly in *Little Ice Cream Boy* Gideon, a contemporary character, chooses to represent Sharné in this stereotypical manner. This suggests that for some men the angel/whore binary remains their main point of reference when it comes to describing the women around them. It could be that Gideon needs to perceive Sharné as an angel, despite all evidence to the contrary, in order to make her worthy of his affection. Their relationship escalates from a professional one, where he makes use of
her services, to a romantic association “without any money changing hands” (2009:221). Gideon and Sharné go on quite a few dates together until he declares his love to her which results in Sharné ending their association as she claims that love is “not part of the deal” (2009:224). She therefore chooses to exert her right of choosing who she associates with by breaking off the relationship. Gideon is therefore rejected again; and again he does not handle it well. He confesses that he “became obsessed with her” (2009:236) and “spent hours and nights following her” (2009:237). Again, as he did with Maryna, he took to stalking the woman who rejected him. This behaviour communicates that Gideon continues to experience a sense of possessiveness over these women who rejected him. Gideon’s obsession with Sharné however brings about fatal consequences. After following her for a while Gideon comes to realize that she is spending a lot of time with a man named Theo Papadakis, who is heavily involved in the world of “drugs and prostitution” (2009:238). Chappies, one of Gideon’s colleagues, informs him that he is pitted against a noteworthy adversary as Papadakis “likes fucking jailbait and feeds them drugs and makes them do groeps-woepse” (2009:239). Gideon “became filled with rage and fury” (2009:239) at the thought of Sharné subjecting herself to this and he “decided then and there that [he] was going to say a hard goodbye to him” (2009:239). His motive appears to be a desire to rescue Sharné. This again communicates his sense of superiority over Sharné and his possessiveness in relation to her as he makes this choice for her. His possessiveness masquerades behind his good intentions yet the fact that she is not allowed to choose for herself suggests that he perceives her as his subordinate, someone he can possess. However on some level he is aware that his motivation is selfish as it “was the only way to get rid of the toxic brew in [his] head” (2009:239). It seems that Gideon will do whatever he needs to in order to have Sharné to himself. Chappies offers his assistance partly because he does not like Papadakis and partly because he wants to get a hold of the “fortune in a safe in his office” (2009:239). Gideon’s motives are not financially motivated as he claims not to want any of the money for himself but Chappies points out that he will need it because “Sharné is an expensive chick” (2009:239). This statement further enhances that Gideon and his friends see Sharné as a possession that he can acquire. Additionally it suggests that Sharné is aware of the currency her physical beauty affords her and she uses it to her advantage. Gideon’s blatant disregard for the law as he chooses instead to satisfy his own desires and sense of entitlement when it comes to Sharné is furthermore conveyed here.

30 Translated: orgies.
The fact that he chooses yet again to solve his romantic problems by making use of violence is reminiscent of Hendrik Goosen and suggests that he did not manage to escape the influence of his father. Gideon also does not appear to fear being held accountable for his actions indicating the position of privilege he enjoys as a member of the South African police service. The instances that his major previously covered up where he became unnecessarily violent secured Gideon’s position in the police and possibly reinforced his belief that he is above the law. This effectively communicates the position of privilege he enjoyed under the apartheid dispensation as an Afrikaner male. Sharné’s desires do not come into play in his decision-making process and he only acts on what he believes is best for her, and what suits him best. Gideon kills Papadakis after breaking in at one of his clubs and when his associate Spyker asks Gideon what Papadakis’ sin was he responds by saying he “fucked my girlfriend” (2009:249). Gideon therefore exacts revenge on someone for sleeping with Sharné despite the fact that she ended their relationship quite some time ago. Gideon clearly regards Sharné as his property despite what she herself says on the matter. The fact that he later purchases a nightclub and names it “Club Sharné” (2209:273) further evidences both his obsession with her and his desire to possess her. Their relationship does commence again at a later stage but it is a tumultuous relationship and Gideon believes that “Sharné consumed and absorbed” (2009:318) his life before she “spat him out and gave him up and buried him for ever” (2009:318). Eventually Gideon does end up becoming physically violent towards Sharné after she becomes pregnant with his child and though he apologizes for hitting her she threatens “to take the baby and go back to her family” (2009:381). Gideon manages to avoid this as he “made her a pipe so she stayed” (2009:381) indicating that he knows exactly how to control and manipulate Sharné by playing on her weaknesses. Hendrik Goosen’s influence is particularly apparent in this relationship as Gideon is physically violent toward the mother of his child yet he manipulates her into staying with him much as Hendrik did with Maria. Despite his sense of entitlement in relation to Sharné she is one of the lead witnesses against him when he is eventually convicted for some of his crimes. Sharné is not the only woman responsible for sending him to prison as a journalist Georgina du Toit also testifies against him. Gideon believes that in “a bizarre way she became the other woman” (2009:319) in his life. These two women are very instrumental in sending him to prison suggesting that his previously stable position of power as a white Afrikaner male has shifted.

Gideon first meets Georgina as she wants to do a story on him after he is shot in a brothel turf war. Georgina comes to see him in the hospital and reports on the shooting. In
doing so she gains his trust as she reports the exact information Gideon divulges. Georgina appeals to Gideon because of her foul language and appreciation for hard liquor evident when she pulls “a half-jack of brandy from her handbag” (2009:317) when visiting Gideon in jail. Sharné refers to her as a “creepy-crawly” (2009:317) suggesting that the two women have different standards in terms of physical beauty. Gideon becomes “bewitched” (2009:319) by Georgina and later realizes that she played him “like a soccer ball” (2009:320). Georgina is the one who coaxes Gideon into telling her everything he knows about Vlakplaas and eventually into confessing to the high profile murder of Professor Paul Williams that lands him in jail. Gideon was therefore outwitted by this woman who bewitched him despite the fact that she “was a far cry from the slutty little tarts with nippy little tops” (2009:324) he normally spent time with. The fact that she is different from the other women he knows still did not deter him from turning her into a sexual object. He “fantasised about her voluptuous body, her cherry-coloured lips and her ravenous green eyes” (2009:324) and believed that she “was one of those chicks who preferred to be on top and do the fucking instead of just spreading and waiting to get fucked” (2009:324). In this description it appears that Gideon casts Georgina in the whore role as his thoughts of her are mainly sexual. There are no descriptions of her ‘angelic features’. His main impression of her is therefore linked to her as an object in his sexual fantasies and his inability to see her in a non-sexual light could be part of the reason that Georgina is able to outwit him. Gideon becomes so besotted with her that whenever she wanted to see him he complied and he confesses that he “would have done anything to see her” (2009:350). Gideon confesses everything to her about his illegal activities and she breaks the story in the press, betraying his trust. Gideon’s judgement was therefore impaired by the fact that she was a woman and that he was infatuated with her and by his misguided belief that she would not betray him. His belief in his own superiority over women therefore trips him up in this instance and again serves to indicate that his previously stable role as a privileged and protected Afrikaner male is changing.

His shifting role becomes particularly evident in his final relationship. The romantic relationship between Gideon and Debbie offers him some kind of escape from his prison life. Debbie writes Gideon a letter out of the blue and describes herself as “an ordinary woman from Roodepoort” (2009:7). He initially does not answer her letter as he cannot understand her motive for writing to him as the only reason she offers is that she had seen him “on television, read about [him] and decided to write [him] a letter” (2009:7). Debbie persists however and they start regularly writing to one another. The relationship is therefore
initiated by the woman in this instance, unlike his previous relationship, suggesting that traditional expectations about relationships are changing in his life. It appears that Gideon does not confess much about his previous life to Debbie but that with her he sees himself as a different man. The first time he meets her he realizes that he is “skinny and turning grey and there’s little left of the macho gangster” (2009:10) that he used to be. Debbie describes him as “a decent human being” (2009:10) at their first meeting and they do not appear to discuss his past but instead they “spoke and laughed and generally talked shit” (2009:11). It appears that their relationship does not focus on the past for the most part. For the first time Gideon becomes introspective and casts his judgemental eyes on to himself and does not only judge the woman he is interested in. He appears to enjoy his time with Debbie as they speak “about everything but The Bomb” (2009:399), the nickname for the prison he is held in, but they instead discuss her idea to buy a “smallholding on the other side of Honeydew” (2009:399) as she wants Gideon’s mother and daughter to move in with her. His relationship with her appears to become his way of escaping his reality as he sees her as his “lifeline” (2009:399) and his” salvation” (2009:399). Debbie also goes to great pains to reunite him with his daughter and “to convince Charmaine that her father is not the debased cut-throat that everyone makes him out to be, but the victim of circumstances and shit like that” (2009:427). It appears that in his relationship with Debbie Gideon finds a different way to relate to others and a new identity where he is not primarily Gideon Goosen: apartheid criminal. Interestingly Debbie achieves this in her role as a mother figure. Even Gidoen describes her as looking “too much like a high school teacher and even . . . a bit like [his] own mother a decade or two ago” (2009:11). In contrast to his earlier relationships, Debbie is the primary provider and decision-maker in the relationship. This suggests that this mother role that she assumes in relation to the Goosen family becomes a source of her personal power. Debbie, like Maria, is given power thanks to her domesticity. Gideon needs her at this stage in his life leaving her in the role of primary provider that he would traditionally have assumed. It is only in this stage of his life where he is in prison that he relinquishes his role as dominant member of his nuclear family possibly mainly because he is forced to. Debbie’s power is therefore limited as it is dependent on Gideon’s disempowerment.
4.3. Afrikanerdom - A Religious Experience

As mentioned earlier Gideon is the product of a household described by the blurb on the back cover as being under the influence of a “God-fearing security policeman”. It becomes evident that he has internalised many of his father’s belief systems and behaviours as an adult. Gideon is consequently a product of Hendrik who can be viewed as a product of Afrikaner nationalism. The fact that he is described as “God-fearing” is not coincidental as the influence of the Dutch Reformed Church is apparent in the formation of Afrikaner nationalism. Elsie Cloete comments in specific on the how the church impacted the perception of the volksmoeder. Cloete states that:

The manipulated interconnectedness between language and Afrikanerdom, God and the volksmoeder is clearly illustrated in a letter to the ACVV in 1915 from the Dutch Reformed Church Synod which expressed its appreciation for the organization’s work in the interests of “our language and our nationality” (in Lambrechts, 1957: 180). (1992:52)

It is clear that the Dutch Reformed Church reinforced the expectations placed on Afrikaner women in addition to emphasising the importance of having an exclusive shared language. There appears to be a clear link between religion (specifically the Dutch Reformed Church), Afrikaans and the role of the woman in the construction of Afrikaner nationalism corresponding with Engel’s analysis of the importance of elements such as language and law in terms of forming an imagined community. The Dutch Reformed Church operates with its own set of rules or laws within South African society. Saul Dubow comments on the fact that the opinion of this specific church denomination carried some weight with the Afrikaner people in “Afrikaner Nationalism, Apartheid and the Conceptualisation of ‘Race’ (1992)”. Dubow observes that the Dutch Reformed Church “acted as a self-referential discourse, a coded vocabulary of imperatives and shibboleths which could be, and were, constantly reinterpreted in the light of political realities” (1992:217). This indicates that the church was appropriated by the state in order to influence the Afrikaner people. This corresponds with Elsie Cloete’s statement that the Dutch Reformed Church Synod carried a lot of weight with the ACVV in the past. It can therefore be argued that the opinion of the Dutch Reformed Church influenced Afrikaners yet that the ultimate power was locked up in politics.
Although the Goosen family themselves are not particularly involved members of the DRC, this church denomination does serve as a symbol of social acceptability to them. This is evident in Gideon’s awareness that he is not allowed to have a crush on Linda, a girl who is not a member of this particular church denomination. Despite the fact that instances of attending church are not described regularly in the narrative it becomes apparent that the church has authority in their lives even if they are not avid members. An instance that effectively illustrates this is when Karel Goosen develops a crush on the Dominee’s daughter and she rejects him. This results in a fight between Karel and her brother Paul, who decides to “settle their score on Friday at the vlei” (2009:49). Karel knocks out the Dominee’s son resulting in a visit by Dominee Reyneke to the Goosen house. Karel pleads his innocence and as a result is not disciplined physically, his “only punishment was that he had to go on his knees and endure an excruciatingly long prayer from Dominee Reyneke” (2009:50). Karel therefore comes out of the episode virtually unscathed. Yet it is important to note that the Dominee has the authority to come into the Goosen home and challenge Karel in this manner suggesting that he holds a position of power in their lives based on his position. His position of power however does not bring about any real change as the Goosen men do not attach a lot of value to this visit and his prayer. In this instance the ineffectiveness of the Dominee, the representative of the Dutch Reformed Church, is communicated. He is not truly able to do or say anything that will oblige Karel to take the blame for what he did or to bring about a change in Karel’s future behaviour.

Despite their seemingly blasé attitude towards the Dominee’s reprimand of Karel the Goosens are members of the church and they attend its services. This suggests that the church continues to play a traditional role of importance in their lives despite their personal qualms about the Dominee. It is after “the usual dreary service” (2009:63) that they return home to find the dead body of Pieter. The youngest Goosen, Pieter, hangs himself in the bathroom while the rest of his family are attending the church service. Pieter’s funeral service drives home to Gideon just how far removed the reality of the church is from the reality of his life. He is not able to relate to the way “Dominee Reyneke spun a delightful tale about a beautiful and promising young life that had been tragically snuffed out by an evil demon” (2009:65) or how the Dominee believes they should not despair “because one day we will embrace Pietertjie again” (2009:65). This indicates that Gideon no longer finds solace in this church or its beliefs
and rituals as it does not appear to be connected with the reality the Goosen family faces. Gideon believes that “if it was a demon who had tied that knot around my brother’s neck, his name was Hendrik Goosen and he was sitting right there in church next to me” (2009:65). This communicates that Gideon believes that real life is radically different from the glossed over version of reality that Dominee Reyneke is presenting to them. The fact that his father can sit in the church, and not be indicted for the part that he played in Pieter’s demise, suggests how uncomfortable aspects of reality can be disregarded by the churchgoers. Gideon credits this as the day he “lost faith in Jesus and turned [his] back on God and his so-called goodness and greatness and holiness” (2009:65). Gideon’s disillusionment with the beliefs of the society he lives in and the culture he adheres to at that time becomes apparent. Maria Goosen also becomes disillusioned with the Dutch Reformed Church and decides to join the Apostolic Church in favour of the D R C after Pieter’s death as she is tired of “people’s prying pitying glances” (2009:80). Hendrik is angered by her decision and her son Karel responds by chanting the offensive saying “Apostolie stink na olie!”

Significantly Hendrik does not refute Maria’s decision even though he is upset by it which leads Gideon to believe that Hendrik wouldn’t mind “skipping church as he usually had a motherfucker of a hangover on Sunday mornings” (2009:81). This suggests that even though Hendrik did not want to attend church the Goosens kept up appearances in order to be accepted by their community. Hendrik attended church even though he found it uncomfortable because of the weight the D R C carried in the Afrikaner community. Like Dubow, Johan Kinghorn explores the role of the Dutch Reformed Church in relation to Afrikaner nationalism and finds that “the religious dimension was integral to the internal discourse on ethnicity in Afrikaner circles [and that it] is not for nothing that Afrikaner ethnicity presented itself as Christian Nationalism” (1994:394). It is the D R C that was responsible for “the myth of Afrikanerdom” that represented Afrikaners as “infused with the spirit of Calvinist religion” and having come “to form a new nation commissioned by God to further civilisation and Christianity in Africa” (1994:397). The respected position Afrikaners afforded to the D R C is therefore not surprising as this church denomination played such an instrumental role in Afrikaner nationalism. The decision to move away from

31 Translated: Apostolic smells like oil. This would be considered humorous as it rhymes in Afrikaans and is a reference to the more charismatic tendencies of the Apostolic church, like anointing its members with oil on occasion.
the D R C is therefore a significant decision and could account for Hendrik’s initial anger when Maria informs him of her decision resulting in him shouting at her and throwing “his napkin on the floor” (2009:80). This reaction could possibly be ascribed to the fact that Maria is deviating from the norm as the Apostolic church is disrespected and mocked by some Afrikaners. Gideon admires his “riff-raff friends that crawled out of the dungeons of Randfontein” (2009:77) and he confesses that he “grew to love them more than Dad, Mom, Karel or Jesus” (2009:77). This statement implies that there was an expectation placed on him during his upbringing to love Jesus. It is implied that Jesus, and therefore the church, played a role in his younger life and that his disillusionment only came later in life, after feeling that he had been personally failed by the lies of the church. The text seems to suggest that the D R C could be slipping from its reputable position in the lives of some Afrikaners. Traces of this church denomination’s former power and influence could remain in the lives of some Afrikaners as it was so integral to apartheid policies. Yet the text also alludes to a sense of disillusionment with the D R C, even prior to the end of apartheid, due to the vast difference between the reality of Afrikaner experience and the version represented by the church. One of the great pillars of Afrikanerdom, the Dutch Reformed Church, let the Goosen family down so they distanced themselves from this church denomination. The decrease in influence of the Dutch Reformed Church indicates that the ideology that Afrikaner nationalism relied upon has become unstable.

4.4. The Post-apartheid Afrikaner Male – Reconciling to His New Role

In prison Gideon is initially a deserted figure without friends. This suggests just how meaningless his belief system was as he is left alone and not even those who paid his salary when he was committing crimes for the government defend him. Gideon is deserted by the forces he was acting on behalf of. This is reminiscent of the situation Eugene de Kock, one of the most notorious apartheid criminals, finds himself in. Pauw describes De Kock in his autobiography *Dances with Devils* and after the conviction of Eugene de Kock remarks:

> And then without preamble, apartheid’s ultimate weapon was not just defeated, but denied and shunned. He awakened from his long nightmare alone and forlorn. The politicians who had spawned the hate and funded the killers, the generals who spurred them on, the dominees who prayed for their
deliverance from enemies, the judges and magistrates who excused their deeds as self-defence, the civil servants in grey shoes who did the paperwork that let the system classify, remove, disinherit and control, clucked their tongues and shook their head, then gave silent thanks for their personal escape from retribution. (2006:148).

In this statement Pauw indicts the fact that only some apartheid criminals were charged with their crimes. This list represents a litany of the institutionalised powers that go into upholding states and governments, including religious institutions. Pauw describes how some perpetrators, like De Kock, became scapegoats for others who were never called upon to answer for their active participation in bringing about apartheid policies and enforcing apartheid rule. Gideon is partly alone because of his past crimes and partly because he chooses not to associate with those who were jailed for similar crimes. Interestingly he refers in particular to a fictional version of Eugene de Kock and his friends. Gideon becomes annoyed at this fictional De Kock who is always attempting to seek amnesty for himself and others jailed for similar crimes. Gideon does not believe that this will ever happen and sees himself as being very different from the other apartheid criminals and he thinks they are misguided to believe that because he “whacked a leftie commie – or anti-apartheid activist as they’re called these days - ” he’s “on their side” (2009:4). The shift in labels subsequent to the end of apartheid is conveyed in this statement as a person who would formerly have been labelled as a communist is now labelled as an activist thanks to the change in perspective. This suggests that language itself becomes complicit in the process of ‘othering’ people within society. He disapproves of the opinion that De Kock and his followers have “something to the effect that the white man must never hensop" to the communists and we must stand together and hold hands” (2009:4). Gideon ensures that these men know that he wants “fuck all to do with any of them” (2009:4). His choice not to align himself with De Kock and the others, but to rather be alone, suggests that he feels betrayed by the forces he formerly believed in and actively supported. J.M. Coetzee remarks on the change that takes place in terms of Afrikaner identity after the fall of apartheid in Stranger Shores (2001). Afrikaners appear to have been betrayed by their former belief system as they find themselves moving from a stable position of superiority to an unstable position in post-apartheid South African society. According to Coetzee:

half a century after the National Party came to power vowing to preserve at whatever cost the Christian Aryan identity of the Afrikaner, the wheel has come full circle: the intellectual vanguard of the Afrikaans-speaking sector,

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32 Translated: To surrender.
nervous of the name ‘Afrikaner’ so long as it carries its old historical freight of racial exclusivity, yet unable to offer a better one, proposes that it represents instead an embryonic, genetically hybrid, culturally syncretic, religiously diverse, nonexclusive, as yet unnamed group (‘people’ remains too loaded a term) defined (loosely) by attachment to a language – Afrikaans- of mixed provenance (Dutch, Khoi, Malay) but rooted in the African continent. (2001:255)

In this complicated definition of post-apartheid Afrikaner identity the instability of the previously unwavering identity is clearly communicated. According to Coetzee’s statement the past cannot help but impact the present and this complicates identity construction now that Afrikaners no longer enjoy a privileged position. Coetzee argues that a shared language and geographical location now become the main factors that define Afrikaners.

Gideon eventually forms a meaningful relationship with a new young prison inmate Brendan de Klerk. Brendan de Klerk is one of “The Menlopark Three”33 (2009:402) a group made up of “three offspring of Pretoria’s elite up for bumping off a black hobo” (2009:401). The three young men were at a party and got “pissed out of their skulls when they decided to engage in a good old boere-sport – kaffir-bashing!” (2009:401). They are convicted of their crime after the girlfriend of one of the three testifies against them in court. Brendan de Klerk is sent to the Bomb and assigned to work in the prison library along with Gideon resulting in their paths crossing regularly. Gideon initially decides that he “was just going to ignore him” (2009:407) and Brendan seems wary of Gideon too as he tells him that his father warned him against Gideon. The two men are from completely different backgrounds. Gideon sees Brendan as being:

from the other side of town; from a leafy suburb where moms wore gold crosses between their tits, drove to their beauticians and shrinks in four-by-fours, had hysterectomies by the age of forty, clasped their legs at the thought of their personal trainers, and guzzled Valium and Prozac as though they were Smarties. (2009:408)

It is clear that these two men have nothing in common in terms of their upbringing or their former lifestyles yet in prison they become friends despite Brendan’s father’s warning and their different backgrounds. The fact that they are both white Afrikaner males imprisoned for violent acts committed against black South Africans indicates that

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33 This appears to be a reference to the notorious Waterkloof Four who were convicted of killing and assaulting two black men in a Pretoria park in 2001. According to The Witness of 23 December 2011 the crime was committed when the perpetrators were still in high school and they started serving their prison sentences only in August 2011, ten years after the actual crime. The teenage boys claimed at the time that they had “wanted to ‘scare’ the man, and assaulted him” (www.witness.co.za) as they believed him to be guilty of theft. According to The Witness two of the Waterkloof Four, Reinach Tiedt and Gert van Schalckwyk, were released from prison in 2011.
they also have quite a bit in common. This communicates that a racist mentality is not exclusively a poor white phenomenon as Brendan is not from an underprivileged background as Gideon and his friends were. In this it becomes evident that the sense of Afrikaner superiority and entitlement extended across all class divisions and that Afrikaner nationalism managed to promote this sense of racial hatred across the class divide. The text therefore does not shy away from invoking instances of racial violence that are recorded from the height of apartheid up to contemporary society. The extent of the crimes against humanity committed based on Afrikaner nationalism is therefore exposed in the narrative.

*Little Ice Cream Boy* communicates that in order to attain white privilege someone has to pay a price. Gideon and Brendan come to pay the price for their violent racially motivated actions by being imprisoned. Initially however in order for them to attain privilege others were made to pay the price. Now in post-apartheid South Africa a few isolated nominal characters who were socialised into believing that they were doing the right thing and acted on behalf of the Afrikaner nation are made to pay the price. Gideon does not appear to be attempting to excuse his behaviour in the re-telling of his life story, but he does appear to be endeavouring to make sense of it on a personal level. He claims that the prison psychologist he had to see had her own opinion about how he was “brutalized by his father and the subsequent rage that permeated [his] mind” (2009:253). His mother believes that his “deviant behaviour was the result of having the wrong friends” (2009:253). Gideon himself is not certain as to the reason for his behaviour as despite the various reasons or justifications that could be offered he wonders if maybe his “genes are freaky” (2009:253) or whether it’s “all of the above” (2009:253) that can be blamed for his lifestyle. He does not appear certain of either option yet seems to lean more towards the side of biology as he thinks that he’s “probably just a bad person” (2009:253). Gideon is clearly left in an uncertain space, not sure what motivated his actions to begin with or how to relate to those around him in post-apartheid South Africa due to the changing role of the Afrikaner man.

Despite the importance of telling a story like this that focuses on the life of an apartheid criminal it is easy not easy to read. The text brings to light the violent manner that Gideon and those around him adopted when it came to defending their assumed right to live in South Africa in the way that they chose to live. The violent episodes are described in
detail in the text suggesting that it is not attempting to soften, or perhaps excuse, what Gideon did in the name of the former government but rather that *Little Ice Cream Boy* is an attempt at understanding it. In order for Gideon to live the life he wanted to live someone had to pay a price. Despite the many benefits he gained from his former lifestyle in terms of finances and, initially, freedom he pays the price of relinquishing his innocence when committing these crimes, and eventually by being made to give up his freedom. Gideon claims that ‘whacking the ANC was the last thing on his mind’ (2009:272) and that all he “wanted was to pursue [his] perversions” (2009:272). These statements suggest that his actions were not entirely fuelled by racial hatred or politically motivated but that he was perfectly positioned within the police force to live out his appetite for violence without being truly held accountable for it. His violent domination over those around him only ends after he is found guilty of murder and has to pay the price of his personal freedom as he is held accountable for his actions by the new government.

4.5. Conclusion

In *Little Ice Cream Boy* the cost of attaining white privilege is examined, especially in relation to the perpetrators of apartheid. The text exposes the physical and psychological violence Afrikaner nationalism brought about in the lives of South Africans. Theorists Johan Kinghorn and David Welsh are invoked to suggest the reason behind Afrikaner nationalism. They suggest that it is a defensive reaction against prior domination and indicative of an internalised inferiority complex. This inferiority complex results in the marginalisation of various members of society which is explored in the narrative of *Little Ice Cream Boy*. The text exposes how under the nationalist apartheid government the rights of everyone who does not meet the ‘standards’ set by Afrikaner men in particular are at the mercy of the dominant group. In *Little Ice Cream Boy* this includes people from different racial groups that are not considered white as well as women and effeminate men. The position of women in terms of Afrikanerdom is consequently investigated by examining Elsie Cloete and Marijke de Klerk’s work on the role of the volksmoeder in relation to Afrikaner nationalism. The role Afrikaner women are made to play relative to Afrikaner men is communicated in the Goosen men’s relationships with the women around them. It becomes apparent that the power available to some of the women in the text, like Maria and Sharné, is mediated by men. Maria’s power is mainly related to the domestic space corresponding with Nancy Armstrong’s argument that
female power is mainly related to domestic space whereas male power is not. A further pillar of Afrikaner nationalism, the Dutch Reformed Church, is portrayed in the text. Saul Dubow, Elsie Cloete and Johan Kinghorn respectively argue that the Dutch Reformed Church was instrumental in creating what was “called the myth of Afrikanerdom by some” (1994:397). The fact that the D R C is deeply influential in the Afrikaner community is therefore not surprising yet *Little Ice Cream Boy* suggests that the role of the Dutch Reformed Church in Afrikaner society may no longer be as stable as in the past. This is evidenced in that the Goosen family initially use this church denomination as a way to gauge the value of those around them and that they also appear to perceive it as a space where they can fit in. The text suggests that the role of the church is changing and for the Goosen family it manifests in all their lives when Pieter Goosen commits suicide and Gideon becomes disillusioned with what he perceives to be lies that are told during the funeral. Although the text indicates that the D R C still carries some influence in Afrikaner society it appears to suggest that the sphere of influence has been changing.

Lastly, the price of white privilege is examined in relation to the perpetrators themselves by examining Gideon’s life in prison. The text indicates that the apartheid perpetrator is jettisoned from a position of security to a more unstable position under the new dispensation. The perpetrators in the text therefore pay for the privilege they attained during apartheid by serving prison sentences. Their unstable position post-apartheid comes across in their relationships to one another and in their relationship to those outside of prison. Gideon’s position changes in relation to women and people from different racial or economic backgrounds to his own. This becomes apparent as he finds himself engaging in relationships he would never have considered in the past. Firstly, he becomes romantically involved with a woman who is very different from the women he was involved with in the past. Debbie appears to be drastically different from his other romantic partners in that he does not describe her physical appearance in the same great detail as he did his former girlfriends. Debbie is also the one who initiates the relationship unlike his former girlfriends and she becomes the provider in their relationship thanks to his imprisonment. Gideon consequently changes the way he relates to women yet it can be argued that he is forced to change as he has limited options available to himself as an ageing prisoner. Secondly, Gideon becomes friends with a young Afrikaner from a privileged background. *Little Ice Cream Boy* appears to propose that the role of the Afrikaner man is changing within South African society due to his being made to pay the price for the white privilege enjoyed under apartheid.
5. Conclusion

In the introduction to this dissertation I quoted Leon De Kock who suggests that South African literature at present may no longer be defined by the struggle, but must find new subject matter in order to avoid “the striking danger of ennui where our oneness takes on the hue of indifference” (2005:78). He proposes that writers consider “getting more irreverently local” (2005:81) in order to avoid the danger of this ennui. The texts examined here are all certainly ‘irreverently local’ in their approach to the world that post-apartheid South Africans inhabit, and the way in which they inhabit it. Coconut, Playing in the Light and Little Ice Cream Boy all bring into focus the lives of ordinary South Africans, representative of three major racial groupings, thereby demonstrating the necessity of Njabulo Ndebele’s call for a ‘rediscovery of the ordinary’. However it becomes clear that the work of excavating the past, started by the TRC, has been continued by South African authors as they explore issues that the TRC exposed but did not manage to resolve. Each of these novels exhibits a fixation with race, indicating that South Africans have not been able to move away from the effects of the racialised past brought about by the apartheid system. Additionally, as I have suggested, the writers are concerned with the way in which whiteness is seen to be synonymous with privilege resulting in the condition of ‘whiteache’. However, this white privilege is never attained without cost. As Melissa Steyn states the “intimate role that the denigration of Africa has played in the identity construction of whiteness on this continent cannot be evaded” and that this “lies at the deepest heart of all whiteness” (2001:170). The fact that identifying as white results in the vilification of blackness cannot be overlooked. Steyn believes that “whites in South Africa cannot move forward without dealing with it [the aforementioned denigration of Africa]” (2001:170). (2001:170)). However, what emerges from this examination is that, not only are white South Africans unable to move forward if this issue is not dealt with, but that coloured and black subjects also need to examine what whiteache has done to them.

It becomes evident in both Kopano Matlwa’s Coconut and Zoë Wicomb’s Playing in the Light that aspiration to whiteness, and the privilege it brings, always comes at the price of internalised racial shame. The various characters examined in the two texts illustrate how there has to be a form of racial shame inherent in forsaking one’s own racial identity in order to have access to the privileges that come with a more Westernised identity. The two young female characters in Coconut illustrate how the valorisation of whiteness can work on two
levels. Firstly Ofilwe has internalised Western norms and values, while for the most part being unaware of this until her brother Tshepo points it out to her. In Ofilwe’s uneasy relationships with her fellow black students, and crumbling relationships with her family and with her white friends, the price of imbibing all things Western is evident. The insidiousness of this belief is communicated in that she is initially unaware of the emphasis she places on Western norms. She does not appear to realise that she measures herself against white standards of beauty until her brother apprises her of this. Ofilwe becomes an increasingly lonely character, caught in a space where she is not able to relate to anyone either black or white. Ofilwe’s loneliness becomes the major indicator of the consequences of imbibing a sense of inferiority based on the differing cultural practices and values she holds as a post-apartheid subject. Fikile however overtly embraces all things white and she is certainly not unaware of her admiration of whiteness. Yet she appears to be unconscious of the racial self-loathing this implies. Consequently she is an isolated and misunderstood character, always attempting to escape her circumstances. Her entire mission is to escape the poverty she still lives in and she rigorously pursues this escape and the privilege that comes with whiteness. Fikile is not able to see how this affects her relationship with herself and others as she has come to value the world of privilege she has come to associate with being white over and above other important processes, like self-awareness or friendship. This indicates both how much she hates her current situation as well as how powerful her desire for change is. In examining the characters in Coconut I have illustrated that whiteness remains an aspirational identity in the post-apartheid context. In addition to this it becomes clear that whiteness offers these characters no escape but in fact sets them up to become increasingly lonely and fractured individuals as they perform different aspects of what is considered white behaviour. Coconut appears to challenge the stability of whiteness in showing up how damaging it can be to internalise it as an aspiration.

An analysis of Playing in the Light suggests that, unsurprisingly, whiteness in South Africa has been linked to privilege for a long time. The Campbell family, who so desperately want to advance beyond the derogatory and debilitating conditions of apartheid-legislated colouredness give up their true identity and decide to live a lie in order to become white in apartheid South Africa. This is not without cost as they have to forsake their families and friends because they can no longer associate with coloured people. The Campbell family therefore pay dearly for the so-called privilege they gain. The price they pay becomes evident when their daughter Marion learns of their true identity. Marion is forced to battle
with how to define herself now that she has to acknowledge the lie. Interestingly enough the fact that apartheid has ended does not negate the trauma Marion experiences from having to renegotiate her identity. She may not lose any of the financial privileges her parents’ deception brought about in her life, yet she feels forced to redefine herself in relation to the world she inhabits. I argued in this chapter that the fluidity of whiteness as a racial identity is exposed in relation to Marion’s discovery. The system of racial classification was not infallible resulting in all white identity becoming questionable. This automatically begs the question whether whiteness was worth all the sacrifices the Campbells made as the ‘inauthentic’ whiteness the Campbell family acquired resulted in separateness, both within the family and in relation to relationships outside of the family. The legacy of whiteness/whiteache in Marion’s life appears to be isolation, much like for Ofilwe and Fikile communicating that, for the Campbells, whiteness is “a dead end and a failed exit” as Olaussen suggests.

Little Ice Cream Boy focuses on what arguably was, at least during the apartheid era, one of the most stable forms of identity, the white Afrikaner male. In exploring what has becoming of a notorious apartheid criminal Jacques Pauw exposes how whiteness failed this particular character. Gideon Goosen becomes the scapegoat, made to pay the price for the white privilege, he himself, as well as all other white South Africans both Afrikaans- and English-speaking, enjoyed during apartheid. It becomes evident that Gideon’s role is no longer stable in relation to those around him. In prison he is like all other prisoners, without certain rights and privileges. This also results in him having to rely on others as he is unable to provide for his family outside of prison, or to make any decisions for them as he would have been able to do before. Gideon’s violent account of his past crimes certainly goes some way to exposing the story of an apartheid criminal. The narrative does not shy away from addressing difficult subject matter thereby ensuring that the focus is not exclusively on the unstable situation that white Afrikaner males may find themselves in now. The narrative therefore also explores the great lengths that a few had to go to to secure privilege for others and what it cost them. The first person narration gives the reader direct access to the way he reasons and the sense of entitlement that enabled him to ignore the rights of human beings. In this chapter I have contended that his white identity has now become unstable, that it failed him despite the price he paid for it.

It is clear that more work has to be done in order to undo the shackles of legislated racial categorisation. If these three narratives are in any way representative of thematic
concerns in post-apartheid South African writing, if nothing else, each demonstrates that whiteness and privilege are forces that continue to affect us all. Whiteache is a response to the elevation of whiteness. For black South Africans it means alienation from one’s cultural roots. For coloured South Africans it often means some sort of betrayal. For white South Africans it means the loss of guaranteed superiority and the necessity of acknowledging a history of privilege.
Bibliography:


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