

Disrupting the Familiar Family in Postcolonial Literature

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

at

Rhodes University

by

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February 2018

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Abstract

Anne Enright's *The Green Road*, Petina Gappah's *The Book of Memory* and Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's *Dust* offer various disruptive representations that challenge the normative family, and allow for an excavation of the potency and pervasiveness of the notion of family as an organising social principle, in a postcolonial context. Through these novels' depictions of unorthodox families, it becomes possible to unpack the metaphorical architecture that underpins the normative family – by which I mean that social formation which enables and relies upon gender binaries, heteronormative constructions of sexuality and exclusionary racial structures. Additionally, I will attempt to examine the role that the normative family plays in shaping the subject, and determining its avenues of association, through encountering the disruptive possibilities portrayed in Gappah, Owuor and Enright's works. My analysis is concerned with how the family orientates the subject in particular ways that regulate and delimit the subject's means of relating to herself, those who surround her and the historic and mnemonic pasts in which she is embedded. In representing alternate kinship structures, these novels expand the aesthetic and imaginative landscape of the family and allow for new forms of relation to emerge. These transgressive and radical ways of being, knowing and loving have disruptive consequences for those social formations which are structured by, and draw on, the family – in particular the nation state. This reworking of the nation state, as well as the destabilisation of the relations between nations states, provides new avenues for inhabiting the postcolonial world. In particular, my reading argues that representations of the unfamiliar family offer different ways of receiving and relating to the self, others, and the past within a social order ruptured by the violent legacies of colonisation.

Acknowledgements

The financial assistance from the Guy Butler Research Award towards this project is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to Rhodes University or the donor.

I would also like to thank:

My eternally patient and wise supervisor, Dr Minesh Dass, for teaching me so much and so well.

My parents, Zoe Laubscher and Neil Wesley Laubscher, for a lifetime's support and encouragement and for showing me the value of hard work.

My sister, Sara Beth Laubscher, for believing in me.

Keenan Dale Collett, for being my home.

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Introduction

The heteronormative family, as concept and structure, is both powerful and pervasive. Within its social formation are hierarchical social arrangements and political orientations that position people in relation to one another, and the world that surrounds them. In their representations of unorthodox, transgressive kinship formations, Anne Enright, Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor and Petina Gappah offers a revisionist challenge to those power structures that seek to restrict individual subjectivities and delimit the means of relation open to them. By reworking and challenging the recognisable outline of the family, these authors narrate more capacious contours for being in relation to those historical and social discourses that we create, and in which we are embedded.

Whilst the individual experience of the kinship structure – and the myriad permutations of those structures themselves – vary wildly and dramatically, the importance and weight of its influence is well remarked upon in scholarship and in literature. The normative family constitutes a fundamental principle of social organisation (Collins 63). Patricia Hill Collins outlines how the kinship structure links individuals with social communities¹:

Families constitute primary sites of belonging to various groups: to the family as an assumed biological entity; to geographically identifiable, racially segregated neighbourhoods conceptualised as imagined families; to so-called racial families codified in science and law; and to the [Nation-state] conceptualised as a national family.

(Collins 63)

Through this ubiquity, the family enables, and is shaped by, many kinds of social identities and structures. These identity markers and formations are inherited and internalised within the family. Accordingly, individuals typically become assigned within hierarchies of race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, nation, and social class by their experience of family (64). Collins refers to the versatility and pervasiveness of the ideological implications of the family as “the richness of the root metaphor of the family” (64).

Through my engagement with Petina Gappah’s *The Book of Memory*, Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor’s *Dust* and Anne Enright’s *The Green Road*, I will unpack and outline some of the operation, effects and possibilities of this root metaphor of the family in a postcolonial context. In an extremely broad sense, the family trope “offers a ‘natural’ figure for sanctioning social *hierarchy* within a putative organic *unity* of interests” (McClintock, “Family” 63, original emphasis). Anne

¹ In this discussion, Collins is specifically referring to the family structure in the United States of America but her analysis is more widely applicable as well.

McClintock identifies how the imaginaries of the family have been used to sanction, naturalise and legitimise oppression within social communities and structures. As a result of the perceived biological basis for the organisation of the family, particularly in the so-called West, its inherent hierarchies and inequalities are coded as given and, subsequently, made invisible. McClintock further notes that, with the advent of Western modernity, the increasing institutionalisation of the family metaphor – as it became implicated in national ideologies – took on an imperial shape, “as the cultural invention of the evolutionary Family of Man was [projected] both onto the national metropolis and the colonial bureaucracy” (64).

This pervasiveness meant that the hierarchies inherent in the family structure (particularly with regards to the subordination of women) became entangled with colonial discourse and ideology. As McClintock states, these domestic oppressions became embedded within other social formations as well:

The metaphoric depiction of social hierarchy as natural and familial – the ‘national family’, the global ‘family of nations’, the colony as a ‘family of black children ruled over by a white father’ – thus depended on the prior naturalising of the social subordination of women and children within the domestic sphere.

(64)

As a result of these affinities between the family metaphor and the colonial apparatus, the gendered and racialised violences perpetrated under the rubric of imperialism remain intricately connected. Owing to this yoking of oppressions, literary depictions of postcolonial families offers a rich nexus for intersectional investigation.

Attempting a conclusive definition of the much vaunted and often controversial term postcolonialism, a nebulous and loosely arranged field of enquiry, seems anachronistic and ultimately fruitless. The nature of the kind of work vaguely gathered under the moniker ‘postcolonial’ has resulted in a field which “itself remains undefinable and amorphous in its outlines” (Seshadri-Crooks 49). Whilst the three countries represented in my project – Ireland, Kenya and Zimbabwe – were all occupied and administered by the same colonial power, the conditions resulting in their incorporation into the British Empire and the circumstances under which that imperial occupation took place necessarily differ drastically. My choice of novels, then, does not stem solely from any organising principle arising from the condition of postcoloniality; in other words, I am not grouping these works together simply because they demonstrate similarities of kind or character, being works located in former colonies. Rather, as I will attempt to demonstrate, these novels engage in complementary paths of imaginative enquiry. As such, when read alongside one another, they deconstruct, dispute and re-imagine the family in a manner

consistent with my understanding of the broader egalitarian, disruptive objectives of postcolonialism.

For the purposes of this project, I will attempt to clarify my usage of the term postcolonial through my understanding of some of its objectives, rather than by providing an exhaustive definition of the term. Postcolonialism can be understood to foreground a “politics of opposition and struggle [which] problematises the key relationship between centre and periphery” (Mishra and Hodge 276). For Kalpana Seshandri-Crooks, this politics of struggle prioritises questions of identity and visibility because “postcolonialism [works] to examine the conditions by which a group arrogates to itself the function of granting or denying recognition and respect” (52). The work that Owuor, Gappah and Enright’s texts do to challenge the limits of recognising, representing and centering that which has historically been silenced, thus writing a more accommodating vision for future relations, falls within the aims of postcolonialism.

Of particular significance to my investigation is the systemic and connected incarnations of relatednesses the family is entrenched within, and reproduces. Enright, Owuor and Gappah unpack and complicate these forms of relation by illustrating how individual subjectivity is shaped by its embeddedness within the family, how the kinship structure is defined and determined by those social formations that surround it, and how the framework of the nation state serves as a further web of connection. In particular, they assess the ways in which the nation state acts to link and delimit how different kinship groups understand themselves to be affiliated or separated. In other words, my analysis will focus on the family’s metonymic relations to other forms of identity construction and social contact in a postcolonial context.

Additionally, I wish to engage with how, “conceived of in its broadest sense, relatedness (or kinship) is simply about the ways in which people create similarity or difference between themselves and others” (Carsten, *After Kinship* 82). In Janet Carsten’s usage, relation determines every human interaction and an engagement with relation is, by necessity, a reckoning with difference (82). Following Collins and McClintock, relation, as an analytical term, operates as a flexible signifier which draws attention to the fact that individuals are submerged and imbricated within systems of relation, whilst simultaneously invoking the family’s influence upon these systems. For Kerry Bystrom, these kinds of associations can be understood as a reading frame that can “operate to destabilise common conceptions of the boundaries between public and private” as well as inviting and invigorating the potential power of imaginative worlds in reconfiguring social

realities (4). It is this composite understanding of relation and relatedness, as reading frame and analytical tool, that I use as a point of departure.

The kinds of compound destabilisations and reconfigurings offered by an engagement with relation are, in my estimation, central to the postcolonial concerns I have outlined previously. Consider Robert Young's assertion that "the postcolonial seeks to develop a different paradigm in which identities are no longer starkly oppositional or exclusively singular but defined by their intricate and mutual relations with others" (15). If we follow Janet Carsten's assertion that relatedness is, in fact, a function of difference, then the reworking of our approach to difference can be facilitated by a recasting of how we recognise and associate with the family. The family's implication within those differentiating systems of race, gender, sexuality and nationalism – not to mention its historical and mnemonic operations, which I shall discuss shortly – mean that the kinds of reworkings offered by these novels have intricate and far reaching consequences for those interests and objectives that can be loosely gathered under the rubric of the postcolonial.

As a result of the seemingly ingrained hierarchies inherent within the traditional family, any ethical or egalitarian project will necessarily have to challenge its operations and logics. As such, feminists "critique the family by deconstructing it, historicizing its structures and practices, analysing its normalizing operations in specific contexts, and even re-envisioning or reworking it" (Kaplan 207). These authors – Owuor, Gappah and Enright – engage in such a deconstructive critique but also offer a counterbalance to the dangers and violences of the family by gesturing towards the inclusive, recuperative and transgressive possibilities of love and relation as well. Consider Young's statement that: "[n]o one is so different that their very difference makes them unknowable. Othering was a colonial strategy of exclusion: for the postcolonial, there are only other human beings" (Young 29). Whilst Young's position is an uncompromising one that, perhaps, in an uncharitable reading may be seen to erase or deny the necessities of respecting and acknowledging the nuances of difference, I would maintain that his sentiment is visible in Enright, Owuor and Gappah's work. These novels utilise various narrative and aesthetic strategies that challenge, repudiate or mediate difference in order to offer new and more inclusive possibilities of relating across those social chasms that produce spectres of Otherness.

These sympathetic and tolerant capacities of the family are explored in the novels through their representations of the rewards of loving openly across boundaries. Enright, Gappah and Owuor's works all gesture towards the potential for a compassionate reconfiguring of the self enabled by such kinds of transgressive love. In Judith Butler's analysis of a photograph of what

appears to be two women kissing, titled “Lucy and Linda, liplocked”, she draws attention to love’s capacity to remake the self and “to somehow know oneself in the dispossession that love provides” (“Doubting Love” 68).

Through her exploration of love, which may not provide a definitive outline of the term but certainly contains its evocative silhouette, she draws attention to love’s relationality:

I am the one who loses myself here, in this way, under these conditions [...]. One finds that love is not a state, a feeling, a disposition, but an exchange, uneven, fraught with history, with ghosts, with longings that are more or less legible to those who try to see one another with their own faulty vision.

(68–69)

It is this sense of love – a discovery through loss, fraught with its accompanying ghosts and histories, legible only to those caught within it – that I read in these texts. The kinds of compassionate, benevolent possibilities to be found within familial love are complicated and costly, this love is riven with doubt and uncertainty in that it requires an exchange that revives and resuscitates at the cost of a security of self.

Reading Women, Writing Nation

These novels’ concerns with the self, subjectivity and the limits of recognition converge around a shared attempt to dispose of archetypal renderings of individual identity in order to incorporate visions of more nuanced subject positions. Consistent across the novels is a concern with the hostility of rigid identity positions, particularly that binary category of gender. In the conception of women as “an already constituted and coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location” there lies the implication of “a notion of gender or sexual difference or even patriarchy which can be applied universally and cross culturally” (Mohanty 199). By providing specific, detailed and distinct representations of women, these novels challenge such reductive modes of thinking and reading.

Crucially, these depictions focus on the social embeddedness of women (as category and as subject) and, consequently, challenge the structures that participate in the normalisation and conservation of such diminishing ways of conceiving of women. As noted by Elizabeth Cowie, “women as women are not simply *located* within the family, rather [...] women as women are *constructed*, defined within and by the group” (53, original emphasis). By drawing attention to the communal aspects of gender, Cowie emphasises the specifically political nature of kinship structures which designate men and women as father and mother respectively (54). The failure to

recognise the necessarily multitudinous and unstable nature of kinship structures is also implicated in the erasure of the identities located within those unfamiliar families. This negligence, which suppresses alternative or transgressive forms of relation, goes hand-in-hand with the ideological manifestation of an essentialised, given entity of 'women' (Mohanty 204). The intersectional feminisms apparent in Owuor, Gappah and Enright's novels recontextulise, excavate and problematise the categories of 'mother', 'wife' and 'daughter' in order to provide more inclusive forms of recognition for the subjects in question, but also to challenge their position within the family (and, by extension, the nation).

In reconceptualising how women are conceived of and typified within the family, these novels also gesture towards new avenues for women to relate to those wider social formations within which the family is rooted. McClintock outlines how, through the institution of marriage, women's access to and participation within the nation state is policed: "[m]arital laws, in particular, have served to ensure that for women, citizenship in the nation-state is mediated by the marriage relation, so that a women's *political* relation to the nation is submerged in and subordinated to her *social* relation to a man through marriage" (McClintock, "Progress" 298, original emphasis). As Elleke Boehmer establishes, women are generally integrated into the body politic in a contingent, primary symbolic capacity (*Stories* 13). In consequence, avenues for civic participation and political self-governance are restricted (14). The work undertaken by these novels to demythologise the category of 'woman' and rework the feminine position within the family through representation indicates alternative prospects for women to participate as citizens, or, more radically, conceptualises new, more accommodating forms of polity.

This kind of adaptive work has implications beyond the individual's relation to wider social formations. Owuor, Gappah and Enright also use the unorthodox kinship relations in their work to depict more hospitable forms of relation between individuals, particularly with reference to the challenges which arise from the fraught social contexts they depict. Aesthetic explorations and reconfigurations of domestic life can act to unsettle still influential discursive and visual economies of national belonging which are tied to those conservative organisations of home and family (Bystrom 14). In what Kerry Bystrom refers to as 'dilemmas of relatedness', she outlines the paradoxes generated by systems of oppression and segregation that have deeply scarred and fractured the social fabric of a nation (3). This critic is specifically referring to post-Apartheid South Africa in this instance, but I would contend that the questions she raises remain relevant for

other postcolonial contexts as well. After such systematic brutalities, how might a people recover their ability to relate to one another? Bystrom asks:

In what ways might shattered relationships within families and homes be repaired or rehabilitated? What can be done with the social relations left over from colonialism, slavery and apartheid? What does it mean to be related, through the framework of a democratic state, to those previously defined as radically other?

(3)

Enright, Gappah and Owuor's novels use the root metaphor of family to offer insight and commentary upon those dilemmas of relatedness associated with the postcolonial context. In doing so, they harness the ideological power of the family to offer non-traditional visions of relation. This reworking has far-reaching implications in that private life, family and home "are bound up with so many of the most pressing questions that faced transitional culture and society, from how to confront the traumas of the past to how to imagine new forms of daily life" (Bystrom 2).

The facets of family associated with time and chronology are particularly significant to my enquiry in that, in addition to organising our relation to those around us in the contemporary moment, kinship structures are central to navigating and enabling the individual's access to a communal past. For Barbara Misztal:

These groups – the family, the ethnic group and the nation – are examples of the main mnemonic communities which socialise us to what should be remembered and what should be forgotten. They affect the 'depth' of our memory, they regulate how far back we should remember, which part of the past should be remembered, which events mark the beginning and which should be forced out of our story.

(15)

As a result of the entanglement of historical communities with kinship structures, those revisionist – or at the very least transgressive – possibilities offered by a reworking of the activities of relation have implications for conceiving of, approaching and representing the past as well. Gappah, Owuor and Enright's novels offer ways of engaging with the past that produce more habitable modes of being in the present. Owuor, in particular, also gestures towards how, in changing means of our relation in the present, those silenced or erased aspects of the past may find space to be revealed or recovered in new social formations.

Crucially, community and narrative are mutually constitutive:

Groups of persons – those we refer to as communities – can be said to constitute themselves around and through narratives. Just as the individual exists through the implicit life-story, so the community exists through a 'story' that draws together the shared memory and expectation or projection.

(Carr 126)

As such, depictions of non-traditional kinship arrangements can be understood as history and memory

work because the representation of unorthodox families creates space for marginalised narratives embedded within those formations to emerge. In other words, through the depiction of unorthodox mnemonic communities, repressed histories can be more hospitably narrated within them. The work that these authors do in reforming and reimagining social communities consequently have similar revisionist implications for the historical and memorial narratives they contain and sustain. More extensive depictions of community formations in the present offer more inclusive ways of accessing and characterising the past.

Domestic history, if such a thing can even be said to exist, has been extensively undervalued, silenced or erased in the production of larger, sanctioned historical narratives (Hartman 4). Consider the ways in which the home and the family have often been read and represented as a space of silenced history, or as a space not worthy of being considered historical:

Standard historical interpretation, after all, continues to take for granted that ‘the making of the modern world’ was a performance generated almost exclusively from extra-domestic sites, and largely by the elite men. It is true that from the 1960s a new social history, and an even newer women’s history, have contested the latter assumption, arguing that activities of ordinary men as well as women must always figure into accounts of what makes history run. Yet even these interpreters have rarely contested the ingrained view that all the historical action that truly matters takes place in arenas beyond the household.

(4)

In narrating domestic, private and devalued spaces, these novels destabilise this view that history happens beyond the home, and act to locate both the events and their telling back within the domestic space. The critical work done by these novels does not end with this unsettling. Rather, the destabilisation of the customary structures and contours of the family also results in a related disruption of the individual relation to the narratives embedded within, and preserved by, these kinship structures. If we are socialised into specific versions of history by the communities we are embedded within, then surely a changing relation to those communities both necessitates and produces a changed relation to these histories. Consequently, the boundary between public and private memories and histories is disrupted and reworked as well.

These meta-textual concerns in Owuor, Enright and Gappah’s texts have distinct implications for the discursive and narratological aspects of the postcolonial work engaged in by them. Empire was and remains, in concrete and intangible ways, a textual undertaking. Traveling Europeans sketched imaginative and spatial contours in order to control, regulate and reproduce the spaces and people they encountered (Boehmer, *Colonial* 16). These acts of representation afforded a particular kind of authority in that “to assume control over a territory or nation was not only to

exert political or economic power, it was also to have imaginative command” (5) As such, colonialism was a metaphoric and cartographic undertaking where aesthetic reproduction and representation were allied with physical regulation (17). This meant that “from the early days of colonisation [...] literature [...] underpinned efforts to interpret other lands” (15). In these acts of interpretation and representation, colonial writers contributed to “the complex of attitudes that made imperialism seem part of the order of things” (2).

Given the textual architecture of empire, works attempting to address, challenge or resolve colonialism’s lingering violences often have a meta-textual bent. This concern with the fictive quality of imperialism, or more specifically, this focus on the discursive aspects of colonisation manifests itself (particularly in Owuor and Gappah’s texts) through an engagement with the possibilities of postcolonial writing. Specifically, these texts demonstrate the potential to remake those imaginative and spatial contours established by the colonisers and, subsequently, create more generous and inclusive practices of reading and relating. Enright and Gappah’s works both demonstrate the ways in which representing transgressive kinship groups expands the boundaries of what kinds of relation become recognised and incorporated into a broader understanding of ‘family’. In these novels, it is possible to read a profound concern with the boundaries between the personal and the public, as well as how a recreation of forms of interpersonal connection can have reverberating consequences for wider structures of relation. In particular, a reworking of the normative family necessarily disrupts how we conceive of, and identify within, the nation state.

Literature Review

Heidi Hansson identifies the uncomfortable or uncertain place that Enright’s work occupies in the Irish literary cannon, noting that it has often been read under the rubric of women’s fiction rather than within the broader genre of contemporary Irish literature, which tends to concern itself with the embodiments and interpretations of Irishness (216). This critic speculates that the perceived domesticity of Enright’s work, with nationalism being an oblique focus rather than a central concern, is at the root of this (216). As has been established, the metaphorical architecture that informs the heteronormative family structure is one which is intimately bound up with nationalist narratives. As such, Enright’s return to the trope of the family in her fiction should be read alongside that literary work which engages explicitly with the contours and confines of Irish nationality.

This characterisation is not to say that women do not occupy a privileged position in Enright's work. As noted by Marrisa Mazek, "Anne Enright has been writing about women's lives for a generation. Women's lives, and the difficult families from which they stem. In her short fiction and novels, she explores the nuances of the relationships that shape our interactions with the world" (1). I would contend, however, that contained within Enright's investigation of "the relationships that shape our interactions with the world" in *The Green Road* is a subtle and pervasive inquiry into the correspondence that exists between the family and the nation. More specifically, I would argue that the novel draws explicit links between an inability to feel homed within the family and difficulties occupying the position of normative 'Irishness'. *The Green Road* unpacks these connections and offers means of inhabiting such narratives of belonging in uncertain, precarious and tentative ways.

The association between the Irish family and the Irish nation state is encoded metaphorically, historically and legally. As identified by Hansson, the "1937 Irish constitution emphasises the role of the family in the state-building project, producing an idealised picture of family life that Irish writers have struggled to shatter ever since" (222). In keeping with these ends, Enright depictions of the family romance acts to destabilise its usage as one of the "common props of Irish nationalism" (222). Margarita Estévez-Saá describes the links between the public and the private that Enright establishes in *The Green Road* as going "from the particular to the universal" in that "the story of the Madigans serves to cover the recent history of Ireland as well as to deal with concerns such as motherhood, religion, sex, aging, depression, illness, materialism and migrations, among others" (45). My analysis concerns itself with the ways in which the root metaphor of the family is subverted and challenged in order to enable investigations into these social phenomena. *The Green Road*'s preoccupation with the family is not merely a way into such broader investigations. Enright's thoughtful and detailed illustration of the quirks and rhythms of an Irish family offers insight into how families are experienced by the individuals contained within them. Across Enright's fiction, "there is a tension [...] between this need for family connections and the alienation from their families most of the characters experience" (Hansson 224). Enright explores this paradoxical nature of the normative family structure; its members desperately seeking for connection within it, but, more often than not, finding a sense of isolation. The tension between a need for the kinds of social contact provided by the family, and feeling misrecognised and ostracised within it, is most explicitly explored through the characters of Rosaleen Madigan and her son, Dan Madigan.

The character of Rosaleen Madigan, who is the matriarch and, for most of the novel's duration, sole occupant of the Madigan's ancestral home, speaks to the intimacies, difficulties and powerful capacities of motherhood. For Margaret O'Neill, reading Rosaleen "facilitates an understanding of motherhood as a phenomenon that is both historically and culturally emergent and individually distinctive" (188). In addition to providing a moving depiction of motherhood, *The Green Road* details how challenging it can be for an individual to occupy such a symbolically weighted position as 'Mother'. Mary McGlynn describes Rosaleen's almost uncanny relationship to her home, and links it to the fickle and mutable relationships she has with her children (39). Whilst, thus far, the character of Dan Madigan has been under-explored in the criticism of *The Green Road*, he shares much of Rosaleen's discomforts and difficulties in occupying their allotted position within the heteronormative household. For Dan, it is not merely that the role of eldest son weighs too heavy upon him; it is also that heteronormative Irish family formation has no room in it for a homosexual to exist comfortably. Through Dan's troubles locating himself within, and later extricating himself from, the conventions of the normative family, *The Green Road* dramatises the exclusionary economies of recognition that operate within kinship structures, as well as demonstrating their often harmful effects. Ultimately, it is these concerns with being, knowing and being known within various social formations and relations that permeate the novel. McGlynn asserts that each of the novel's chapters "depicts a moment of isolation and loss [and] the valence of these losses varies. All [of the chapters] are about self-knowledge—or more, the failure of each Madigan to achieve self-knowledge" (41). To expand upon this, I would emphasise the reciprocal nature of the self, as illustrated in *The Green Road*; identities are known and constituted in relation to those that surround them. Failures in self knowledge, in the text, are often depicted as being implicated with failures to be known and recognised. Through the Madigan family – Dan and Rosaleen in particular – the structures that inform these acts of self knowledge are destabilised and unpacked, offering the broader possibilities of relation outside of archetypal social positions and restrictive sexual expectations.

For instance, O'Neill argues that a consideration of Rosaleen, "whose children know her by so many names, provides for an exploration [...] beyond preconceived ideas of Irish motherhood to a place where new meaning may emerge" (182). Similarly, Dan's eventual identification as a gay man and his experiences within queer kinship structures gestures towards possibilities for more spacious and hospitable social formations. The potential for experimental ways of occupying space

within kinship structures, as well as more inclusive ways of associating and relating to the people that surround you, are explored in *The Green Road*.

Anne Enright's *The Green Road* investigates and illustrates the link between family and home, with particular reference to how our embeddedness within the family structure orientates us in particular ways towards the world, and how we can become alienated from the home/family/nation space as a result of difference. In particular, my analysis focuses on the character of Dan Madigan, who is estranged from his family as a result of his homosexuality. Enright's engagement with, and depiction of, a group of young gay men is a moving consideration which reveals how queer kinship relations demonstrate the work that goes into creating and maintaining a family. This work, in turn, denies the prevailing view of the family as a natural or organic happenstance and reveals it instead as being made (and therefore open to reconfiguration). *The Green Road*'s concern with the logics and operations of the Irish family centers around the kinds of harms enabled and necessitated by organised forms of relation as well as the disruptive, redemptive possibilities of loving despite these limitations.

These selfsame concerns with disruptive, transgressive forms of love and kinship emerge in Petina Gappah's *The Book of Memory*. Through the novel's engagement with inter-racial families, adoption and hybridity, *The Book of Memory* offers a nuanced encounter with the politics and operations of recognition, representation and visibility in asymmetrical power structures. As a result of the protagonist's hybrid bodily and identity positions, Memory develops complex strategies for speaking to power that gesture towards possibilities for subversion and challenge within relations between the margin and the centre. In particular, this text engages with the means by which Zimbabwean stories are read globally and the social formations that underwrite the prejudices that inform their reception – in other words, the global relation to Zimbabwe. It draws distinct links between personal associations and larger political formations and, in doing so, demonstrates how the reworking of intimate relationships offers new ways of reading and being read within wider social structures as well.

An explicit concern of Gappah's writing is the representation and reception of Zimbabwean society and its histories. Gibson Ncube reads Gappah's work as belonging to a literary tradition that seeks to explore and represent contemporary Zimbabwean life: "[t]he intricate lives of the various characters that inhabit their literary works, as well as the critical themes that they treat, echo the state of postcolonial life in Zimbabwe" (222). His is an optimistic reading in that, despite "the myriad problems and shortcomings that bedevilled this southern African country, [the novel

also portrays] the resilience, unfaltering hope and steadfastness of the ordinary people” (222). Gappah herself aligns her work, at least loosely, with these ends in her claim to be interested in telling “the stories of everyday normal people, who even in this injustice still managed to find their humanity” (Gappah, “Language and Afropolitanism” 33).

Jessica Murray also draws attention to the resilience and strength of Gappah’s characters – particularly the women that populate her work. This critic outlines how Gappah’s earlier work, *Elegy for Easterly*, forms part of a larger conversation that attempts to address the elision of women from Zimbabwean history (154).² In asserting the importance of women’s experiences, Gappah joins an undertaking that seeks to confront “a deeply sexist representational legacy” (155). Murray locates this legacy within the context of Zimbabwean nationalism, pointing to a long history of erasing women’s presence and contributions (155). Gappah’s work, which is being read in Murray’s research alongside fellow Zimbabwean author Yvonne Vera, can be seen to subvert traditional construction of Zimbabwean nationalism through asserting the value and variety of women’s experiences:

All Zimbabwean women do not experience oppression and violence in the same way and they certainly do not respond to it in any uniform manner [...]. This is the alternative historical narrative that Vera and Gappah draw on in their work: a history that chronicles the extent and depth of women’s suffering but also pays homage to the tenacity of women’s will to survive.

(156)

In addition to these overtly feminist strategies of representing marginalised women, *The Book of Memory* expands Gappah’s project to invoke and critique the broader tactics of reading and writing that produce narratives with such exclusionary elisions and fissures.

One of the textual strategies used by Gappah to investigate the narrative underpinning of identity and community is the metaphor of the prison. Memory’s narrative is written during her time in Chikurubi, a Zimbabwean women’s prison, and this concern with entrapment is one applied in the text to provide commentary upon inhospitable social structures, identity positions and relations. The protagonist’s attempt to navigate her incarceration provides a reflective commentary on her experiences of the restrictive discourses of race, gender and nationalism more widely. There

² It does not escape my attention that there exists something of an imbalance of available criticism between the European and African texts in my project. I will, for now, attribute this disparity to *The Book of Memory* and *Dust*’s more recent publication dates. Of course, Enright is a Booker winning novelist and her work is bound to draw critical attention. I would counter this with the fact that both Owuor and Gappah have received prestigious awards as well, including Owuor’s 2003 Caine Prize. As a result of the relative paucity of criticism accessible to me on Petina Gappah’s *The Book of Memory* and Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor’s *Dust*, I will be relying on discussions of their earlier work in addition to book reviews in order to bolster the more traditional commentary.

are explicit parallels drawn in the text between Memory's narrative endeavour and the kinds of social, physical and psychological freedoms she is able to obtain.

Fiona McCann underscores the centrality of narrative to the novel's emancipatory aims when she argues that:

[T]he attempted reconfiguration of the prison space in Gappah's novel is rendered possible through the prior exposition in the non-fictional life narratives of the external societal, economic, institutional and gendered prisons to which Zimbabwean women find themselves condemned. [The] life narrative form adopted, whether fictional or non-fictional, offers a textual space for resistance in which women prisoners become visible and audible subjects of self-representation.

(91)

The protagonist's attempts to understand and represent her life through narrative offer her an avenue for negotiating the various prisons in which she finds herself, thereby enabling alternate means for self-expression and embodiment. As Heather Hewett claims, *The Book of Memory* acts to remind us "how the act of storytelling may not only save lives but also, in a fundamental way, create them" (12). My reading concerns itself with the kinds of relations established and destabilised by these constitutive acts of storytelling; those associations depicted in the text as well as those that exist between the text and the reader.

Rather than acceding to a context that promotes and enforces hegemonic binaries, Gappah's text gestures towards narrative as a more accommodating way of encountering difference, allowing for relations of love and care to exist across historically violent rifts. Hewett argues that *The Book of Memory* explores the challenge of living a complex and, at times, transgressive life in a society that relentlessly reduces identity to binary categories (12). The novel "weaves a story that embraces the in-between and the indeterminate, and it artfully shows how the present (and, by extension, the future) are interwoven with the past" (12). Following Hewett's reading, *The Book of Memory* proffers narrative and storytelling as a way of productively mediating difference.

The Book of Memory draws together these concerns – with representation, reception and interpretation – through the motif of the unfamiliar family. Memory's investigation of her relationship with Lloyd, her white adoptive father, allows her to grapple with her own identity, her relationship to the people that surround her and her association with, and embeddedness within, English culture. I would argue that Memory's attempts to work through these issues allow for a broader commentary on Zimbabwe's position in a postcolonial world. Memory's narrativisation of her life and the social formations in which she is immersed allows her to create flexible identities and associations, thereby opening new paths for relation amid asymmetrical power structures. As such, Kamila Shamsie places Gappah's work within a category of writing that attempts to survey

and challenge the changing shape of global relations (109). For Shamsie, “the links between writers, nations, groupings, empires (neo- and former-) are entirely other than before” (109). The kinds of narrative negotiations and textual strategies found in *The Book of Memory* allow Gappah’s novel to navigate and comment upon the shifting nature of the postcolonial world.

This concern with strategies of representation is also central to Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor’s *Dust*, an intricate, masterful and sprawling work that seeks to challenge hegemonic conceptions of Kenyan identity, history and nationalism as well as participating in the reworking and revising of these concepts. Owuor’s novel is centrally concerned with uninhabitable histories and inhospitable social structures. Through the protagonist, a female artist, Owuor provides commentary on the role that women have in representing and creating – through a rubric of art-as-praxis – more hospitable social structures for themselves and for the future. *Dust* draws attention to the ways in which writing was intrinsic to the production of colonised (and later nationalised) space, and how feminine imaginings may offer a way of achieving and narrating more capacious and habitable spaces and conceptual structures.

Much like Ncube’s assertion that Petina Gappah’s work should be read as an exploration and representation of contemporary Zimbabwean life, Stephen Partington argues that Owuor’s fiction – “which is rooted in historical time” – should be read “alongside the postcolonial history of the region” (113). For Partington, Owuor’s fiction is deeply enmeshed with the history of the region and, as an author, she can be understood to write with a “willingness to attempt literature that is politically charged and possessed of a responsible, conventionally Kenyan social function” (112). For Russel West-Pavlov, this historical entanglement can be seen in the spatial aesthetics of the text, where the dynamics and consequences of the coloniser-colonised relationship permeate and shape (295). Owuor’s fiction offers a “textualised version of a worldview” whose topographies and discontinuities have been radically altered by the geography of colonialism (295). The aesthetics of *Dust* draw attention to the imaginative possibilities of such acts of representation in addition to emphasising “the productivity and dynamic creativity embedded in the fabric of material reality” (295).

Crucially, these social and historical wounds present in the text are all communicated through – and mediated by – human contact and relation. Russel West-Pavlov draws attention to the centrality of personal relation in the text: “[t]he dynamism of life is powered by the relationships that pull entities towards each other, make them connect, and in doing so transform them” (296).

Owuor imagines these transformative meetings via “the setting and action of two lovers embracing” (296). As such, *Dust*’s representation of Isaiah and Ajany’s fraught and fragile relationship gestures towards the possibilities of reconciliation or, failing that, the kinds of relations and actions that are needed to work through a traumatic history.

In Marie Kruger’s reading, Owuor’s fiction engages “the rhetoric of violence that has often preoccupied Kenyan women’s literature” (2). For Kruger, Owuor is concerned with the enabling conditions of violence and attempts to unpack the social economies that produce harmful relations:

But rather than addressing the physical violence directed against particular populations, the narratives reveal the enabling conditions of genocidal violence and are particularly concerned with the epistemic violence of identity discourses that establish privileged and disenfranchised positions within the nation. Since only select social groups are granted the privilege of citizenship, the exclusionary practices of the nation-state relate as much to the physical borders of political territories as to the epistemological boundaries between “citizen” and “stranger”.
(2–3)

The logics that grant and deny citizenship are, most obviously, those of nationalism. In Owuor’s engagement with the social circumstances that produce such exclusionary categories as citizen and stranger, she is providing a demonstration of the inhospitable aspects of the nation state. According to Kruger, Owuor’s work delivers a powerful critique of the modern nation state, and “its desire for a politically opportune order, its monopoly on violence, and its construction of privileged and disenfranchised categories of identity” (14). Expanding upon Kruger’s position, my project is particularly concerned with the ways in which this uninhabitability and violence is experienced and challenged by the woman in the text.

Similarly, Christina Kenny reads Owuor’s engagement with the nation-state through the figure of Akai Lokorijom, the matriarch of the text. For this critic, “*Dust* is a kind of mythography of the Kenyan republic, told through the body of Akai – in equal parts because Akai herself is a mythic embodiment of nation, and because the fates of her and her children are the fates of all those holders of a persistent and transcending dream of the Kenyan nation” (19). The trope of the family, as illustrated and deconstructed within the novel is central to an engagement with the contemporary Kenyan nation state because “[s]o much violence within the post-colony is manifest *within*, and *against* families” (19, original emphasis). Kenny identifies the family as a crucial site for investigating intersecting forms of violence, and positions Akai’s body as a symbolic territory upon which the outcomes of these brutalities is played. My reading of the text attempts to problematise

the association between the archetype of 'Mother' and the nation state, in order to challenge women's interpellation into a symbolic, rather than agentive, role within the polity.

The centrality of the mother figure – in narratives of family and of nation – is paramount in both *The Green Road* and *Dust*. In contrast to Enright's depiction of an almost uncanny domesticity, wherein Rosaleen is trapped within a home she cannot comfortably inhabit or recognise, Akai Lokorijom – the matriarch of *Dust* – is powerful, uninhibited and prone to leaving her home and her family for long, unexplained stretches. For Kenny, "the life-force of Akai is a narrative lodestone, her actions and relationships shape the events of the novel" (15). As a black woman whose life was dramatically altered by colonisation, "Akai comes to represent a trans-historical experience of gendered subjugation suffered by black women in the colonies, and stands as an allegory for the exploitation of the African continent's natural resources for the economic enrichment of Europe" (Njovane 8–9). Whilst I would agree that the text uses Akai's experiences as a commentary upon the relation between the maternal and the national, I would further claim that the novel problematises this relationship rather than entrenches it. By destabilising the discourses that position women as symbolic carriers of national identity, rather than citizens, the characters of Akai and Ajany suggest new ways for women to inhabit, or break from, the nation state.

The motif of home (or, more explicitly, that of a return to home) is of great importance in *Dust*. As noted by Kenny, "the insatiable desire for home burns through the novel" (18). *Dust* shares a similar concern with *The Green Road* in its exploration of the anxieties surrounding homecoming. The novel does not frame the 'home' as a straightforwardly celebratory location, rather "the prospect of the return is one characterised by paradox, for it is an outcome both deeply desired and feared" (Rushton 45). The motif of homecoming, or of the journey home, is used in the novel to excavate the relative habitability of certain historical narratives. Thando Njovane draws attention to the aesthetic intertwining of the formations of history with the structure of the home when she notes how the "disruptive and paradoxically restorative disentombing of both personal and political secrets of the various characters concerned" is "a drama which takes place in and around the gradually crumbling colonial mansion" (1).

Art's capacity to enact such negotiations between the present and the past, in addition to its ability to dramatise various modes of inhabiting these narratives, is explored in *Dust*. Gareth Griffiths draws attention to the pervasive presence of popular culture in the text and identifies the crucial role it has to play in any remedial historical action (26). His reading emphasises how the presence of contemporary Kenyan art and popular culture in the novel make the point that "the

current elite rulers have merely replaced the colonial oppressors and employ the same or even worse tactics to retain power” (26). Whilst my reading of the text does not focus on popular culture per se, much of my analysis draws attention to the crucial role of art and the artist as depicted by the novel. The character of Ajany, as the central artist figure, is responsible for the recuperation of lost histories, a reconstruction of the inhospitable present or, failing that, a radical destabilisation of those hostile social and historical structures that surround her. Her partial success, or the necessity of her failure, can be read as a commentary on the troubles that plague the postcolonial Kenyan nation state.

The novel’s ambivalent ending has been read in this way by Kenny, who argues that:

On the explicit tragedy of love in the post-colony, and the failure of family formation in the post-colonial world – *Dust* offers the reader a qualified redemption, only in the death or scattering of the previous generation, and a literal bonfire of structures of the past – can a new Kenya be imagined.

(20)

Through her engagement with the rich narrative landscape that produces, and is shaped by, the root metaphor of the family, Owuor offer a progressive vision for the possibilities of relation in a postcolonial context. This destabilisation of traditional forms of relation can be read to open more inclusive possibilities for embodiment within the present moment as well as opening up more hospitable spaces for those silenced or erased stories from the fractured past.

Whether inhabited as refuge or penitentiary, whether its barriers are experienced as permeable or inviolable, whether its occupants find themselves isolated or embraced within it, the family’s effects are significant and far reaching. We are, presumably, born into a social structure – or are indelibly marked by a lack thereof – and grow to some measure of ourselves within it. The shape of one’s personhood, and its orientation to the world that surrounds one, bears the traces of this social saturation. For good or for ill, we are marked by the kinds of families within which we live. Enright, Owuor and Gappah’s novels act to acknowledge, challenge and alter this social shaping and marking. Through their depictions of unorthodox, fragile and collapsing kinship structures, these authors offer revived ways of conceiving, representing and inhabiting means of relation. These literary interventions allow the reader to imaginatively occupy moments of unfamiliar relation, offering the potential for a reworked association with the self, those persons that surround the self and the texts that one encounters.

Failing Families in Anne Enright's *The Green Road*

An old photograph in a cheap frame hangs on a wall of the room where I work. It's a picture dating from 1946 of a house into which, at the time of its taking, I had not yet been born [...] 'The past is a foreign country,' goes the famous opening sentence of L. P. Hartley's novel *The Go-Between*, they do things differently there.' But the photograph tells me to invert this idea; it reminds me that it's my present that is foreign, and that the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time.

– Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*

The Green Road is a novel about a family's struggle to know themselves, each other and a space where they belong. Through her engagement with the makings and failings of the family, in the form of the Madigans – the fractured and far-flung family of Irish home makers, migrants and relentlessly unsettled nomads – Enright invokes the power of belonging whilst simultaneously examining its possibilities for harm. The novel centres around, and builds up to, the Madigans' uniting after many years of separation. During this reunion, they negotiate the changes undergone by the siblings, resisted by their mother and produced by the death of their father, whilst coming to terms with the loss of their ancestral home. Enright examines the issues of love, belonging and home in order to write of both their allure and their dangers. Rather than offering a narrative with fixed conclusions, *The Green Road* teeters perilously on the brink of failure, gesturing towards the difficulties and possibilities inherent in not knowing, not recognising and not belonging. The novel's opening chapter describes the events surrounding the oldest sibling, Dan Madigan's decision to become a priest and join a mission to Africa. In it, the uncertain and tension-filled relationships between the Madigans are explored through the eyes of Hana, the youngest sister. The reader does not discover what comes of Dan's original intentions, as the novel never directly refers to the ten years that pass between the first and second chapters. This next chapter, which primarily follows Dan, is set in New York during the 1990s and differs distinctly from the rest of the novel in that it is narrated from the position of an unidentified 'we' located within a queer community. It is possible to read this 'we' as a voice of the community in that it follows multiple characters within the community and has a privileged perspective on many of their intimate moments.

This New York section is directly juxtaposed with the uneasy splintering of the Madigans as seen in the opening chapter. The various characters which populate this group display deep affection, support and love for the members of this makeshift group in which they find themselves. In juxtaposing the Madigans with the queer community of the second chapter, Enright opens up questions regarding the nature of kinship and seems to suggest a more inclusive vision regarding the limits of family, and the nature of home. The queer migrant subjects of the second chapter exist

in various states of untetheredness that can be read as unsettling normative constructions of belonging.

“A map of things known and lost”: Homing the Queer Diaspora

In his position as a queer migrant, Dan is doubly estranged from his home (and the imagined communities that permeate and produce that space) in that he is located outside of the geographical boundaries of the Irish nation and cannot be assimilated into the heteroreproductive space of the family. As Anne Marie Fortier notes, the national estrangement is often, for queer people, a necessary reaction to a familial one: “not only are queers forced to leave, but their entitlement to home is questioned because of the irreconcilability of being queer and being ‘home’ insofar as ‘home’ is a function of heterosexuality” (119).

One of the ways in which the inextricability of heterosexuality from the home-of-origin is illustrated in the novel is through Rosaleen and Pat Madigan’s marriage bed:

the double bed where her father lay dying, and then died. It was the bed where she herself had been conceived, and it was also her marriage bed [...] and in it, all the pomp of her family life: kisses, fevers, broken waters, the damp of their lives, the sap.

(161)

The marriage bed – with its embedded heteronormative assumptions – serves as the centre of the house. It is the place of births and deaths and contains “the sap” of the family life. The Madigan’s family life, as illustrated by Enright, is firmly anchored in a heteroreproductive framework which functions to alienate Dan.

For Janet Carsten, there are “direct linkages between the enclosed private world of the family, and the outside world of the state’s legislative apparatus and the project of nation-making” (*After Kinship* 6). Kath Weston argues that modern constructions of citizenship mirror the productions of kinship in that “the two elements of nature and of law give rise to three categories of being a relative (by birth, by law, and by a combination of the two)” (155). It is the very familiarity of the family that enables these productions and “structures our experience of nationhood” (Weston 162). Both the nation and the family establish and police homogenous spaces of imagined belonging. These structures act to exclude those lives and experiences that cannot be easily incorporated because, as outlined by Carsten, “national scripts of identity-making can be read as smoothed over versions of dominant narratives of identity, in which the stories of the marginalised or the dispossessed have largely been omitted” (*After Kinship* 25).

Dan's relations to his family and his country are complexly interweaved and their interconnectedness serves to illustrate the links that exist between these various imagined communities, as well as the ways in which those conditions that enable their production rest upon intersecting practices of exclusion. The family and the nation are founded upon various heteroreproductive discourses that reiterate normative values of home and kinship organisation (Carsten, *After Kinship* 26). The enabling category of 'sameness' manifests itself in homogenising requirements of belonging, wherein individuals are recognisable to one another as members of these communities, whether they be family, neighbourhoods or nations.

One is reminded, in this regard, of Benedict Anderson's work on nationality or 'nationness', which he described as a product of culture that serves to produce an imagined political community (12). For Anderson, the nation is inescapably located within an imagined space because the members will never know or meet most of their fellows, but the citizen has in their mind "the image of their communion" (15). While the image of the recognisable fellow citizen is unavoidably fictitious, he or she is also the enabling condition of the bounded nation. Additionally, nation-ness is always imagined as *limited*, "because even the largest of them [...] has finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations" (16). Those who are not recognisable as part of the nation must belong outside of its borders.

As an Irishman in America, Dan embodies modes of transnational and migrant living which interrupt traditional conceptions of national borders. Irish immigration to America is embedded in a historical legacy of forced dispersal. In 1950s Ireland, two-fifths of the working population was located in a declining agricultural sector, hence emigration to industrially developed areas was an economic necessity (Gray, "Becoming Non-Migrant" 417). Due to these economic hardships "nearly half a million people left the southern Irish state between 1951 and 1961 – almost a sixth of the total population recorded in 1951" (418). As Breda Gray notes, "coming to young adulthood in Ireland at that time involved at least a one in three chance of emigrating" (418).

In Dan's story of migration (which is also a coming out narrative), Enright shifts away from the more traditional representation of Irish immigration which presents the story of the Irish in America as a "chronicle of the triumph of the human spirit over adversity" (Delaney 35). Enda Delaney describes the way in which the successes of Irish migrants were utilised as a nationalising narrative: "the message is unequivocal: to be Irish is to survive and indeed prosper, despite the obstacles of intolerance, colonial legacies and ethnic stereotyping" (35). The narrative of the Irish

diaspora is one of success and propagation – focussing on the thriving generation of Irish families abroad achieving economic and political advancement (35).

As a response to the widespread scattering of Irish citizens and their subsequent upward economic mobility, the Irish diaspora was reframed as a national asset (38). This reconceptualisation served to produce a new, less territorial conception of Irishness and Ireland (38). In her speech ‘Cherishing the Irish Diaspora’, Mary Robinson – who was elected president of Ireland in December 1990 – argued for a rethinking of traditional nationalist attitudes towards emigration and a reframing of the Irish Diaspora as “one of the treasures of [Irish] society” (qtd in Delaney 39). Robinson’s assertion that Irishness “was not circumscribed by the boundaries of the Irish nation-state” served to reclaim and assimilate migrant Irish descendants as members of the nation to be “cherished” (qtd in Delaney 39). In this way, she sought to articulate the Irish Diaspora as part of the ‘global Irish family’ and, in doing so, “re-coded Irish identity as multilocal and legitimised new possibilities of Irish identification and belonging” (Gray, “Irish Diaspora” 124).

On the one hand, the deterritorialisation of the nation state can be understood as an inclusive gesture that serves to expand ideas of nationality and citizenry to incorporate diverse representations and embodiments of ‘Irishness’. On the other, Robinson’s use of the word ‘family’ as a way of incorporating the forgotten Irish of the diaspora into a reinvigorated sense of Ireland draws on ideas of biological or ‘natural’ relatedness and, subsequently, infers that those scattered Irish migrants would be recognisable as familiar citizens. Drawing on Anderson’s discussion of imaginary nation-ness, the image of the now deterritorialised citizen is one that is premised on economic success and heteronormative reproduction and, as a result of this, includes only those citizens *worth* ‘cherishing’. This narrative of the ‘treasure’ of the Irish diaspora excludes – among others – those migrants who did not go on to further the nation through achieving economic success and starting Irish families abroad.

As a result of these exclusionary narratives, Dan’s diasporic Irishness is contested by his relative lack of economic advancement and his ‘failure’ to start a heteroreproductive family. His original move to New York was consistent with this narrative of economic mobility and homemaking. For instance, he was accompanied by his long-term Irish girlfriend, and he moved with ease from one job to another. He did not make very much money but “you would not think it to look at Dan, who attracted sample size jackets and many invitations” (Enright 61). Dan appears, at this stage of the novel, to be achieving that narrative of Irish migratory success, but his

relationship with Isabelle is grounded in a falsehood, as is his apparent wealth. At this time, Dan is propositioned by clients, all of whom “[are] rich, most of them [are] men” (61).

His first homosexual encounter in New York is described in liberatory terms:

And Dan forgot for a moment that he was a spoilt priest and English literature graduate with plans to go home, after his year abroad, to do a master’s in librarianship. He forgot that he was a shoe salesman, or a barman, or even an immigrant. For a moment Dan was an open space, surrounded by a different future to the one he had brought in through the door.

He said, ‘I think this is your size. I think this is you.’

(61)

The emergence of his queer identity offers new avenues outside the pressures of his past and imagined future. Rather than representing Dan as failing to conform to the ideals of a ‘cherishable’ diaspora, Enright depicts the ways in which his sexuality offers him alternate means of deploying his identity outside the narrow narratives of success offered by even a deterritorialised conception of national identity (such as that of Robinson’s ‘global Irish family’).

Of course, these processes of renegotiating identity in terms of alternate conceptions of success – or, in other words, through a framework that embraces certain kinds of failures – is not smooth and untroubled for Dan. While Isabelle is out of town, he accepts an offer to accompany Billy to Fire Island – a location synonymous with the homosexual community. This scene is markedly different from the rest of the New York chapter in that the characters are able to be comfortably and openly gay. It is described in almost fantastical terms, as an escape from their grimmer realities of social ostracisation and of the HIV/Aids crisis: “[y]ou could not say that Fire Island was entirely happy in the summer of 1991, but it was defiant, and happiness was there on the horizon, if you lifted your eyes to the sea” (54).

While Dan and Billy are on the beach, Dan swims out towards the horizon and the narrator notes the following:

Dan was so small in the distance that Billy could not tell if he was heading out or coming home [...]

‘What took you so long?’

‘I was swimming home.’

‘Oh my.’

‘Just over there – see? Three thousand miles thattaway, that’s where I am from.’

‘You miss it’, said Billy.

‘Fuck no.’

(Enright 56)

Even in this makeshift, fantasy homosexual homeland, Dan is still bound by failed motions of return. His swimming out towards the horizon – towards ‘happiness’, towards Ireland, towards ‘home’ – illustrates the ultimately unsuccessful nature of his homing motions. His ‘swimming to Ireland’ can be read as depicting the hold which those homing desires, bound in static notions of belonging, still have on him.

Initially, Dan is uncomfortable and aloof until he announces to Billy: “I am going to get married” (57). The narrator then notes that once they were “agreed on the subject of his essential and future straightness [...] He kissed Billy as though he loved him, all afternoon” (58). After Dan establishes the temporary and contingent nature of his presence on Fire Island, he relaxes into his queerness and his relationship with Billy. The narrator describes their encounter as follows:

We can assume, of course, that Dan went back to his melancholy little apartment and his brave wife-to-be, and held all the beautiful men of Fire Island in great contempt for being helpless to their faggotry when his was so clearly under control. But tripping on Ecstasy under a July moon, he was the happiest queer in New York State.

(59)

Once again his queer identity is figured as tentatively liberating, even in the context of his inability to feel ‘authentically’ homed on Fire Island or in his ‘melancholy little apartment’. He attempts to establish the contingency and inauthenticity of his relationship with Billy and his presence on Fire Island but, in doing so, reveals the fragility and falsity of his ‘essential and future straightness’. This scene’s multiple references to Ireland and Dan’s fraught relation to home suggests that the latter’s discomfort with his queer identity can be traced back to his relationship with *Ardeevin* and his inability to occupy the heterosexual space of origin. If he abandons his relationship with Isabelle, he loses his claim to belonging within the ‘cherishable’ Irish diaspora (and by extension, Ireland and the heteroreproductive home).

Dan’s alienation from his family home (as a space that is in many senses hostile to the queer individual) is an example of the ways in which the Madigans become distanced from their familiar home and their narratives of origin. His becoming estranged from his heteroreproductive home-of-origin manifests itself in his migrant and unsettled way of being in New York. Like Dan, the characters that populate the queer community of the second chapter are all estranged from their homes of origin, and their position in New York is marked by migrancy. They have *made* homes for themselves in New York by leaving their homes of origin behind.

Alan Sinfield describes this process of migration-as-homecoming in terms of a ‘queer diaspora’ (280).³ Fortier argues that the terms ‘queer’ and ‘diaspora’ are used to host a decisive change of orientation “away from primordial identities established alternatively by either nature or culture” (183). Both ‘queer’ and ‘diaspora’, with their uncertain boundaries, are produced by unbelonging and resist essentialised categories of the self or firm notions of placement, and can be used productively in relation to each other. Furthermore, Fortier asserts that by “embracing queer and/or diaspora, theories of identity turn instead towards contingency, indeterminacy, power and conflict” (183). By thinking through the production of queer communities using a diasporic framework, it is possible to open the concept of community to the kinds of uncertainties that exist in the queer experience. In this way, the “conceptual rubric of queer diaspora allows other worlds of political possibility to come into focus” (Gopinath 636). The diasporic hermeneutic provides an interpretive frame that makes connections between seemingly disparate structures of power (636). Accordingly, reading communities in terms of a queer diaspora can function as a critical lens that produces a disorientation of dominant notions of home, nation and belonging (636). J Jack Halberstam describes queerness itself as a form of disorientation, of “getting and staying lost that diverges from the straight and narrow paths prescribed by racialised heteronormativity” (qtd in Gopinath 636). The queer diaspora offers a model of home and familiarity premised on dislocation and disorientation – a community united by their shared sense of displacement (from the heteronormative home and family). For Gayatri Gopinath, this disorientation “is productive and generative in that it opens the way to more capacious and liveable modes of both inhabiting and remaking home, nation and belonging” (636).

If the queer community is to be considered in terms of a diasporic model, it would differ fundamentally from traditional notions of diaspora in that there is no temporal or spatial place of *queer origin* – there is no ‘homosexual homeland’ from which to become displaced (Sinfield 280). Rather, homosexual ‘homing’ is premised on becoming displaced (Fortier 190). Sinfield points towards the way in which queer hybridity is necessarily constituted differently: “while ethnicity is transmitted usually through family and lineage, most of us are born and/or socialised into (presumptively) heterosexual families,” he writes (280). Rather than the queer identity being produced from within the context of origin, the narrative of ‘coming out’ requires the queer

³ It must be noted that the term is not Sinfield’s - the origin is disputed but it has been attributed to Frank Mort’s usage in his paper “Essentialism Revisited? Identity Politics and Late Twentieth-Century Discourses of Homosexuality” where he states that there exists “a well established homosexual diaspora, crossing nation states and linking individuals and social constituencies” amongst others (Mort 202).

individual to leave the heteroreproductive framework of the normative family. The diasporic sense of separation and loss is attached to an irretrievable homeland – the space of heteronormative origin – where the queer individual is no longer ‘at home’ and a new space of familiarity, premised on separation, must be produced (280). In Sinfield’s words, “instead of dispersing, we assemble” (280). Consequently, this way of reading homosexual communities in terms of a queer diasporic model allows for a way of conceiving of a community without a historic ‘origin’ and the problematics of stability and stasis that originariness produces.

The queer diasporic subject exists in a space from which they are multiply excluded. Through structural arrangements such as citizenship and marriage, the nation privileges heterosexuality (Wesling 31). According to Meg Wesling, “queerness challenges not just the nation’s familial logic of belonging, but disrupts national coherence itself” (31). Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé and Martin Manalansan offer a similar argument in their description of the ‘sexile’: the diasporic queer subject who is geographically and ideologically unlocateable, a mobile body that “challenges not simply the repertoire of localised categories of desire but the stability of national identity itself” through the disruption of heteroreproductive logics (33).⁴

From this transgressive position of disorientation, the queer diasporic subject pushes against the limits of established definitions of nation, community and tradition:

Defined as decidedly anti-nationalist within critical cultural theory, it has been widely argued that the presence and experiences of diasporic subjects puts any notion of culture, identity and citizenship in question by their very location *outside* of the time-space of the nation.

(Fortier 184)

In existing as an exile from the heteronormative family home, the queer individual is also excluded from those imaginaries that feed into and play off of the family narrative – nationality, in particular. The widespread narrative of migration as homecoming, within queer culture, “establishes an equation between leaving and becoming, and creates a distinctly queer migrant subject: one who is forced to get out in order to come out” (Fortier 190). It must be noted that the danger of reducing the diaspora to forced dispersal is that it recentres the importance of home as place of origin, and subsequently defines the queer individual as a perpetual stranger in relation to their ‘lost homeland’.

⁴ In the same way that Sara Ahmed warns against the reification of migrant ontologies – in which migration is understood as a necessarily transgressive mode of existence – I am wary of constructing the queer subject as an inherently transgressive individual, who must (as a result of their queerness) exist in a perpetual state of unbelonging. Rather, I wish to use these thinkers to investigate how Enright’s characters mobilise their migrancy and queer identities to open themselves to alternative ways of becoming (dis)located within a new form of kinship structure.

Fortier suggests a way of resisting this recentring through reinvigorating the concept of diaspora by “defining it as a fruitful and original mode of existence that thrives through dispersal” (191). I read Enright’s description of a queer community as offering such a reinvigoration; under the trauma and duress of a community stricken by HIV/AIDS, the characters that populate *The Green Road*’s second chapter display enduring acts of love that succeed across temporal and spatial separation and dispersal. Many of these acts of love involve the caring and self-sacrifice required to aid someone on their deathbed, as opposed to the more customary gestures of heteroreproductive caring associated with raising children. For instance, after their relationship ends and Billy discovers that Greg has been diagnosed with HIV/AIDS, the former commits himself to caring for Greg. In a particularly tender moment between the two, where Greg is bedridden and irritable, Billy’s dedication to him is made clear:

Billy knew that, even if he did not love Greg, even if he had other guys, and other plans for the long term, he would still do this thing. He would help Greg in his last months, or years. And he might resent it but he would not regret it: because this was the thing that was given him to do.

(Enright 45)

Mimicking the pre-ordained and ‘natural’ obligations of biological kinship, Billy commits to a self-sacrificing care of a loved one because it was *given* to him to do. This is not to suggest that Enright depicts this queer community as an ideal kinship arrangement, where characters exclusively love and support each other; indeed, the characters experience, and are responsible, for multiple hurts and betrayals. Rather, the community of Enright’s second chapter illustrate alternate possibilities of loving and belonging in times of exile, abandonment and crisis.

The fragility and tenuousness of this community is continuously invoked by the hovering spectres of illness and death. At the end of the chapter, when Billy, Dan’s lover, is on his deathbed, Jessie pages through his address book which is “thick with Wite-Out, like everyone’s address book in those days” (71). The missing friends and love ones who have died of HIV/AIDS are conspicuous in their absence. Enright’s representation of this community seems to suggest that the gracious and generous forms of love, support and kindness depicted in this chapter are, in some senses, made possible by the temporariness of the community. There can be no static narratives of origin and hominess because the fragility of these kinship arrangements must always be able to cope with the constant upheaval and change caused by death and illness.

Such depictions of moments of extreme emotional upheaval draw attention to the power and possibilities of kinship. When Christian, Greg’s Danish boyfriend, is lying on his deathbed in New York, his mother finally arrives to find her “unrecognisable son” (Enright 40). This instance of

reconnection, of love and solidarity, is depicted as transcendent and transfiguring: “[t]hey looked at each other, ice to ice, and whispered in Danish and something happened to Christian. He became human again. He became pure. They gazed at each other for three days straight and then he died” (Enright 40). This “moment of grace” is echoed again at the chapter’s close, when it is Billy on his deathbed and he is surrounded by his loved ones – not biological family, but those friends and former lovers who serve as his emotional anchors and support. Rather than it being Billy’s mother at his deathbed, it is his former lover Greg.

The poignant scene is described as follows:

Greg did not leave the bedside. He did not let go of Billy’s hand. He refused food, ignored everyone around him. At ten past three in the morning he started to sing, very quietly, and when Billy recognised the tune he tried to smile up at him, and died.

(71)

By including both of these ‘moments of grace’, Enright neither repudiates the power of biological kinship nor imbues it with a primacy. Rather, *The Green Road* includes visions of multiple types of kinship relations which are not premised on hominess or fixed notions of belonging, and that reiterate the value of relations of love and care.

Enright’s inclusion of this community, which transgresses discursive boundaries of nationness and resists the production of an originary space or narrative, allows for the consideration of the possibilities of a kinship structure not based on ‘sameness’ or at the very least, a kinship relation without static and permanent conceptions of belonging. While Halberstam may conceive of it as a disorientating feature, queerness does serve to organise and co-ordinate the community (thus it can be seen as providing a substitute ‘sameness’). The disorientation underpinning Enright’s community appears to allow for a more flexible and elastic border; at Massimo’s dinner party (the meal at the centre of the New York chapter, much like the Easter meal in the opening chapter and the Christmas meal near the novel’s close), the guests are multinational, migrant and include various individuals who identify as heterosexual. Membership is not limited to queerness in the way that familiarity is limited to biological relation in the Madigan family. An individual’s relationship to another within the kinship structure is also open to flexibility and rearticulation (in a way precluded by the fixed, ‘biological’ relations of the family). Consider Billy and Greg: lovers, friends, rivals and eventually caretakers in their illnesses. The New York chapter allows for a consideration of the kinds of kinship structures that do not merely allow for multiplicity and uncertainty, but are premised upon disorientation and fragility. Through such representations,

Enright draws attention to those alternate forms of love and relations of care that exist in these threatened and ephemeral social formations.

“Mud in your eye”: Reciprocity, Hospitality and the Limits of Visibility

Expanding upon *The Green Road's* preoccupation with relation and attachment, Emmet's chapter raises a complex set of issues regarding care, cultural exchange, global citizenship and neocolonialism. Presenting something of a shift from the rest of the novel's more suburban settings, Emmet's chapter details his time as an aid worker in Mali. There is not much detail provided about the specificities of Emmet's work; although his remarks focus on sanitation and disease prevention programs, the chapter does not include him actually in the field. The chapter is largely domestic in setting, focused on his strained relationship with Alice, a fellow aid worker, who brings home a stray dog. There is a strange silence in the text regarding the world outside of their home and the work they are in Africa to do. Like the rest of the novel, the focus is on relationships between people and the failures thereof.

Due to his position as an aid worker, Emmet has travelled widely and lived in various challenging circumstances. His chapter is interspersed with grisly memories of his time in Cambodia where dogs would make off with the amputated limbs of land mine victims and intrusive recollections of starving Sudanese children. Emmet's mobility and rootlessness can be read in contrast to Dan's diasporic unsettlement; whereas Dan's migrancy is depicted as inviting possibility, Emmet's chapter in Africa has less optimistic consequences. His rootlessness represents the other, more problematic possibilities of migrancy and transnational living. In contrast to the untethered, anti-nationalist possibilities of Dan's diasporic existence, Emmet's migrancy underscores the elitism and historical determinism facing any globally mobile body.

Elleke Boehmer describes migrant writing as increasingly representative of postcolonial writing generally (*Colonial* 215). Migrancy, according to Boehmer, introduces issues of division, displacement and uncertainty as productive aspects of postcolonial identity (226). As Sara Ahmed notes, however, migrancy is not an all inclusive quality or position and in the haste to extol the virtues of transnational living many critics homogenise displacement and erase the historical materialities that produce a particular migrant position (26). The material circumstances that underpin Emmet's and Dan's mobility differ vastly and the power differentials of their respective circumstances in their host countries are equally distinct. As Karen Caplan notes,

“[h]ow subjects move or do not move tells us much about what counts as human, as culture and as knowledge” (209).

Emmet’s work is directly concerned with global inequality and the real-world effects of the historical legacy of colonialism, but the manner in which that engagement articulates itself is difficult to resolve. In keeping with Enright’s refusal to allow a simplistic and univocal reading of her text, Emmet’s chapter can be interpreted in contrasting and conflicting ways. The fact of his relative economic and social privileges cannot be disregarded or underestimated. Although he and Alice have little to spend their excess income on beyond Dutch beer and Nutella, the very fact of that excess income is remarkable considering the socio-economic context in which they find themselves. Additionally, it is significant that although Emmet is clearly mentally and emotionally traumatised by his work, he is free to get back onto a plane and escape. His work is illustrative of the wider problematics of international relations and the operations of neo-colonialism. This section of *The Green Road* can be read both as an attempt to subvert the homogenisation of postcolonial subjects and as a stark illustration of the costs of having and maintaining the twenty first century bourgeois domesticity depicted in the rest of the novel.

Remaining consistent with the text, the confines of Emmet’s home in Mali dominates the chapter. His home is the predominant setting and the various tensions and intricacies of his relationships with Alice and Ibrahim, the household staff, are the thematic focus. The Malian setting often fades in importance, becoming a secondary concern. For instance, their home is an “old colonial house” on the edge of town and decorated with “hangings from the market”, “wind chimes in the door frames” and a “ritual mask on the bedroom wall” (112). In a demonstrable way, the context is sanitised into decorativeness.

Whilst treating Africa as a symbolic backdrop is not unproblematic by any means, there is an awareness in the text of possibilities for sensationalism or the reiteration of stereotypes in more dramatic or detailed representations. Consider the following conversation between Emmet and Alice:

So what was it like?’ said Alice.

‘What?’

‘The Sudan.’

People always wanted to know about the Sudan.

Two thousand people sucking water from the same patch of mud. Thirty water pumps stuck at the airport, and every piece of paper shuffled and lost by the bastards in Khartoum. What did she want to hear?

‘There was a lot of paperwork,’ he said.

(Enright 115)

The contrast between the horror of what he is thinking and his dispassionate response points to the difficulties of communicating where he is and what he has seen. His response to Alice can also be read as a remark to the readers, who are part of the group of people who ‘always wanted to know about the Sudan’. The readers are also asked to consider what it is they wanted, or expected, to hear. Characteristically, Emmet continues the conversation internally: “[h]e wanted to tell her that starvation does not smell sweet, the way death smells sweet. There’s a chemical edge to it, like walking past the hairdresser’s at home” (115). Again he subverts expectations of what Alice (and by extension the reader) expects by beginning with what starvation does *not* smell like.

These issues concerning the asymmetrical, and often tense, relations between Emmet and Alice, as guests in a foreign context, are brought to the fore by Alice's decision to adopt a dog. This strain also manifests in their relationship:

‘Things are bad enough’

‘No they're not. Are they?’

‘I mean in Africa. Things are bad enough *in Africa*, without bringing a dog into the house.’

(116)

The slip in understanding between Emmet referring to Africa and Alice interpreting it as a comment on their relationship destabilises the boundaries between their home and its context. They are fighting over the dog because they are *in Africa* and they do not dictate what is and is not acceptable in the home. More accurately, Emmet and Alice do not entirely dictate who or what is allowed into their home because “[d]ogs are unclean to Muslims, as Alice well knew – she had done that course at college – so she also knew not to bring him inside when the help was around” (119). In many ways, Emmet and Alice live in Segou as both neocolonial authorities and guests. Ibrahim, who works in Emmet and Alice’s shared home, is both hired help and the household authority. The tension that exists in scenes where Ibrahim is serving them highlights the uneasiness of their dual position. After Ibrahim discovers the dog’s stool in the pantry, the relations in their house become ever more strained:

But it was clear that Alice felt herself humiliated by the scene in the pantry, and by Ibrahim’s silken looks in the days that followed [...]. The more careful he was, the worse it got. Water was poured so beautifully, crockery laid with such utter grace and tactfulness, that she thought she would actually give the man a slap.

‘He creeps me out,’ she said.

(Enright 126)

As Ibrahim becomes more outwardly hospitable, to the point of obsequiousness, Alice becomes more uncomfortable. In openly contravening the cultural customs that disallow dogs in the home, Alice has become a bad guest. Emmet and Alice are ostensibly in Mali to ‘help’ the people (who include Ibrahim) and Ibrahim is in their home ostensibly to ‘help’ Emmet and Alice, but the uneasiness of the relations in the home dramatise the complexities of these relations of care and the imbalances of power they produce.

By focusing the action of the chapter in Emmet’s home, Enright complicates the ways in which the reader recognises Africa and the tropes that Emmet’s presence is playing into through being there. The hierarchical relationship that allows for the presence of aid workers in Africa is, of course, a legacy of colonialism and serves to perpetuate a patriarchal relationship between Africa and ‘the West’ (Gunnarsdottir 3). By participating in relations of aid or ‘care’, an unequal power structure is established and maintained (3). The industry of volunteering can be read both as an attempt to redress historical wrongs, as well as a reproduction of those same unequal relations in a modern context (3). Elsa Gunnarsdottir argues that stories of volunteering in Africa repackage the volunteering industry for a neocolonial framework and consequently “recycle problematic narratives of the past” (3). While the material inequalities should not be ignored, these narratives allow volunteers to imagine their presence in Africa as necessary for themselves and unproblematically ‘helpful’ (8).

Emmet seems to resist this belief in his ‘helpfulness’ but he does not discernibly interrogate his presence in Mali either. Much like the textual silence on Dan’s decision to abandon the clergy, *The Green Road* provides no details regarding Emmet’s decision to become an aid worker. Rather interestingly, it is Emmet who ends up in Africa saving the children, rather than Dan – as was originally intended. Unlike Dan’s quiet, calm faith in the rightness of his decision to join a mission, Emmet is disillusioned and mentally fatigued by his work. Consistent with Enright’s ambiguous position, the novel resists any simplistic position regarding Emmet’s occupation or his presence in Africa, and the chapter is threaded with a sense of uncertainty and hopelessness.

Alice, with whom he shares the home that dominates the chapter, is much more passionate and optimistic. Her attitude is more in keeping within the idea of the cheerfully ‘helpful’ volunteer. There is a naiveté about her actions, and her presence in Mali, that Emmet silently criticises:

He wanted to tell her to go home and rescue some fucking gerbils, because she was about as much use as a chocolate teapot, she would end up killing more people than she ever helped. And it was all very well, he wanted to say, it was all very nice *as a feeling*, but love was no use at the end of the day, to man or beast, when there was no fucking justice in the world.

This rejection of love and his connecting it with relations of help and care are central to Emmet's character. Much later in the novel, after the Christmas dinner in *Ardeevin*, he considers his relationship with Saar, his Dutch girlfriend, and the narrator remarks: "Emmet would never fall in love. He would 'love', he would, that is to say 'tend'. He would cure and guide, but he did not have the helplessness in him that love required" (296). The novel seems to suggest that the ability to help whilst simultaneously being helpless is intrinsic to love.

In his essay *To Hell with Good Intentions*, which was delivered at the 1968 Conference on InterAmerican Student Projects, Ivan Illich harshly criticises the practice of volunteering remarking that "by definition you cannot help being ultimately vacationing salesmen for the middle-class American way of life" and that, in volunteering, the aid worker comes "to help the underdog accept his destiny within this process" (3). For Illich, the unequal power structures that exist between volunteers and the community they work in inevitably reproduces a cultural imperialism. He also links the necessity of being helpless to helping when he claims that: "the only thing you can legitimately volunteer for [...] might be voluntary powerlessness, voluntary presence as receivers, as such, as hopefully beloved or adopted ones without any way of returning the gift" (1). According to Illich, volunteers must have the awareness that even they "can receive the gift of hospitality without the slightest ability to pay for it; the awareness that for some gifts, one cannot even say 'thank you'" (3).

There is a parallel between love as characterised in *The Green Road* and Illich's description of volunteers as guests. Through Emmet and Alice, Enright dramatises the challenges associated with being helplessly helpful and, in doing so, the power relations between volunteers and those who they presume to help are intricately explored. After the dog becomes an uncomfortably semi-permanent feature of their home, Ibrahim falls ill and Alice visits his home to bring him medication. On her way back, she is humiliated by children barking at her in the street:

A passing woman started to laugh at the white lady, who could not get free of the barking children. Open derision – like the time she had to crap out in the bush and everyone fell around the place because she got someone else's shit on her foot, and it was like, 'I am here to save your babies' lives, you bastards.'

[...].

They wanted to eat the dog's food. Alice had realised by the time she got home, that Mitch ate more meat than Ibrahim's children got in a week. Which wasn't exactly news. She just hadn't ...

(130, original emphasis)

Despite her training and ‘college courses’, Alice is woefully unprepared and ignorant of the impact of her actions. The presumptuousness and arrogance of arriving in a community and expecting them to be grateful is underscored by her indignation at being the object of mockery: “I am here to save your babies’ *lives*, you bastards” (130, original emphasis). The unexpected and unintended violences of care, help and aid are suggested in the trailing off after “She just hadn’t ...” (130). In filtering these interactions through Emmet’s perspective, who is by far the more pessimistic and disillusioned of the two, Enright undercuts this idealised vision of help.

Emmet is far more aware of the possibilities of violence inherent in loving and caring for another as evidenced when he makes reference to his first NGO mission to Cambodia, where he fell in love with a little girl:

He spent long nights planning her future, because the feel of her little hand in his drove him pure mad: he thought if he could save this one child, then Cambodia would make sense [...]. There are things you can do, if you have the foresight and the money, but there isn’t that much you can do, and the child is left – he had seen it many times – the aid worker cries on the plane, feeling all that love, and the abandoned child cries on the ground
[...].
Better a dog.

(125)

For him, it is better to love a dog because the risk of hurting it, and the extent of the damage, is less than with another person. The subtext of this logic is that it is best not to love anything at all. Emmet’s failure to rescue the girl in Cambodia is played out again with Alice and her dog, Mitch, when he is eventually poisoned and dies. Mitch’s death is the catalyst for the end of Emmet’s and Alice’s relationship and her presence in Mali. This rather bleak ending to the chapter undercuts the more traditional narratives associated with the value of volunteering and the necessity of providing help to the developing world.

Madhu Krishnan argues that the imagined Western reader is “subliminally encouraged to read texts about Africa in ways that flatter rather than challenge our preconceptions” (2). This produces a dynamic wherein the aesthetic function of the literary text is always implicitly positioned alongside a parallel and pre-existing sociopolitical discourse (2). According to Krishnan, this discourse draws upon stereotypical images of the savage and saviour, victim and perpetrator and functions to position “Africa as the unredeemable space of postcolonial failure, exemplified in the trafficking of images which elide historical context and emphasise the superordinant position of the outsider/viewer in gazing upon a homogenised space of suffering” (2).

Whilst Enright does work to undercut the variously problematic narratives that volunteering and aid working function to reproduce, she is still writing from an outsider's position and, in some senses, instrumentalises Africa as a space wherein the novel's larger thematics of care and mobility can play out. Consider Margarita Estévez-Saá's reading of this chapter, where she describes Emmet's chapter as allowing the reader to "witness the adverse circumstances of third world Africa" (51). For Estévez-Saá, setting this chapter in Africa allows Enright to "put Ireland and the Irish in a global context" thereby allowing the novel to "transcend local Ireland" (48).

Following this reading, the use of Africa as a backdrop positions the reader as an alienated witness and subordinates the representation of Africa to the other, more central textual concerns. In other words, rather than engaging with it as a space of equivalent value, Mali becomes an exotic marker of globility. Famously, Chinua Achebe has written of the way in which Africa is set up as a "foil to Europe, as a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar" (251). The concerns of the African setting are subordinated to the interests of the European imaginary. Enright's representation of Emmet's time in Africa can be read as participating in this problematic depiction of Africa as a 'foil' for greater self knowledge rather than as a centred subject.

The Green Road does undercut this problematic relation somewhat through an emphasis on the gaps of knowledge that both Emmet and Alice display in that they do not speak the language and make regular social gaffes. Mali's atmosphere of exoticness is displaced somewhat onto them in the text's emphasis on their out-of-placeness – Alice cataloguing her mosquito bites, Emmet's sunburned and weatherbeaten skin as well as their extreme discomfort in the heat. Their constant refrain of 'mud in your eye,' which they use when drinking the exorbitantly expensive imported liquor, underscores the limits in their ability to interpret and recognise the intricacies of their context and their relation to it.

Belonging, Recognition and the Possibilities of Disorientation

Recognition, and its central role in the operation of community, is further explored through the character of Rosaleen. There is a scene in *The Green Road* where Rosaleen Madigan is lost out in the countryside and her adult children, recently returned home for Christmas, are stumbling around in the dark trying to find her. Rather absurdly, they are all searching for her by a different name and the page is marked by their different calls: "*Mama, Mama*", "*Mam! Mam!*" and "*Mammy?*" (Enright 283, original emphasis). In the confusion of the moment, the narrator notes:

Rosaleen's children stood peering and calling into the black air. She was somewhere out there, and it was unbearable. Their concern was also a concern for themselves, of course.

[...].

The comedy of it was not lost on them, the fact that each of her children was calling out to a different woman. They did not know who she was – their mother, Rosaleen Madigan.

(284)

Although this scene occurs towards the end of the novel, I have used it as a point of departure for this section because it captures, in a moment, much of the novel's concern with recognition, belonging and disorientation.

The moment out in the countryside, where all Rosaleen's children are calling her by different names exemplifies the issues with misrecognition that proliferate in the novel. Much of what plagues the Madigans relationships is their failure to understand or recognise one another. It is productive to consider the difficulties they experience in connecting with one another in terms of Louis Althusser's characterisation of subject interpellation. For Althusser, interpellation is the constitutive process whereby ideology acts to recruit subjects among individuals (174). In other words, by responding to another's hail you are both recognised (by yourself and by the person hailing you) as concrete subjects within that ideology. To respond to someone's call is, in some sense, to become what they have called you.

This process of interpellation is somewhat interrupted within the Madigan family. There is a sense of confusion when the adult Madigans refer to her as "Ma" or "Mammy" as she either does not respond (219, 231) or refuses the titles by telling them to "Grow up, would you?" (157).

Rosaleen rejects the children's various calls, wanting to be known by her own name:

Where [Constance] got the 'Mammy' from, Rosaleen did not know. When her children grew out of 'Mama', they had failed to grow into anything else.

'Call me Rosaleen,' she used to say. Until she realised that no one ever did, or would.

(156)

'Mama', 'Mam' and 'Mammy' all have an element of childishness about them, and suggest that the children do not know how to relate to their mother as adults. Margaret O'Neill offers an optimistic reading of this sense of disconnection and the failure of recognition when she argues that "a consideration of Rosaleen, whose children know her by so many names, provides for an exploration, alongside Rosaleen, not of who she was in the past or who we might wish her to be but beyond preconceived ideas of Irish motherhood to a place where new meaning may emerge" (182). This slippage of recognition opens up the possibility of new modes of relation.

There is a particularly poignant scene in Rosaleen's first chapter, where she is attempting to write Christmas cards to her children, imploring them to come home for the holidays. For each card, there is some issue that prevents it reaching the children – she does not have Dan's address, Hana's card is marked with corrections which meant that "the thing was not fit to send" (152), Constance does not get a card and Emmet's card was from a charity "that Emmet did not like, or probably did not like" (151). After writing the cards, she looks at her signature: "There it was, in handwriting that was unwavering, 'Your loving Mother, Rosaleen'. Four words that could mean anything at all. She read them over but could not put them together, somehow. She could not put them in a proper line" (152). There is the sense that Rosaleen herself does not know how to inhabit the role of 'loving Mother' to her adult children. Incidentally, it is while she is writing these doomed Christmas cards that she decides to sell the house. There is the suggestion that, for her, the breakdown of family relations has made the house unliveable or unfamiliar.

Once Rosaleen's children have all moved away and her husband has died, *Ardeevin* becomes decidedly inhospitable:

But there was something wrong with the house [...]. It was as though she was wearing someone else's coat, one that was the same as hers – the exact same, down to the make and size – but it wasn't her coat, she could tell it wasn't. It just looked the same.

Rosaleen was living in the wrong house [...]. And where could you put yourself: if you could not feel at home in your own home? If the world turned into a series of lines and shapes, with nothing in the pattern to remind you what it was for.

(Enright 165)

Her discomfort illustrates the disorientated relationship she has with the house, with her self and with the world in which she finds herself situated. She makes a link between being able to successfully navigate, make sense of and recognise the world around her and being 'homed'. In her unsettledness, she feels disconnected from the sense-making schema that would allow her to navigate and orientate herself within a "world turned into a series of lines and shapes" (165). Mary McGlynn describes Rosaleen's association with her home as being "an uncanny adaptation of a longstanding association of women with domesticity" (34). Her fraught relation with her home and her subsequent lostness dispels the idea that migration, as physical movement away from home-as-origin, is the only way to experience estrangement and suggests the possibility of becoming unhomed within the home.

Rosaleen's defamiliarised sense of her home results in her feeling disorientated with the world. This idea that the relationship to home, or the space of familiarity, affects an individual's

ability to inhabit other spaces of belonging is visible elsewhere in the novel. Questions of identity and belonging can be rearticulated as questions of origin in that the home-as-origin operates as a space responsible for producing certain kinds of orientations and settlednesses (Yanagisako and Delaney 1). As a prime locus for a society's notion of itself, origin stories – and by extension, spaces of origin – serve to produce a kind of map of familiarity for an individual (2). The consequences of such genesis stories are profound:

Narratives of origin tell people what kind of world it is, what it consists of, and where they stand in it; they make it seem natural to them. By anchoring individual lives to some kind of larger, cosmic order, identities are secured. Within the context of origin stories, people spin meaningful lives. Narratives of origin incorporate classificatory schemes that describe the order of things, as well as the relations between things and between different kinds of people.

(2)

Through the unsettling of narratives of origin, Enright acts to destabilise the classificatory schemes provided by the heteroreproductive family and, in doing so, allows for new conceptions of an unfamiliar and disorientated 'order of things'. *The Green Road's* treatment of *Ardeevin* is central to her unsettling the Madigans' genesis stories. As their ancestral and childhood home, *Ardeevin* is the structural repository for the Madigan's histories and personal memories and serves as the locus for many of the narratives of origin that orientate the Madigans.

The return to, and loss of, the Madigan's ancestral home structures and drives the novel. Enright discusses the characters in relation to their distance from, or closeness to, *Ardeevin* (and by extension Ireland). Rosaleen Madigan describes her children in the following terms:

These people, who spent their entire time leaving her. Not ringing, not writing. They told her nothing, spent their lives getting out of there. Get out and keep going! that was the cry.

Don't turn back! If you turn back you will see your mother turned into a pillar of salt.

(Enright 272)

The Madigan children, in particular, are aligned by the home they all share and desert. Enright seems to imply that their troubled relationship with their home affects their ability to inhabit spaces of belonging in their adult lives. Anne-Marie Fortier describes a model of 'home-as-familiarity' wherein inherent qualities are attributed to 'home' and 'hominess' which, in turn, become the causes of its refusal when one no longer feels familiar in the childhood home (116). Home-as-familiarity "entails stasis – it is a site where things and subjects stand still, and it is there to be left behind or desired" (116). The familiarity of home functions to exclude those who do not belong by relying upon the exclusionary technologies of recognisability and assimilation to produce borders

and boundaries. These assumptions of belonging are troubled by Enright's detailing of the experience of an Irish family who no longer relate to their home as a space of familiarity.

Janet Carsten discusses the relation between ideas of belonging and the family home, stating that "the meanings with which houses are invested are not simply a source of stability. These meanings are themselves enmeshed in historical processes" (*Ghosts of Memory* 53). The house, as a structural embodiment of a space of belonging and familiarity, represents and reproduces those historical processes that inform the 'naturalness' which underpins the heteroreproductive family. As the space where the family 'belongs,' the house both enacts and disguises naturalised processes of estrangement begat by those assumptions of heterosexuality and homogeneity which are found in the normative family. The very everydayness of the home "both suggests the importance of what goes on within [its] walls and also makes it liable to be dismissed as familiar and mundane" (Carsten, *Ghosts of Memory* 55).

It is the very familiarity and mundaneness of the normative conception of the home and the heteroreproductive family that must be interrogated in order to problematise the power differentials embedded within those invisible structures of culture that invest the house with meaning (Yanagisako and Delaney 1).

Sylvia Yanagisako and Carol Delaney describe the weighted effects of cultural productions such as these:

Cultural domains are culturally specific, but they usually come with claims of universality, which are part and parcel of their seeming to be given-in-nature and/or god-given. The apparent logic and naturalness of these domains is a consequence of the way they are made real through institutional arrangements and discourses people encounter in everyday life.

(12)

As a consequence of the perceived naturalness of these cultural structures, the biological aspects of social arrangements appear to supersede the power differentials that underpin them. In other words, "the family seems to be about reproduction and childrearing rather than about gender and religion" (12). I would also include nationality, heteronormativity and reproductive patterns and choices under the rubric of those various cultural artefacts that become disguised as natural and essential by the imaginaries of the heteroreproductive family.

Enright dispels the invisibility that normality provides by extricating the familiarity and belonging provided by 'naturalness' from the normative family. She does this by depicting the estranging effects of the heteroreproductive home on the family through the disconnection between the characters, as well as the discomfort Rosaleen feels living in the house alone. In Rosaleen's

chapter, the reader follows her wandering through a large, empty house that is falling apart around her:

They had all left [Rosaleen]. They deserved no better.

The gutters falling into the flowerbeds, the dripping taps, the shut-up rooms that she had abandoned, over the years; the pity of it; an old woman chased into a corner by her own house. The pity of it – an old woman.

(Enright 165)

The Irish family, as depicted by Enright, is tightly wound up with migrancy and movement; abandoned houses becoming unhomely and unwelcoming through their inhabitants moving away. The unhomely homes of the novel are those which have been left behind, static and undisturbed in the past. Consider *Boolavaun*, Pat Madigan's home where the children's grandmother lives on her own. When Hanna visits her grandmother in *Boolavaun* she is exposed to the fracturing of families that resulted from the massive migration of young Irish men in the 1950s and 60s:

There were four rooms in the house at Boolavaun. Hanna went into each of them and listened to the different sounds of the rain. She stood in the back bedroom her father used to share with his two younger brothers, who were in America now. She looked at the three beds where they once slept.

(Enright 17)

These various homes – *Ardeevin*, *Boolavaun* and, perhaps by association, Ireland – have become abandoned places, inhospitable to those lonely mothers left behind inside them. In this way, Enright challenges the notion of home as a stable place of origin, suggesting that a home that is left static in the past becomes inhospitable.

It is suggested by the novel that this is because it is not possible to leave something behind and expect it to remain unchanged. After the Christmas meal near the novel's end, when the children are sitting around the table after Rosaleen's announcement that she is going to sell the house, the children "pretended that nothing had happened, that this room would always be the same, and always theirs" (238). Their relationship to their home is changed however, they "saw it with wiser eyes" (238). The dust, decay and cheapness of the various fittings is visible to their adult eyes, and the inevitable alterations of their home are made apparent along with its imminent disappearance. Through these transformations, the static and permanent nature of the home-as-origin is unravelled, as well as the changing nature of its inhabitants:

The people inside the room were older, too. All of them so child-like still, despite the absurd grey hairs and the sagging skin in which their familiar eyes were set [...]. They looked at the plates heaped with food and marvelled aloud at it, each of them silently shouting that she could not take it away from them, whatever it was – their childhood, soaked into the walls of this house.

The Green Road's representation of the various unsettlements experienced by the Madigans reveals the difficulties that occur as a result of the disjuncture between conceptions of home as a static space produced by fixed senses of belonging, and the realities of a space dependent upon constantly shifting identities, relations and imaginaries. Alison James describes home as a "spacial context where identities are worked on" (116 qtd in Fortier). She illustrates the way in which identities of 'home' and those who inhabit it are never fixed, but are continuously reimagined and redefined (116 qtd in Fortier). Similarly, John Thompson contends that identity is communally and contextually produced; that identity formation is located in the collective (qtd in Gray, "Irish Diaspora" 196). The realities of a family home (as a space populated by the instability of individuals) belie the static underpinnings of an imagined home-as-origin. Breda Gray, in her discussion of Irish migrant women, describes their experience of home as "something to be accomplished on an ongoing basis even for those who stay at home" ("Irish Diaspora" 429). The end of the book, where Rosaleen is lost in the countryside and her children have to find her, reverses the image of Rosaleen sitting at home waiting for her children to return to her. Due to her emotional upheaval and the inclement weather, she becomes lost and wanders off of the titular Green Road. Much later, her family realises she is missing and mobilises the community of County Clare to find her. The scene is filled with the unity, urgency and purpose of people uniting around a common cause. *Ardeevin*'s inhabitability is dispelled momentarily when the house becomes "filled up with people from the town" (270). There is a sense of irony in the fact that the only scene in the novel in which *Ardeevin* is not described in unhomely, uncomfortable terms is when it is filled with other families.

Against the depiction of a newly full and bustling *Ardeevin*, Rosaleen remains alone, becoming progressively more lost in the Irish countryside: "she couldn't turn back, she had no confidence in the road, she thought it might be disappearing behind her. Because there were gaps between things, and this frightened her. This was where Rosaleen was now. She had fallen into the gap" (266). This vision of Rosaleen wandering aimlessly in the darkness picks up the threads of her disorientation and sense of unsettlement from her earlier chapters. The structure of familiarity that renders the world recognisable to her has finally fallen away – she has "fallen into the gap" between the comprehensible world she knows and the darkness outside of that. She has now 'lost' her home the frame of reference that it provides. Subsequently, the Madigans' search for her continues the

destabilisation of the static and stable narrative of home-as-origin in that it highlights the misrecognition that underpins the production of their family.

To return to the quote from earlier, more fully:

The comedy of it was not lost on them, the fact that each of her children was calling out to a different woman. They did not know who she was – and they did not have to know. She was an elderly woman in desperate need of their assistance and even as her absence grew to fill the cold mountainside, she shrank into a human being – and human being – frail, mortal, old.

(284)

The image of the children wandering the countryside, all looking for different versions of their mother speaks to the novel's concern with the possibilities of disorientation. By foregrounding the inescapable multiplicity of their mother's identity (as well as their varying conceptions of that identity), their ability to *recognise* or know their mother is undercut. This abandonment of the requirements of belonging and admittance – recognition and knowability – is figured as productive and inclusive. In letting go of the boundaries of belonging, they are able to care for their mother as 'a human being'.

Later, after Rosaleen has been rescued and she is sitting in the hospital looking at her children, the narration slips into the first-person plural style of the New York chapter utilising the inclusive 'we': "she looked on her children as though we were a wonder to her, and indeed we were a bit of a wonder to ourselves. We had been, for those hours on the dark mountainside, a force. A family" (292). The time in the hospital is described in these rather idealistic terms that emphasise the connection, understanding and sense of community the Madigans experience. Similarly, the closing paragraph of the chapter illustrates this communal warmth and includes Constance graciously inviting Rosaleen into her house and away from the unhomeliness of *Ardeevin*:

There followed a time of great kindness and generosity, not just from neighbours and from strangers, but among the Madigans. There was no talk of bringing Rosaleen home to Ardeevin, 'That cold house,' said Constance. She had the room all made up, she said, and Rosaleen's things brought over, so she could stay as long as she needed to.

(Enright 292)

By collectively getting lost in the countryside and coming together to find Rosaleen, the novel seems to suggest that the family also manages to find themselves. The chapters following Rosaleen's stay in the hospital describe Dan and Emmett reaching out to reconnect with their pasts. Emmet attempts to establish a relation with his past in the form of a letter to Alice, the woman who had left him years earlier because he could not love her. Even in this closing chapter, love seems beyond him: "Emmet would never fall in love. He would 'love', he would, that is to say

‘tend’. He would cure and guide, but he did not have the helplessness in him that love required” (296). This denial of the possibilities of love is undercut by his second, impulsive email to Alice: “*I think about you all the time*” after which he “listened to his life opening” (298, original emphasis).

Similarly, Dan seeks to get in touch with one of the last surviving members of the New York community, reminiscing about the time:

His heart was busy with the cohort of the dead: men he should have loved and had not loved. Men he had hated for being sexy, beautiful, out, dying. Free. [...] But now – look – Gregory Savalas.

The relief he felt was close to love. The fact that this human being, among so many human beings, should have survived.

(294)

This is the novel’s closing moment with Dan and depicts him coming to terms with his past in that he “had forgiven himself” (294). He is able to connect with his history with a feeling “close to love” as opposed to the hate and derision he had felt at that time (294). Enright seems to suggest that Dan’s going ‘home’ to Ireland, saying goodbye to *Ardeevin* and, in doing so, losing the static narrative of home-of-origin allows him to come to terms with himself, his past and his sexuality. Emmet and Dan’s moments of vulnerability, of sending missives to a lost past in an attempt to rekindle a connection with themselves are suggestive of the possibilities attendant with losing one’s connection to home. More specifically, these moments can be read as indicating that, in losing the home that they were never able to home themselves within, they are better able to get in touch with themselves and their pasts. The Madigans ‘becoming a family’ is linked to the disruption of the boundaries of belonging and recognition.

“Corruption or return”: Touching the Past, the Self and the Other

After the Christmas meal at the end of the text, Dan returns to his childhood room and sits on the edge of the bed where “even the sag of the mattress was familiar to him: taking his shape as it had always done” (247). He tries to contact Ludo, his partner, but there is no signal. During this time, he scrolls through their text messages, the irrelevant, unimportant minutiae of their everyday life which revolve around social engagements and shopping for food that “in their carelessness would remind him of his actual life – the one that happened far away from here” (247). This moment where Dan is occupying a dual space of knowing and unfamiliarity, where he is reaching out to a

life and a home established away from *Ardeevin*, points to the ways in which narratives of origin can be destabilised and unsettled.

In this moment, Dan tries to come to terms with the difficulties of his youth and his sense of estrangement from his home and his past:

Dan looked about the room where his young life was stored, his life before New York, not innocent so much as stupid [...]. The Modigliani poster on the wall a failed attempt to love some idea of a women in the raw. Wrong painter. Wrong picture [...]. All that withering and wasted time. He had failed to name the real events of his youth, or possess them as his own.

(247)

Faced with the reality of the multiple, shifting and produced nature of home, Dan points to the insufficiencies and falsity of the narratives of origin that forced him into a failed heterosexual identity and relationship. In abandoning the ‘wrong picture,’ he becomes free to co-create new versions of home and of family.

Dan’s process of becoming, of self-discovery, takes place outside the confines of the narrative; the reader is not privy to where he goes or what he does between Billy’s death and his relationship with Ludo. Dan’s life with Ludo, his partner in the latter half of the book, is much more settled and domestic.

Ludo’s house, now Dan’s home, is the sole setting, and its material security and relative normalcy features prominently:

[Ludo’s] house was full of stuff. This was new for Dan, who had woken up in a lot of beautiful white rooms in his day. A nice brick-colonial in Rosedale, Toronto, it had antique cotton quilts and a rocking chair in the bay window: there were three different kinds of maple in the front yard and behind the up and over garage door was a wide shovel for snow.

(Enright 170)

This is a marked shift from Dan’s previous chapter, where his home is not described and his narrative lacks the sense of normalcy and dependability found in his relationship with Ludo. Their relationship reflects much of the supposed stability and permanence found in the heteroreproductive model of home-making (their life includes discussions of grocery shopping, social engagements and plans for the holiday). Their transition from lovers to a monogamous relationship is framed in terms of comfort and of settling: “Dan felt his age as he realised this was, in fact, what he had flown up for – for the chat, for Ludo’s easy, good company. It did not take them long to hang up the leathers and settle into something else” (171).

Dan's settledness with Ludo is directly paralleled with his unsettledness in relation to his own family and to Ireland:

Dan had not been home to Ardeevin for three years, maybe five. [His niece and nephews] were different people already [...] with their beautiful country accents if they ever brought themselves to speak, and the mottled blush when they did because their uncle was a queer [...]. And he, Dan, maddened by the shame of it, carried a boner with him all the way back to Dublin and, one time, fucked a guy until he yelped in the washroom on the train.

The ground rushing under them in the crescent-shaped gap at the bottom of the bowl; a thousand flickering railway sleepers and the cold earth of Ireland.

Now that's what I call gay.

No, Dan could not go home. Or if he did go, it was not Dan who walked in the door to them at all [...]. It was someone else. A terrible version of himself.

(172)

In this scene, Dan's sexuality, his national identity and his ability to be homed in the family space are all directly intertwined. The image of his homosexual intercourse occurring at a distance, at a remove from the 'cold earth of Ireland' gestures towards the irreconcilability of normative conceptions of nation-ness and queer identity. This irreconcilability is located within the family – his nieces and nephews, with the obvious Irishness evident in their 'beautiful country accents' (as opposed to Dan's Americanised way of speaking) are ashamed of him. This shaming and estrangement – from Ireland, from his family – is the reason that "Dan could not go home" (172). In some respects, the settledness and stability of Dan's life with Ludo are at direct odds with the uncertainty and fragility of the queer community of the New York chapter. Dan and Ludo's relationship moves towards becoming articulated within hegemonic modes of recognition when they become engaged. Given Enright's critical stance towards normative kinship structures and state-sanctioned means of recognition – both of which marriage is embedded in and serves to reproduce – it is difficult to productively interpret this movement back towards normative and recognisable kinship relations.

Whilst critiquing the politics of gay marriage, J Jack Halberstam argues that:

Gay marriage as an activist target seems to complete a long process of human classification that began in the late nineteenth century and is ongoing today. This process that began by making fundamental assumptions about human difference by distinguishing between people with homo and people with hetero desires comes full circle when homo people ask to be recognised just like hetero people.

(Gaga Feminism 98)

It is possible to read the desire for marriage within the queer community as an act which embraces

the heterosexual culture that previously rejected queer relationships and identities (100). For Halberstam, marriage has always been an exclusionary system rather than an inclusionary one, always functioning to draw lines between individuals who do and do not qualify for marriage (100). In this way, gay marriage functions to maintain the heteronormative status quo (104).

Given the problematics of gay marriage and the productiveness of the queer community depicted earlier in the novel, I find Enright's decision to collapse Dan's experience of a transgressive and open-ended queer community into the more traditional modes of marriage, settledness and home-making difficult to understand.⁵ The character of Dan Madigan, however, does offer various avenues of resistance to, or rearticulation of, this movement into heteronormative structures in his discussion with his lover:

‘Oh toughen up,’ said Ludo. ‘Talk to a woman, they’ve been [getting married] for years.’
‘Yeah, yeah,’ said Dan, who did nothing but talk to the wives of rich men [...] Dan loved these women; their woundedness and their style; he admired the way they rose to their lives.
But he did not want to be one. That would be a convergence too far.

(178)

He elaborates on this position in a discussion with his sister Hanna, when he tells her that he is getting married and they have the following exchange:

‘I am really pleased for you. Of course I am. I just thought that you got away from all that, you know? That great institution called marriage.’
‘I did get away from it,’ he said. ‘And now, I can do what I like.’

(254)

Dan locates his marriage as being distinct from heterosexual marriage in that it is, irrevocably, ‘away from all that’. He resists a simplistic mapping of heterosexual relations onto his bond with Ludo in that it would be ‘a convergence too far’ to conceive of himself as being interpellated into the woman's traditional position in a marriage. For him, his partnership with Ludo is, necessarily, distinct. Dan focuses on his agency in that he is *making* a home and a family for himself. Even after he has, in a sense, homed himself and become recognisable within the heteroreproductive framework (by becoming married and ‘settling down’), Dan is still faced with the unfamiliarity and hostility of his home-of-origin:

It was pitch black. Dan had walked away from the house and when the light went out on his phone, the night blinked and swallowed him [...]. He turned one way and

⁵ It is possible to read Dan's movement back into more traditional modes of homemaking as Enright resisting the essentialisation of the queer individual as necessarily transgressive. The New York chapter underscores and illustrates the estrangement of the queer individual from normative structures of belonging such as nationality and family. Dan and Ludo's relationship can be read as a balance to that untetheredness, offering a vision of a settled home that has room for the queerness of its inhabitants. My concern is not with the possibility of a stable queer family; rather I take issue with the recentring of the familiar home and all its entrenched exclusions and violences.

then the other, and was not sure of his direction. Twenty yards away from the house and he did not know where he was, or how to return [...]. He felt, at every step, as though he was walking into something, and he flinched away, taunted by the black air.

(271)

This discomfort points to the persistence of the hostility of the heterosexual home space and the lingering presence of his experience escaping it. Within Dan's more traditional queer social relationship lies the history and remnants of his becoming in the context of a less traditional and far more fragile and tenuous community. Halberstam points to the ways in which:

The history of alternative political formations is important because it contests social relations as given and allows us to access traditions of political action that, while not necessarily successful in the sense of becoming dominant, do offer models of contestation, rupture and discontinuity for the political present.

(*Queer Art of Failure* 19)

Enright seems to suggest that the open-endedness of the New York chapter is, in large part, made possible by that community's impermanence. In some senses, the brevity of these relationships – or at the very least, their lack of security – was the enabling condition of their existence.

For Halberstam, "the contingency of queer relations, their uncertainty, irregularity, and even perversity, disregards the so-called natural bonds between memory and futurity" (74). This contingency, for Halberstam, seems to be undercut by the adoption of the marriage structure:

The deployment of the concept of family, whether in hetero or homo contexts, almost always introduces normative understandings of time and transmission [...]. An ideology of family pushes gays and lesbians towards marriage politics and erases other modes of kinship in the process.

(71)

In light of this argument, one must ask whether it is possible to mobilise the normative concept of family in a way that acknowledges, and is inclusive of, other modes of kinship? Is the metaphoric architecture of family irrevocably linked to historicity and continuity?

The impermanence and ahistoricity of the queer community of the New York chapter contradicts the reproductive objectives of the heteronormative model of home-making. In being excluded from narratives of futurity – by this I mean social structures that seek to propagate themselves, such as the heteroreproductive family and the nation-state – certain queer kinship structures can be read as embedded in a *here-ness* and *now-ness* that foregrounds the value of loving relationships over a historical sense of legacy or continuity. Consider Dan and Billy's final moment together: "They ended up kissing up against a chain link fence, in the deserted lot by the East River [...] waiting to be knifed by a passer-by" (68). Danger and impermanence take centre stage and, clearly, there are no expectations of continuity.

The narrator describes the moment directly proceeding Ludo's proposal with a similar emphasis on the fragility of their relationship: "[t]he night before he left for Ireland, Dan told Ludo that he loved him. He told him because it was true and because he thought that, this time, the plane might fall out of the sky" (177). Rather than being guided by the desire to produce a family, Dan and Ludo's marriage is grounded in the transience of life and the fleeting nature of human relationships. In gesturing towards a disconnection of kinship relations from the structures that produce them – through a focus on fragility and tenuousness – *The Green Road* offers a vision of kinship relations that are not grounded in originary narratives and do not seek to replicate and reproduce themselves.

Enright seems to suggest that we need to unlearn the fixities and reveal the invisibilities of the 'normal' family. Her novel provides various alternative visions of kinship relations premised on an uncoupling of kinship from narratives of continuity (such as sexuality, reproduction and nationality) and an acceptance of fragility, mortality, temporariness and change.

Despite her clinging to the framework of the family, Enright's depiction of Dan's experiences can be read in relation to Halberstam's vision for alternative modes of kinship:

De-linking the process of generation from the force of historical process is a queer kind of project: queer lives seek to uncouple change from the supposedly organic and immutable forms of family and inheritance; queer lives exploit some potential for difference in form.

(*Queer Art of Failure* 70)

Unlike Dan, Ludo is comfortable in his home-of-origin and has no difficulties belonging in it. According to the narrator, Ludo and Dan:

went over to Montreal, twice, maybe three times a year, and Ludo came home each time more contented and capacious [...]. Dan liked to watch Ludo about his mother's house, a big man in a small space [...]. It seemed to Dan that Ludo spoke many languages – even his body spoke them – while he, Dan, spoke only one.

(Enright 171–72)

Ludo's ability to 'speak many languages' gestures to the possibility of multiple kinds of belonging or hominess. His ability to occupy multiple spaces comfortable as a queer man is at direct odds with Dan returning home as a "terrible version of himself" (172). To use Halberstam's phrasing, Ludo embodies and mobilises his queer potential for difference in form. It is the Madigans' failure to account for difference in form that results in Dan's estrangement from his home.

The static and unchangeable nature of the Madigan's conception of family is, in part, responsible for Dan's difficulties feeling homed within *Ardeevin*. A static conception of belonging does not allow for the changes he has undergone and the uncertainties that underpin his life. As

such, the recognisable and knowable version of Dan Madigan, the version that could be homed in *Ardeevin*, is not reconcilable with Dan Madigan as a queer, middle-aged man in a framework that does not account for difference, uncertainty and change. When Constance meets him at the airport, the disjuncture between her idea of him and the reality is made clear: “she was not bothered by her brother’s gayness – except, perhaps, in a social sense – because she had not believed in his straightness, either. In the place where Constance loved Dan, he was eight years old” (198). Enright seems to suggest that part of Dan’s difficulty rests in the fact that his family struggles to *know* or *recognise* him as a queer man.

The closing half of *The Green Road*, titled “COMING HOME”, is interspersed with the motif of two disparate elements meeting which is framed through the image of the river Inagh. Constance, lost in the memories of her brother as a child, “the boy who ran beside her in her dreams” (198), remembers their childhood exploration of the Irish countryside:

And the thing they found was the river Inagh as it ran across the sands into the sea.
Sweet water into salt [...]. Rainwater into seawater, you could taste where they met
and mingled, and no way to tell if all this was good or bad, this turbulence, if it was
corruption or return.

(198)

Still on the drive from the airport to *Ardeevin*, Dan falls asleep and, at the petrol station, “woke from a dream of the river Inagh entering the sea – loosely, endlessly” (202). This meeting and mingling of opposites, salt water and sweet, is rendered ambiguous in that it could be read as either ‘corruption or return’. The suggestion of twin possibilities inherent in all meetings of opposites is central to the reading of COMING HOME.

In some ways, Dan’s impending marriage can be read in the same ambiguous arrangement, either constituting corruption or return. In one of his sessions with Scott, his Canadian therapist, Dan talks about a memory in the Sonoran desert, the first time he had made a “move on a guy, really wanted him” (177). He recalls the way the desert light “washed his lover’s body with dusk and turned it into such an untouchable, touchable thing” (177). Dan follows this up with a discussion of his relationship with Ludo:

‘It’s just. I don’t know if I am losing all that, with Ludo I don’t know if I am losing
it, or if it’s all finally, coming good.’
‘I see.’
Scatter cushions and oak dressers – in Toronto, Dan thought.
Here we go.

(177)

Dan’s encounter in the desert is positioned as a liminal, multiple thing which happens at dusk and

where his lover's body is simultaneously untouchable and touchable. The domesticity of his relationship with Ludo, the scatter cushions and oak dressers, is described ambiguously as either a loss of this liminality and multiplicity, or a positive resolution of its uncertainty. Again, these encounters and relationships involve meetings of opposites that Enright leaves ambiguous. Touch is also developed as a motif of opposite contact, and is positioned as something that can be read as either corruption or return. This touchability or untouchability occurs between people, but also between a person and a physical space. For Dan, home is a place he knows but cannot touch:

As they travelled towards home, the landscape accumulated in Dan like a silt of meaning [...]. All at once, it was familiar. He knew this place. It was a secret he had carried inside him; a map of things he had known and lost, these half-glimpsed houses and stone walls, the fields of solid green.

The road was wider than the road of his childhood and the rain felt less and less real to him as they spun along it [...]. Aquaplaning. Flying his sister's fancy car through the wet air. Touching nothing. Untouched.

(203)

Again, Dan is figured as being above the land, his home and the familiar spaces of his childhood somehow out of reach. This image emphasises how coming home is, for Dan but also for all the Madigan children, a meeting between their past and present selves and involves an ambiguous contact.

The Green Road's concern with touch and contact comes to a head in the novel's closing scene. After the optimism of the hospital scenes, where the Madigans finally become 'a family', and the opening of boundaries initiated by Dan and Emmet reaching out into their pasts, Enright collapses this hopefulness in a return to her characteristic uncertainty and ambiguity. The closing scene is set in Emmet's home which he shares with Denholm, his Kenyan roommate. Rosaleen arrives with her bags after being kicked out of Constance's house and Emmet walks in on Rosaleen and Denholm having tea in his kitchen. Emmet is struck with the strangeness of "his mother exerting the full of her charm on a Kenyan, in his kitchen" (306). His shock increases when Rosaleen reaches out to touch Denholm:

The veins of her old hand were purple under the thin white skin, and the surface of Denholm's arm very opaque by comparison. She held it up off the table and ran a curious finger along the side of it where the dark brown of his skin gave way, in a line, to the lighter shade of his palm.

[...].

'Why have I not seen it before?'

(307)

This scene draws together the novel's various concerns with exclusion, boundaries, recognition and touch. Rosaleen reaching out to touch Denholm can be read as the culmination of the various meeting of supposed opposites that occur in *COMING HOME*. Her startled response, 'Why have I not seen it before?', indicates the limits of Rosaleen's worldview and her failure to recognise both the similarities and differences of other people.

Sara Ahmed discusses the possibilities and violences of any physical encounter between bodies. Drawing on Judith Butler's theory of materialisation, Ahmed emphasises that "there is no body as such that is given in the world: bodies materialise in a complex set of temporal and spatial relations to other bodies, including bodies that are recognised as familiar, familial and friendly" (40). Ahmed emphasises the material, historical and social underpinnings of any encounter between bodies in the world. Furthermore, "the body becomes imagined through being related to, and separated from, particular bodily others. Difference is not simply found in the body, but is established as a relation between bodies" (44).

In closing the novel with the precarious scene of connection figured by Rosaleen touching Denholm, Enright raises the question of bodies and investigates the limits and possibilities of touch. Rosaleen's interest with Denholm's skin brings to the fore the potential for healing and for hurt inherent in any contact with another. The point of contact between bodies produces both (mis)recognition and difference. It is a moment of becoming but it is also the instant of fracture. Touch is a significant element of this encounter between bodies in that it is an affective contact, for if this skin is a border, "it is *a border that feels*" (Ahmed 45, original emphasis). The skin both protects and exposes us and, in being touched, we are simultaneously touched by another (45). In a novel so concerned with the limits and borders between people and community, the vulnerability offered by *feeling* exposes the boundary to a reciprocal rather than exclusionary relationship with the outside. By closing the novel with such an uncertain, ambiguous moment of touch, Enright seems to be suggesting the possibility of a more permeable boundary between familiar bodies and those marked as strange, a boundary that feels and is felt. The vulnerability of this reciprocal relation to the outside means that the border is forever uncertain in that it is both exposed to, and dependent on, the other that it is excluding.

This reciprocal exposure recalls Butler's consideration of the precarious relation between people. Butler holds that in living socially, we are implicated in and obligated to the lives of those around us (14). To expand upon this idea:

[These precarious relations are] not necessarily relations of love or even of care, but constitute obligations toward others, most of whom we cannot name and do

not know, and who may or may not bear traits of familiarity to an established sense of who 'we' are. The social implication of this view, however, is precisely that the 'we' does not, and cannot recognise itself, that it is riven from the start. The obligations 'we' have are precisely those that disrupt any established notion of the 'we'.

(Butler, *Frames of War* 14)

I think that this understanding of a riven, obligated and exposed 'we' is central to understanding Enright's position on community. Consider the use of 'we' in the novel – the queer community of the second chapter and, briefly, the Madigans on the hillside looking for their mother. It is a moment of disorientation and vulnerability, where the members of the 'we' are both helpless and helpful that this kind of community can be conceived. The obligations that form the community are precisely those that produce its constant collapse. It is important to note that both these moments of community are partial, contingent and subject to vulnerability and reformation; they are beautiful but they do not last. Rosaleen's closing remark can be read as gesturing towards the necessity of acknowledging these contingent relations: "I think that's the problem. I should have paid more attention to things" (310).

The Green Road is at once a gentle and unforgiving take on people, communities and families. It is a story which holds moments of truly moving connection as well as lifetimes of irreparable misunderstanding and fracture. Enright presents neither a simple repudiation of home nor an appreciation of its benevolent qualities. Through her illustration of the lives of an Irish family, whose joys and hurts are significant in their everydayness, Enright calls into question care, compassion and community. In its vacillation between tenderness and harm, the novel resists any simplistic conclusions on the nature of human relations and presents the reader with an open-ended meditation of its limitations and possibilities.

“Speak, Mnemosyne”: Telling Life and Love from Behind and Between in Petina Gappah’s *The Book of Memory*

In keeping with Enright’s investigation of the economies of recognition in the family structure, Petina Gappah’s *The Book of Memory* concerns itself with being heard and being seen. The novel engages with those discursive and social structures that both create specific identity positions, and determine the ways in which subjects within them are linked or divided. These acts of positioning and defining relations between individuals – whether it be within a family, neighbourhood or nation – are unpacked and challenged in *The Green Road*. This same discursively disruptive concern lies at the heart of *The Book of Memory*. The many oppositions and incompatibilities of *The Book of Memory* are sites of tension and struggle that the reader and narrator must negotiate. In doing so, Gappah’s novel also creates possibilities for inhabiting spaces of friction productively and gestures towards the potential for new forms of telling, knowing and being. In offering such an intimate narrative of contact and conflict, this writer challenges the reader’s relationship to Zimbabwean stories – those of fiction and of history.

Comprised of multiple time strands which lead up to, and reflect upon, Zimbabwe’s tumultuous 2013 election, *The Book of Memory* is a prison narrative which recounts the story of Memory. She is a black, Zimbabwean woman with albinism who is currently on death row in Chikurubi, Zimbabwe’s largest prison. The protagonist has been convicted of the murder of Lloyd Hendricks, a wealthy descendent of English colonialists, who adopted her as a child. Lloyd originally intended to shelter her in his home to protect her from a difficult life in Mufakose but, as a result of her mother’s mental illness and her parents’ subsequent deaths, she was unable to return there. The narrator interprets this as her parents entirely abandoning her. Indeed, the young Memory – seeing Lloyd hand her parents money – believes she has been sold to this strange white man. As a black person with albinism who spent her adolescent years in a white home, Memory occupies an uncertain, hybrid position between blackness and whiteness in Zimbabwe. These underlying conflicts between Lloyd and Memory complicate their relationship and can be read in relation to the larger economic inequalities that divide them. The issue of treating people as tradable – in other words, the consumptive commodification of identities and stories – is one which the novel investigates from multiple perspectives.

This concern can be seen through the narrative situation of the novel, which signals the fragile and precarious position of Memory and her story. *The Book of Memory* is written in the

second person and is addressed to an American journalist, Melinda Carter, who is writing a story on miscarriages of justice in the Zimbabwean judicial system. The text's second-person narration brings into question a range of issues regarding authorship, interpretation, legibility and recognition. Being read, and by extension being seen and heard, is engaged with by the novel on the social level of the family; particularly through Memory's struggles to know her foster father, understand the contours of their relationship and her identity in relation to him. The problematics of legibility within social structures is expanded to comment upon Zimbabwe's relationship with the colonial centre, particularly with regard to the ways in which stories from Zimbabwe – in the form of personal narratives, news articles and histories – are read within the social structures that form and determine the margin, the centre and the relations therein.

“it was a strange time to be living in a white family”: Telling Stories of Self, Family and History

Memory and Lloyd's family is, in many ways, a transgressive one. Their relationship, and the kind of love that exists between them, disrupts the logics of heteroreproductive families in that it challenges legacies of racial reproduction and continuity. Richard Dyer writes about the white family, claiming that: “if race is always about bodies, it is also always about the reproduction of those bodies through heterosexuality” (25). An intrinsic feature of the construction of the white family is its ability to propagate and convey whiteness to a future generation – whiteness reproduces itself (25). Consider Alexandra's constant attempts to get Lloyd to settle down with an eligible bachelorette: she sends various suitable young, single white women to Lloyd's home on increasingly spurious errands. Lloyd's lack of a wife and children – and, underlying this, his homosexuality – are a constant source of consternation to Alexandra because she has been socialised to think he should reproduce and create a recognisable family.

For Dyer, the inter-racial family threatens the power of whiteness and the legitimacy of the white body: “if white bodies are no longer indubitably white bodies, if they can no longer guarantee their own reproduction as white, then the ‘natural’ basis of their dominion is no longer credible”, he proffers (25). The reproducibility of the white body is a condition of possibility for the domineering structures of white legacy; the white family acts to naturalise and convey authority to formations of colonial oppression.

Consider the Hendricks family's prominent and dubiously distinguished history:

Lloyd's past was an active part of his present. It was in the Distinguished Flying

Cross that Lloyd's father had obtained with the 44 Rhodesia Squadron, in the Victoria Cross awarded to his grandfather, and in the sepia-toned photographs from long ago that hung on the walls of the library [...].

[Lloyd's grandfather] appears on page 245 of the second volume of the *African Heritage* history book, a man with colourless eyes and a bushy moustache, looking out at Zimbabwe's schoolchildren with the glassy stare of the subjects of early photography.

(Gappah, *Book of Memory* 154–55)

Lloyd's family history – and its celebration of white authority – is enshrined in various photographs, awards and books. It appears concrete and well established, to the point where it has become significant enough to be taught in schools. The narratives of continuity and achievement that distinguish his family and make it a part of Zimbabwean history are entangled in notions of legacy and white propagation.

In adopting Memory into his family, Lloyd threatens the concept of white reproduction that underpins his family heritage, thereby destabilising the perceived credibility of his family's domination. This heritage is further disturbed in the novel when, after adopting Memory, he makes her his legal heir, leaving Summer Madness, the ancestral Hendricks home, and all his colonial wealth to Memory. In doing so, he is challenging the constructed concepts of supremacy, authority and historical entitlement that Gappah depicts as being tied into white continuity and legacy. This irrefutable, secure and active presence of Lloyd's family history stands in direct contrast with the contingency and uncertainty of Memory's family history and her place within it:

When Lloyd talked about his family, I thought of my own, undocumented past [...] We seemed like the Spartoi, the earth-grown men that sprang up, fully formed, from the teeth sown by Cadmus, to be completely unconnected to anyone but ourselves, to have emerged complete into the present without a history.

There were no letters, no mementos, no links to any kind of past.

(152–53)

Her family history is not well established and verifiable in the ways that Lloyd's family history can be seen to be. When she moves from one family context to another, this disparity becomes more evident – Lloyd's long dead grandfather's survival in the pages of Zimbabwean textbooks is a stark contrast to Memory's poignant attempt to hold onto the remaining fragment of the only photograph of Mobhi, her dead sister.

The robust and distinguished character of the Hendricks's legacy when compared to Memory's almost non-existent family history, also speaks to the inequalities and insufficiencies of Zimbabwean history. Lloyd's family history is institutionally enshrined, to the cost of the black Zimbabwean archive. The gaps and discontinuities that Gappah points to in these histories are

deeply intertwined with family legacies and the ways in which the past is carried forward through social relations. This concern with the relative valuation of certain stories, or, more explicitly, the ways in which some stories enjoy legitimacy and conservation to the detriment of others, is explored in multiple ways throughout the novel and informs much of *The Book of Memory*'s approach to interpretation and recognition.

In its engagement with the relative security and perceived value of certain narratives, the novel illustrates how family and history are entangled with one another. Gappah's novel illustrates how precarious families hold, and are informed by, threatened stories. Elaborating upon this connection, Barbara Misztal writes about the power of communities to create different versions of history:

These groups – the family, the ethnic group and the nation – are examples of the main mnemonic communities which socialise us to what should be remembered and what should be forgotten. They affect the 'depth' of our memory; they regulate how far back we should remember, which part of the past should be remembered, which events mark the beginning and which should be forced out of our story.

(15)

As a result of the entanglement between kinship communities and narratives of the past, Memory's position within and between two families can also be articulated as tension between two histories. The work the narrator puts into negotiating her identity and her social position also becomes the work of integrating these histories – seeing the fallibility and bias of white history, and trying to recover the remains of her black history. As such, the novel's concern with assimilating and recuperating histories can be read alongside the meta-textual involvement with the global place of Zimbabwean stories.

The narrator's focus on unpacking her memory through narrative in order to better orientate herself speaks to this work. Similarly, *The Book of Memory* acts to locate and secure threatened stories (whilst simultaneously excavating their prospects for creating more capacious modes of reading and being read. Memory's attempts to know and write herself within her relationship to Lloyd, and English culture more widely, can be loosely mapped onto her attempts to position herself within the fractious landscape of Zimbabwean society. These discursive manoeuvres also have meta-textual implications for Gappah's mediation of Zimbabwean postcoloniality and the country's relationship with former imperial powers, particularly in relation to the complexities of narrative work that exists, like Memory, in the fraught space between the margin and the centre.

(Re)membering Against Erasure

Janet Carsten links this kind of narrative and memory work undertaken by Memory and Gappah – personal, social and national – to the limitations and possibilities of the kinship structure when she argues that:

The intertwining of memory and relatedness necessarily also involve creative processes of rearrangement of the past and of regeneration. Memory work in this sense can be seen as a restoration of the past, or may be side-stepped by the vivid assertion of alternate scenarios of social engagement against the perceived restrictions and impositions of normative familial life.

(*Ghosts of Memory* 16)

In this extract, Carsten points to the role that narrative creativity has in establishing cultures of relatedness, but also gestures towards the possibilities of disruption offered by non-normative familial structures. Much of *The Book of Memory* is concerned with the main character's attempts to work through her fragmented past in relation to her anomalous family experiences. The work she does integrating her own life into a coherent and cohesive whole has discursive repercussions for her mnemonic communities and the histories participated in by them. Additionally, Gappah's metatextual and narratological engagements regarding the relations between readers and stories, also explicitly position this work within a wider mnemonic and historical context. As such, her work can be read as attempting to create a more accommodating climate for Zimbabwean stories by telling them, and challenging the reader's relationship to them.

The protagonist outlines the links between identity, family and narrative when she describes the conventions of oral story-telling: "[t]he ritual of autobiography here is that we introduce and begin stories by locating our position in the family [...] Identity begins in that one sentence: I am the first, the middle, the fourth, the second, the last" (Gappah, *Book of Memory* 12). Her location in her family establishes identity. In working through her various kinship positions and relations, Memory is developing and generating her sense of self through narrative.

Her lack of family history means that the protagonist's narrative must work to fill in the lacunae, or make sense around them.

She describes the difficulties that arise as a result of her uncertain family history in the following terms:

Until you attempt to write the story of your life, you cannot quite understand just how hard it is to grasp at the beginning. I wish I could start this the traditional way, by telling you all about my father and mother and how they met and who their parents were and all the begats that preceded their lives, but I cannot. Until they sold me to Lloyd, and I moved away, I knew nothing about them beyond the fact that they were my mother and father.

(12)

Since she must write into and around these historical gaps, Memory must start her narrative in a non-traditional way, thereby producing a new identity for herself that accounts for the unfamiliarity of the legacies she is caught between. Here the novel directly demonstrates Carsten's assertion that vivid assertions of alternate kinship scenarios may give rise to new forms of relation and, by extension, fresh ways of being read and received.

This vivid assertion of alternate forms of relation is not a straightforward process, however, as can be seen through the narrator's struggle to know and understand herself and her relationship to Lloyd. The conflicting politics of strangeness and belonging that shape and challenge Lloyd and Memory's connection can be read in relation to some of the literature on transnational or transracial adoptions (the two are frequently conflated). As Toby Anne Volkman comments: "all adoption that crosses borders – of culture, race, ethnicity, nation or class – is shaped by profound inequities in power, by contradictions and ambivalences" (1). These inequities and ambivalences are experienced by Memory throughout the novel, which is reflected in the fact that she is never sure of her relationship to Lloyd. Consider her discussion of how she came to live in Summer Madness: "Lloyd rarely talked openly about how I came to live with him. When he spoke of it at all, it was always in euphemisms. He spoke of 'taking me in', of 'giving me a home'" (Gappah, *Book of Memory* 5). The euphemistic uncertainty of Lloyd and Memory's family history is at direct odds with the well-established, canonical history of the Hendricks's.

As a result of her relative 'strangeness', Memory cannot take on the easily identifiable role of Lloyd's heir. During her trial, the judge remarks: "[t]he relationship between the accused and the deceased was unclear, but it was not necessary to go into the exact nature of that relationship. What was beyond question was that the deceased had left the accused his house in his will, and his money" (224). Clearly, Lloyd and Memory's 'family' is not an easily recognisable one, or one held in much esteem by the law. Although Memory has been legally appointed as his heir, and Lloyd

was legally recognised as her guardian during her childhood, the courts deem their relationship ‘unclear’ and unworthy of further examination.

This lack of clarity illustrates how hegemonic family logics deny and erase transgressive kinship relations. Memory struggles to be recognised as Lloyd’s daughter, both in public and private spaces. Lloyd’s white family, Alexandra and Ian Flemming, treat her in a way that makes this erasure particularly evident. After she has moved into Summer Madness, Memory breaks a doll Lloyd gave to her that had once belonged to Alexandra. Instead of directly addressing Memory, she speaks about her as if she is not present:

But she didn’t look at me or ask what had happened.

Instead, she looked at Lloyd and said, ‘If you are to make a success of this, you must teach her to respect other people’s property. And you really ought to teach her better manners, too.’

She put the doll down next to me.

(158)

Alexandra consistently treats Memory as if she is an interloper in Lloyd’s home, speaks about her instead of to her and interprets her silence as a lack of intelligence. She paints the narrator as avaricious, ill mannered and unintelligent – which illustrates how her racist preconceptions shape her interactions with the world. Alexandra’s inability to perceive Memory from within her prejudiced frame of interpretation erases the value and complexity of the narrator’s relationship with Lloyd.

Similarly, Ian Flemming, Alexandra’s husband and Memory’s de facto uncle, also treats Memory as invisible and inaudible. In doing so, he enacts the coloniser’s attitude towards the country and its black citizens. In the narrator’s estimation,

His Rhodesia was one of excellence and possibility and he was given to enumerating its successes. He said all of this in my presence, but I was probably invisible to him, and he did not think that I understood anything he said – or if I did, that it did not matter. I was not sophisticated enough to take him on, to point out to him that his Rhodesia had only worked for a few thousand white people.

(162)

Through this extract, Gappah illustrates the prevailing attitude of the white minority from the viewpoint of a person rendered invisible by this perspective. Memory’s relationship with Alexandra is a source of constant fear and anxiety for her. She is reticent to speak in front of her, to the point where Alexandra describes Memory as “slow, somehow retarded” (163).

This hesitance to speak, which stems from the marginalised position Alexandra puts Memory into, leads directly to the latter’s incarceration. On the night of Lloyd’s death, Alexandra walks in on Memory attempting to drag Lloyd’s body to the pool. Memory is holding the gun, after having shot Lloyd; all the evidence suggests that she has murdered him.

She attempts to explain the situation to Alexandra, but fails:

Babbling and weeping, I made to move towards her, my hands turned to hers in supplication, pleading with her, willing her to understand [...] She would help me, I thought; we would decide what to do, the two of us.

[...].

‘You have to believe me,’ I said. ‘I found him dead.’

But the words remained in my mind. I could not speak them.

(229)

This is the moment that damns Memory, Alexandra is the only witness in her trial and there is no other corroborating evidence. Her inability to speak to Alexandra costs Memory her freedom. The violence of invisibility and inaudibility is inextricably linked with Memory’s captivity. These links that the narrator draws between being treated as invisible in a white household and being incarcerated by white constructions of justice dramatises the concrete socio-political consequences of visibility and recognition. Memory is tangibly imprisoned by structures of whiteness. In this incarceration it is possible to see the workings of Richard Dyer’s assertion that whiteness operates as a frame for producing normative versions of humanity. For Dyer, whiteness has come to be represented, interpreted and recognised as defining humanness, normality and universality (8). This sets up a standard for ‘humanness’ that all people of colour will necessarily fail. Memory’s marginalisation can be traced to this exclusionary construction of humanness and its erasing effects upon people of colour.

The functioning of these frames of recognition is best described by Judith Butler:

The ‘frames’ that work to differentiate the lives we can apprehend from those we cannot [...] not only organise visual experience but also generate specific ontologies of the subject. Subjects are constituted through norms which, in their reiteration, produce and shift the terms through which subjects are recognised [...] These normative conditions for the production of the subject produce an historically contingent ontology, such that our very capacity to discern and name the ‘being’ of the subject is dependent upon the norms that facilitate that recognition.

(*Frames of War* 4)

As such, the visual economies that govern the recognition of subjects are enmeshed within those that produce differentiated subject positions. The politics of seeing, in many ways, compose and delimit the possibilities of being.

Butler emphasises the politically and historically contingent nature of these frames (4). She describes them as “politically saturated” in that they are operations of power (1). The relative valuation of various subjectivities is historically and politically located. Memory’s silencing by Alexandra, and subsequent incarceration by the Zimbabwean judicial system, is intrinsically linked

to a history of racial oppression and colonial brutality. These legacies of colonialism – specifically with regard to the ways in which particular racialised and sexualised subjectivities were constructed, perceived and valued – are entrenched within the operations of power that work to incarcerate Memory and delegitimise her account of the world. By unpacking the violent logics of the white settler family, it is possible to identify and renegotiate the wider repercussions and prospects of those frames for a postcolonial world.

In tracing Memory and Lloyd's relationship, it becomes clear that much of the novel is concerned with the potential for unconventional or transgressive families to live and love in ways which disrupt these normative frames and widen the possibilities of what constitutes recognisable relationships and subjectivities. *The Book of Memory* places particular emphasis on the role of creative memory work, or narrative reconstruction, in achieving these kinds of disruptive recuperations of threatened pasts. This focus on writing's capacity to create more capacious modes of being and loving is multiply checked and restrained by the novel's concern with recognition and interpretation. From Alexandra's personal and intimate snubbing, and subsequent devaluing, to the judiciary's rendering of their relationship as 'unclear', Memory and Lloyd's connection is at all times threatened by misrecognition. *The Book of Memory*'s concern with the dangers of being seen and heard are intimately explored through Memory's attempt to narrate the contours of her often paradoxical position.

Spectacle, Spectatorship and the Illegible Body

Gappah's complex concern with recognition is dramatised through the novel's engagement with seeing and being seen. The novel's most obvious engagement with how bodies are rendered and read within discourse is through Memory's albinism. Her physical illegibility – being neither easily readable as black or white – mirrors, complicates and emphasises her cultural hybridity. As such, the acute visibility of albinism operates in the text as a way of discernibly manifesting those practices of visual classification, whilst at the same time showing them to be intrinsically flawed. In other words, the objectification experienced by Memory as a result of her albinism illustrates the fallibility of systems of racial classification in that she is othered because she is 'black but not black', 'white but not white'. This illegibility is further complicated by the fact that she is culturally hybrid and does indeed occupy a space between and within both blackness and whiteness. It is her simultaneous visibility and silence within these frames of recognition that acts to exclude her from

easily recognisable forms of belonging whilst also acting to position her as a unique authority on both black and white spaces in Zimbabwe, interceding and interpreting between the two.

According to Baker et al, in sub-Saharan Africa, albinism is “the most visible of conditions” (169). It comes with risks and a life of challenges, as a person born with albinism is susceptible to severe stigmatisation, ostracisation and the threat of physical violence (Baker et al 173). In Zimbabwe, to give birth to a child with albinism is often seen as a spiritual punishment for infidelity and is associated with a higher rate of infanticide (172–73). Albinism “was regarded as a blemish or an impurity” (Machoko 319). Baker et al interviewed a number of people with albinism living in Zimbabwe and one of the respondents described the pervasive psychological consequences of their condition as follows: “nowhere can an albino be his real self – socially, at work, at school, at home – nowhere, it is a living nightmare” (173).

Not only is Memory subject to the violences of racism and sexism but she must also endure the added ignominy associated with the public response to the condition of albinism. The inescapability of her condition follows her into her home, where her Mother cannot braid her hair because of her sensitive scalp and she looks out of place in her family photo due to her skin colour: “I always looked pale, paler than everyone else, like a ghost against the others”, she recalls (Gappah, *Book of Memory* 33). In a particularly poignant scene from her childhood, she recounts how she attempted to cover her skin with her mother’s make-up in order to look as if she belonged in her family: [the powder compact’s] brown colour lay invitingly in its blue compact plastic case, and I smeared and smeared it all over my face” (56). I am reminded of a passage from bell hooks’ *Writing Beyond Race*, where she states that “[h]ome is the only place where there is no race [...] to move beyond race I ground myself in my homeplace. In this house where I live race has no place” (184–5). For Memory, however, home is a place where the markers of race are always visible because she does not look like her family. In her words, “[t]he lightness of skin that made my mother and my sister beautiful had been bleached to the point of distortion in me. I was just three, possibly four, shades away from beauty” (Gappah, *Book of Memory* 56).

This is not to say that the difficulties experienced by Memory are specific to Zimbabwe – the objectification of, and discrimination against, people with albinism is culturally and historically pervasive, as Memory discovers:

I once found [...] a facsimile of a hand-bill exhorting the public to witness THE AMAZING WHITE NEGRO, YOURS TO SEE FOR 2S ONLY in Piccadilly [...] It struck me as I looked at that handbill that any alternative life I might have had in a freak show in Piccadilly in the seventeenth century would not have been particularly different from my childhood in Mufakose.

Through this anecdote, the narrator emphasises the harshness of her childhood in Mufakose, where she was treated as an object of ridicule. She recalls how children would shout “to remind me I was a *murungudunhu*,⁶ and not content with that, danced around me and announced my presence to everyone”, which is tantamount to being treated as a freakish exhibition for public entertainment (52). It also serves to underline that this treatment is ubiquitous. Memory’s drawing of explicit links between her life in Mufakose and the discrimination that she experiences during her studies in England signpost those pervasive issues of legibility and recognition that undergird the novel. The widespread nature of these visual economies that stratify society, and objectify the narrator, gestures towards the interconnected power relations of the postcolonial world. These political asymmetries and entanglements signal Gappah’s wider concern with being read and received in the West.

This writer’s involvement with the complications of recognition, and mediating opposing forms of interpretation, is explored through Memory’s albinism. It is a condition which is often described as being part of two worlds but belonging to none (Baker et al 172). The mythological associations of the condition in Zimbabwe incorporate the “intermediary nature of people with albinism” in that they are “considered to belong to both the living and the dead” (177). In this way, “people with albinism are positioned between two worlds” and serve as a “physical symbol of the in-between” (177). Apart from the mythological connotations, there is the more mundane issue that black individuals who are born with albinism look as if they are white. One of the individuals interviewed by Baker et al succinctly describes the issue as: “[y]ou are black, but you are white, so you belong nowhere” (130).

This non-belonging has been utilised in artistic representations of the albino body as albinism is a condition “loaded with symbolism and meaning in terms of racial difference” (91). The capacity to exceed or resist categorisation has made the albino body subversive (92).⁷ The human body always serves as a site of identity construction but the need to categorise, to define and

⁶ *Murungudunhu* or *musope* are Shona terms for a person with albinism.

⁷ Baker critiques this (mis)representation of albinism as it erases the fact of illness which often leads to albinism being misinterpreted and its aetiology being ignored (92). Gappah is certainly invoking the metaphoric and symbolic possibilities of the condition but I would argue that the text’s focus on Memory’s physical, emotional and social difficulties does ameliorate this issue somewhat. The physical aspects of the illness are important parts of the text with Memory’s frequent visits to the hospital and her extensive skin care regimen underlining the fact of her illness.

‘know’ the other is frustrated by the albino body (96).⁸ Consider Memory’s experiences in spaces mainly occupied by white bodies:

Even in London, or Sydney, where I should have blended in with everyone, the world’s gaze came with a double take. On the surface, my skin looked like everybody else’s, but seen closer, my features are very obviously not Caucasian. I could feel the puzzlement on the face as the mind tried to work out what was different.

(Gappah, *Book of Memory* 51)

Even amongst other visually white bodies, Memory is remarkable. According to Baker, this uncategorisable characteristic of the albino body manifests itself in a “perceived emptiness or lack which invites interpretation and inspires elaboration” (95). This inspiration often centres on albino skin, which is “most often seized upon for its symbolic value in fictional representation” (93). Skin is supposed to protect, contain and delimit the inside from the outside but “the skin of the albino is open to assault from the sun and easily becomes damaged or diseased” (93). As such, it is an inefficient barrier between the individual and the world (93). The lack of writing by people with albinism, in conjunction with the way in which the albino body is positioned as an ‘empty’ symbolic site, means that people with albinism are often written for, or written about, rather than representing themselves.

The symbolic weight given to albinism supersedes the acknowledgement of Memory’s subjectivity and, subsequently, erases or stifles her. Oversimplified ways of reading and seeing are shown to wrest control away from Memory in that they overshadow how the protagonist is inscribed and received in society. Through the novel’s engagement with the albino body’s construction as an ‘empty’ symbolic site, Gappah draws attention to and problematises fixed or essentialist frames of recognition. The narrator’s albinism becomes a complex nexus which draws attention to the static and essentialising ways in which identity is often read and figured.

Memory is placed in the paradoxical position of being both invisible and constantly on display, even within her home. Much like how the symbolic connotations of albinism eclipse the physical realities of the medical condition, it is her hyper visible physical appearance that often serves to silence her experience. In the emblematic reading of her illness, the narrator’s subjectivity

⁸ The term albino has rightly come under scrutiny for the fact that it erases the personhood behind the illness and results in further objectification and dehumanisation. I wish to disambiguate between my uses of ‘person with albinism’ and ‘albino’. When referring to the subjectivity of an individual with albinism I will be using the phrase ‘person with albinism’ but when I am discussing the representational or metaphorical aspects of the condition I will use ‘albino’ or possibly ‘albino body’ in an effort to signal and acknowledge the objectification inherent in discussing a person’s body in a disconnected and symbolic way or as a metaphor for something else entirely. An exception to this would be where I am directly quoting from someone else’s work.

is erased: she is addressed and called out as *murungudunhu* rather than by her own name. In *The Book of Memory*, the protagonist is imprisoned within various systems of representation and recognition which act to deny her complexity, agency and hybridity. This essentialising effect of the frames of recognition in which she is embedded, and through which she is received, acts to subordinate and silence her. *The Book of Memory* engages with the symbolic incarceration that results from the protagonist's extreme visibility through her conflicting positions as an object of spectacle and a silent spectator. Memory was made aware of the conspicuousness of her condition very early in life. For instance, in Mufakose, her fellow children would follow her down the street, calling for people to "come and see", "calling attention to each deficiency" (Gappah, *Book of Memory* 10).

She emphasises how her condition served to make her an object of public mockery as well as to alienate her:

I could not join in because, if I went out and stayed in the sun for any length of time, my skin cracked and blistered. I spent my days indoors [...] I sat and observed [...] And when I did venture out, it was to be greeted as *murungudunhu*, so that I thought that must be part of my name.

(47)

In this extract, the narrator signals how her experience of alienation and ridicule shaped her understanding of herself. She writes extensively of the games children would play in Mufakose and how she could only participate in her imagination because her sensitivity to sunlight trapped her indoors: "this was all in my mind. I longed to play on Mharapara with the others but I could not join in" (47). Listening to the sounds of Mufakose coming through the window, or sitting on the veranda, she was forced into the position of observer (47). Her extreme visibility in public is contrasted with her position as a hidden spectator. The issues of visibility and belonging are also linked by Memory. In the scene described above, she is hidden in the spare room, or *speya*, wishing she could participate in the children's games and become part of their community.

When she is presented with the offer of community by Lameck, another person in Mufakose with albinism, she retreats from him repulsed: "[i]t was terrible to me that he sought me out, that he offered me this solidarity" (53). Unable to become part of the community she desires to join, and unwilling to become part of the community offered by Lameck, Memory adopts a strategy of invisibility: "[i]f I could not be like the others I would be invisible," she confesses (57). As she is writing in hindsight, Memory is able to offer perspective to her decision to shun Lameck and embrace invisibility and isolation: "[t]o befriend someone like me would defeat that desire to disappear, to melt and observe, and so I ignored Lameck, because to acknowledge him was to see

that in myself which I would rather not have been” (57). This interaction signals how deeply entrenched these economies of recognition are within Memory’s experiences and understanding of her own subjectivity. If she had recognised the commonality of their positions, it would change the way she understood and experienced her self.

Through this interaction with Lameck, Memory explicitly links visibility, recognition and belonging. As identified by Butler, recognition and visibility underpin various aspects of identity production and are politically and historically located. Annette Hoffman and Esther Peeran reiterate this association, stating that “if representation creates realities, discourses, images, fields of knowledge and political contestation, then it never occurs accidentally or is inconsequential, but is embedded in history, power relations, and current politics” (14). Gappah’s engagement with the complexities of representation draws attention to those unnoticed or unconscious practices of defining people’s identities through visual categorisation and further acts to problematise them. The isolation that Memory experienced as a child continues through her life to the prison, where – because she is on death row – she has her own cell. Yet, as she notes, her childhood alienation prepared her for this:

The idea of being alone horrifies the others. They prefer to move in groups, to work in clusters, to always have a companion. Solitude is not the hardest thing about prison life for me. From the time that I was a child, I have been able to retreat into myself, and to find within myself the resources that have made it possible to bear my own company.

(Gappah, *Book of Memory* 77)

It is Memory’s proficiency at being alone, her comfort with solitude, that makes her such a skilled spectator: “I spent so much of my time on my own that I learned early to follow the thread of my own thoughts, and to watch, and be still while others talked” (78).

For this reason, I would argue that the protagonist of the novel moves between being an object of spectacle and a silent spectator. As narrator, her spectatorship is also the reader’s and, as such, serves to complicate the politics of representation in the text.

Recognition is explicitly linked to, and acts to shape, the limits of self representation:

Those who are relatively powerless to represent themselves as complex human beings against the backdrop of degrading stereotypes become invisible and nameless. Identity is shaped, in part, by recognition, absence of recognition, or misrecognition by others.

(Weaver qtd in Hoffman and Peeran 14)

In Memory's experience, this is inverted somewhat – it is her extreme visibility that serves to objectify her and obscure the fact that she is a complex human. Paradoxically, it is in her invisibility as a spectator (and narrator) that she takes back control of her own representation. Her narrative is an explicit attempt to humanise herself to the reader and, by extension, to the public and, through such an act, prove her innocence.

“that is how it was, and I will tell you all about it”: Writing Identity, Identifying the Writer

Through these issues of spectacle and spectatorship, the novel both draws attention to and subverts the economies of visibility that position and plague the narrator. The paradox of her position – white but not white, black but not black – becomes a fruitful cultural landscape, rather than an identity prison, through her writing. Memory's experiences with white culture in Zimbabwe both adulterate her sense of belonging and serve to make her a privileged voice of authority. This concern with speaking from within a position of confinement resonates multiply through the narrator's attempts to know and understand her hybrid self, provide an account of the white society she lived within, and negotiate her relationships with English and Shona.

Gappah's concern with imprisonment or entrapment manifests itself in various, intertwined ways in Memory's life. Her skin traps her inside and prevents her playing with the other children of Mufakose, her 'sale' to Lloyd imprisons her in Umwinsidale and separates her from her family and her albinism confines her to an uncomfortable position between these two worlds. The narrator's uncomfortable, uncertain life is a direct result of fixed constructions of racial identity that create these two worlds. Memory's narrative attempts to complicate and undermine these static notions of identity as well as acting to perturb the existing ways in which racial identities can be lived and read.

The protagonist's albinism, in addition to her relationship to white culture, troubles her identity as a black woman. Through her narrative interrogation of her own identity, she acts to subtly complicate not only her own relation to black femininity, but constructions of black womanhood more broadly.

Shirley Anne Tate argues that the construction of 'the Black woman' is essentialising and reductive, stating that:

Racialised gender government has detailed 'facts' about the nature and character of 'the Black woman'. Such facts construct an archive of and character of 'the Black woman'. Such facts construct an archive of reifications which come to be seen as basic and unalterable. There is a silencing of difference as those made other are also made invisible.

(33)

Hegemonic constructions of black femininity deny or erase difference, acting to create static identity categories. According to Tate, "in order to be placed within the home of Black community, difference has to be denied, sameness must be naturalised" (33). This archive of recognisable characteristics commodifies and objectifies the subjectivity of black women, erasing and silencing those whose embodiment and experience of this identity does not fit the requirements of the identifiable mould. As such, easily consumable, superficially readable identity performance becomes a prerequisite for belonging.

These visible and internal differences experienced and embodied by the narrator challenge and unsettle the activities of the racialised gender government. Her physical hybridity as well as her multiple sites of cultural attachment resist any such notions of essentialised identity or belonging. Memory does not just look white, she has lived in a white family and attended a white school. She has intimate experience of living in white spaces and is an acknowledged cultural authority – in the prison, her other inmates defer to her knowledge on whiteness. Consider the discussion between Memory and Jimmy regarding sex change operations: "I explained about sex changes, but it took time to convince her [...]. She only accepted it because of the authority that enveloped me, from having lived with white people [...] I knew them inside out" (Gappah, *Book of Memory* 82). This knowledge is not an impartial spectatorship, but arises from an intimate kinship which is accompanied by the many of the symbolic inheritances which are associated with the family. In making Memory his heir and the recipient of his legacy, Lloyd also locates her in the strange position of inheriting his history. Her position as heir to his history is not merely a matter of material wealth, as she also receives his old books and toys, participates in the same social functions as Lloyd and goes to the kinds of schools he would have gone to as a child. The narrator is an authoritative witness to, and acknowledged beneficiary of, white culture and practices. Crucially, it is through her writing that her hybridity is legitimised and recognised rather than being erased by the essentialising practices of the 'racialised gender government'. Memory uses her

knowledge of white culture and proficiency with English to insert herself within the discourse of whiteness by bearing witness to it in Zimbabwe, rather than being erased by it.

Consider how Memory's schooling career is depicted as affirming, bringing her confidence and autonomy:

At school, I eventually became just another girl in a blue dress, and when I entered the secondary, another girl in a blue skirt and white blouse. In time I gained the confidence that comes with any private education.

More than anything else, I felt an incredible sense of freedom: not from want but from scrutiny. I had not yet found home, but I found a place where I could belong.

(168)

The uniform and prestige of her schooling protects her from the objectification she experienced in her early life as a child with albinism in Mufakose – she experiences a greater freedom from scrutiny. While she remains something of an outsider, she can become part of a community. Her links to Lloyd's prestigious family mean that she has access to the requisite trappings of privilege in the form of her own horse and later, her own car.

Of course, Memory does not fit unproblematically into the 'mink-and-manure' ranks of Umwinsdale – when she eventually returns to Zimbabwe after her break from Lloyd and her international schooling, she is still something of an outsider in the suburb. On her morning jogs, Memory runs past two young white women from the neighbourhood who are similarly engaged and recalls: "[o]n the first day that I had seen them, I saw in their faces the look of confusion that I often see on strangers. From a distance, I looked like I could be one of them, but seen closer, the difference became visible" (214–15). Even though they are living in the same place and doing the same thing, Memory is still subject to the economies of visibility and recognition that position her as a stranger. Her belonging continues to be contingent and fraught.

It is this instability that uniquely positions her as an authoritative witness to the failures and violences of whiteness in Zimbabwe. Her various and contingent sites of belonging enable the relative accessibility and authenticity of her narrative in that she is able to speak from multiple insider/outsider positions. More specifically, her situation as a silent spectator allows for Memory's reversal of the power dynamics that render whiteness invisible in that it becomes the object of her scrutiny. This is a vastly different kind of invisibility than that which is experienced by black women or other oppressed people wherein their voices and experiences are marginalised by the same system which privileges other subjects. The invisibility of whiteness comes from being the lens through which others are seen and judged; whereas black women are rendered invisible or less

than human by the violent biases of that privileged lens. Through Memory's narrative, Gappah unpacks different kinds of visibilities and invisibilities, thereby dramatising the experiences of living as a spectator and as a spectacle.

As a framing position by which the relative 'humanness' of other people is measured, whiteness is not 'empty' in the sense that it is absent of meaning. The normativity of whiteness "denotes ostensible absence but actual presence" (Dyer 45). In this sense, absence does not denote a lack of content (45). The invisibility of the 'white' body is almost directly opposed with the visibility of the albino body in that representations of people with albinism tend to produce ostensible presence but actual absence through the writing onto an 'empty' body. Referring back to Baker's assertion that the albino body 'inspires elaboration' and is viewed as an empty site inviting inscription, the whiteness of the albino body is a site onto which meaning is ascribed whereas it is constructions derived from notions of the white body that produce racist discourse.

The visual economies that create different kinds of visibility and invisibility are obviously a matter of perspective. Subsequently, "whiteness has always been visible to people of colour" (41). Through encountering the brand of whiteness that exists in postcolonial Zimbabwe from Memory's perspective, the naturalness that renders whiteness invisible is disturbed for the reader. Dyer notes how, in rendering whiteness strange, it becomes possible to dislodge it from its centrality and authority (10). The narrator's humorous and, at times, scathing depiction of the 'mink-and-manure' set of Umwinsdale positions whiteness as the object of scrutiny and criticism.

Similarly, her description of the Compton-Jones's summer party is an example of how she identifies and ridicules white colonial practices:

They threw a summer party in June, which of course, is winter here, but they were not people to let an inconvenient thing like being in the wrong hemisphere get in the way of what they considered unassailable English traditions [...]. An hour in their house made you feel like you were an extra in a Bizarro version of *To the Manor Born* or some other drama about distressed gentfolk in the English countryside.

(Gappah, *Book of Memory* 183–84)

The narrator concludes that "[t]heirs was a highly stylised simulacrum of England" (184). In doing so, she reveals the counterfeit nature of white Rhodesian culture and draws attention to its conditional, fragile and ridiculous position. Instead of being an invisible framework, it is shown to be an object of spectacle due to its incongruousness.

Memory-as-narrator is also positioned as having superior knowledge and authority of contemporary English culture when she remarks: “[t]hey would have fled in horror from the real England, with its Indians, Pakistanis and Jamaicans” (184).

Of course, the narrator does not exist insulated and unaffected by her life in a white family. Her identity is shaped and influenced by cultural exchange. She learns to ride racehorses, drink Pimm’s, love classic British novels and, through this, becomes conversant with broader Western culture. Her comfort with using English is particularly evident in prison – while the other prisoners are discussing the dangers and difficulties of relying on the court translator, Memory thinks privately to herself: “I had famously used English, and only English, at my trial. In my first week in prison, I had overheard Jimmy tell Evernice that even when I cried, I cried in English. ‘And she even laughs in English,’ she had added” (73). Even the narrator’s experience and expression of her emotions are filtered through English.

Memory’s comfort and conversancy with English comes at a cost, however. As she notes:

My spoken Shona is still fluent, but my writing is frozen at the age of eight [...] This is one of the consequences of a superior education, you see. In this independent, hundred-per-cent-empowered and fully and totally indigenous, blacker-than-black country, a superior education is one that the whites would value, and as the whites do not value local languages, the best-educated among us have sacrificed our languages at the altar of what the whites deem supreme. So it was in colonial times, and so it remains, more than thirty years later.

So I have never learned how to write with lyricism or beauty in my own language.

(50)

The value placed on English proficiency is an insidious product of the legacy of colonial occupation and oppression. Even in a postcolonial, independent Zimbabwe, the cultural legacies that privilege English remain, to the detriment of local languages.

Memory’s concern with language and expression is one that permeates the text. Her lament regarding her ‘frozen’ Shona is echoed by Gappah’s own regret regarding her lack of written fluency with Shona. In an interview, this writer states that her inability to write poetically in Shona is her “biggest regret” continuing: “[t]he colloquialisms, the idioms... the veins of a language, not just the surface—that’s what I don’t have. In a way I feel something was lost in me, and over the years I’ve tried to get it back” (“Language and Afropolitans” 18).

The protagonist’s relationship with English language and culture is one that she negotiates through writing. Even though her expertise with English comes at the cost of her Shona, she asserts her agency and control over the language through her love for reading and writing. After being

displaced from her home in Mufakose into the unfamiliar space of Umwinsidale, she finds solace and escape in books: “crippled by fear and longing for home, I was saved by books,” she confides (Gappah, *Book of Memory* 164). Later, in prison she remarks, “[t]his is what I have missed most in here, the simple, unremarkable wonder of having the printed word within my line of vision” (63). Memory’s love of literature and of reading are a recurrent theme in the novel.

She also draws attention to the fact that she enjoys writing “these words, crafting sentences, seeing paragraphs form” (84). Ostensibly, Memory is writing an account of her incarceration for her appeal, for Melinda, the American journalist, and for her lawyer, but, as she asserts, she is actually writing for herself:

I am writing to keep myself alive. But I am also laying out the threads that have pulled my life together, to see just where this one connects with that one or crosses with the other, to see how they form the tapestry from which I will stand back to get a better view.

(85)

The sense-making, truth-seeking aspect of Memory’s project is one which is shared with the reader. She is writing to grapple with the disorder of her life in order to better understand how she came to be where she is – to create ‘a better view’. In this way, the reader is not just entangled with the project of the future author, Melinda, but also with its current author, Memory. The reader is also participating in the journey of sense making and, in doing so, is co-creating a new position from which to see herself and the events of her life.

Through this negotiation of her history and her identity using narrative, she asserts her agency in relation to the imprisonment she experiences. As previously asserted, she is trapped between two cultures, two languages and two histories. In her attempt to ‘lay out the threads’, she is also producing the story of her own identity. Chris van der Merwe and Hein Viljoen argue that identities are not just constituted through representation, but that narrative representation shapes identity and self-other relations: “[i]n the transformation of the data of one’s life into a narrative, a narrative identity is created which grants the individual a meaningful position within a network of relations and provides [her] with a purpose in life” (1). Organising one’s lived experiences into a narrative form serves to produce identity as well as creating a framework through which meaningful relations with others can be understood and interpreted.

Much of the narrative is concerned with locating the protagonist within her own history as well as in relation to the members of her various families. *The Book of Memory* is a chronicle not just of her attempt to negotiate her identity, but also her position in relation to the various communities she encounters and inhabits. This identity work can be seen in her attempts to belong

within her family and within the community of women in the prison. Memory likens herself to the peppered moth: “I loved the story of the peppered moth because it seemed to be the only creature that understood what it was to be black and white. Like the peppered moth, I adapted to my changing environments” (Gappah, *Book of Memory* 175).⁹ In telling her story, Memory represents and produces the modes of this adaptation.

Tate argues that story-telling is crucial for black women so that they are able to negotiate hybrid identities within essentialised conceptions of black female identity. She argues that “[b]lack women face the biographic disruption of racism and Black community exclusions but rebuild coherent selves in their identification talk. As women perform identifications through their stories, they create texts that are partial and selective representations of experience” (21). Whilst Tate is specifically referring to black women living in England who come from interracial families and have mixed cultural heritages, I would argue that Memory’s narrative work echoes much of what Tate has identified. For these women, who are often excluded from the black community for not embodying an ‘authentic’ black identity, story-telling offers a way to negotiate their own identity in relation to essentialised notions of blackness and deploy new understandings and meanings of what constitutes black identity and black community. This recalls Carsten’s statement that vivid assertions of alternate means of relation allows for the emergence of these different kinds of kinship structures. Through her narrative, the protagonist is creating a more accommodating discursive climate for her own identity as well as producing imaginative room for her communities and kinship structures.

As such, Tate’s formulation that stories of lived experience “contribute to defining what Black womanhood and, more broadly, what Black identities are” can be read productively in relation to Memory’s situation (27). The narrator constantly struggles to fit into a ‘sufficiently black’ identity – in occupying the uncertain space of looking white but being born black, her identity is hybrid and contested. It is not just in Zimbabwe where Memory is not ‘black enough’. For instance, she says of her relationship with a former American boyfriend, Simon, that she thinks “I disappointed him because I was not African enough. I had no national dress, no foods of tantalising exoticism” (Gappah, *Book of Memory* 179). In not conforming to these stereotypical markers of race and culture, Memory’s blackness is placed into question.

⁹ The peppered moth is a commonly cited example of evolutionary adaptation due to environmental pressures. In the pre-industrial period, the moth was predominantly white but after its environmental conditions were changed by the increasing usage of coal and subsequent soot deposits on the bark of the trees, the species became mostly black in colour (Majerus 64). After clean air laws were passed and the trees returned to their natural colour, the species became predominantly white once more (Majerus 64).

Gappah problematises this idea of belonging to a black community – where blackness is embodied in a stable, continuous and consistently recognisable way – through Memory’s multiple and contingent sites of belonging. In a strange way, her relationship to the women in Chikurubi prison is one of the most stable and satisfying communities she is part of – their stories and antics bring levity to the novel and provide emotional support to the protagonist (and the reader). She emphasises that her relationship with Jimmy and Verity is not consistent with romanticised, familiar stories of community and belonging; it “didn’t emerge from heroic exploits, as it would have done were my life a film” (88). Rather, Memory’s unlikely friendship with “Jimmy and Verity, the prostitute and the con artist” emerges from shared experiences of abuse and misery (70).

In resisting familiar tropes of prison inhabitants, Memory positions herself and her community as something new. Tate identifies women’s talk as a productive and innovative site, outside of traditional theoretical or intellectual spaces, for locating identities and deploying new understandings of what constitutes identity and how one positions oneself in relation to social structures. She argues that the “enunciatory moment, the beyond theory, provides a process in the articulation of culture by which ‘objectified others’ can become subjects of their history and experience” (59). By speaking about and for themselves, women can affect the narratives that shape their identities.

In her depiction of this community of women in prison, Gappah acts to de-essentialise constructions of black femininity by illustrating the unique ways each woman understands her identity position and relation to her community. The women share various concerns and have common experiences but they are realised uniquely and individually. For instance, they negotiate power in relation to, and through, men to varying degrees: Memory’s education and wealth comes through her relationship with Lloyd, Verity’s confidence regarding her release and return to her previous high social status comes through her relationships with various politically well-connected men, and Jimmy plans to return to her profitable trade as a sex-worker. The vast differences between these relations and their effects on each woman’s understanding of herself are related through their everyday talk about themselves and their lives.

Memory’s narrative does not just act to invite her reader to imagine Zimbabwe, herself and her story more fully and more sympathetically; this story also serves to help her better understand herself. By writing her story, she is “laying out the threads that have pulled [her] life together [...] to see how they form the tapestry from which [she] will stand back to get a better view” (Gappah, *Book of Memory* 85). Her narrative also acts to give her own life shape and meaning, for her to gain

a better perspective and, in doing so, more fully realise and define who she is. By the novel's end, the narrator has come to terms with the events in her life and has made a fraught peace with herself and the situation in which she finds herself. She contacts Melinda Carter and asks for her journals back, so that she may read them again. Through rereading her writing, the narrator comes to realise the value of her own storytelling:

I am also rereading these notebooks that you sent back [...]. Even if nothing comes of the magazine feature you were planning to write, I am grateful to you for setting me on the path to truth.

I asked you to bring them all back because I wanted to go back, to see where it was I made that fatal mistake.

(261)

In this extract, the narrator dislodges Melinda as the future-author of the narrative because the story this journalist may write has become a secondary concern. Her journey on the path to truth, her renegotiation of her history and her identity has become the central focus and most important outcome of the narrative.

After reading her journals again, the protagonist asserts that her life “finally makes sense” (262). She realises that her “discomfort has not just been feeling ill at ease in [her] skin, but a discomfort in [herself]” (262). Writing her story has allowed her to make her life story coherent to herself and, in doing so, she has become more comfortable in her identity. Tellingly, it is at this point in the novel that she notes: “The prison is open to me now; I go where I please, when I please. There is no lock-up” (260). In coming to terms with her life by finding what she terms the truth of her history, Memory has attained freedom (albeit a circumscribed one).

“Ketscke”: Narrative as Defence and Prison

This image of Memory's regulated freedom – institutionally confined but narratively unencumbered – is particularly suggestive in relation to the novel's metatextual concerns; particularly those that pertain to the international reception of Zimbabwean novels. In drawing attention to the conditions under which Memory became fluent in English, Gappah is also engaging with the historical and political circumstances that produced her own novel, a Zimbabwean book written and read in English. Those institutional and symbolic snares that delimit Memory's narrative autonomy are faced by Gappah as well. The narrator's attempts to locate her subjectivity, as a person with albinism and as a black woman, in addition to her struggles to position herself socially, within her multiple families and communities, can be read in relation to Gappah's concern with how

Zimbabwean stories are received globally, and the kinds of freedoms available to African writers. By interpolating the reader through the second person narrative, Gappah implicates them in these essentialist, static practices of interpretation – both within the world of the novel and from outside of it.

As such, the novel's thematic concerns with reading and writing provide a critical commentary on the reader's relation to the text. Her position, both within and towards the text, necessitates a re-evaluation of the asymmetrical relations that exist between authors in the margins and readers in the centre. In what ways is Memory's association with Melinda Carter emblematic of the relation between an African author and a Western reader? How can the violences of inscription and misrecognition, which are experienced by Memory in the text, be avoided in the reader's encounter of her? Once you have acknowledged the links the novel draws between interpersonal recognition (in other words, how people read and receive one another) and the textual practice of reading, how should the reader approach Memory's narrative?

As a counterpoint to these issues, the novel consistently gestures towards the recuperative and restorative powers of writing. Gappah does not merely draw attention to these issues, but offers Memory's narrative as a response to them. Consider how Memory's gradual assertion of authority over her text displaces Melinda Carter as prospective author, an act which has symbolic repercussions for the place of black narratives in white spaces. More specifically, her working through of her relationship to Lloyd – and cultures of whiteness more widely – can be interpreted as reflecting upon her relationship to the reader. In a broad sense, the narrator's negotiation of her hybridity can be read as a mediation of the fraught position of the African novel in English. More comprehensively, I would argue that Memory's working through of her hybridity and her relationship with whiteness and Englishness can also be read allegorically as a negotiation of the troubled relations between postcolonial Zimbabwe and the former colonial centre. How should contemporary Zimbabweans understand and relate to those fragments of colonial history embedded within their cultural landscape? This question is particularly pertinent to the question of English in Zimbabwe.

In a review of contemporary female writers from Africa, Heather Hewett foregrounds the popularity that authors such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie have had in the global literary scene. She argues that this commercial success offers women writing from Africa a new freedom to write. "One implication for women may be an increased autonomy and authority to write the stories they want to write – a freedom that may not necessarily adhere to the desires of Western readers or, for that matter, male readers", she proffers (3). In establishing African women's fiction as a viable and

vibrant genre, Hewett argues that these writers have created a space in which to write unencumbered by the expectations and desires of others (4).

Gappah's focus on black women's interactions can be read in this light. As Tate argues, women's talk is a powerful medium for challenging hegemonic identity constructions and producing new spaces to inhabit as a black woman (25). The women Gappah depicts can be seen, to borrow from Tate's discussion of Black British women, as "speakers who work to make the discourses within which they are embedded coherent and meaningful, which has the reflexive function of constructing and displaying their identifications as Black women" (26). Black women's talk is, for Tate, a strategic space for identity construction (26). In devoting so much of the novel to the experiences of black women amongst black women, Gappah's writing can be seen as a product of this new freedom both Tate and Hewett explore in different contexts.

Of course, the increasing liberty experienced by women writing from Africa is not uncircumscribed or unproblematic. Consider Simon Gikandi's discussion of the position of the African novel within the global literary marketplace:

In order for these fictions to become global they have had to be involved in a fascinating and sometimes disturbing act of cultural translation because their audiences are no longer located in their sites of referent [...]. There is a split between the object of representation, and the people who read it [...] it would be interesting to ask what kinds of transactions have taken place so that these fictions can succeed in a global scene.

(Gikandi para 8)

In order to acquire this new freedom of writing by and for African women, their novels must participate in the kinds of transactions and transformations that produce 'global fictions'. What are the effects and costs of these cultural translations? Jeremy Weate argues that the globalisation of African fiction constitutes a form of neo-colonialism in that African literature is often treated as an extractable resource for the enrichment of Euro-American publishing. He describes the African writing as "a raw commodity, bought wholesale, sold retail only" (para 7). For Weate, African fiction "is simply another form of capital whose value is formed and transacted in London or New York (for the English-speaking world)" (para 8). As Lily Saint points out, all of the wealth produced by these novels is recouped in the West, echoing earlier imperial patterns of wealth accumulation (4).

Gappah engages with this set of problematics through the issue of language in the novel, as well as her complication of the reader's relationship to the text. Following Gikandi's discussion of the translations inherent in locating the African novel globally, it is important to remember that the

reader does not – and, it is assumed, cannot – access these interactions between women in the prison directly. Memory is recounting these discussions, which would have taken place in Shona, to the reader in English. This translation or interpretation is signalled through the various inmates' struggles with speaking and being understood in English and the hybrid 'Zimlish' interactions that occur as a result of this. The distance between the English of the novel and the English in the novel is foregrounded in Memory's interactions in prison. One thinks, for example, of the following exchange:

Unlike the others, Patience prefers to speak to us in English. She is training to be a court interpreter. 'Irregardless of the absence of water,' she says, 'you should make sure the hoarse pipes are connected.'

'You must make sure that your plates and bowels are clean.'

'You have the wrongful number!' she screamed into her phone the other day.
'I said this is the wrongful number!'

(Gappah, *Book of Memory* 29)

There are many such instances of 'Zimlish' in the novel. These often comical mannerisms of, and mistakes in, speech are obviously included for the enjoyment of the reader, to provide a 'local' flavour. They also act as reminders that the conversations included in the novel have been translated by the narrator.

In many of Gappah's interviews she is asked about her use of 'Zimlish':

I'll give you one example [...] we have a lot of phrases that we take from the Bible that we think are English words [...] So to do something "nicodemously" is to do something secretly, under cover of the darkness. So you have politicians condemning the "Nicodemus machinations of the government" and you think, "What?" It's my absolutely favourite Zimlish word of all time.

(Gappah, "Sentenced to Death" 12)

These humorous anecdotes serve to pique the reader's interest in the Zimbabwean context as well as provide information about it. The distant and the exotic is easily consumable, easily exhibited. In this extract, Gappah positions herself as being conversant with 'Zimlish' but obviously commands a more widely acceptable and recognisable dialect of English. She acts as an interpreter or translator for the reader.

The dangers of such work are also discussed by the characters in Chikurubi:

Those translators are the dangerous ones [...] They are the people with the power. They are the very people who will really fix you for ever, like if you say something that is too difficult for them to translate, *hodo*, they will just say whatever comes to their heads, and the necks thing you know, *ketsheke*.'

She made the sound of a key in a lock. '*Ketscheke*,' she said again.

(Gappah, *Book of Memory* 72)

By linking the act of translation to incarceration, language is figured as dangerous or possibly

imprisoning. More accurately, the translator's linguistic power over the person being represented is portrayed as the power to imprison them. This power relation complicates and problematises Gappah's responsibility as author, Memory's role as narrator and the reader's position as implied future-author in that all three roles can be understood as forms of translation.

In some ways this aspect of the meta textual problematics can be read as Gappah speaking to the anthropologisation of African writers. Books written about Africa are read as direct representations of diverse cultures and communities and are taken as means of accessing and consuming exotic social contexts. *The Book of Memory* has been described as bringing "together a vibrant cross-section of Zimbabwean life" (Gappah, "Interview: Petina Gappah" 3). Authors are placed in the position where they speak for entire countries; in publicity for the novel, Gappah was described as "the voice of Zimbabwe" (Gappah, "A Zest for Life" 11). In interviews, she has resisted being taken as a 'spokesperson for Zimbabwe' but, due to the rarity of internationally acclaimed books by Zimbabwean authors, she is unavoidably placed in this position ("A Zest for Life" 15).

This author is situated as being both an 'authentic' representative of Zimbabwe, with knowledge of local eccentricities who is able to provide insight into the distant and exotic, as well as being placed in the role of the authorial voice responsible for representation in a familiar language and a familiar format. As she herself notes: "I won't deny for a minute that part of what makes me, in my writing, appealing, is that I know [Western] culture extremely well. So I can put Vermeer in a book about Zimbabwe" ("Language and Afropolitans" 6). Her conversancy with multiple cultures makes her an authoritative and accessible voice.

In interviews with European press, Gappah is often asked about her experience as a Zimbabwean in Europe. Notably, she describes feeling like an outsider in Austria – where she completed her doctorate in international trade law – in terms of being a spectacle, of literally stopping traffic:

Being an African in a place like Austria, you're immediately different. All the black people that people had seen were on television. And suddenly there's one in front of you.

I stopped traffic in Ljubljana, you know, not because I looked particularly good or anything, but just the shock. Squealing brakes, and me saying, "What? What have I done?"

("Language and Afropolitans" 13–14)

In the statement above, Gappah outlines her experience of being objectified as a black person in Europe, where she was positioned as a sight so extraordinary as to stop traffic. Consequently, she is

being positioned as an outsider but, as previously established, she is also conversant with the nuances of the culture – she can reference art, historical events and locations with ease. This author is located as an outsider by visual economies of recognition but, as a result of her knowledge and familiarity with the culture, she can navigate and negotiate it. She is simultaneously an insider and an outsider; it is this unique position that produces her position as a writer and enables her distinct authorial voice.

The Book of Memory can be read as Gappah investigating and commenting on the complex set of relations that produces and informs the position of the African female writer in the contemporary, international literary world. After describing the incident above in Ljubljana, Gappah continues: “[a]nd it seemed to me that looking at albinism [...] was an interesting way of writing about that. Because Memory is black, but she isn’t really. And she looks white, but she isn’t really” (“Language and Afropolitans” 15). Here Gappah explicitly links Memory’s uncertain ‘dual citizenship’ within black and white cultures with her own experience as a Zimbabwean living and working in Austria.

Whilst the novel suggests that writing in English – and the resultant sacrifice of one’s original language – constitutes a form of imprisonment, Gappah also asserts her control over and ownership of English. According to Richard Lea, who interviewed Gappah, “there was never any question that [she] would write in anything other than a Zimbabwean-inflected English. It was a language that was imposed on her, [she] says, but it is a language which has become her own” (Gappah “Interview: Petina Gappah” 6). Following this, Gappah states: “English is my language. I speak English, I dream in it. I cannot separate my English from my Shona, I see the world with those two languages” (“Interview: Petina Gappah” 6). One could argue that she is moving away from viewing the English language as a trap or a prison, and has begun to see it as her own, as intrinsic to her.

Part of what Gappah’s usage of ‘Zimlish’ gestures toward is a growing population of English-speaking Zimbabweans. Whilst much of the English used by Zimbabweans in the novel is fractured and unfamiliar, it is pervasive and functions as a lingua franca between the different language communities of Zimbabwe. In Chikurubi, Sinfree is an inmate who cannot speak Shona, only Ndebele and, because of this, is abused by the guards as she cannot understand their instructions. She attempts to speak to the guards in English but is harshly rebuked by Synodia. Memory defends Sinfree from Synodia in English: “[c]an’t you see that she does not understand you, that she does not speak Shona? Why shouldn’t she speak English to you?” (89). In this case,

English is established as a useful medium of interaction in Zimbabwe as it is widely spoken as a second language and can be used to facilitate understanding.

The pervasiveness of spoken English in the novel speaks to Chinua Achebe's argument that "a national literature is one that takes the whole nation for its province, and has a realised or potential audience throughout its territory" (343). Following this logic, a novel written in English by a Zimbabwean is not necessarily directed outwards towards a Western readership – it can constitute a national literature because it has a potential English-speaking audience within its own borders. I would therefore argue that Gappah's inclusion of 'Zimlish' is not just for the enjoyment of Western readers – it also locates her own novel within the boundaries of Zimbabwean national literature. More importantly, Gappah's 'Zimlish' contributes to the destabilisation of the discursive structures that position the English novel as a necessarily Western cultural artefact. As Achebe states, "the price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many different kinds of use" (347).

These many different kinds of usages include the re-imagining of national borders and national literatures. Achebe unpacks the hegemony of English novels in Africa:

What is it that has conspired to place English in the position of national language in many parts of Africa? Quite simply it is the fact that these nations were created in the first place by the intervention of the British, which (I hasten to add) is not saying that the peoples comprising these nations were invented by the British.

(344)

Here Achebe problematises the relationship between identity and formal nationality. Subsequently, he opens up the possibility of using English as a national language in a way that circumvents or destabilises the kinds of nations 'invented' by the British. He inextricably connects the use of English with the creation of colonial nations and, in doing so, suggests that it can be used again to re-create them.

In interviews, Gappah positions herself within a new generation of African writers "who are building their own tradition, moving beyond the explicitly political concerns of their predecessors" ("Interview: Petina Gappah" 7). Rather than focusing on broader structural issues, Gappah locates herself and her writing in the realm of the personal:

The earlier generation was really concerned with these big ideas about colonialism [...] What we are trying to do now, this new generation of African writers, is to write about what it is to be a human being living in a particular African country. These are stories that resonate with anyone, anywhere.

("Interview: Petina Gappah" 8)

This writer points to her position within a generation of African writers that are emphasising the particularity of personal experience in a way that can be understood by multiple kinds of audiences.

By writing about ‘what it is to be a human being living in a particular African country’, Gappah wants to undermine the pervasive discourses that position Africans as victims rather than people, that creates African countries as spaces of disaster rather than places where people live. Gappah’s writing reflects her desire to change the ways Zimbabweans are read and received internationally:

But despite all these awful things that have happened to the country there is still a life there. People still quarrel, people still have affairs, people still cheat on each other, cheat each other. They still do things that people everywhere else do. What is needed is to find some sort of balance. It's not to say that those terrible headlines about Africa are not true, it's simply to say that there is more than just the headlines you see.

(10)

In service of her commitment to addressing Zimbabwe’s international reception, Petina Gappah uses fiction as a way to destabilise the politics of visibility and recognition. Much like Memory reading through the holes cut out of the newspapers in Chikurubi, Gappah’s fiction calls to readers to imagine beyond the homogenised and essentialised depictions of Africa that circulate outside of the continent and to recognise the insufficiency of the Africa realised in ‘those terrible headlines’. It also calls for a more ethical or realistic approach to reading African art, and representations of blackness.

This balance that Gappah calls for, her appeal for international audiences to read between the headlines, recalls the novel’s concern with visibility and spectacle. In an interview with Richard Lea, Gappah critiques the curious place of Zimbabwe within British media and the disproportionate amount of attention given to Zimbabwe, in relation to other African countries (14).

She traces this exceptionalism to the remnants of the colonial relationship:

There's a huge disaster happening in the Congo, but that is not given as much of a high profile as Zimbabwe [...]. It's partly because of the colonial relationship, as well as the commercial connections between the UK and Zimbabwe, but the underlying reason [...] is that some of those beaten by Mugabe's thugs are white.

(Gappah, “Interview: Petina Gappah” 14)

By arguing that the spectacular position of Zimbabwe within British press is a result of the remnants of the colonial settler population, Gappah is problematising the relationship between value and visibility. Whilst Zimbabwe itself may occupy a visible position within British press, it is an essentialised and limited position, one that acts to objectify its citizens. For an international audience, black lives in Zimbabwe are less valuable than white ones.

This relative valuation of lives can be traced back to those frames of recognition that disproportionately apportion worth. Drawing on my earlier discussion of how Memory's position as Lloyd's daughter is rendered contingent and conditional as a result of the discriminatory logics of the white family, it is possible to read the differential allocation of value with regard to black and white lives in Zimbabwe as the operation of this selfsame logic writ large. As discussed by Anne McClintock, the family logics that undergird the colonial enterprise mean that white lives are perceived as legitimate relatives and black lives are erased or undervalued ("Family" 63). It is the same judicial structures that render Memory and Lloyd's relationship 'unclear' that disproportionately value his life over her freedom. Gappah draws explicit links between the injustice of Memory's incarceration and the wider context of Zimbabwe's relationship to the former colonial centre.

This connection can be seen in how Memory's trial is conducted at a record speed, at the cost of due judicial process, as a result of the pressure of an international audience. In the month before Lloyd's death, three white farmers were murdered and there had been "an outcry around the world about these deaths, but no one was arrested" (Gappah, *Book of Memory* 222). Memory links the swiftness of her trial to these murders:

So when Lloyd died, another white man over whom the world would make a hue and cry, something had to be done. And there I was, a readily available suspect, caught with the body, ready to make this a simple domestic murder, nothing at all to do with the vexed and anxious questions of land and its ownership.

(222–23)

Of course, Memory's trial had everything to do with land and its ownership. This author links the visibility of the inter-racial violence following land redistribution in Zimbabwe with Britain's colonial relationship to the country. It is this visibility, coupled with the relative value placed on black and white lives that leads to Memory's incarceration. Again, this reflects the many ways in which Memory is imprisoned by structures of whiteness.

The narrator's relation to whiteness in Zimbabwe is shown to resonate deeply with Gappah's vision of Zimbabwe's association with England. In reading the narrator's attempt to map and understand her relationship with Lloyd, Alexandra and Ian, we are also reading a working through of a version of Zimbabwean postcoloniality. Of course I am not suggesting the Gappah is offering a one-to-one mapping of Memory-as-Zimbabwe and Lloyd-as-England, and certainly do not want to imply that Zimbabwe's postcolonial identity is centred around its relationship to England. Rather, I would offer that the narrative work done by the protagonist in negotiating her relationship with the remnants of colonial culture in her country, and in herself, has implications for

the kinds of mnemonic and historical work done by postcolonial authors (in Zimbabwe specifically but also in the postcolonial world more widely).

The narrator's negotiation of her place within her family reflects the novel's meta-textual concerns with Zimbabwean postcolonial identity. As McClintock established, the enterprise of imperialism relied on, and invoked, the root metaphor of family in order to legitimise itself ("Family" 65). The colonial centre is positioned as benevolent patriarch, whilst the colonies were forced into subservient, dependent and childlike positions. *The Book of Memory* locates these issues back within the family drama, whilst retaining their broader political implications. Memory's struggles to locate herself dramatise the essentialising erasures experienced by black women and positions these attempts to obscure difference within her various kinship structures. By problematising exclusionary kinship structures and offering visions of more inclusive ways of relating to others, Gappah is excavating the imperialist mythology implanted within the traditional family structure as well as creating more capacious alternatives to it.

Narrating the Hybrid Self

The Book of Memory draws attention to the role that the family plays in defining particular identity positions as well as delimiting the possibilities for relation between those subjectivities. A central narrative thread is Memory's working through of her relationship with Lloyd and the assertion of their love against the structures that seek to erase it. Consider how, when she still believes that her parents sold her, she asks "[c]ould there have been love? [...] love in its simple purity of one being opening up another, with no expectation beyond the gift of that love" (144). Towards the novel's close, once she has asserted authorial control over the narrative and unpacked the events of her life more clearly, she answers confidently: "what I had with Lloyd was love" (269). In telling her story, in navigating those conflicting elements of herself, Memory is able to negotiate and understand her relationship with others more effectively as well as better determine her position within her various communities and families.

For Sally Anne Hanslanger and Charlotte Witt, "[a]lthough the family is often thought to be the basic and natural form of social life for human beings, adoption highlights the powerful role that law and politics play in shaping families and our ideas about those families" (1). Hanslanger and Witt argue that adoption complicates the boundary between what is natural and what is social in terms of kinship relationships. In being 'unclear' in the eyes of the law, thereby blurring the lines

between natural and social, Lloyd and Memory's family brings into focus questions of relatedness and belonging.

Memory's struggle to 'fit into' Lloyd's history is a common issue amongst transracial adoptees. In the structure of transnational adoptions, the past is treated as something that can be "erased or contained in an abandoned 'there', the racialised trace of origins [tends] to be treated as manageable" (Volkman 5). In order to become part of a new family with different historical origins, the old family's histories must be suppressed. For Barbara Yngnesson, "[the clean break narrative] separates the child from everything that constitutes her grounds for belonging as a child to *this* family and *this* nation, while establishing her transferability to *that* family and *that* nation" (26, original emphasis).

As a result of this managing or containment of historical origin, adoptees often struggle to negotiate their relationship with this erased past. As Toby Anne Volkman notes of the adoptees he studied, "[they] articulated their sense of dislocation, uncertainties about where they fit as they struggled to reconcile their outer appearance and inner sense of self, the ambiguities of simultaneously belonging and not belonging" (5). These uncertainties suggest that there is no such thing as a 'clean break'. In recognising that individuals cannot be unproblematically transplanted from one context to another, it becomes necessary to acknowledge the differences between an adoptee and his or her adoptive parents, thereby "constituting the adoptive family as a site of tension" (Yngnesson 27). Even though Memory flourishes in Summer Madness and feels like she 'belongs' in the Convent school, memories of her parents still haunt her: "[t]hey still come to me sometimes, my father and my mother. They come to interrupt the rhythm of my waking moments, they come unbidden" (Gappah, *Book of Memory* 12). The narrative and identity work that Memory does is not simply to integrate herself into a new social context; it also involves negotiating her relationship with her past.

Memory articulates this friction in terms of her struggle to understand her relationship with Lloyd. According to her, "my feelings for Lloyd went through a complex spectrum that took in fear, affection, anger and revulsion, gratitude and ultimately, pity" (Gappah 144). In attempting to negotiate and understand her feelings for Lloyd, she also connects her relationship with him to her understanding of herself and the world: "[l]iving with him in that house, I fell in love with history. Through him, living in his world, I got a sense of a world that was bigger than myself." This line of thought leads her to ask, "Could there have been love?" (145). It was Lloyd who introduced Memory to the study of history and the National Archives wherein the "symbols of the

extraordinary juxtapositions that birthed [Zimbabwe] are contained” (151). Much of her knowledge about Zimbabwe’s past and her love for history came through him. Memory’s understanding of, and connection to, her past is not so clearly divisible into *this* family and *that* family.

The tension between, and bleeding over of, Memory’s dual histories suggests that it is not merely a matter of transplantation, moving from one context to another. Rather, Volkman argues that transracial adoption points to the impossibility of exclusive belongings (9). Yngnesson points to the “familiar and powerful (Western) myth about identity as a matter of exclusive belonging and of belonging as a matter of ‘an active proprietorship’” (27). Memory’s experiences of placement and displacement in her various homes and families deconstructs this idea that belonging is something you can straightforwardly do and have.

Of course, Lloyd does not unproblematically belong within his own family history either – his homosexuality forces him to hide who he is, to the point where his need to conceal his sexuality causes his death. As Memory notes, “[n]ot even Lloyd’s whiteness could have saved him from the stigma of homosexuality because it is a stigma that cuts across race and tribe and religion and class and sex and political beliefs and all the artificial divisions this country has erected to keep people apart” (Gappah 197). In much the same way that Dan Madigan is unable to locate himself within the hetero-reproductive home in *The Green Road*, Lloyd’s eventual accidental suicide speaks to the intense stigma and estrangement he experienced. It is this alienation that truly provides Lloyd and Memory with common ground, if only they had been able to share it. Memory laments the following: “If I had been mature enough or had sufficient imagination, or generosity of spirit, I might have seen that Lloyd was as different to those around him as I was, that the fact of our difference bound us” (197).

Whilst the fact of Lloyd’s homosexuality was never a manifest part of their family life, it nevertheless formed one of the conditions of its possibility. Lloyd was free to take Memory in because he had no biological children of his own. Aaron Goodfellow points to the ways in which queer kinship – or the kinship structures that arise around gay men and women adopting children – raises “the general epistemological problem of coming to know how and if one is related to another as kin” (4).¹⁰ More specifically, queer families are distinguished by the work that goes into creating and maintaining kin relations when biological notions of relatedness threaten to turn one’s family relations into fictions (4). This work manifests itself in the novel through Memory’s constant

¹⁰ Goodfellow’s work is specifically focussed on gay men, but I believe this argument would be at least partially true for lesbian family relationships as well, or for parents who are not genetically related to their children at the very least.

interrogation of her relationship to Lloyd as well as her repeatedly asking herself whether or not she loves him.

Perhaps the origin and nature of Memory and Lloyd's family is best summed up by Pauline Turner Strong's assertion:

Adoption across political and cultural borders may simultaneously be an act of violence and an act of love, an excruciating rupture and a generous incorporation, an appropriation of valued resources and a constitution of personal ties.

(qtd in Volkman 3)

Memory's struggles to place herself and know herself are born of this violence and love, and her family with Lloyd is both a rupture and an incorporation. In belonging to two families, Memory must work through her histories, memories and conflicting identities. The unresolvable tensions at the heart of her identity can be read more productively in terms of a hybridity, her simultaneous belonging and not-belonging in two distinct families and cultures. Tate describes hybridity as "a breaking and a joining at the same time, in the same place: difference and sameness in an impossible simultaneity" (64). Her position between cultures both isolates Memory and introduces her to multiple modes of being. In this way, she has a hybrid identity where hybridity "represents a merging of identities and a pluralistic acceptance of both the merge and its constituent elements" (Ben-Cnaan 73).

This pluralistic acceptance is not without its challenges – the impossible simultaneity of Memory's hybrid position between families and cultures is a source of persistent tension in the novel. *The Book of Memory* illustrates the productive potential of the friction inherent in Memory's identity. She mobilises the possibilities of her location within and between in her capacity as spectator and spectacle and her narrative derives much of its power from her unique perspective. Through her narrative, Memory constructs her identity as inherently hybrid. Rather than attempting to recover an authentic history or an adulterated subject position, she embodies both her worlds simultaneously. As Nikos Papastergiadis notes, "[r]ather than expecting that the victims of colonialism must reclaim their 'original' history and glue back together their authentic culture *before* they can be admitted into the present, it might be more valuable to recognise the horizontal forms of exchange that are already occurring" (124).

One such example of this reconceptualisation is the narrator's perspective on the crisis around the land redistribution in Zimbabwe. She notes the international condemnation of the violence of the many farm attacks, expressing sympathy for the families affected as well as critiquing "the greed with which the top people took farms for themselves" (Gappah, *Book of*

Memory 212). This censure is balanced by her experiences within white Zimbabwe, which she criticises for its lack of perspective:

I had lived long enough among them to understand and feel pity for their losses, but I found it infuriating that they spoke as though there was no context to this, as though this is something that had just happened, with no history to it.

They spoke as if the Pioneer Column had never invaded a land that was not theirs, as if land had not been stolen, as if this had not been a crisis long in the making.

(212)

In speaking for and from both sides, *Memory's* narrative is able to provide the kind of evenhanded and measured perspective Gappah calls for in relation to news headlines from Africa.

The narrator's hybrid position allows her to see beyond binaries of blackness and whiteness into the nuance and complexity of the situation. She critiques the kinds of reductive attitudes that have dominated the conversations, stating that: "[t]he whole thing had been reduced to a simple matter of blackness versus whiteness. White people stole the land. Black people took farms and ruined them. Black people took control and ran things down. White people stole" (212). *Memory's* ability to co-exist in two conflicting cultures allows her to negotiate the possibilities and insufficiencies of the various histories produced by these mnemonic communities. She has access to, as well as an outsider's perspective on, more than one side of the story.

It is the narrator's unsettled sites of belonging that allow her to speak from multiple outlooks and provide a nuanced account of Zimbabwe's fractious social landscape. This concern with multiplicity and nuance speaks to Gappah's frustration with static, easily consumable stories – fictional and historical.

This author describes herself as a 'frustrated historian' claiming that she writes into these gaps and insufficiencies of Zimbabwe's oversimplified history:

I'm interested in excavating the social histories of Zimbabwe. For instance, Zimbabwe was built on a very unjust system of racial segregation; I know that. But I also know that there were amazing stories of love across the races. And there were some really nasty white people in Zimbabwe. But there were white people like Peter Garlake, who lost his job because he argued that the Great Zimbabwe ruins were built by black people and not by Phoenicians.

History's always distorted to suit a political purpose, but fiction can try to redress the balance. And those are the stories I'm interested in telling – the stories of everyday normal people, who even in this injustice still managed to find their humanity.

(Gappah, "Language and Afropolitanism" 33–34)

It is possible to trace how Gappah links relationships across social divides – particularly those of race – with more inclusive ways of reading and recounting the past. In recovering and representing

stories of love across race, it is possible to complicate simplistic historical narratives and create more inclusive imaginative spaces within such stories.

This concern with reimagining relationships across divides in order to produce more inclusive accounts of history and society is at the very heart of the novel. As such, the central thread running through *The Book of Memory* is Lloyd and Memory's relationship. At the novel's close after she has uncovered the truth about her past, Memory is able to see their family more clearly. She discusses her feelings regarding the death of her parents and realises: "[i]t is for Lloyd that I grieve the most [...]. He gave me an understanding that took me outside of myself, that there was a life beyond things; there was an existence that went on long after the self had gone" (Gappah 269). In writing a story of love across races, Gappah's *The Book of Memory* seeks to challenge historical gaps and insufficiencies as well as offer new ways of telling and understanding stories. Her novel implicates the reader in the task of uncovering these fraught and threatened histories in order to make space for ambiguous, uncertain forms of love. Much of Memory's story is concerned with conflict between cultures and the kinds of complexities and tensions that arise when different cultures come into intimate contact with one another. *The Book of Memory* concerns itself with the possibilities and productions of these excruciating ruptures and generous incorporations. In focussing on the stories of love that arise from these exposures and proximities, Gappah points to new ways of knowing and telling across boundaries.

Excavating the Nation's Silences and Exhuming the Family's History in Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's *Dust*

Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's novel, *Dust*, draws together aspects of those concerns with representation and reception which were raised in Gappah's fiction, alongside those regarding inhospitable social structures which I discussed in relation to Enright's novel. Coinciding with the treatments of unfamiliar families found in *The Green Road* and *The Book of Memory*, *Dust* recounts the history and present situation of the Oganda family, as it intersects with, and is shaped by, the formations and fractures of the Kenyan nation state. Through this exploration of the Oganda family's embeddedness within the landscape of Kenyan history, *Dust* surveys the association between national identity and the root metaphor of the family. A specific focus of the novel is how reworking the contours and trajectories of the kinship structure can allow for alternate expressions of, and relations to, the nation state to emerge. In congruence with *The Book of Memory's* metatextual themes, *Dust* provides a consideration of art's capacity to relate to the irretrievable past as well as to imagine more open ended futures. As such, Owuor's examination and critique of the nation state constitutes a provocative gesture towards more radical forms of social connection, as well as a powerful demonstration of the role art has to play in conceptualising new possibilities for subversive social structures.

Dust is arranged around the causes and repercussions of two separate murders, those of Odidi Oganda and Hugh Bolton, both one-time inhabitants of Wuoth Ogik, the colonial mansion at the centre of the novel. Ajany Arabel Oganda, Odidi's sister, and Isaiah Bolton, ostensibly Hugh's son, meet whilst searching for the truths of their respective relatives' deaths. In doing so, they unravel the intimate complexities that tie their families together. This milieu of inhospitable homes, unquiet dead and buried history allows for a nuanced engagement with some of the troubles found in Kenya's past and present, as well as the ways in which those complications are experienced by Kenya's citizens today. Owuor's usage of the family's imaginary cartographies to investigate national identity and history reminds one of the attachments established in *The Book of Memory* between Memory's home life and her relationship to Zimbabwean stories. Whilst I do risk embarking on an ideological collapse of various kinds of discrete communities – family, clan and nation – I would argue that *Dust* asks its readers to connect the workings of these various social groups. Most obviously, the Oganda family operates as a microcosm of the state upon which the failures and violences of the postcolonial nation are played out.

This novel is a rich, complicated and moving representation of, and engagement with, the relationship between Kenya's troubled history and its lived present. Through the lives – and deaths – of the Oganda family, Owuor depicts the legacies of harm associated with inhospitable social structures such as the postcolonial nation state and the patriarchal family. The Oganda's home, Wuoth Ogik, serves as a representation of the kinds of unhomelinesses endured by Kenyan citizens today, and its destruction gestures towards what can be thought of as Owuor's vision for a more inclusive future. Through the character of Ajany Oganda, the young daughter who is also an artist, this writer illustrates the vital position that art must play in imagining these futures, as well as the central role that women have in re-authoring new nationalist narratives and literatures.

Dust is haunted by the figure of Hugh Bolton, an archetypal settler colonialist who arrives in Kenya at the height of the British Empire in order to participate in, and further, the ends of imperialism. Wuoth Ogik, where the Ogandas now live, was built at Hugh's behest as part of his estate. The house serves as a metaphorical representation of the brutalities endured in these edifices of empire that are now inhabited by the very people they were built to exclude. This building, as a tangible colonial formation, draws together many postcolonial concerns with the regulation of space and the exclusion of the symbolic other. Owuor draws distinct links between the fate of the Kenyan nation state and Wuoth Ogik. In doing so, she collapses the boundary between the personal and the public, or more specifically between the domestic and the civic spaces. As such, the broader power struggles visible in Hugh's – and by extension the British government's – attempts to oppress and contain the indigenous Kenyan population, are also visible within the workings of Wuoth Ogik.

The decaying unhomeliness of Wuoth Ogik permeates the novel:

Now a fly weaves in between fault-lined pillars [...] it navigates wall fissures that start at the base of the house and disappear into eaves. The house creaks, musk of neglect, and something else – as if the inhabitants whose memories drenched the walls had lived their lives within the house, but not *in* the house, and the house had never participated in the ebb and flow of their existence.

(Owuor 72, original emphasis)

In its discomfiting decrepitude, Wuoth Ogik illustrates the fracturing of formations left behind by colonialism in Kenya, as well as their increasing uninhabitability. The novel's concerns with the remains of cruel legacies as well as the histories and knowledges that were silenced by the construction of such inhospitable edifices such as Wuoth Ogik, and the nation state of Kenya more widely, are embodied in this strange, deteriorating house. *Dust* offers a way into a present that is continuously being disrupted by the past and emphasises the role that literature has to play in both portraying this past, as well as moving beyond it.

Colonial Mapping and the Makings of Empire

Literature, with its ability to create and propagate ideas and dreams, was central to the production of a colonial vision – writers “contributed to the complex of attitudes that made imperialism seem part of the order of things” (2–3). The act of writing normalised and embedded convictions of European cultural superiority and the rightness of empire (3). As such, the text served as a vehicle of imperial authority which symbolised and, in some cases, performed the act of taking possession (14). A central aspect of this writing and mapping involved the construction of territory intended for colonisation as uninhabited. For Tirop Simatei, the colonial project involved “constructions of territory as empty and hostile jungle that must be conquered and tamed for ‘human’ settlement” (86).

This production of emptiness relies on multiple, intersecting forms of violence. It dehumanises and renders invisible both the people inhabiting these spaces as well as their modes of interpreting and relating to their territory. John Noyes describes this empty space phenomena as resting on “the inability of the European eye to look at the world and see anything other than European space – a space which is by definition empty where it is not inhabited by Europeans” (qtd in Simatei 86). This gaze – unable to recognise or account for the people occupying the land it is surveying – is then reproduced in the writing and mapping of colonial territories. Of course, precolonial territory was never an empty space in the way the colonial expropriators visualised it, but rather it was “a landscape already defined and mapped by local histories, myths and memories of bequeathal and ownership” (Simatei 87). Inherent in this project of imperial mapping is the erasure of local systems of signification and interpretation. The epistemic violence inherent in wilfully building over what was there before constitutes the “immeasurable disruption and erasure of local systems of meaning that guide the ownership and use of land” (86). Colonial writings and maps become the authoritative account of the space in question, through instruments such as nation states and historical records; and indigenous people’s presences, voices and stories are lost and silenced.

Boehmer describes how the diaries of settler colonists participated in this silencing: “[i]n diary descriptions of new lands [...] colonists declared their intention to make a home, to begin a new history. Often the effect of their descriptions was to erase, either wholly or in part, the signs of other lives which had unfolded in that particular space” (14). The eagerness and entitlement of settlers who desired to start anew by inscribing and occupying an ‘empty’ landscape is depicted in

Dust through Selene and Hugh Bolton. Owuor describes their romantic dreams of starting a life, a family and a farm in the ‘exciting new’ landscape of colonial Kenya. In Selene’s letter to her son, Isaiah, she describes the beginning of her married life with Hugh and their decision to leave England for Kenya: “[w]e eloped eleven days later, certain, in the way of fools, that we had been created for one another. We sought adventure in blank-slate kingdoms where we owned the rules and would remake a country in our image” (91). In this extract, Selene is invoking the colonial imagery of an empty and malleable landscape, upon which they can found their own kingdom. This concern with remaking, founding and establishing is deeply embedded in colonial discourse. The erasure of local systems of meaning and signification is achieved through the establishment of new historical narratives of origination and progression:

In the view of the British imperial nation, its history is made up a tale of firsts, bests, and absolute beginnings. Where the British established a cross, a city, or a colony, they proclaimed the start of a new history. Other histories, by definition, were declared of lesser significance or, in certain situations, non-existent.

(Boehmer, *Colonial* 24)

These new beginnings – which enabled the teleological narratives of colonial enlightenment and progress – reinforced the legitimacy of the imperial enterprise whilst silencing indigenous stories.

In her achronological novel, Owuor draws from colonial literary tropes in the description of Selene and Hugh Bolton but subverts the tradition by inserting within it an uneasiness, a sense of inevitable doom. It is interesting that this sense of impending catastrophe is achieved partly by telling the story through Selene’s eyes, as this perspective challenges the hegemony of patriarchal historical accounts through providing a feminine interpretation. Additionally, it connects Selene’s early misgivings with the eventual catastrophes experienced, and perpetuated, by the Boltons in Kenya. As she arrived in Kenya, her immediate thought was “*Let’s go back, Hugh*” where his first words were “We are home, my love, we’re home” (91, original emphasis). This uneasiness, the creeping sense of danger lurking beyond the margins, works to unsettle the Boltons’ attempts to remake their blank-slate kingdom. Selene’s account of their attempt to establish a home and a farm is threaded with worry from beyond the edges of the story. For instance, she describes her social milieu in the following terms: “[f]riends, farming dreams; parties, music, drink and barbiturates to ease the unease” (99).

As Selene becomes increasingly unhappy in Kenya, and in her marriage, the Mau Mau revolution looms larger.¹¹ Owuor's description of a party held at the country club illustrates the links between Selene's fracturing personal life and the growing threat of insurrectionist violence:

[Hugh] gave the third toast to acting Governor Potter. Selene drank down the toast and then some more. She tried to fox-trot, because Hugh had disappeared with a boy-figured woman on his arm

[...].

News: The murder of a settler family in the Aberdare Range, children included. Crop fires, and the threat to Hugh's perfect plans for the perfect country where they could live out perfect lives.

Mau Mau. Acrid fear.

(99)

Rather ironically, it is directly after a State of Emergency has been declared in Kenya that Hugh decides to start building Wuoth Ogik. His attempt to establish his home as a fixture in the Kenyan landscape, thereby ensuring his permanent presence in Africa, is juxtaposed with – and threatened by – the political uncertainty and insecurity surrounding them, which reveals the ultimate fragility of the colonial enterprise.

The construction of Wuoth Ogik draws together the novel's concerns with inhospitable structures, spaces and narratives. Built out of pink coral sourced from Dar es Salaam, the house is an incongruous and ill-fitting edifice in the Northern Kenyan landscape. Selene Bolton describes Wuoth Ogik as "a house of gargantuan pretensions, a pink folly" (91). Hugh Bolton's attempts to dominate and subjugate Kenya, its inhabitants and his wife pivot around the building of Wuoth Ogik. Notably, his decision to build his gargantuan pink folly comes at a time of crisis for him: his marriage is disintegrating and the independence insurgencies have become violent, requiring military reinforcements from England.

This reactionary assertion of ownership and domination – Wuoth Ogik is Hugh's attempt to assert himself as the possessor of Kenya – can be understood in relation to Boehmer's reading of *Robinson Crusoe*. For Boehmer: "[t]he lone shipwrecked settler Crusoe wards off starvation and the anxiety of the unknown by building himself a small estate. He lays claim to land by investing it

¹¹ Whilst the term Mau Mau remains contentious, and has been referred to variously as the Kenya Land and Freedom army as well as the War of Liberation (Ogot 8), I am attempting to remain consistent with the text's references to the Kenyan guerilla army as Mau Mau.

I will provide a more thorough explanation of Mau Mau as it pertains to my analysis shortly; although a full excavation of the contested history of Mau Mau is beyond the scope of this work. For a more comprehensive overview of the history of Mau Mau, both in Kenya and in Britain, see Caroline Elkins' *Imperial Reckoning* and David Anderson's *Histories of the Hanged*.

with his labour [...] and protecting it with high walls” (18). Much like Crusoe, Bolton lays claim to Kenya by establishing an estate. Rather than “developing it according to true Protestant tradition” (18), as Crusoe does, Bolton’s legitimizing labour takes the form of a more overt brutality when he joins the colonial militia in its attempt to suppress perceived insurrection. His participation in the war effort makes Kenya ‘his’, Bolton outlines the logics of this brand of ownership when he claims that: “[m]y people built this land, named it, toiled, built, and died for it” (98).

No matter how hard Crusoe works to assert his control over the land, the unknown remains a constant anxiety for him, thus “[t]he protecting walls declare his vulnerability” (Boehmer, *Colonial* 18). Crusoe’s anxiety centres around cannibalism and manifests itself in his attempts to remake Friday in his own image (18). Within *Dust*, Bolton’s anxiety of that which lies beyond his walls relates to the violent threat to his ownership of the land represented by Mau Mau. In service of his brutal quest to subjugate the land and its people, Hugh enlists Nyipir – training him in English habits and social practices, even amidst the arid Kenyan landscape. As Nyipir recounts, “I fed and washed a grown man who could kill if he wanted to [...] [boiled] bathwater, and set up a safari camp [...] And tea. At ten and at four” (271). This fanatical attempt to restrain and regulate the colonised space and peoples speaks to the coloniser’s anxiety of that which lies beyond the boundary he has established. Like Crusoe’s protecting walls, the rigid reproduction and defence of familiar structures established in occupied territory declares Bolton’s vulnerability.

Simatei elaborates on the operation of these artificial partitions:

The spatial stratification of physical space in conquered territory is the means by which colonialism annexes and marks exclusive ownership of the land, and yet, ironically the privileged enclosures, the no-go zones that this demarcation creates, invites the violation it intends to forestall.

(87)

The hit-and-run guerrilla tactics of the Mau Mau fighters represent exactly this kind of violation. In Kenya, guerrilla warfare arose because of the colonial compulsion for rigid regulation of space. Mau Mau existed in response to the borders of the governable colonial space and represents that “other space that, though already declared part of the colony, is to a greater extent out of reach of colonial surveillance” (88). As such, rather than an outright attempt to overthrow the colonial occupation, the Mau Mau strategy involved an attempt to “keep the fighting going” in order to “teach [the colonists] that white settler supremacy was too costly to maintain” (Lonsdale and Odhiambo 3). Mau Mau militia relied on the fear and instability their tactics inspired, rather than any particular martial successes. For perspective, Mau Mau killed “a mere 32 European settlers” (3). Consider this in comparison to the “brutality of British response to Mau Mau, which resulted in

more than 1000 Kenyans hanged for suspected Mau Mau crimes” (Musila 49). In this asymmetrical apportioning of death, the desperation and brutality of the colonial regime is readily apparent. Among other things, it is the threat of instability and disruption represented by Mau Mau that haunts the margins and silences of Selene and Hugh Bolton’s story.

The domestic drama that plays out between Selene and the household staff reflects and realises an additional colonial anxiety – that regarding the virtue of women. This regulation of women, and more broadly, the patriarchal nature of colonialism is revealed in descriptions of Hugh and Selene’s attempts to establish a family in Kenya. When Selene suggests that they should start a family, Hugh’s response is “A son! My son!” which is described as the “first of Hugh’s “my’s”” (93). Here Selene is relegated to the position of broodmare and the very possibility of a daughter is dismissed.

Moreover, the list of Hugh’s possessions grows to include almost everything that surrounds him:

In time, whatever Hugh desired, he touched and claimed.
The houseboy: my Kavirondo.
[...].
The dead elephant: my trophy.
Kenya: my country.
Selene: *my wife*.

(Owuor 94, original emphasis)

Hugh’s expansive certainty and possessiveness is described as him becoming “uncontained” whereas Selene feels herself “becoming smaller” (96). The novel’s fractured, disjointed prose describes her growing unhappiness and dissatisfaction in her home against the backdrop of Hugh’s distancing himself from her and involving himself in the establishment and securing of colonial Kenya. For he sees Kenya as space to be conquered, whereas Selene, steeped as she is in colonial discourse, sees it as dangerous and insidious.

She finds the house distinctly unsettling: “if houses had resident spirits, Selene knew the ones here regarded her as an invading entity” (Owuor 113). It is not merely in Kenya that she feels the grip of social and familial pressure; her parents were obsessed with English-ness and with keeping their “daughters’ skins fair and lovely” in order to conceal their Anglo-Indian heritage (92). Their approval of Hugh was based solely on his ginger hair and pale complexion (92). Racial anxieties have shaped much of her childhood, as well as her married life. Selene’s discomfort, her unease in Wuoth Ogik and in Kenya more widely, speaks to her inability to live securely in the

kinds of patriarchal, colonial spaces envisioned and built by people like Hugh, and cherished by her parents.

Owuor creates space for intersectional nuance in her representation of Selene in that the novel is, in many ways, sympathetic to her unhappiness in Wuoth Ogik and depicts the violences of the white patriarchy, as Selene experiences it. Yet, *Dust* demonstrates how she is complicit in the imperial enterprise as well. She is caught in the intersection of sexist and racist social structures, benefitting from the one and being oppressed by the other. Rather than the overt forms of abusiveness that can be seen in Hugh's participation in the colonial project, Selene colludes in the production of a kind of domestic mapping – it is her responsibility to establish a respectable English home, or a reasonable facsimile thereof, in Kenya. Behind her seemingly innocuous household habits and practices lies a similar kind of refiguring of space as that undertaken by Hugh. Consider, for example, how the household servants are marshalled into silence and subservience by her genteel and English form of domesticity.

It is from within these anxious regulations that govern the relationship between Selene and the black Kenyans who run her home that the threat of disruption arises. Ultimately, Selene's interracial infidelity fractures the domestic aspect of Hugh's colonial world-building. His son is not biologically his and, in Isaiah Bolton, the white anxieties regarding the perceived perils of interracial relationships are realised. During the events of the novel, Isaiah discovers that Hugh was not his biological father and that Selene had participated in an affair with an unnamed member of the household staff at Wuoth Ogik. As previously discussed, Dyer identifies the reproductive capacity of the white family as being key to the perpetuation of white supremacy (25). Selene's infidelity means that ideals of racial purity are disrupted through Isiah's mixed race heritage.

Consider the scene depicting Selene's infidelity:

Needing to go home to England but not wanting to leave without Hugh. Why live? What was the point. Haunted. Wanting warmth in July. Hurting for her husband's body, his soul, his laugh. Hers. His laugh was hers. Mucus on her face. "I don't belong to anything," she told the wall. "Not even to myself." Body-shuddering weeping. *What do I need?*

A deep-voiced answer came from within the room. "I'm here, memsahib." And from that moment until the light of the next day, it was all she needed to know and touch and feel and smell and have.

(333)

Selene's partner, reduced to 'a deep-voiced answer', is unnamed and their contact is fleeting. Her infidelity – which acts to fracture and disrupt Hugh Bolton's plans for 'his son' and the associated establishment of a legacy – results directly from his abuse and abandonment. Consequently, it is his

constricting and abusive treatment of those around him that results in the disruption of his home, a pattern which foreshadows his eventual downfall.

The cover up of this disturbance of the narrative of the settler colonial family – Selene withholding the truth of Isaiah’s parentage from him – also signals the intimate secrets and silences that lie within the Oganda and Bolton families. Consider the steps that Raulfe, Selene’s second husband, takes after her death:

[Isaiah] dreams of his mother, her death, its horrid stillness. How, later, he and his stepfather, Raulfe, had taken her life-things and stored them in boxes [...]. She had left her other jewellery, letters, and novelty items to the care of Raulfe, who before Isaiah could react, had sealed them all in a safe deposit box, to be opened only after he was dead, and Isaiah had turned sixty.

(31)

It is by such deceits and deceptions that the fiction of the colonial family was maintained. Raulfe’s containment of the truth illustrates the erasures undertaken in order to maintain the narrative of the unsullied white family – from Selene’s participation in excising her Indian grandfather from their family legacy, to her concealing the true parentage of her son. *Dust* draws attention to the kinds of censorship undertaken in order to retain such fictions, and illustrates the ways in which the silences produced by such erasures always continue to retain the power to disrupt.

“This kind of thing does not end right”: the Violent Logics and Legacies of the Nation State

This reshaping of the past in order to co-opt historical narratives in the service of larger political agendas is visible both on the domestic scale – such as Isaiah being raised with the belief that his biological father was Hugh Bolton – and on the national one. The Mau Mau Uprising has a contentious position within both British and Kenyan national imaginations, and its place in history has been reworked and revised variously. Questions regarding the necessity of the violence, partisan ethnic divisions within the movement, atrocities perpetrated against the rebels by indigenous loyalist forces as well as the sheer horror and inhumanity of the event set the stage for a policy of official amnesia within the early independent Kenyan state.¹²

¹² For a more thorough overview of the treatment of the legacy of Mau Mau within contemporary constructions of Kenyan nationalism see *Mau Mau & Nationhood: Arms, Authority, and Narration*. Eds. E.S. Atieno Odhiambo and Jon Lonsdale.

Whilst I risk perpetuating the selfsame erasures I am critiquing, inherent in any seemingly contiguous historical account, for the purposes of this discussion I will relay what Bethwell Ogot terms the populist version of Mau Mau's place in Kenyan history:

[By] 1950, militants and moderates in the nationalist movements were uneasy allies. The moderates preferred to negotiate, while the militants, aware of the devious nature of the colonialists, wanted to fight for their independence. By 1952, the militants were in open insurrection, and the colonial administration, with the implicit support of moderates, retaliated with the declaration of a State of Emergency which was to last until January 1960. It was the militants who fought the war of liberation (Mau Mau) which had nation wide support and aimed at national independence [...]. Those who emerged to rule in 1963 were, in many cases, those who had betrayed the freedom fighters, a group of nascent grabbers and looters.

(Ogot, *Mau Mau* 9)

In this extract, Ogot provides a rough sketch of the shifting web of allegiances surrounding Mau Mau and reveals the partisan tensions involved in this episode of history.

Despite the generally acknowledged necessity of this insurrectionism for Kenya's acquisition of independence, President Jomo Kenyatta would later actively distance narratives of Kenyan nationalism from the actions of the Mau Mau militants (11). In particular, the Mau Mau fighters were widely criticised by Kenyans for the gruesome scale of the violence after the fact:

Mau Mau fighters [...] contrary to African customs and values, assaulted old people, women and children. The horrors they practiced included the following: decapitation and general mutilation of civilians, torture before murder, bodies bound up in sacks and dropped in wells, burning the victims alive, gouging out of eyes, splitting open the stomachs of pregnant women. No war can justify such gruesome actions.

(Ogot, *Britain's Gulag* 502)

The revolutionary violence was marked by a brutality that led many to characterise it as somehow 'un-African' and against the ideals of a free and independent Kenya (Ogot 502).

As a result of this aura of vileness and its perceived irreconcilability with a narrative of Kenyan-ness, Kenyatta declared that: "[w]e are determined to have independence in peace, and we shall not allow hooligans to rule Kenya. We must have no hatred towards one another. Mau Mau was a disease which had been eradicated, and must never be remembered again" (qtd in Hughes 187). Following their president's lead, the new Kenyan government sought to bury Mau Mau in the interests of national unity (185). Rather than excavating and engaging with the realities and consequences of these atrocities, the new narratives of Kenyan-ness became complicit in similar kinds of forced erasures and expeditious silences as were found within the production of the colonial Kenyan nation state.

Dust's extended thematic concern with buried secrets is intimately tied to the four decades of orchestrated silence about Mau Mau. Nyipir, who became entangled in the cruelty of the Mau Mau Uprising and is bedevilled by memories of his torture from that time, has the most intimate experience of the brutalities inflicted in the interests of preserving state order. Owuor describes the treatment of the legacy of Mau Mau within narratives of Kenyan national unity through Nyipir's experiences.

Consider her description of Nyipir's feelings about the persistent nature of these buried secrets as they exist in contemporary narratives of national unity:

Much later, the horror was painted over and replaced with myths of triumph, repeated, repeated again, then adorned in all seasons of retelling. Nyipir waited for the inheritors of these silences to call out the names of their undead dead. Not a word. Now, fifty years later, the murdered were shrieking from their earth tombs [...]. They seemed to accuse every citizen inheritors of their haemorrhaging.

(Owuor 84)

In her complex and layered narrative, Owuor dramatises and investigates the inhospitability of the Kenyan nation state in the contemporary moment. By drawing attention to the various traumas and erasures that haunt the margins of the narrative, she points to the silences which contain Kenya's bloody secrets and continue to beset the lives of its citizens. Tellingly, the silences that haunt the margins of contemporary Kenya are specifically linked to the same kinds of violent erasures that were performed in service of imperial conquest.

Through drawing these kinds of ideological links between the Kenyan nation state under English rule and the postcolonial Kenya of the contemporary moment, Owuor forces the reader to grapple with the ways in which the postcolonial state can be read as an inhospitable structure. Much like Wuoth Ogik, *Dust* depicts the nation of Kenya as being envisioned by white eyes to the exclusion of the black hands that built it and, in Owuor's estimation, is therefore habitable by neither. The questions that pervade the novel – what endures and how to speak of it – coalesce around the issue of how to inhabit a space that was never intended for you. The recurring refrain, “[y]ou can't live in the songs of people who don't know your name” (6), signals the novel's concern with the habitability of structures, spaces and stories. Through the repetitive and rupturing presence of silence in the novel, Owuor draws links between the institutional and systemic inequalities that were established through the colonial occupation of Kenya and shows the ways in which these political imbalances are still present today.

As such, the recovery and re-situation of the history is an essential question for Kenya's present: “to contest the past is also, of course, to post questions about the present, and what the past

means in the present. Our understanding of the past has strategic, political and ethical consequences” (Hodgkin and Radstone 1). By contesting the legacy of Mau Mau, Owuor is engaging with the relationship between Kenya’s past and present. For Atieno Odhiambo, the Mau Mau question is one about the shape of knowledge and history in Kenya. In what he refers to as ‘Maus Maus of the Mind’, Odhiambo characterises the persistent presence and resistant nature of Mau Mau history as being “about the production of knowledge, the production of history and the use of that knowledge, that history by the various contending sections of society” (qtd in Hughes 185). Kenyans have “come to understand ‘rewriting history’ to *mean* the rewriting of the Mau Mau story” (191, original emphasis). *Dust* illustrates and investigates the ways in which Mau Mau history has been variously used to create specific nationalising narratives in service of one or other faction’s version of Kenya. Through these various forgettings and rememberings, individual stories and experiences – as well as the human cost of such brutality – have been subsumed and silenced. Owuor demonstrates how nationalist ideologies have been used and co-opted by various contending powers throughout Kenya’s history. ‘For the good of the country’ was used by colonialists to justify the seizure and subjugation of Kenya, as illustrated by Bolton’s assertion of “*my Kenya*” to validate the violence necessary to sustain the colonial state (94, original emphasis). Nationalism was also the rallying cry of both the Mau Mau fighters and the loyalists who sought to stop them. The effects of these can be seen in Nyipir’s grapples with his national identity: “Nyipir was Kenyan once [...] Myth of valour spun to explain the desecration of a nation; oaths of silence” (Owuor 123). Kenyan nationalism has been invoked as a legitimising narrative by parties seeking to bury the Mau Mau Uprising as well as those attempting to re-integrate it.

The treatment of the Mau Mau legacy in the workings of Kenyan nationalism gestures towards the erasures and omissions that occur in the creation of community. An image of unity is only created through the concurrent production of silences. As Lotte Hughes notes, both state and civil groups in Kenya were actively engaged in “suppressing, whether consciously or not, nuanced multi-faceted narratives of the struggle for independence in order to serve various political agendas” (186).

The persistence, even in their absence, of these suppressed histories is what *Dust* is concerned with. According to Lotte, this haunting is visible in the “signifiers of Mau Mau commemoration, which appear to indicate a new openness to historical remembrance and the redress of official silencing; [yet] they mask the fact that a deeper, possibly more troubling amnesia continues” (186). Even when the deliberate erasure of the Mau Mau histories was redressed, and the rebellion was used as a national unifier, its intricacies and complexities were ignored and silenced

in favour of the comfortable kinds of narratives that can be co-opted into a contiguous national identity.

In this treatment of nationalist narratives, it is possible to see the ways in which nationalism operates as a ‘surrogate religion’ which links “individuals to persisting communities whose generations form indissoluble links in a chain of memories and identities” (Olick 2). It is this power to connect, to establish a historical legacy within which citizens can orientate themselves and imagine a cohesive future, which Boehmer identifies as being central to the decolonial power of the nation state. This idea of the memory chain is central to the functioning of the nation in these histories secure for the national imaginary “the false unity of a self-same national subject evolving through time” (Olick 3). In some ways, memory can be understood to underwrite national identity by establishing permanence and continuity in the face of rampant change (7).

Of course, this idea of a reliable, continuous and permanent historical narrative belies the shifting and uncertain nature of memory as well as the kinds of absences and erasures that are unavoidably incorporated into any remembered account. For Ernest Renan, “forgetting is at the heart of national self-understanding – forgetting alternative possible stories and alternate possible identifications” (qtd in Olick 1). This forgetting can be a natural process of self-inscription or can be engineered by larger social forces to produce particular kinds of memories, histories and narratives. It is possible to identify this kind of engineering in memorials and museums. These memory sites “represent public statements about what the past has been and how the present should acknowledge [the past], who should be remembered, who should be forgotten; which acts are foundational, which marginal; what gets respected, what neglected” (13).

It is this concern with the links between remembering and representation that animates *Dust*. After all, “memory is above all a form of representation” (Passerini 238). In remembering the past, we produce a version of it. As established, however, remembering is dependent upon forgetting and memory contains within it its own silences: “there can be memory within silence and memory through silence” (248). Any historical narrative is, necessarily, “a bundle of silences” and for this reason, “[t]aking silence into account means watching out for the links between forms of power and forms of silence” (Trouillot qtd in Passerini 249). Memory always exists within a context of silence which necessitates the “recognition of the fragmented nature of memory [...] as if memory were more than words” (249).

The contested and irreconcilable nature of the narratives informing the Kenyan nation state is linked to the production and propagation of a haunting silence, which in turn engenders more harm:

Silence's oaths, slow-dripping venom with their seductive promise of memory loss. Erasure of secrets, as long as the oath was fed in intermittent seasons with spilled human blood. "Ahhh! We bury evil with covenants of silence." Nyipir says, "For the good of the country."

[...].

"Even if you plant another story into silence, see, the buried thing returns to ask for its blood from the living."

(68–69)

In this extract from the text, the recurring, cyclical nature of violence is underscored, as is the relationship between such aggression and certain silences. The unquiet dead of the novel, those multitudes of bodies buried in silence, are positioned by Owuor as the victims of the brutality of nation-building.

Not coincidentally, Nyipir himself is responsible for many of these silent, secret burials of nameless victims since he worked as a gravedigger, trying to make money to travel to Burma and find his family:

[Nyipir] did not yet understand the state of the nation, or that interrogation units were generating far too many bodies for one man to bury alone under the blanket of night. Bodies in *gunia* leaked liquids into the ground, over his hands, the stench of invisible human beings, smashed up and nameless, lowered into grounds that he then leveled.

(167)

In this gruesome description, Owuor invokes the bodies of those who have been rendered invisible and unnamed by the workings of nation-building. It is these unquiet dead who "return to ask for blood from the living" (69). The silences and unquiet dead produced by the various aggressions of nation-building recur in the novel through the legacies of violence they produce. It is through passages like these that the production of the nation state is intrinsically linked to questions surrounding the dead bodies of the novel. The unquiet dead of the novel are 'buried with covenants of silence' – the same silences that haunt the edges of the narrative. As such, questions surrounding how to deal with the unburied or unsettled dead, are also implicated in questions regarding how to exhume and lay to rest the troubled histories and silences of Kenya.

One such body is that of Hugh Bolton. It is Bolton's ghost which haunts both Ajany and Isaiah and, as the text progresses, it is revealed that it is his violent death which is responsible for the unrest within Wuoth Ogik. Bolton's remains, which are found by a young Odidi and Ajany, require their own covenant of silence: "[n]ever, never, never shall we talk about this, never to

remember the cave. We forget, and if we tell, the earth must gobble us up. Swear?" (75). This compact of silence is an obvious echo of the Mau Mau oath, taken by those participating in the uprising: "[a]nd if I speak, may the oath kill me" (302, original emphasis). It is these compacts of secrecy, which proliferate in the novel, that demand to be fed with "spilled human blood" (68). In layering these covenants of silence upon one another, and linking them to the cyclical presence of violence in Kenya, Owuor dramatically illustrates how legacies of violence operate. The new generations become complicit with the forced silences of the past, and as such, become haunted by them as well.

Consider also the assassination of Tom Mboya, which Nyipir describes as the death of his Kenya: "[t]he murder was a culmination of fears, swirling rumors, the meaning of clandestine oaths that made the rest of the country enemy territory to be owned. It was the purpose of the silences that had started before" (272). *Dust* specifically links the production and maintenance of the nation state with murder. As illustrated through Nyipir's grave digging, the machinations of the nation state produce multitudes of dead bodies. John Lonsdale and Atieno Odhiambo maintain that all modern nation states have their foundations in brutality: "[a]ll states that claim to be nations have skeletons in their cupboards, stained with fratricidal blood" (1). National histories, then, when recounted accurately, involve bitter and brutal struggles over the meaning and forms of nationhood (2). No state has ever come into being without bloodshed, and Kenya is no exception (3).

For Grace Musila, "violence, in various shapes and guises, has been a consistent instrument of state power and its practice in Kenyan history" (32). Odidi's death speaks to the presence of politically motivated assassinations in Kenya. Violence broadly, and assassination specifically, have historically been wielded as political tools for maintaining state order in Kenya (32). Drawing on Atieno Odhiambo and David Cohen's discussion of a genealogy of assassinations in Kenya, Musila argues that "violence and assassination, as important syllables in the grammar of state power, were part of the British colonial endowment to the newly independent Kenyan government which, in turn, refined and adapted this brutal inheritance" (33). This legacy of state-sanctioned killings, coupled with the pervasiveness of politically motivated assassinations in Kenya, means that the trope of assassination is deeply embedded within Kenyan popular memory and consciousness (35). One such victim of state-sanctioned murder, Tom Mboya, was a revolutionary figure of hope for many Kenyans and a national hero, who sought to change the operations of power within the country to promote fairness and equality. He is positioned by the novel as a kind of sacrificial son.

It was Tom Mboya's Kenya that Nyipir imagined himself into: "[a] mosaic people had cheered. Wanderers, cattlemen, camel herders, fisherman and hunters, dreamers, strangers, gatherers and farmers, trading nations, empire builders, and the forgetful. Such were the people for whom Nyipir had carried the new Kenya flag" (Owuor 25). In contrast to this multitudinous image of unity, with its mosaic of people, is the reality of modern Kenya as represented by Owuor – fractious and beset by inter-ethnic conflict. His work represented the possibility of a more comprehensive power shift in the country, but Tom Mboya was assassinated.

The novel draws distinct links between Odidi and Tom Mboya's murders, both symbolically and causally. Much as Odidi's death is the catalyst for the dissolution and scattering of the Ogandas, Tom Mboya's death is described in the novel as a "fissure in the nation, as if it had split apart its own soul" (272). Post-Tom Mboya Kenya is described as 'cracked': "[n]othing was certain, not even hope" (272). The narrator also notes that "[c]itizens spoke to one another in whispers, if and when they spoke at all. When those associated with Tom Mboya and his name were hunted down like vermin, there was silence" (234). Again, the novel links the proliferation of silence with a cyclical legacy of state-sanctioned harm.

Like Mboya, Odidi is described as a dreamer with buoyant hopes for Kenya's future. His company, Tich Lich Engineers, was contracted to build hydroelectric dams. It was Tom Mboya's Airlift Education scholarships that educated Odidi's university professor and, subsequently, allowed Odidi to become an engineer. Odidi's honesty and integrity are eventually his downfall in the sense that, after his partners at Tich Lich succumb to the lure of bribery from corrupt government politicians so that the dams are silted and the project derailed, his refusal to participate in this betrayal of Kenya results in his dismissal, public humiliation and his eventual involvement in organised crime. Tom Mboya and Odidi Oganda's deaths are symbolically linked in the novel as they were both a product of a corrupt and divisive system attempting to retain control of the Kenyan nation-state. Through Odidi's death, Owuor draws attention to the numerous state-sanctioned murders that continue to plague Kenya, and illustrates how the nation continues to be entangled with historic institutions of violence.

Odidi is cast in valiant terms; the narrator explicitly draws on imagery of heroism and nationalism. After joining the school's rugby team, he "transformed the school's game", the narrator noting that "[i]n the created songs of worship for their new hero [...] Odidi found belonging, and Ajany, reflecting Odidi's glory, was at last left in peace" (14). *Dust* deliberately invokes nationalist metaphors linking sports heroes with war heroes, positioning him as a champion

in ‘songs of worship’. Here the dynamics of citizen son and secondary, invisible daughter are brought to play – Ajany fades away behind Odidi’s physicality and popularity. Similarly, once she leaves Kenya, he goes on to participate in nation-building projects and attains success as an engineer before he is betrayed. Even when he resorts to a life of crime, it is with a community-orientated motivation, in that his “time with the gang came from heroic idealism” (287).

When Ajany returns for the second time to Wuoth Ogik with news of Odidi’s life, she tells Nyipir that:

He had only been organising the disenchanted youth to work for a different future for themselves. It is sad, she tells her father, that the stupid state did not have the capacity to grasp Odidi’s vision and had instead destroyed him.

(287)

The legacy of Tom Mboya is again invoked in this extract through the description of a heroic male citizen ‘too good’ for the ‘stupid state’. Odidi’s intrepidity, talent and commitment to Kenya are betrayed by the machinations of a corrupt and violent nation-state. *Dust* draws attention to the pattern of shining sons sacrificed for a dangerously broken political system.

“Cartographies of the unutterable”: Women as Silent Citizens and Citizens of Silence

Against this milieu of war-hero fathers and nationalist sons, the struggles of the women in *Dust* play out. The uneasiness in the text manifests itself variously in the female characters’ experiences of Wuoth Ogik and of Kenya, and gestures towards the ways in which men and women experience state violence differently. Selene, Akai and Ajany’s multiple discomforts within the home – specifically Wuoth Ogik – can be read as an allegory for the ways in which the nation state is often an inhospitable space for women, in a way that appears to cut across race and class.

Whilst the apparatuses and ideologies of the nation state are not always experienced as harmful by the women living within them, the position of a woman-as-citizen is markedly different from that of the normative, or male, citizen (Kandiyoti 56). This difference is illustrated through Ajany’s ongoing struggles to feel homed; indeed, she is described as a rootless character (Owuor 119). Her childhood is marked by her musings of placelessness, with dreams to travel ‘Far Away’ with Odidi (119). When she acts on this, applying for a scholarship to study in Canada, her decision to leave Kenya creates a rift in her relationship with Odidi: “[w]as it possible that two separate feelings of place could exist between them? [...] She saw [Odidi’s] rootedness, compared it with her floundering” (119–20).

Rather than an out-of-placeness, Akai's character is marked with a wanderlust that takes on almost mythical proportions. She is described by Nyipir as a wandering leopard (41). In their desperation to keep her at home, Galgalu, Ajany and Odidi resorted to mythical means when they were younger:

Galgalu had tried to scrape the earth under Akai-ma's shadow, to try to exorcise those ghosts that made her wander. Ajany and Odidi had colluded with him by trying to make their mother stand still. They always failed. As long as there was sun, Akai jumped from place to place.

(40)

This homelessness, or wanderlust is, according to Christina Kenny, a result of the fact that "Akai finds the boundaries of nation and family complex and stifling, unpredictable and violent" (18).

These discomforts experienced by the women of the text can be read in relation to the ways in which the nation state is implicated in the kinds of ideologies and social structures that serve to oppress and restrict women. The integration of women into nationalist projects "has been rich in paradoxes and ambiguities in most postcolonial societies" because "the regulation of gender is central to the articulation of cultural identity and difference" (McClintock, "Family" 56). In other words, gender is intrinsic to imagining the nation in that national difference, like other forms of difference, "is constituted through the medium of the sexual binary, using the figure of the woman as a primary vehicle" (Boehmer, *Women* 5). The imaginaries of nationalism and gender have been deployed mutually to invoke and constitute one another (8). As Anne McClintock notes, it is the metaphorical values of the family that are appealed to by nationalist discourse in order to naturalise, legitimise and strengthen these gendered hierarchies within the nation state ("Family" 63).

Whilst largely investigating the deleterious and circumscribing effects of the state's reliance upon the technologies of gender, Boehmer contends that the nation retains the possibility of serving as a site of resistance for women. It offers them a means to challenge the multiple ways in which colonialism distorts and disfigures a people's history: "[t]he narrative of a nation imposes meaningful chronology and continuity upon the anarchic flux which the coloniser ascribes to the native's past" (10). The role of national literatures in creating, sustaining and fleshing out these meaningful national narratives is central (12). For Boehmer, the modern novel is a key site where the nation is articulated and the narrative power of the novel can be co-opted by women to fictively fashion more capacious modes of living within nationalist ideologies and imaginaries (12).

McClintock takes a stronger stance on the position of women within the nation state, claiming that "all nationalisms are gendered, all are invented, and all are dangerous" ("Family" 62). For her, nationalism is radically constitutive of people's identities because, although nationalism is invented,

it does not merely consist of “phantasmagoria of the mind” (61). Even more emphatically than McClintock, Rajaswari Sunder Rajan argues that: “[i]n all postcolonial nations the state, envisaged as the guarantor of rights to its citizens, has invariably emerged instead as a major perpetrator of injustices” (61). She therefore contends that “[i]n such a context, the women’s movement ends by forming alliances with the state” (61). As a result of this, despite claims of unity and collective aspirations towards equality, nations have historically amounted to “the sanctioned institutionalisation of gender *difference*” (61, original emphasis). For McClintock, the nation state is a key feature in the construction of the feminine under patriarchy as well as in the operation of gender-based oppression.

As such, women are integrated differently than men into the sovereign nation state: “women are relegated to the margins of the polity even though their centrality to the nation is constantly being reaffirmed” (Kandiyoti 46). Women become symbolic bearers and repositories of national identity, rather than being integrated and identified as citizens (46). Consider the ways in which ‘motherland’ tropes invoke images of the nation-as-woman, where the nation is represented as a woman to be protected and disciplined. Positioned as the objects of an ideological, territorial dispute, women’s bodies are substitute geographies upon which nationalist campaigns can be waged. In other words, they are more often positioned as the sites of internal conflicts and contests rather than participants in them (Sunder Rajan 6).

The binary of man-as-citizen and woman-as-symbol complicates and obstructs the aims of a feminist nationalism:

Wherever women continue to serve as boundary markers between different national, ethnic and religious collectivities, their emergence as full-fledged citizens will be jeopardised, and whatever rights they may have achieved during one stage of nationbuilding may be sacrificed on the altar of identity politics during another.
(Kandiyoti 51)

Following this line of argument, the expansion of freedom, autonomy and liberty of female citizens under a nationalist framework is always contingent and threatened because their position as citizens is a conditional and secondary one.

Consider the description of Akai Lokorijom’s childhood quest for independence and her subsequent exile. Akai experiences various curtailings of her freedom by her father, her community and her school which lead to become Hugh’s mistress: “Akai never did deliver the message of her suspension from school to her stepfather. Instead, greedy for the promise of the bigness of life, she became Hugh’s mistress”, notes the narrator (Owuor 344). Her desire to learn about the world, to experience the bigness of life, drives her to throw off the shackles of her childhood life and escape

school but, in doing so, she becomes ensnared in a new form of exploitation. After she becomes pregnant and Hugh rejects her, she returns home to further scorn, as the narrator notes: “Akai’s beloved stepfather [started] calling her section of the family ‘the outsiders’ [...]. He moved Akai and her mother out, to save face” (347). Eventually Akai is completely rejected by her family and she is thrust out into the arid landscape with nothing, save her children, both of whom eventually die from dehydration and malnutrition. Each attempt she makes to increase her freedom and autonomy results in a new articulation of the patriarchal oppression she experiences, rather than a lessening of it. For Christina Kenny, Akai’s silences “speak to the terrible price of freedom” (18).

Akai’s archetypal motherhood also brings to the fore the symbolic role that mothers have in the national imaginary. The mother figure is positioned as “mentor, fetish or talisman” (Boehmer, *Women* 91). Where the citizen is embodied as a male figure, feminine identity is characterised as “an idealised carrier of nationalist sons” (92). For Boehmer, “the weighty presences of national mothers have overshadowed and disguised the actual absences of women in public national life” (92). As such, national independence transitions in ex-European colonies were experienced differently by women in that the achievement of national selfhood confirmed in women “a lack of self” and served to emphasise “their difference from national wholeness or essence” (92). The rootlessness of Akai and Ajany can be read as speaking to this issue since they experience themselves as being profoundly different from those around them.

Of course, *Dust* draws specific distinctions between Akai and Ajany – their relationship is deeply fraught, and Ajany is often pushed aside by Akai in favour of Odidi. When Ajany returns home, for the first time in many years, with Odidi’s body, her reunion with Akai is deeply upsetting and disappointing:

Ajany takes four steps toward Akai-ma, a history of longing in the movement.
Akai’s arms reach out: Ajany steps in, inhales Akai-ma’s rancid, sad warmth.
Incense, hope, and softness. Almost touching, almost disappearing into her mother.
But then Akai shoves Ajany away [...]. “Where’s your brother?”

(Owuor 37)

This fractious reunion dramatises the complexities of the relationship between Akai and Ajany. Owuor seems to simultaneously invoke and repudiate the collapsing of mother-into-nation because Ajany’s relationship with Akai mirrors her difficulty homing herself within the state of Kenya. Much like her subordinate place in Akai’s affections, Ajany is positioned as a secondary citizen to the state’s nationalist sons.

Of course, Akai and Ajany’s relationship is not merely a crude rendering of the connection between state and subject; it is also a nuanced representation of the relationship between a mother

and daughter. Boehmer identifies the ways in which the female child occupies an almost incidental, silenced position within national literatures:

In relation to the national son, the self-defining inheritor of the post-independence era and the protagonist of the nation shaping narrative, the female child is a – if not *the* – non-subject within the national family romance [...] if not subordinate, peripheral and quiet, then virtually invisible.

(Women 106)

Owuor's representation of Ajany seems to concurrently draw on this trope of the silent, secondary daughter whilst resisting it. More accurately, *Dust* depicts the ways in which Ajany is socially positioned as peripheral whilst giving space and profundity to her experience as a marginalised subject. For instance, Ajany is consistently outshone and decentred by Odidi's success in school and prowess at sports, but the reader experiences her sense of being overshadowed through her own telling of it. Similarly, the Boltons' attempt to settle in Kenya is focalised through Selene, rather than Hugh. The depth and breadth given to women's experiences in the novel speaks to *Dust*'s concern with recentering marginalised and silenced stories and repositioning women as the focus of narratives that otherwise might exclude them.

This power of stories to variously position and displace people speaks to Boehmer's contention that stories embody nations:

[T]he nation is widely conceptualised as a fabricated identity, even though it may be experienced as a community defined by certain 'real' attributes held in common [...]. Far from being a biological or cultural given, a nation operates as a *fiction* uniting a people into a horizontally structured conglomerate into which they imagine themselves.

(Women 8, my emphasis)

By challenging and changing women's position within, and relationship to, the narratives in which they are embedded, Owuor offers an outline of more inclusive structures into which women might 'imagine themselves'. This fictive, written and created quality of the nation state is particularly central to this author's engagement with it. Ajany's position, and capacity, as artist operates as a complex commentary on Owuor's role as artist-author and the related responsibilities that places upon the text. *Dust* features many artist figures, notably Hugh Bolton and Ajany Arabel Oganda, and through their art, the novel explores the limitations and possibilities of representation.

Seeing the Mothers Naked: Black Women's Bodies as Sites of Protest

The power dynamics that exist between men and women, in domestic and civil settings, is explored and charted through the power relations that inform the art present in the novel. Hugh's

domineering and exploitative relationship with Akai is both reflected and challenged in his paintings of her. In foregrounding how Akai's power is variously co-opted or restrained, the novel's depiction of Akai can be read as speaking to black mothers' place in the nation state. As previously discussed, "the new postcolonial nation is historically a male-constructed space, narrated into modern self-consciousness by male leaders, activists and writers, in which women are more often than not cast as symbols or totems, as the bearers of tradition" (Boehmer, *Women* 22). This symbolic dimension of women's position within the imaginary geography of the nation state leads to an erasure of the presence and experience of actual women as living citizens. The tensions surrounding this disembodiment through the symbolic appropriation of women's bodies is explored in the novel through Hugh Bolton's relationship to, and paintings of, Akai Lokorijom. She, the powerful matriarchal figure in the novel, is described in elemental, dangerous terms: "[s]he flows like magma, every movement considered, as if it has come from the root of the world [...]. At unpredictable moments, for nameless reasons, she might erupt with molten-rock fury, belching fire that damaged everything it encountered" (33). Owuor clearly associates Akai with unpredictable violence and renders her an unreliable, wandering mother figure. In the novel, Akai assaults Ajany with her fists and threatens her with a weapon, but, at particular points in the narrative, this violence is shown to come from a deep desire to protect her children. According to Christina Kenny, "[t]he life-force of Akai is a narrative lodestone, her actions and relationships shape the events of the novel" (15). Kenny therefore concludes that "[t]he great tragedy of *Dust* is Akai's inability to protect her family in spite of her prodigious and elemental power" (15). In Akai, Owuor illustrates the tension between the power women wield and the oppression they endure despite this.

In the ekphrastic depiction of Hugh's paintings of Akai, Owuor once again invokes and resists the tropes surrounding the representation and positioning of black women's bodies. Though the earth-mother-goddess dimension of Akai's character is emphasised in these paintings, both of them – the bookmark and the full-scale portraits – are described to the reader through women's experiences of them. These women also have personal relationships with Akai – Ajany is her daughter and Selene is the wife of Akai's lover – which undercuts the universalising, dehumanising aspects of such a representation. Consider, for example, the description provided to the reader of Ajany's feelings and thoughts when she is handed the bookmark by Isaiah: "[t]he woman, not just naked, exposed, raw to the soul. Intricate body scars jump off the small canvas [...] something arcane suggested in the fecund, swollen belly [...]. She averts her face, moves towards her brother to shield him and conceal herself" (65). This quote illustrates the move from an essentialised

response to ‘the woman’ to Ajany’s personal desire to shield her brother and herself from an image of their mother’s nakedness.

The second description of Akai’s nakedness focusses on when Selene finds the portraits in Wuoth Ogik. Featuring her exposed and pregnant body, these paintings viscerally evoke Akai’s presence and power:

She stretched out the charcoal portrait of a fiery-eyed, long-limbed, crop-haired, fulllipped, dark-brown-skinned woman [...] stretched in a pose that might have been lewd if it were not for fine details – a beaded bracelet, intricately patterned stomach scars – which made the work an intimate ode to visceral femininity [...]. The women, her belly rounded, pregnant, legs stretched out, watching the artist, the universal lover’s gaze, hand beneath her head, a half-smile.

(112)

What is emphasised in this description is Akai’s relationship to the artist, her staring back out whilst the artist (and the reader) are staring into the painting and the person it depicts. With reference to *Dust*’s recurrent inclusion of eyes and gazes, it is useful to keep in mind the multiple perspectives involved in this portrait. By invoking several viewpoints in one image, the reader is forced to grapple with the various intersecting subjectivities that inform this (or any) representation. This scene in the novel includes Hugh’s vision of Akai, Selene’s response to his depiction of Akai and then, lastly and most apparently, Akai’s unsettling gaze out of the portrait, ‘watching the artist’. His gaze is a white, male colonial one. For Sarah Anne Tate, “the white colonial gaze homogenizes Black women’s bodies as it dissects and inscribes its own meanings of racialised otherness” (5). Hugh’s paintings of Akai draws on a long history of problematic representations of women of colour. Art featuring Black women produced during the colonial period participated in practices which reproduced attitudes that objectified and over-sexualised their bodies – bodies which were constructed as being “made for reproduction” (1). These representations partook in a custom of widespread dehumanisation, and these notions can be seen in Hugh’s treatment of Akai.

After she becomes pregnant with his children, he slanders her and throws paint at her:

Hugh sometimes tore the paper with his paintbrush, throwing the paint and staining Akai’s body and clothes. He would command Akai to leave it on. And she would walk around in garish and grotesque shades.

Insults in Ngaturkana, applied by Hugh.

(345–46)

In this moment, Akai’s naked body is literally treated as a canvas by Hugh, dehumanising her and revealing the power relations that lay behind his paintings of her. Her paint-splattered, pregnant body is vilified by Hugh and her humanity is denied by the gaze of ‘the universal artist’. This kind of voyeuristic relationship recalls the politics and brutalities surrounding the treatment of Sarah

Baartman, and later, her body. As Tate argues, “Sarah Baartman shows us that the Black woman’s body has long been the object of pathological distortions in which it has been constructed as sexually abnormal and racially other” (2). The insidious, lingering realities of these colonial attitudes still impact the knowledges of, power over, and positionings of Black women’s bodies in contemporary times (8). It is likely the same attitudes and power dynamics inform, for example, Ajany’s treatment in Nairobi, where she is called a whore for traveling alone and is often verbally abused while wandering around the streets.

Through Hugh’s paintings of Akai, Owuor engages with this legacy of representation in order to expose its influence on contemporary attitudes towards Black women’s bodies. When focussing more specifically on the context surrounding Owuor’s invocation of the specifically nude, maternal body in Kenya, the paintings take on further significances. These paintings can be read alongside the cultural taboo of “seeing the mothers naked” (Mwangi 2). In Kenya, women’s naked bodies have operated as powerful sites of protest: “Kenyan women have been laying their bodies on the line for years. A group of women stripping naked in public is one of our most potent political practices” (2). Wambui Mwangi discusses this protest practice in terms of a ‘secret weapon’ – women’s bodies as always containing the potential to disrupt social order (3).

Mwangi places this disruptive potential within the larger Kenyan context that silences women, citing the Gikuyu term ‘mutumia’, which is used as a marker of respect but literally translates to ‘one who does not speak’ (8). This silencing of Kenyan woman is, for Mwangi, fundamental to the current national order and raises questions about women’s political participation in, and representation within, the democratic process of postcolonial Kenya. According to Mwangi, the Kenyan nation state is a patriarchal, oppressive space for women: “[t]he Kenyan post-colonial social contract is not a political agreement between allegedly neutral individual citizens but a patriarchal and ethnicist order based on the domination of all Kenyan women by all Kenyan men” (3). This oppression can be seen in the ways in which the country’s public spaces are defined and punctuated by monumental forms of homage to powerful men but women are relegated to a symbolic civic space (4). Ultimately, in Kenya, “the business of politics is patriarchy. All the bodies that matter are male” (7). In the context of this disembodiment and silencing of women, the nakedness of a mother’s body is an influential way of speaking outside of the traditional modes of protest. The intentional act of stripping contains the possibility to speak from different horizons of political possibility that create “generative conditions of dissent and democratic renewal” (3). In this way, Owuor’s depiction of Akai’s body – as represented by Hugh – invokes a complex nexus

of power relations regarding the legibility of black women's bodies as well as their powerful potential for disruption.

Significantly, Owuor's descriptions of the paintings of Akai's naked body emphasise black women's ability to speak through and from within silence. Whilst Hugh's relationship to Akai – which the painting, in many senses, dramatises and embodies – is an abusive, asymmetrical one, Akai is not a demure object in his paintings. She stares out, dislodging and upsetting the traditional economies of visibility between the artist and those who are represented. Through drawing on Kenya's history of women speaking dramatically and powerfully in silence through their bodies, Owuor opens up questions regarding black women's relationship to, and exploitation of, the links between art, the body and silence.

“In order to see, she sketches”: Recovering Inhospitable Pasts and Representing Habitable Futures

In many ways, *Dust* presents the reader with the impossible challenge of trying to hear silence. This is, necessarily, an arduous and ultimately doomed task. In the very act of interpreting silence, its nature is collapsed. Rather than trying to understand the meanings embedded within, or masked by, the lacunae of the novel, it is more useful to attempt to read it in relation to what is already there. Luisa Passerini reminds us that “when trying to understand connections between silence and speech, oblivion and memory, we must look for relationships between traces, or between traces and their absences” (240). This relationship of silence to speech is intimately connected to the one between the oppressed and power. The production of intelligibility entails inevitable erasures. As previously discussed, colonial writing used this relationship to envisage colonised space as empty and disordered. Colonial writing consisted of lines of power that rewrote the world, constituting centre and margin, binary oppositions: “the power to name, identify, classify, domesticate and contain that simultaneously doubles as the power to obliterate, silence and negate” (Chambers 49). Owuor invokes this dynamic in multiple ways: silence in the novel is the refuge, territory and prison of women, the traumatised, the forgotten, and the oppressed. The dynamics surrounding the inaccessibility of these censored stories, and their persistent presence despite this impenetrability, is explored through *Dust*'s engagement with silence. Silence, by necessity and by its nature, refuses absolute interpretation, which makes the task of interpreting it a strange, selfdefeating act. This failure is perpetuated by the textual form of the novel itself; one cannot truly ‘write’ silence. Rather, the recurring textual presence of ‘silence’ in the novel – the word silence continuously punctuates

the text, disturbing and interrupting scenes, moments and descriptions – acts to remind the reader of the presence of this inviolable illegibility. Instead of the appearance of smooth linguistic cartographies, *Dust* deliberately invokes and draws attention to the existence of illegible silences and tells a story that is constantly interrupted by the presence of the marginalised, disappeared and forgotten.

Ajany is represented as speaking to and from these silent spaces in the novel. In Owuor's attempt to deviate from the script of nationalist sons, she has included a shy, stuttering heroine who lives in, and speaks tentatively from, the margins. Her hesitant stutter is contrasted with the oratory power of Nyipir and Odidi. Against Odidi's bright heroism, Ajany's shyness and slight demeanor becomes ever more apparent; Ajany's dialogue in the novel is punctuated with starts and stops, she is described as a "small, stuttering thing", whereas the "Oganda men were gifted with soft-edged, rumbling voices" (Owuor 23).

This eloquence is interesting when read in correlation with the novel's concerns with the treachery and the insufficiency of words. Consider, for instance, how the controversy of the Mau Mau tactics is represented in the novel:

[Fear] split words into smaller and smaller fragments until words became secret, suffocating, and silent. No one cried when the voracious, frenzied seizing of lives began. A new word slithered into the landscape – *Nyakua*: plunder, possess. Entitled brigandage. But it was cleansed to mean "hard work." [...]. Such eyes-turned-inward silences so that when bodies started showing up mutilated and truly dead, the loudest protests were created out of whispers.

(25–26)

Words are described as fractured and deceitful – unable to cope with the magnitude of the fear people were experiencing, and therefore liable to be co-opted for dangerous political ends. The line 'the loudest protests were created out of whispers' can be read multiply. It can be understood to refer to the weakness of protests against the atrocities committed by the Mau Mau fighters, which were conducted only in whispers, but it can also be interpreted as gesturing towards the power and possibility of whispers in the face of the unspeakable. Ajany's art, and its capacity to access the silent spaces of the novel, offers a way for the text to navigate this treachery of words.

Her artistic talent is linked with the ability to recover – or more accurately re-present, in the sense of bringing a version into the present/presence – the lost, the dead or the forgotten. Her first attempts at art, which won prizes in her school, depict the silences and secrets that haunt her family life. Her parents respond to her work by burning the paintings: "[t]hey saw the stories as they would see secret nightmares. In the faces and patterns their daughter had conjured, her parents recognised

their enemies and some of the devils that haunted them” (51). Whilst Ajany grew up with fractured half answers, she is able to paint the hidden stories that lurk in the silences of Wuoth Ogik. This recuperative or restorative ability is also central to her reconstruction of Hugh Bolton’s skull in the novel. After she encounters the skeleton in the cave, Ajany is haunted by it (and its manifestation in the figure of Obarogo) for years after and, in Brazil, starts to reconstruct his skull: “the form had journeyed with her for seven years, traversed the Americas, wrapped in brown paper, waiting for dimensions, nuances, completion, and a name” (49). After Isaiah finds her in Nairobi, she continues the project to reconstruct the skull based on her memories, Isaiah’s face and an old photograph of Hugh:

Inside a Nairobi guest room, a skull acquires its own eyes. Fingers mold contours and crevices, drawn from worlds of feeling that she has known and that she imagines [...]. Ajany has done this before, always returning to the memory of the cave for meaning.

[...].

Hugh Bolton’s gaze.

Obarogo.

She drops the photograph. Picks it up, hands it over to Isaiah. Not looking.

Composing herself, she touches his face instead, tugging at skin [...]. She touches Isaiah’s mouth to learn it and transfer it to clay.

(265)

I have quoted at some length here because this complicated scene draws together many of the novel’s recurring leitmotifs and connected concerns. Most obviously, there is the allusion to Obarogo – the horror story that Odidi used to tell Ajany when she was a child, of a monster living under the bed who would steal young girls’ eyes, which her child’s mind had connected to the skeleton in the cave. Additionally, the eyes, staring back at the artist, gesture towards Akai’s eyes in Hugh’s paintings of her, as well as Justina’s paintings of Odidi. *Dust*’s return to the image of the eyes looking out at the artist draws together the novel’s engagement with the politics and economies of representation.

Furthermore, Ajany is reversing the power dynamics present in Hugh’s paintings of Akai in that she is becoming responsible for representing Bolton. Rather than a strict forensic approach, she weaves together her impressions of the long dead Bolton with Isaiah’s face. Of course, Isaiah’s illegitimate parentage means that his face bears no certain resemblance to Hugh’s. Accordingly, Ajany’s representation of Hugh – based, in part, on Isaiah’s face – can be understood to reflect the latter’s imagined longing for the father he never knew. It is not Hugh Bolton that Ajany is depicting, but rather the ghosts that have haunted her family, and Isaiah as well. These pasts, both those recorded and imagined, are brought together into the present in order to resurrect and reconstruct the unquiet dead that have disturbed all of their lives for so long.

Ajany’s artistic reconstruction of Hugh Bolton can also be read in relation to Wuoth Ogik, in its capacity as Hugh’s monument. Her careful reconstruction of his skull visibly echoes the kinds of colonial statues and memorials that Wuoth Ogik can be read to symbolise. Crucially, however, rather than being erected as a monument to colonial domination, in line with the allegorical function of statues wherein they stand as immortal invocations of long dead bodies, her sculpture is a creative re-imagining whose purpose is to represent her response to the tangible man behind the lingering phantoms (thereby dispelling the figment of Obarogo). In other words, the asymmetrical dynamics of representation existent in Hugh’s paintings of Akai are overturned and Hugh Bolton can finally be buried (literally and metaphorically). By offering new ways of accessing buried secrets and silenced histories through art, the novel suggests that it becomes possible to produce more habitable modes of occupying the present, ones that are less haunted by the traumas of the past.

This can also be seen through Ajany’s relationship with Nyipir. Towards the end of the novel, when Nyipir has erected graves for Odidi and Bolton in order to lay their bodies to rest, he finally tells Ajany about his past and his search for his father and brother.

Once he has told her about his quest for his lost relatives – which took him from his home and into the path of Hugh Bolton – Ajany recreates their images for him:

Before Nyipir crossed the threshold that separated Wuoth Ogik from the rest of the world, Ajany gave him her sketchbook. Inside were two watercolours: one an impression of his brother, Theophilus, and the other his father, Agoro, revealed in colours taken from shades of longing within Baba’s voice. He inserted Odidi’s photograph into the pages: all the Oganda men in one place.

(361–62)

The lost, scattered and dead Oganda men are finally reunited through Ajany’s ability to recuperate and represent the past through her art. Nyipir takes these paintings with him when he leaves Wuoth Ogik, leaving the ghost of Hugh Bolton with it.

It is interesting to read Owuor’s engagement with the unquiet dead bodies of Kenya in relation to the symbolic disembodiment of women produced by state ideologies. In the novel, it is *male* bodies that are positioned as the speechless, symbolic repositories for nationalist imaginings. Hugh Bolton, the dead and dispossessed coloniser and Odidi Oganda, whose brutal murder opens the novel, are the dead bodies around which this narrative revolves. The action of the novel centres

around their (re)burials. A dead body is meaningful not in itself but through culturally established relations to death and through the way a specific dead person's importance is variously constructed (Verdery 28). The speechlessness of dead bodies acts to both collect and dispel contesting interpretations, and is a site of uncertainty (29). In placing these two acts of burial – one of a freshly dead corpse and one long gone – at the centre of the novel, Owuor draws attention to the political and personal significance of these acts. The metaphorical architecture that positions women as symbolic sites is disputed in *Dust*, as it is these men's allegorical presences that are being reworked by women artists (Ajany and Owuor).

Hugh Bolton's corpse haunts the narrative. His body can be read in various ways because it is invoked both in terms of a memorialised historical presence – through the monument-like nature of the house, which is infested with relics of his life – and as an anonymous corpse. In many ways, the house can be read along the same lines as a statue commemorating a colonial settler – along the lines of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes that used to sit in front of the University of Cape Town in South Africa.

These kinds of monuments perform a dual function:

They symbolise a specific famous person while in a sense also *being* the body of that person. By arresting the process of that person's bodily decay a statue alters the temporality associated with the person, bringing him into the real of the timeless or the sacred, like an icon.

(Verdery 5)

Statues act to render these dead personages permanently visible in a way that an actual dead body can never be (12).

This function of producing a permanent visibility and presence is also fulfilled by Wuoth Ogik. In many ways, the house can be interpreted as an allegorical statue. Consider how the house perpetuates his presence, albeit in a fractured and haunting manner:

Next door, the library-study, family room with functional furniture [...]. A rough shelf laden with the weight of Someone Else's Baudelaire, George Sand, Charles Dickens, the Brontës, Carle Vernet, Flaubert, encyclopaedia, and books on engineering, empire and agriculture.

[...].

Ajany pulls out a large grey *History of Art* and turns to the first blank page. There "Hugh Bolton" has scrawled his name in semi-cursive script. Most of the books had once belonged to Hugh Bolton. Odidi nicknamed Hugh Bolton "Someone Else." "Whose books are these?" Odidi asked his parents one day. Akai ma had snarled, "Someone else's."

(53–54)

His books and paintings, scattered throughout the house, invoke and preserve his presence. His

knowledge, influence and artistic representations of the world continue to affect the people living within Wuoth Ogik, despite the fact that he is long dead.

Later in the novel, when Isaiah is speaking to Ali Dida Hada, the policeman in charge of the search for Hugh Bolton, about his father's disappearance, he uses these relics as evidence of his presence:

Isaiah continues, "His books, art, the house itself – his signature. He was there."
Isaiah pulls out the draft house sketches from inside his coat. He unfolds and spreads the paper out on the table. He points: "My father's work."
(215)

Wuoth Ogik and the objects contained within it act as a monument to Hugh Bolton, consistently invoking him in the present. Considering the links that Owuor draws between Wuoth Ogik and the Kenyan nation state, it is possible to read this haunting relationship between the house and its builder as a commentary on the persisting presence of colonial influence in contemporary Kenya.

Ali Dida Hada's internal response to Isaiah's statement illustrates how Kenya is replete with these colonial monuments:

But there were houses like this everywhere. Homes taken from colonial-era owners. After the new owners moved in, old, misunderstood household goods – books, artwork, and cutlery – were left untouched to gather dust or quietly decompose with everything else. Nobody asked why or how.
(215)

In this way, Wuoth Ogik represents both the specific and the general. Owuor focuses on the particularities of the Oganda's lives, bringing their characters to life in rich detail but also gesturing to the pervasiveness of the forms of violence that haunt them. The intricacies and intimacies of the Oganda's world speak for a much wider experience. It is this larger commentary that is invoked by Nyipir's reburial of Bolton's body. If we are to understand politics as "a realm of continual struggles over meanings or significations" then dead bodies help us "to see political transformation as more than a technical process" and thereby realise that "the 'something more' includes meanings, feelings, the sacred, ideas of morality" (Verdery 25).

Owuor's treatment of Hugh Bolton's body is intimately linked with her representation of Kenya. Katherine Verdery explicitly aligns constructions of nationalism with the politics of death: "instead of seeing nationalism, for instance, in the usual way – as a matter of territorial borders, state-making, 'constructionism', or resource competition – I see it as part of kinship, spirits, ancestor worship and the circulation of cultural treasures" (26). The politics of death draws on cosmologies and practices relating the living to the dead. Burying and reburying bodies explicitly shifts the ways in which the living are supposed to relate to the dead: "politics around a reburied

corpse thus benefits from the aura of sanctity the corpse is presumed to bear, and from the implicit suggestion that a reburial (re)sacralizes the political order represented by those who carry it out” (32).

Nyipir’s exhumation of Hugh’s body, and his subsequent reburial in a cairn next to Odidi’s, is linked with the revelation of secrets and the undoing of silences. It is in the context of these burials that Isaiah finds out the truth of his heritage – as well as a more palatable version of how Bolton died – and Ajany hears about her dead siblings, Ewoi and Etir. In this closing section of the novel, the silences of the Oganda family – and Kenya’s history more generally – are revealed against the backdrop of the novel’s (re)burials. Drawing on the power of reburial to reframe the past, Owuor depicts these burials as redemptive, freeing silenced and forgotten histories by publicly burying the dead that haunt them.

Crucially, before these dead bodies can be buried and their associated silences expunged, Ajany ‘finds’ them through artistic representation. Her sculpture of Bolton blends together memory and record, past and present, and creates a bridge between her and Isaiah. By uncovering the secrets ingrained within both of their families – and finding their families to be very different to how they once imagined and understood them – Ajany and Isaiah open up new, more open-ended ways of relating to themselves and others. Their relationship seems to suggest that, once they have understood their relation to their respective families to be both fragile and flexible, they become more willing to come to terms with the past (through abandoning Wuoth Ogik and the bodies buried there) and more receptive to an increasingly inclusive future (by journeying from Wuoth Ogik together).

Similarly, it is through her art that Ajany uncovers the truths of Odidi’s life in Nairobi and, through Justina, is able to find some degree of consolation for her grief at his death with the fact of Justina’s pregnancy. When faced with her brother’s death, Ajany thinks to herself:

Here. She could paint this; hold the brush as a stabbing knife. There. Colouring in landscapes of loss. She could draw this for him, this longing to hear his particular voice, listening for echoes of bloodied footsteps, borrowing dead eyes to help her find him again. Here. Jagged precipices of wounding, and over cliffs, an immense waterfall of yearning, falling and falling into nothingness.

(Owuor 18)

Her art allows her to both locate herself and simultaneously invoke that which she has lost. When she returns to Nairobi from Wuoth Ogik in order to ‘find Odidi’, she buys art materials, drawing his face in order to photocopy it and plaster his image around the city. Although Odidi is already dead at this

point, her paintings of him allow her to find his lover, Justina, and piece together the remnants of his life.

Interestingly, it is through Justina's art that Ajany is able to 'find' Odidi. Justina notices Ajany searching the streets of Nairobi, trying to find out what had happened to her brother and invites her into her home: "Justina points to a canvas on the wall. Next to one of the photocopies of Odidi that Ajany had distributed, Odidi's eyes, a triptych in four shades of rust" (195). It is at this point that Ajany finds out that Justina is pregnant with her brother's child:

The baby kicks.

Odidi, Ajany calls with all her heart, *Odidi*.

She exhales.

This she can paint.

[...].

She could sketch hope living in a womb, the best portions of a brother's life – shoes, football, a woman, and an unborn child [...]. Two women crying while the beloved unborn and the now dead listen.

(199).

This scene creates a link between the capacity of art to reconnect with a lost past as well as its ability to imagine a more fruitful future.

Ajany's art is also connected to her ability to place herself more comfortably; her struggles in school are alleviated by her talent. She is desperately unhappy at school, overshadowed by Odidi until:

[O]ne Christmas holiday when Ajany was eleven and a bit, and had found a new way of speaking what clamoured inside her. She drew shapes, forms, and creatures. [She had] the sense that what she felt was what it was like to be born at last.

(51)

In this extract, it is possible to see how Owuor positions art as a medium for self definition, expression and renewal. This capacity for Ajany's art to allow her to locate and understand herself is particularly interesting when read in conjunction with the homelessness and dispossession she feels as a result of the structural violence of the nation state, and with her imbrication in stories with no space for her.

Pumla Dineo Gqola asserts that this kind of self-definitive representation by black women should be considered a core focus of postcolonial feminism. For Gqola, art-as-praxis offers a way of opening the terrain of black women's representation and theorisation in order to experiment with new ways of being and knowing:

Reciprocity marks the connection between experience and theory, so that representations in creative texts are seen as enriching the variety of possibilities of Blackwomen's theories in Africa [...]. Many of the ways in which Blackwomen

imagine feminism and postcoloniality are through creative media, not traditionally subsumed under the terrain of theory building.

(11)

I read *Gqola* as positioning black women's art as a way of bridging the gap between experience and theory in order to create more capacious modes of imagining black women's identities and lived experiences. Owuor's experimental text and her concern with the violence endured by women – Ajany, Selene and Akai are all abused by a romantic partner and Justina is a sex worker by trade – can be read in relation to *Gqola*'s assertion. For *Gqola*, "the task of representing Blackwomen in postcolonial ways is challenging since it demands from us that we create and refashion forms of representation which continue to break new ground" (15). The textual presence of 'silence' – with particular reference to Ajany's ability to inhabit it – gestures towards the novel's concern with representing a path to more hospitable ways of narrating black women – and people more widely – into the world.

The possibilities inherent in Ajany's art can also be read as an allegorical commentary on *Dust*'s position within the Kenyan national literary cannon. Ultimately, Ajany's art is framed as being able to "paint a river out of Wuoth Ogik" (195). It is useful to engage with this phrase within the context of the novel's complicated symbolic depiction of water. Whilst an analysis of the exact intricacies and complexities of the text's depiction of water, fire and the earth are beyond the scope of this discussion, in broad strokes water in the text is metaphorically positioned as both a repository for secrets as well as a catalyst for cleansing and renewal.

Information in the various searches for Hugh Bolton – by Ali Didi Hada and Isaiah Bolton – is associated with water. The Trader says to Isaiah, "[i]n the places of water, where stories are left to be found, long-ago tales of a man named Hugh Bolton linger" (131). Similarly, for Ali Didi Hada, "the name Bolton was vapour at the water holes" (234). In the larger context of the novel, water is connected with a kind of revelation, or more accurately: "[w]atering holes are littered with memory ciphers" (328). Odidi, a water engineer, aimed to uplift Kenya through the construction of hydroelectric dams; linking the good governance and equitable distribution of water with a project of national stimulation. Even Wuoth Ogik's inhospitable silences are disturbed by the house's water tanks: "[a] creak and grumble from one of two massive water tanks sitting on platforms and posts inside the roof. They had leaked for years, creating a grooved, reliable wide tear line that sustained the life of small things" (55). This image of leaking water tanks slowly eroding the house, creating a tiny space in which small things can thrive is suggestive in terms of the novel's larger engagement with the relationship between silence and the marginalised.

The purifying and restorative powers of water are illustrated during Ajany's cleansing of Odidi's death place. Before she has found Justina and discovered the factors leading to Odidi's death, Ajany returns to the scene of his murder and washes the road clean:

She has poured water onto the wound in the ground, and scrubbed with her fingers and hands. But before she poured the water, she had bent over, rested her head on the warm tarmac, touched the memory blood with her face. Ears to the ground, listening and waiting. Becoming Odidi. Waiting, toppling over the limits of space, and as she stares at the below, she can see Odidi's footsteps and they are turned toward Wuoth Ogik. *Odidi!* she whimpers.

Silence answers.

It bursts inside her.

(189–90)

Ajany's ability to connect with a dead, lost past allows her to 'topple over the limits of space' and see her brother's dying desire to return home. Crucially, this moment of revelation is followed by a cleansing of water – removing the evidence of Odidi's death from the earth.

It is after this moment, where the busy life of Nairobi continues around her and her pain is made invisible by the machinations of everyday citizenry – “when a nation has smoldered inside the small egos of broken men who would be kings [...] a small woman scrubbing blood off a potholed road is nothing to marvel at” (190) – that Justina sees Ajany. This pattern of painful revelation, cleansing and the possibility of renewal occurs again at the novel's end with the destruction of Wuoth Ogik.

Consider the role that women play in this pattern of destruction and renewal. Selene began the disruption of Hugh Bolton's genetic legacy through her infidelity, which eventually brought Isaiah to Kenya where he helps to bury Hugh and burn Wuoth Ogik. It is Akai who notes that “a spirit solution requires a forfeit. A scapegoat. What is she willing to offer? Soul healing needs sacrifice” (200). The spirit solution she decides upon is to burn the drought grass at Wuoth Ogik and take all the livestock, effectively ending Nyipir's occupation of the land. Finally, it is Ajany who lights the fire at the end of the novel to burn down Wuoth Ogik. The women in the novel are active participants in the destruction of the inhospitable structures of the home and the nation. Through the implicated legacies of state violence – how the silences and erasures of the contemporary Kenyan nation state are structurally linked with the violences of colonialism – as well as the inherent hostility of the nation state towards women, Owuor problematises the national project. For Boehmer, independence involves the transfer of power amongst men:

These offices and other state formations, instruments of colonial rule imported from Europe, in any case remained in form and expression patrimonial [values]. Further legitimation of the state's power required the family metaphor – local, familiar,

embedding the a-political, domestic character of women – could again be put to official use [...]. Postcolonial independence across the world has by and large manifested as a take-over, rather than a radical transformation of gendered power [...]. The nation as a body of people was imagined as a family arrangement in which the leaders had the authority of fathers and, in relation to the maternal national entity, adopted the position of sons.

(*Women* 33–34)

Through the metaphor of the family, the power structures established by violent colonial rule were legitimised and translated into the postcolonial context. The lack of radical revolution in the structure of the nation state has resulted in the continued dispossession and marginalisation of women.

Boehmer positions women's literature as having the power to disrupt these legacies of nationalism. According to her, "when these marginalised groups begin to claim access, even if circumspectly to the public sphere, they go against the hegemonic line when they tell their own histories, re-place the unplaced space in the national drama with the concrete figures, bodies and voices of daughters" (*Women* 35). Ajany's art serves as a catalyst for the reburial of the unquiet dead and the associated recovery of lost histories, which speaks to the role of women's writing within the contemporary moment. Whilst Boehmer imagines women's literature as being able to challenge oppressive narratives and create more capacious modes of living for women within the national context, my reading of *Dust* suggests that Owuor's position is more radical than this. Consider the fate of Wuoth Ogik. Rather interestingly, once its residents – Akai, Nyipir and Galgalu – have left, Isaiah and Ajany burn the house down:

Ajany and Isaiah are the last to leave Wuoth Ogik. They leave so the fire burning down the house can finish its work. The house glows. Resin-infused flames. Everything – wood, books, art, chairs, memories – turns to ash. At first the fire had mesmerised them [...]. But then, seduced by the fire's frenzied freedom, they had danced before it giddy as children, and in their dancing there was fire.

(363)

The house's metaphorical position in the text – particularly with reference to the ways in which it embodies the links between the colonial and postcolonial nation states – suggests that this decision to burn it down, and the subsequent elation and celebration experienced by its inhabitants at its destruction, is representative of Owuor's vision for the future of the Kenyan nation state.

After Ajany and Isaiah leave, a great flood sweeps the landscape, tearing down Wuoth Ogik, erasing the features of the landscape around it. Crucially, Ajany and Isaiah are caught in this flood and their fate is uncertain:

A rushed, endless plunge.

Later, at the tip of the water, the woman called out to the man. Her voice was smooth, as if newborn. Her eyes contained the shine that marked those who emerge out of chasms. It took an eternity before he answered. Dripping water, he asked if this was the road that led to the place where journeys ended.

(363–64)

Ajany and Isaiah's baptism by fire, and then subsequently by water, echoes the fate of the house. Their bodies, while dancing at the site of Wuoth Ogik's destruction, reflect the flames and later, they are threatened with drowning, even as the house is. Perhaps Ajany and Isaiah emerge from the floods, reborn or, perhaps it is the fate of revolutionaries and artists to be caught in the destruction of their own making. At this point, Owuor seems to be gesturing towards her vision for the future of the Kenyan nation state: the necessity of sacrificial destruction, a revelatory washing clean of silenced histories. Only thereafter can Kenya's citizens start looking forward to an uncertain but hopefully more egalitarian future.

The novel ends on an obscure, but tentatively positive note:

Within sight of what had been Wuoth Ogik, a spread-out acacia sprouts green life [...]. The bluster of air currents flanking the country disturbs the quiet care of a graying midwife crouched in front of a long-limbed, painting woman who has just given birth to twins – a boy and a girl, who emerged with little arms entwined around each other.

(265)

It is suggestive to read this scene as depicting Justina giving birth to her and Odidi's children. Brother and sister, wrapped around each other, born into a landscape washed clean. Though Ajany and Isaiah's fate – as potential nation-destroyers, through both literal acts of arson and through recuperative artistic strategies – is uncertain, the novel gestures towards a more equal and fertile future. Rather than mimicking the protective brother and silent sister relationship between Odidi and Ajany, the brother and sister born here are equal inheritors and inhabitants of this uncertain, unstable future space that, although it lies in sight of the structures of the past, is characterised by a blooming of new life.

The novel's elaborate and, at times, opaque engagement with the relationships between history and the present, silence and the production of space, women and the possibilities of representation serves as a complex statement regarding the prospects for Kenya's future. Central to the text's vision for a future outside of those violent structures haunted by the atrocities of the past

and riddled with inhospitable silences, is the role of women-as-artist. Ajany's ability to recover and represent lost, suppressed and buried histories in order to more fully grapple with the silences that plague the present can be read as an allegorical commentary on Owuor's own engagement with Kenyan literature and her attempt to narrate more capacious modes of living outside of restricting nationalist narratives. In *Dust*, it is possible to read both a deeply pessimistic commentary on the current state of the postcolonial nation as well as a tentatively optimistic vision of a more equal, rejuvenated future.

Conclusion

Anne Enright's *The Green Road* contends with the family's position as a crucial site of identity construction, and depicts the means by which the individual's experience in the family provides her with particular expectations of, and orientations toward, the world that surrounds her. In particular, this novel draws attention to the associations that exist between the metaphorical architecture of the family and the imaginary geographies of the nation state. Through her account of the quotidian lives of the Madigan family, Enright throws into sharp relief the challenges and impossibilities associated with occupying the space of contemporary Irish nationality. Of particular concern to my project is *The Green Road's* preoccupation with the link between the individual's relationship to the home, and her ability to inhabit the world. With specific reference to the characters of Dan and Rosaleen Madigan, I demonstrate how the inability to feel comfortable within the home translates into difficulty occupying those social structures into which the family is integrated.

As a homosexual man, Dan Madigan is estranged from those narratives of heterosexual continuity that underpin and propagate the heteronormative family structure. The novel suggests a link between the hostility of the heteronormative home towards the queer individual and the unsettled and mobile means of being and loving that Dan demonstrates in his adult life. Using the theoretical discussion surrounding the queer diaspora, it becomes possible to read the New York chapter, which loosely follows Dan Madigan but takes a community of gay men as its subject, as a representation of the possibilities of alternate forms of kinship relations, unbound by the demands and expectations of normative biological filiation. This vision of a kinship structure unencumbered by narratives of origin – as the queer diaspora has no homosexual homeland from which to become displaced – provides an open-ended gesture towards the prospects of inclusive community.

The orchestration of community, and its reliance upon violent forms of (mis)recognition, is investigated and troubled through Rosaleen Madigan, and her relationship with her family. Her children's inability to know or relate to her, coupled with her discomfort in their ancestral home, illustrates the novel's preoccupation with challenging static, archetypal identity positions such as 'Mother'. Rosaleen's discomfort with her role as mother, and the ways in which it locates her in the family, gestures towards the restrictive structures of the normative family. Her decision to sell the house brings her children home and necessitates a reworking of their relation to the space, and to their family. The novel's climax – where Rosaleen becomes lost in the Irish countryside and her children, also wandering aimlessly in the dark, find her – can be read as signifying the potential of

such disorientating experiences for opening new means of inhabiting kinship structures and relating to those around you.

My reading of Petina Gappah's *The Book of Memory* expands upon this involvement with the limitations of recognition and its centrality to all forms of relation. Through the central motif of the prison, Gappah's novel provides a meditation upon the possibilities of reading another, being read by those around one, and writing oneself. The protagonist, Memory, uses the form of the prison narrative in an attempt to exculpate herself in the eyes of the public and, by doing so, uncovers and makes sense of her life experiences. She positions this narrative work as redemptive and liberating, allowing for a sense of agency and control, even from inside a literal prison.

Gappah's engagement with the economies of visibility allows for an investigation of the limitations of encounters between people and the harms embedded in all forms of relation. The narrator unpacks and challenges the social schema that have positioned her uncomfortably as both hyper visible yet subject to a dehumanising erasure. Memory's bodily and cultural hybridity renders her social position – between two families, two cultures and two histories – fraught but also filled with possibility. It is her unique insight, as a result of her privileged access to two cultures, that allows her to provide a nuanced commentary on Zimbabwe's fractured social landscape and global political position through her personal narrative work. This opportunity, however, is costly as her position in two cultures foregrounds the ways in which her membership in both is conditional, tenuous and limited.

In working through her conflicting social and subject positionality, Memory is negotiating her relation to, and the broader legacy of, the remnants of colonial culture in Zimbabwe. Contained within the narrator's attempt to map and understand her association with her adoptive white family, the reader encounters a mediation of Zimbabwean postcoloniality. The protagonist's experiences of discrimination provide commentary on the wider social operation of recognition, the production and reception of stories and the asymmetries of global power. By means of Memory's narrative, Gappah challenges the reader's relationship to Zimbabwean stories and histories, and offers new ways of knowing and telling across boundaries.

Much of Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's *Dust* is concerned with the habitability of social structures and histories. Through Ajany Oganda's attempt to come to terms with her brother's death and uncover the hidden parts of her family history, Owuor locates Kenya's difficult histories of violence and erasure within the domestic space. The motif of the crumbling colonial house, *Wuoth Ogik*, provides commentary on the inhospitability of the Kenyan family structure, nation state and

historical record. By means of the disruptive possibilities contained within the unstable historical and familial landscape of the text, new ways of inhabiting space and stories emerge. The novel suggests that reworking the contours and trajectories of the kinship structure allows for alternate expressions of, and relations to, the nation state to develop.

The continuing existence of silenced or erased histories is linked to the irreconcilability of Kenyan national history, or, more specifically, the paradoxes of the Kenyan nation state. Owuor draws attention to the contested narratives that inform and embody contemporary Kenyan-ness and the violence implicated in the production of such narratives. Kenya's history of assassinations, and the subsequent persistent presence of the novel's unquiet dead, is causally linked to brutality of state machinations and the cost of maintaining political power. The text's deliberate association of the nation state with these murdered bodies means that those questions surrounding how to deal with the unburied or unsettled dead are also implicated in questions regarding how to exhume and lay to rest the troubled histories and silences of Kenya. *Dust* deliberately invokes and draws attention to the existence of illegible silences and tells a story that is constantly interrupted by the presence of the marginalised, disappeared and forgotten.

A sustained concern of the text is the relative habitability of the nation state, with particular reference to the hostility of state structures towards black women. By depicting Ajany and Akai's difficulties locating themselves within kinship and state structures, Owuor links and problematises these social formations. The depth and breadth given to women's experiences in the novel speaks to *Dust's* concern with recentering marginalised and silenced stories and repositioning women as the focus of narratives that otherwise might exclude them. This illustration of the ways in which the family and the state deny women's subjectivity and agency allows for a consideration of the modes of disruption available to oppressed subjects. As such, Ajany's ability to engage with silence through art is positioned as a critical means by which power can be challenged and subverted. Owuor's examination and critique of the nation state constitutes a provocative gesture towards more radical forms of social connection, as well as a powerful demonstration of the role art has to play in conceptualising new possibilities for subversive social structures.

Finding Space for Failed Families

Whilst I have addressed the novels' shared concerns regarding the consequences and possibilities of the family in society, I have not yet attended to the similarities that exist between the novels'

respective endings. Owuor, Gappah and Enright's texts all share an acknowledgement of the limitations of their respective projects, as well as what I would describe as a tentatively optimistic acceptance of this inevitable failure. This failure expresses itself variously; in the persistence of misrecognition in the Madigan family, the irreconcilability of the obstacles facing Memory, and the continuing hostility of the nation state as experienced by Ajany. Although these novels all arrive at their various degrees of disaster by their own routes, I would argue that their impediments and frustrations can be read in complementary ways. Specifically, it is my contention that these uncomfortable endings participate in a project of widening the imaginary landscape so as to include such visions of failure in more capacious and hospitable futures.

Consider the ambivalence of *The Green Road*'s ending – after the family's almost epiphanic coming together in the Irish countryside, the Madigans separate and drift once again. Rosaleen sells *Ardeevin*, her children disperse and she refuses to settle on a new home, leading the narrator to comment: "There would be no perfect house, how could there be?" (Enright 303). The novel's end, an ambiguous scene where Rosaleen touches Denholm, her son's Kenyan roommate, raises questions about the possibilities of relation across socially constructed divides and signals the presence of social partitions that remain even after moments of apparent closure. *The Green Road*'s refusal of a permanent resolution to the tensions and fractures present in the Madigan family structure, followed by its closing on the fraught interaction between Rosaleen and Denholm, denies the reader catharsis and underscores the fragility, impermanence and insufficiency of the kinds of transgressive loves present in the text.

Similarly, whilst *The Book of Memory*'s protagonist may have come to terms with her past through narratively unpacking it, she is still only able to access a qualified and limited freedom as she remains physically incarcerated. Gappah's novel echoes the limited resolution of Enright's text through emphasising the vulnerability of the kinds of communities the novel celebrates. In the novel's final chapter, Memory, alone in prison, is visited by her former inmates. The scene is marked by laughter and humorous anecdotes about the ex-convicts' lives outside of jail. In the midst of this festivity, the narrator remarks: "I wondered for how long they would come. Will they still come in one year, in three years, in five? Will they come in ten? [...] They will forget this place. They should forget this place. They will forget me" (265). Even during this moment of political triumph, personal validation and communal celebration, the tenuous and fleeting nature of community is invoked and Memory's estrangement is brought to the fore.

Owuor's novel features perhaps the most striking ending, with the destruction of Wuoth Ogik and the uncertain fates of Ajany and Isaiah. After the Oganda family has completely scattered and dispersed, *Wuoth Ogik* burns and a great flood sweeps the landscape.

Ajany and Isaiah are caught in this flood and the narrator comments:

Later, at the tip of the water, the woman called out to the man. Her voice was smooth, as if newborn. Her eyes contained the shine that marked those who emerge out of chasms. It took an eternity before he answered. Dripping water, he asked if this was the road that led to the place where journeys ended.

(Owuor 363–64)

This enigmatic moment in the text can be read as redemptive wherein Ajany and Isiah escape chasms – or tragic, wherein they drown and reach the end of their journey. *Dust* denies uncomplicated catharsis and leaves the fate and future of its protagonists uncertain.

These visions of failure can be traced variously to the inhabitability of the structure of the normative family – due to its reliance upon (mis)recognitions, its defining and thus delimiting difference, and its policing of the boundary between a group relegated to a position of 'them' in order to produce a community welcomed as 'us'. Ultimately, these novels' ambivalent, melancholy endings gesture towards a fundamental impossibility that lies at the heart of any community that attempts to welcome widely and transgressively.

At the centre of the thicket that surrounds the literature on hospitality lies Jacques Derrida's discussion of the aporia of hospitality: that this impossibility of unconditional hospitality is its very condition of existence (75). Derrida outlines the issue as follows:

Where do these strange processes of hospitality lead? These interminable, uncrossable thresholds, and these aporias? [...]. It is as though hospitality were the impossible: as though the law of hospitality defined this very impossibility, as if it were only possible to transgress it, as though *the* law of absolutely, unconditional, hyperbolic hospitality, as though the categorical imperative of hospitality commanded that we transgress all the laws (in the plural) of hospitality, namely, the conditions, the norms, the rights and the duties that are imposed on hosts and hostesses, on the men and women who give a welcome as well as the men or women who receive it.

(75–76)

In order to provide unconditional hospitality, one must extend a welcome that exceeds the limits that make hospitality possible, thinkable. In other words, infinite hospitality is both enabled and disabled by its own impossibility. .

For the purposes of this discussion, I will focus on the role that recognition and acknowledgement plays in creating these unobtainable requirements for hospitality. In his engagement with the requirements of hospitality, Derrida asks the reader to imagine the moment of

an unconditional welcome, wherein the host is required to say “yes to *who or what turns up*, before any determination, before any participation, before any *identification*” (77, original emphasis). This encounter would be riven by “an insoluble antinomy, a non-dialectisable antinomy” between the prerequisites of this all-encompassing welcome and the requirements of “those rights and duties that are always conditioned and conditional [...] across the family, civil society and the State” (77). These contingent rights and duties of the citizen, of the member who belongs, render the demands of unconditional hospitality unobtainable. If the processes of knowing rely on, and thereby necessitate, an element of misrecognition and, if the processes of welcome or hospitality require you to know the person invited, then welcome requires misrecognition and an unconditional welcome lies outside the bounds of the possible. You cannot welcome the unknown if knowing is a condition of welcome. Paradoxically, however, the law of unconditional hospitality relies upon the existence of the laws of the state: “[b]ut even while keeping itself above the laws of hospitality, *the* unconditional law of hospitality needs the laws [of Judeo-Christian society], it *requires* them [...] In order to be what it is, *the* law [of unconditional hospitality] needs the laws [of Judeo-Christian society], which, however, deny it” (79). In short, the regulations of civil society and the requirements of relation simultaneously allow and deny the prospect of unconditional hospitality. This irreconcilability is not irrevocably detrimental, however. Sara Ahmed discusses, in much detail, the processes by which the familiar and the strange are mutually constituted. For Ahmed, it is the presence of the stranger that allows the familiar to emerge and be (mis)recognised:

In this sense, the (mis)recognition of strangers serves to differentiate between the familiar and the strange, a differentiation that allows the figure of the stranger to appear. The failure embedded in such (mis)recognition – rather than the failure of recognition – determines the impossibility of reducing the other to the figure of the stranger.

(Ahmed 24)

She therefore concludes that, “it is the recognition of others that is central to the constitution of the subject” (24). As a result of the reciprocal relationship between the familiar and the strange, Ahmed argues – in keeping with Derrida – that the strange is necessarily present within the familiar (24). It follows that in such acts of discursive exclusion, the unknown and unwelcomed becomes incorporated into the space of the recognisable. Of course, any space that includes what it attempts to dispel becomes a fraught and unstable space, open to reworking and alteration. Consider the moment at the end of *The Green Road*, where Rosaleen touches Denholm’s arm, and she notices that the pale skin of his wrist is a similar colour to her own (300). In this encounter, the familiar and

the strange slide over one another, they become entangled in their overlapping and unstable presence that serves to render both states uncertain.

The incorporation of the strange into the familiar, and the resultant instabilities, has repercussions for the normative community and its relation to the transgressive kinship structure. This reliance upon failure, the presence of the impossible as the necessary condition of existence, is also remarked upon by Sara Ahmed when she notes that: “[i]t is the very potential of the community to fail which is required for the constitution of the community. The ideal community has to be worked towards and that labour requires failure as its moment of constitution” (26). In much the same way that the recognition of the familiar citizen requires, and invokes, the presence of the stranger, the failed family is present in all its more ‘successful’ permutations as well. Like the stranger, the abortive family is internal to, and extant within, its more recognisable and acceptable counterparts.

As a result of the mutually constitutive relationship between narrative and community, traces of those stories sheltered within fragile and precarious kinship structures can be found within those hegemonic histories as well. J Jack Halberstam remarks on the presence of failed stories within authoritative narratives: “[a]s a practice, failure recognises that alternatives are already embedded in the dominant and that power is never total or consistent” (88). Halberstam emphasises the political nature of failure, as well as its place and function within the kinds of revisionist, egalitarian work undertaken by postcolonial scholars:

While liberal histories build triumphant political narratives with progressive stories of improvement and success, radical histories must contend with a less tidy past, one that passes on legacies of failure and loneliness as the consequence of that homophobia and racism and xenophobia.

(99)

This characterisation of failure narratives as the traces that exist within the successful histories echoes Robert Young’s interpretation of postcolonialism as being about unfinished business. For Young, the aims of postcolonial work are:

[To] locate the hidden rhizomes of colonialism’s historical reach, of what remains invisible, unseen, silent, or unspoken. In a sense, postcolonialism has always been about the ongoing life of residues, living remains, lingering legacies [...]. Something remains, and the postcolonial is in many ways about such unfinished business, the continuing projection of past conflicts into the experience of the present, the insistent persistence of the afterimages of historical memory that drive the desire to transform the present.

(21)

Exploring Halberstam and Young alongside one another, I would argue that reading and recovering

stories of failure is a postcolonial act. The remains, the unfinished business, the hidden histories are present in the unsuccessful endings of the novels which I study.

The irreconcilabilities present in Enright, Owuor and Gappah's works participate in just such a legacy of failure with its subversive stories that are embedded within the dominant narrative. Whilst their stories do not resolve themselves or the wider issues they confront, their existence and their relation to the reader can be seen as a small act of revolution. Consider Ahmed's contention that encounters "constitute the space of the familial (by allowing the 'I' or the 'we' to define itself in relation to others who are already faced), but, in doing so, they shift the boundaries of what is familiar" (8). The unorthodox, impossible stories both exist within the primary account and simultaneously act to broaden the boundaries of what is included within the possible and recognisable.

Halberstam argues for the transformative power of these hidden histories when describing these records of failure in the following way:

[A] narrative about anticolonial struggle, the refusal of legibility, and an art of unbecoming. This is a story of art without markets, drama without a script, narrative without progress. The queer art of failure turns on the impossible, the improbable, the unlikely, and the unremarkable. It quietly loses, and in losing it imagines other goals for life, for love, for art and for being.

(88)

I would argue that the collapse and foundering present in the unorthodox families depicted by Owuor, Gappah and Enright participate in such a legacy of failure. These novels challenge the limits of community, stretch the boundaries of what it is possible to conceive of by incorporating some of those untold, silenced and illegible inconceivabilities.

By representing queer families, non-biological families, hybrid families and fractured families *Dust*, *The Green Road* and *The Book of Memory* expand the boundaries of the recognisable to incorporate traces of those transgressive, hybrid and failed formations of love. These novels share their acknowledgement of the limitations and impossibilities of a truly hospitable social structure, of limitless belonging, and boundless welcome. Equally, they participate in the commitment to representing the kinds of social structures and kinship relations that gesture towards such open-ended inclusivity, such generous incorporation. In doing so, they widen the discursive and imaginative landscape to make such generous acts of love slightly more conceivable, shifting the boundaries of the familiar to include its own failures.

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