

The Environmental Imagination in Arthur Nortje's Poetry

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to contribute to the conversations in the humanities about the treatment of the physical environment in the context of a global ecological fragility and increased scholarly interest in the poetry of Arthur Nortje, a South African poet who wrote in the 1960s. While previous studies on Nortje concentrate on the political, psychic and technical aspects of his poetry, this study particularly explores the representations of the environment in Nortje's poetic imagination. Writing in the dark period of apartheid in South Africa's history, Nortje's poetry articulates a strong interest in the physical environment against the backdrop of official racialization of space and his personal nomadic life and exile. The poetry abounds with constant intersections of nature and culture (industrialism, urbanity and the quotidian), a sense of place and a deep sense of dislocation. The poems, therefore, present a platform from which to re-evaluate conventional ecocritical ideas about nature, place-attachment and environmental consciousness. Drawing mainly on Félix Guattari's ideas of three ecologies and transversality along with other theories, I conduct the study through what I call a transversal postcolonial environmental criticism, which considers the ecological value of the kind of assemblages that Nortje's works represent. The first chapter focuses on conceptualizing a postcolonial approach to the environment based on Guattari's concept of transversality to lay the theoretical foundation for the whole work. The second chapter analyses Nortje's poetic imagination of place and displacement through his treatment of the private-public tension and the motif of exile. While the third chapter examines Nortje's depiction of nature as both an everyday and urban phenomenon, the fourth chapter turns to his direct treatment of environmental crises handled through his imagination of the Canadian urban spaces, exile memory of apartheid geography, war and ecocide and the human body as a subject of environmental degradation. The fifth chapter, which is the conclusion, takes a brief look at the implication of Nortje's complex treatment of the environment on postcolonial environmentalism.

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Tradition and the Individual Postcolonial Talent

My first proper encounter with Arthur Nortje was in 2012 through *Dead Roots* (1973). The poems in the collection surprised me by their combinations of energy and melancholy, measured lines and fragmentedness, deep interiority and a vision of things, the beautiful and the nauseating. I also found interesting the poetry's self-referentiality, its recurrent confessional mode and its rather unsettling blend of the political and the existential. The level of subjectivity encountered was unexpected in the context of apartheid-era poetry known for public-orientedness and confrontational activism. All these inspired an active search for information about the poet. I was surprised by the discovery of the enormous corpus of his works posed against the brevity of his life. But beyond that, I became aware of Nortje's special interest in the environment, and grew more concerned about how little his oeuvres received scholarly attention despite Dennis Brutus' description of him as "perhaps the best South African poet of our time" (27). A question that I have also grappled with, however, is that of the position, or even 'non-position', of Nortje in the tradition(s) of South African poetry, both in a general way and in specific relation to the environmental consciousness evident in his poetic output.

The mention of 'tradition' evokes T.S. Eliot's famous essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent", which proposes the need for writers to be aware of the tradition to which they belong and their place in it. This is achieved through what he calls "the historical sense" (37), which would make "a writer more acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity" (37). The historical sense is a function of the consciousness of the timeless and the temporal both separately and together. While Eliot does not necessarily propose a simplistic view of tradition as one smooth long story with events and periods connecting easily, it would not be too risky to suggest that Eliot wrote from an understanding of British and American literatures as forming such a narrative. The need to periodize literature always arises, perhaps, as a result of the desire to form a cohesive national narrative or to satisfy the primal human desire for rootedness. However, because the periodization of literature is made not only with the understanding that literature is often in conversation with surrounding history, but also with the sense of history as a singular timeline, it can be easy for literary histories to suggest a unitary view of history as opposed to its disparate and multi-layered realities. What then is the tradition for a postcolonial poet? A postcolonial is typically one educated in the traditions of

the colonizer, yet faced with the call, or even the loss, of a 'native' tradition. If Eliot's wisdom must be adhered to, what then would be the tradition for a postcolonial poet like Nortje, who suffered personal and collective dislocations in the face of spatial and cultural dispossessions, miscegenation, and various forms of marginalization? Where would he be placed if his ancestry had already denied him space in the western canon despite his training in its tradition? Or, inversely, where would he fit, if, as touted, his works diverge from the 'typical' political poetry that was produced by his contemporary black poets? These questions are important to this research as they anticipate the interrogation of tradition not only in terms of the production of literature but even in the (western) formulations of how we ought to think about the environment in a postcolonial world.

South African literary lineages typically betray an inability, or even unwillingness, perhaps, to contain the cultural heterogeneity that the nation represents. As such, it is easy to find such narratives restricted to language or race. Michael Chapman and Lewis Nkosi, for instance, have both provided developmental narratives of modern South African (and African) poetry, but with different emphases. Nkosi's idea of African poetry is that which is produced by *black* writers. He, therefore, points out quite emphatically that African poetry did not begin with "the advent of colonial education in Africa [...] [or] with the training of native speakers in the use of the European tongues" (107). Instead, it descended from a common precolonial African practice. His intention is also to make a distinction between the African poetry lineage from precolonial practice produced in indigenous languages and the African poetry influenced by and written in European languages. He traces the progression of African poetry in European languages through the black writing lineage, pointing out that "historically, it is possible to trace the beginnings of African poetry in the European languages, not in Africa itself but among African exiles in Europe and among ex-slaves of the New World" (108). For Nkosi, this points to the two-fold characteristic of 'modern' African poetry: physical and psychological alienation from the African soil and its political origins (108). He, however, traces the growth of black South African poetry in English to early mission-trained poets like B. W. Vilakazi, H. I. E. Dhlomo and J.J.R. Jolobe (112). While Chapman also discusses the works of these writers in his book *South African English Poetry: A Modern Perspective*, his major emphasis is on white settler poets. The whole work is divided into two major parts. In the first part, Chapman discusses poetic works from 1820 to 1960, whose writers he describes as colonial poets. In this group, he features poets like Thomas Pringle, Roy Campbell, William Plomer, Francis Carey Slater, H.I.E. Dhlomo and Guy Butler. In the second part of the work, Chapman turns to what he describes as modern South African poetry starting from 1960. The writers in this generation

include Douglas Livingstone, Ruth Miller, Sydney Clouts, Arthur Nortje, Wopko Jensma, Oswald Mtshali, Mongane Serote, Sipho Sepamla and Mafika Gwala.

Writing a bit earlier than both Chapman and Nkosi, Christopher Heywood provides a broader anatomy which divides South African literature in English into three major periods, namely 1830-1910, 1910-60, and 1960 to the present (xii). Although not restricted to poetry, his outline corresponds loosely to Chapman's. While the first group, 1830-1910, was concerned with the development of settler communities, the second period "saw a shift of conscience among white writers and the emergence of black writing" (xii). In the period from 1960, "the balance shifted further towards the acceptance of claims made by or on behalf of the African societies of southern Africa" (xii). Although Heywood's narrative conveys a semblance of inclusiveness, its imbalance is already dictated by the restriction placed by language. It is, however, Ursula A. Barnett who crosses the language barrier in order to trace an unbroken progress of black poetry in South Africa. According to her, "[p]oetry is the only form of literature by black writers in South Africa which has led in an almost direct line from the oral vernacular to the modern in either the vernacular or English" (42). She calls this the "crux of the difference between western poetry of the past two centuries and African poetry" (42). The different emphases of these outlines of South African literary traditions demonstrate that if not carefully handled, anatomies of South African literature would be only a gestural sketch of what is supposed to be a richer weaving of multiplicities and divergences. Fortunately, Chapman's more recent *Southern African Literatures* has sought to be more inclusive by retracing origins to precolonial oral traditions. Although the scope of the work is quite expansive in terms of genre and geography, as it covers literature in general from the Southern African region, it does lay a foundation for the sort of multiplicitous literary history that should be pursued. David Atwell and Derek Attridge, in their *The Cambridge History of South African Literature*, have also followed in these steps by compiling a survey that considers South Africa's cultural and historical heterogeneity. The most important aspect of their work lies in their ability to demonstrate the cultural multiplicities that the South African society and literature embody by their multilingual approach in which all eleven official languages of the country are utilized.

The question of the historiography of South African literature has continued to be a problematic area as suggested by the differing narratives above. The reason for this is not far from the inability of such anatomies to contain the diversities that a nation like South Africa embodies. Atwell notes that the challenge has been a matter of how to handle difference, how "to write a properly comparative and integrated literary history that takes into account the

multiplicity of languages, traditions, and social spaces in the country, the kind of literary history that would overcome the cultural balkanization that was apartheid's peculiar *forte*" (8). Lehmann, Reckwitz and Vennarini also point out the insufficiency of the Hegelian essentialist model of history to handle the "fragmentedness of literary articulation in South Africa that was due not only to its linguistic or cultural but also its racial and social divisiveness" (7). The normative linearity that underlies Eliot's thinking about tradition or history is thus being challenged by the delicate nature of South Africa's heterogeneities, interconnections and ruptures that have hampered the success of what can be called a national literary tradition in a homogenized sense.

The complexities are not just interracial, but even further within the different races and cultures. For instance, contrary to Barnett's view of continuity, black South African literature is described by Jane Watts as "no seamless garment with a sustained and continuing literary tradition" (1). It is rather a production from a vast array of cultures: "The related tribal cultures [...] have been overlaid by the heavy and alien cultural impact of English and Afrikaans, and touched at various points by Indian, Malay, Portuguese, Italian and European influences" (1). Watts mentions that from its earliest days African writing was subject to interference extending from

direct missionary intervention and the subtle ideological infiltration of English liberal humanism to the violent overt coercion evident in the Afrikaner Nationalist imposition of Bantu Education, the policy of separate development, the control of the media, the banning of works of literature and the subjection of writers to banning, exile, police harassment, imprisonment and, at times, death. Each generation of writers has had to start afresh with scarcely any access to literary models and in material, political and social circumstances that have changed, generation by generation, for the worse. (1)

On the other hand, Atwell complains about the oversimplification of reducing "black literary and cultural history [...] [to] that of the growth of political consciousness" (9) instead of the wide variety of issues treated by writers, such as "the place of Black people in Christianity, [...] the value of tradition, [...] the meaning of selfhood [...] [and] the social imagination" (9). He, therefore, suggests a move from "the survey to a more heuristic mode of reading, one that takes the literature's ideas more seriously" (9).

Nortje wrote in a significant period of South Africa's history, the 1960s, a period Chapman describes as South Africa's era of modern poetry, Heywood's third period. However, the term 'modern' itself has not found a stable definition. Nkosi notes how problematic the term is in application to the African poetry landscape if deployed as a western concept forced

uncritically on African cultural productions (126). In other words, the usage of the word to describe African poets would convey a different sense from how it is used to describe European modernism since in African poetry it denotes a hybridization of the modernist and traditional oral aesthetics. Feeling that the term is problematic with respect to South African literature, Atwell asserts that modernity is a concept which writers of each generation experience in different ways (3). However, the term can be employed, he suggests, to mean “the currently governing concept of what it means to be a subject of history” (3) in the light of the “powerful system of ideas that we inherit from the bourgeois revolutions of Europe in the late eighteenth century – ideas such as autonomy, personhood, rights, and citizenship” (3-4). While these views about how difficult it is to achieve periodization of the very disparate bodies of South Africa’s literary works convey the truth of the situation, it is still possible to point out, albeit carefully, certain characteristics that set the works produced in the so-called modern period apart as works that imagine change in the political atmosphere both locally and internationally.

Chapman, whose focus is on South Africa’s modern poets in his *South African English Poetry*, explains in what sense he uses the term ‘modern’. It covers a period of “rapid industrialisation and urbanisation” (11) and significant political events such as the Sharpeville shootings, the growth of Afrikaner nationalism and Black Consciousness movements, South Africa’s withdrawal from the Commonwealth, and the attainment of independence by many African countries, all of which engendered a more radical approach to viewing life and producing art (11). This context, which was at variance with the one in which the ‘colonial’ poets produced their works, led to “a special kind of imagination, the metaphors of which are change, transition and the plurality of culture” (10). Modern South African poetry is thus marked by “a sense of historical discontinuity, either a liberation from inherited patterns or, at the extreme, deprivation and despair [...] the violation of sanctioned procedures, the idea of self-signature or conversely of de-creation” (11). Major writers who fall into this category of modern poetry are Douglas Livingstone, Ruth Miller, Sydney Clouts, Oswald Mtshali, Mafika Gwala, James Matthews, Arthur Nortje and Wopko Jensma. Unlike Nkosi, however, Chapman foregrounds white South African poets and lumps the black writers together as Soweto Poets.

Stephen Gray, on the other hand, argues that the 1960s was a period in which what would have developed into a unified body of South African literature in the “spirit of the pre-republic days” (as demonstrated by the exhibition of “The Book in South Africa”, which displayed works by South African authors of different cultural and racial backgrounds alongside each other) was cut short (1). Apartheid’s racial segregation succeeded in making the literary landscape even more disjunctive, he claims, reflecting the racialization of the land

by law. In addition, towards the late 1960s, about half of the writers in South Africa writing in English and from all races had been exiled, thus creating “two distinct literatures” (1) of diaspora and home. Not surprising, it is the transition and disjunction noted by Chapman and Gray as characterizing this historical moment that have come to mark Nortje in a special way that place him as both belonging to a period and marginalized from it. He could not belong to the European literary lineage that the Livingstones and Millers of South African poetry belonged to, despite his debts to the English traditions; neither could he speak with the clear voice of the protest movement. While this simultaneous lack of belonging to and straddling of the two traditions fix him in the modern group, he remains marginalized in respect of these groups.

In addition, contrary to Watts’ view that the poems of Nortje “are firmly ensconced in the mainstream of English literature” (3), any attentive reader of Nortje would question the idea of him as ‘ensconced’. His writings attest to the deep influence of English Romanticism and modernism, but he never seemed to have found aesthetic rest in those traditions. As David Bunn points out, the pastoral lyric Nortje sought to create in the inherited European tradition “is routinely undermined by the intrusion of another semiotics, that of apartheid geography” (37). Even his resorting to an “urban modernist tradition” is seen by Bunn as “a flimsy sort of resolution” (37). So the practice of Eliot’s counsel to work in the context of tradition becomes worrisome for Nortje. If the idea of tradition speaks of the poet’s belonging and ancestry, what Eliot refers to as the poet’s “own country” (37), Nortje’s sense of belonging to South Africa, in view of apartheid, is conflicted. Just as he fails to feel a sense of belonging in a racialized South Africa where, as Bunn puts it, “there is no visible alternative tradition of poetry [...] [as] history is the history of the oppressor” (39), and, as Chapman puts it, fails to belong to the white South African “landscape tradition” (*Modern Perspective* 78), so in the much desired English landscape, says Bunn, “a new type of alienation set it” (39). To emphasize the intensity of Nortje’s marginality, Chapman also notes that Nortje had “neither a religious sense nor his own indigenous culture to sustain him” (“Exile” 61).

From the foregoing discussions on the historiography of South African literature, it is clear, especially as outlined by Heywood (xxi), that land runs through the different stages of writing. Between the white landscape tradition and the black protest movement was the land matter. South Africa’s history, in fact, may itself be seen as a narrative, or a body of narratives, with the land in the centre. The struggle for land began in 1652 with the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck and the Dutch East India Company followed by such notable events as the large-scale entry of British immigrants into the country in the early nineteenth century, the Great Trek of

mid-nineteenth century, and the Anglo-Boer Wars of the late nineteenth century. As these struggles for space were taking place, the black autochthonous population was being displaced and deprived of their original domains. Legislations such as the Native Land Act (1913) further marginalized the indigenous black population to fringes of the land. The introduction of apartheid in 1948 by the Afrikaner-led National Party and the forced removals suffered by the black population from 1960 onwards are maturations of previous struggles and injustices around land. Of course, this resulted in violent resistance at different times in history and government's rampant banning, imprisonments and banishments of opposing voices. This history is what has rendered South African literature uniquely political. According to Pauline Fletcher, writing in 1993, South African writers "cannot simply ignore politics" (12), namely apartheid, "the basic reality of South African life" (13). Apartheid has so permeated everything that even mundane activities cannot avoid an intersection with politics in a space designed to strengthen the tensions of difference and domination.

In his discussion of modern South African poetry, Chapman writes that in the works of Livingstone, Miller and Clouts, "identifiable modern psychological and semantic perceptions ensure revaluations of landscape and nature settings – settings that date back to Pringle's first attempts to record the sights and sounds about him" (*Modern Perspective* 181). Here the question of land is approached in terms of the relationship it has with the European poetic imagination. Chapman's reading of Livingstone's poetry uncovers a deep interest in the physical world. He describes Livingstone's first collection of poetry as "dealing with response to the African landscape" (77), but instead of a sentimental depiction, Livingstone's poetry "depicts neither a pastoral retreat nor a hunter's paradise, but a stark animal-infested land, threatening, ominous and unlovely" (77). Chapman describes part of the work as occupying a place within a South African "'landscape tradition' dating back via Campbell to Pringle, and now superbly modernised" (78). The earlier part of this tradition is, however, described by Elizabeth Thompson as one that regarded "nature as unifying, mystic, a way of healing and history as contingent, messy, true only to the moment" (69), an inheritance from the Romantic Movement. From this she notes William Plomer's deviation towards a complex modernist approach, even though he wrote in the 1920s and 30s, much earlier than the modernism of the 1960s demarcated by Chapman. Later, as the American ecocritical movement developed beyond an American focus, readings of Livingstone, for instance, reveal a strong and even explicit ecological consciousness with concern for the sustenance of the planet and the negative effect of human activity on nature, as evidenced in the article by Mariss Everitt and Dan Wylie (2007). Ruth Miller's poetry has also been noted to have interest in nature and to present a good

body of work to explore ecologically the relationship between humans and animals as argued, for example, by Wendy Woodward (2007). These works and others have obviously laid the foundation for the earlier ecological readings of white South African poetry.

The 'landscape tradition' identified by Chapman, however, comprises a white genealogy descending from the European literary tradition, especially the British Romantic Movement. Black writings in the apartheid era are generally homogenized as political literature fixed to the narrative earlier noted by Atwell (9). Nevertheless, critics such as Barnett and Eunice Ngongkum have shown that the environmental consciousness has never been completely missing in black South African writing of the apartheid years. That is to say black literature cannot be said to have ignored the environment, but rather have paid attention to the environment in a different way. While the white writer has invoked the European notion of local colour to convey the reality of a new landscape that is everything but European, and has raised the question of belonging in such a landscape, as Andrew Fowley has pointed out (35), the black writer has also had land in the centre, but has been pushed to deal with the question of ownership, deprivation and reterritorialization, which have meant speaking with a more collective than individualistic voice. While it is easy to identify renderings of the physical environment in white writers' poetry being quite explicit, it should also be understood, as Frantz Fanon argued, that the 'metanarrative' of black writing is the land (*Wretched* 34). Moreover, the earlier focus of ecocriticism on nature and preservation due to the dominance of western epistemologies, has been shown to have side-lined the place of urbanity, the social sphere and colonialism's impact on the environment in the black literary imaginary as demonstrated in Nortje's poetry.

The necessity of studying Nortje's poetry from an environmentalist or ecologically-informed approach arises from the recurrent engagement with the environment in his works. While a few of the poems focus explicitly on the environment, both natural and built, most of them contain such representations in nexus with other themes. His imagination of urbanity, of apartheid and the South African landscape, of nature, of capitalism and consumerism, of the impact of war on the environment, of animals and of desire and alienation, all combine to present a complex vision of the environment worthy of critical attention. The study is intended to contribute to postcolonialism's fast-expanding environmental dimension. Scholars have developed interest in investigating the engagements of postcolonial writers with the environment and the current global environmental crisis. The environmental approach followed in this study will deal with the intersections of environment, poetic imagination and the historical socio-political context. The study will pay attention to what Anthony Vital calls

an “African ecocriticism” (89) or postcolonial environmental criticism, which examines the environment without neglecting the historical drama that was performed on it and the consequences this has had for the environment in question. This chapter situates Nortje in his historical and literary contexts by giving a brief overview of his life and works. It provides a review of available critical literature produced on Nortje’s works and life in order to establish points of interconnectedness and departure with this study, and explains the usefulness, for this study, of the transversal approach to postcolonial environmental criticism.

1.2 The Poet, the Pruning and the Poetry

Nortje’s life story reveals a relationship with his environment that is characterized by a certain form of nomadism – family transitions between homes and towns, his back and forth movement between Port Elizabeth and Cape Town, and the culmination in his exile overseas, which also saw him moving between cities and countries. These spatial instabilities, coupled with apartheid’s spatial exclusions were, perhaps, partially responsible for Nortje’s heightened interest in the exterior world of both nature and urbanity. These movements dramatized the ways in which he and his poetry remain an embodiment of assemblages of diverse spatial and cultural experiences. In an article about developing a postcolonial biography of Nortje, Dirk Klopper sees him as an elusive figure who straddled the black and white races, Afrikaans culture and the English culture, the poor family environment in the slums of Port Elizabeth and the academic environment of the University College of the Western Cape (“Pursuit” 877). This view of the poet places him in a representative position as a member of the coloured group of South Africa, although not in the sense of homogeneity, but as a representative of the diversities and contradictions that characterize the coloured identity in South Africa. According to historian Mohamed Adhikari, coloureds are a “phenotypically diverse group of people” (469) who are the descendants of Cape slaves, the local Khoisan race, Negro Africans and Asian races also mixed with white European settlers. By the late nineteenth century they had been absorbed into the Cape colonial society. The group has, however, been a marginalized racial category in South Africa, holding “an intermediate status in the South African racial hierarchy, distinct from the historically dominant white minority and the numerically preponderant African population” (469).

Nortje was born in December 1942 in Oudtshoorn, “a dusty town on the fringe of the sprawling Karoo” (Klopper, “A Life Story” 2) to Cecelia Nortje and a Jewish father, whom Nortje never lived to know. This absence of the father, which echoes in the poetry in different ways, is partly responsible for the ideas of rootlessness in his poems. Cecilia Nortje had to

leave Oudtshoorn when Nortje was just three months old probably because her pregnancy outside of marriage was an embarrassment to the family who were, according to Klopper, “middle-class tradespeople [...] closely involved in the local church parishes of Oudtshoorn’s coloured community” (“A Life Story” 3). Cecilia, who would later inspire an important imagery in Nortje’s engagement with his homeland as mother, was a domestic worker in the Port Elizabeth township where Nortje “knew poverty as a child” (Chapman, “Poet of Exile” 60). In the Korsten part of Port Elizabeth, Klopper writes, “the family inhabited a corrugated iron shack and Nortje had to move around at night in a group as security against attack by local gangs” (“Pursuit” 877). Growing up for eighteen years here also meant “[s]huttling between small brick-and-plaster houses and corrugated iron shacks, from embattled schoolyard to the stout piety of the church” (Klopper, “A Life Story” 7). Nortje would later describe Port Elizabeth in terms of its familiar urbanity and strong presence of nature, not only as a “clockwork city / of sewers and towers, smoke and sirens” (“Reflections” 1-2), but also as a place alive with birds, trees, water and wind. Port Elizabeth, with a sizeable number of coloureds, also kept Nortje in touch with South Africa’s complex politics. There were radical political activities moving for full participation of the black population in national politics. According to Klopper, Nortje had attended meetings of the radical Unity Movement with his cousin Carrie Rousseau, who was a committed member (“A Life Story” 5).

Nortje was born and raised during a period when, despite prevailing conditions of protest and struggle, there seemed to be hope for a free South Africa. It was the time when African nationalism was beginning to blossom in its effort to counter Afrikaner nationalism. During this decade, Britain, America and South Africa signed the Atlantic Charter, after which the African National Congress (ANC) produced a document known as Africans’ Claims, which called for African rights in respect of equality in political participation, freedom of movement and settlement and economic empowerment. It is, therefore, no surprise that some of Nortje’s early poems are openly political, from dedicating a whole poem to “an outspoken political journalist” (*Anatomy of Dark* xix) to writing about apartheid, Sharpeville, violence and exile. In a 1961 poem, “For Mervyn – the 1st Chorus”, he writes the following lines:

Jackboots bite and bone-crush,
slash-flesh, fear- and frightful rod
wrecking us, will cause our country’s crash. (7-9)

After successful completion of his secondary education in 1960 at Paterson High School in Gelvandale, Port Elizabeth, where he met his mentor Dennis Brutus, and where,

according to Jeanette Eve, he “proved himself a brilliant student and excellent sportsman” (54), Nortje went on to study English and Psychology at the University College of the Western Cape (now the University of the Western Cape) in Bellville, Cape Town. This was a university for coloured students offering courses prepared by the University of South Africa (UNISA). The university was also known contemptuously among the students as Bush College. Nortje would have preferred to study at highly respected institutions like the University of Cape Town and the University of Fort Hare, but he was prevented by the Extension of the University Education Act of 1959 which barred black students from attending ‘white’ universities and assigned them to ‘ethnic’ universities for Africans, coloureds and Indians. In Cape Town, Klopper writes, Nortje “acquired intimate knowledge of the city, from Elsie’s River to Crawford, from Athlone to District Six” (“A Life Story” 12). He explored spaces like the “rocky beach at Kalk Bay, [...] bus stops and railway stations, [...] wine-drenched alleys [...] [and] a back room” (12), which would inspire many of his poems. The poem “Comparison”, for instance, conveys this personal acquaintance with the Cape Town public space, comparing the spacious and beautiful European part of the city to the township “where rust and violence have allowed reflection” (20). This comparison, instead of working along the lines of negation to polarize the two racial worlds, finds the poet expressing ambivalent feelings of love and resentment for both spaces. It is also possible to speak of the journeys Nortje made between Cape Town and Port Elizabeth as providing major moments of encounter with the country’s ‘natural’ landscapes (see “Quintet”, *Anatomy of Dark* 85-87).

After three years of study, in the course of which he obtained a BA degree, and teaching briefly at South End High School in Port Elizabeth, Nortje began the third major phase of his life in 1965 when he received a scholarship to study at Jesus College, Oxford in England. His poetry written before this phase reveals an eagerness to leave South Africa, which he describes as “land of problems” (“Song for a Passport” 18). This exit became for Nortje an opportunity to find what he hoped would be a free space for his writing. In this he was pursuing a typically modernist trajectory of the writer as exiled, banned or imprisoned. When he arrived in England, he started writing what has later come to be known as the “Oxford Journal”, which Bunn describes as containing fragments about

exile, his aesthetic theories, drinking bouts, film plots, sexual encounters, the imprisonment of South African friends, even the excruciating pain caused by his piles [...], drafts of poems and, obsessively, memories of the racially divided urban and rural South African landscape that continued to provide a context for his writing. (33)

The journal would later become an important source for research into Nortje's life and works. At Oxford, Nortje studied for a BA English focusing on the English literary tradition, and on his own devoured works of the modernist poets of the twentieth century. He also worked harder on his writing and, as Klopper maintains, did not "affiliate himself to any particular school of poetry and worked in isolation from any community of poets. He was a lone voice, divorced from the mainstream" ("A Life Story" 17). According to Bunn, during this time, Nortje also experimented with drugs (41) and lived quite an active social life. His poetry written during this period of his life also contains the special attention that he paid to the English environment exploring nature such as in the poem "Spring Picture in Exile" and urbanity as in "Cosmos in London". Despite his disillusionment after leaving South Africa and his subsequent sojourn to Canada, Nortje would remember England fondly. When about to return to England from Canada, he describes London as "the City of the Heart" (*Anatomy of Dark* 337), remembering it in maternal terms in these lines: "Despite the irony, she, city, / suckled my exiled" (58-59).

After his studies at Oxford, Nortje left England for Canada in 1967 and taught in Hope, a town in British Columbia, and in Toronto. While in Canada, Craig McLuckie and Ross Tyner note, Nortje was not involved in any political activities related to South Africa (107). Unlike his Oxford experience, in Hope he lived a life of "self-isolation", which partly contributed, say McLuckie and Tyner, to his sense of alienation (108). He was recognized as a good teacher at the school where he taught and sponsored a club called the Listeners. When he moved to the city of Toronto, the second largest Canadian city at that time, he could not blend into the literati. His works were dismissed as outmoded and irrelevant to the local community. At this time, he also used amphetamines and barbiturates, "absenting himself from his job and being unusually concerned about his health" (115). Nortje's stay in Canada, as will be seen, is the stage at which his interest in the environment graduated to a form of environmentalist consciousness as his poems began to feature more images of environmental decay, references to toxic wastes, nuclear warfare and even to drug abuse and alcoholism.

After being unable to begin graduate studies at the University of Toronto without an Honours degree, Nortje decided to return to Oxford. At this time he was beginning to gain recognition as a poet, his poetry having been published in various journals and read on the BBC. He also received an invitation to a public reading and discussion about African writing (Klopper, "A Life Story" 24). Shortly before participation, on the eve of his twenty-eighth birthday, however, he died after an overdose of barbiturates and suffocation. It is still unclear whether he intended to commit suicide or not (25).

Nortje started writing poetry from a very young age. According to Brutus, he “started writing poetry as a schoolboy: won top prize in school poetry-writing competition. [He] did extensive study on poetry outside school hours with special interest in Gerard Manley Hopkins” (26). While at the University College of the Western Cape, Nortje was influenced by the existentialist writings of Jean-Paul Sartre and the poetry of Hopkins, Yeats, Eliot, Auden and Plath (Klopper, “A Life Story” 9). His poetry was first published in 1962 in *Black Orpheus*, a periodical published in Ibadan, Nigeria, after he won the Mbari Prize for Poetry. He was also published, though he “did not actively seek publication” (Brutus 26), in other publications such as *Purple Renoster*, *Anglo-Welsh Review*, Penguin’s *Modern Poetry from Africa* (1963), *South African Writing Today* (1967) and Cosmo Pieterse’s *Seven South African Poets* (1971) among others. Though it was earlier held that he was not creatively productive in Canada, it was later discovered he wrote at least sixty-five poems in his two years in Canada (McLuckie and Tyner 106, 122).

After Nortje’s death, his poetry was still being published in various journals, and collections were published as *Lonely against the Light* (1973) and *Dead Roots* (1973). The former contains thirty-five poems, while the latter has one hundred and four poems. *Dead Roots* has been viewed as an “odd and unreliable collection of poems” (Bunn 41) because of editorial inconsistencies ignored by the publishers. The most exhaustive collection of his works, however, is *Anatomy of Dark* (2000), edited by Dirk Klopper, which collects about four hundred poems, and which will be the primary text for this thesis.

1.3 Approaches to Nortje

The earliest detailed work on Nortje was produced by his friend Raymond Leitch as a postgraduate thesis submitted to the University of Toronto in 1975. This was followed by Hedy Davis’s MA thesis, completed in 1983. It is through their committed research that additional information about the poet, unknown poetic works and his personal journal came to public knowledge. The study did not only save Nortje’s manuscripts and make these available to the public, but also prepared the ground for the publication of the more exhaustive and carefully edited collection *Anatomy of Dark*.¹ Years later, McLuckie and Tyner’s *Arthur Nortje, Poet and South African: New Critical and Contextual Essays*, which collects articles that offer divergent perspectives on Nortje’s works, would build on earlier studies to become a landmark

¹ Davis herself had shown interest in editing a collection of Nortje’s unpublished poetry. A footnote appended to her article “Arthur Nortje: The Wayward Ego” reads “During 1981 a collection of newly found and hitherto uncollected poems will be published by Bateleur Press. Hedy, the author of this article, will edit this collection.”

contribution to the study of Nortje. In their own words, their intention has been to “reassess Nortje’s career, biographically, poetically (in terms of theme and structural attributes), pedagogically and bibliographically, in light of the new corpus of work made available in *Anatomy of Dark*” (ix). This section undertakes a survey of the various approaches that have been used to conduct critical studies of Nortje’s poetry and his life with the intention of both unravelling the big picture and tracing leads to an environmental approach. Although an awareness of a chronological sequence in the development of Nortjean studies is factored in, I approach the review mainly according to thematic patterns. Nonetheless, it is rather difficult to categorize Nortje’s themes neatly because of the deep and complex interpenetrations involved.

Nortje’s poetry deals with many themes, most of which revolve around recurrent political and personal concerns. Even though he does not fit into the South African landscape canon, as earlier noted, his work does convey strong interest in the physical world, which invites careful study from the perspective of environmental criticism. The previous studies conducted on the poems and his life have not, however, given such detailed concentration to this overwhelming imagination of the exterior world. That is not to say that this interest has not been noted. On the contrary, it has been referred to and discussed but not necessarily explored in the detail and from the critical perspective this work is designed to do. In fact, the other ideas unravelled by previous studies have provided important angles to be considered in studying the complex relationship of the poet, the poetry and the environment. Klopper, for instance, identifies two basic thematic areas covered by studies of Nortje’s poetry. The first is “a consistent opposition to social oppression” (*Anatomy Dark* xxv) in both South Africa during apartheid rule and in England and Canada, his homes of exile. The second area noted is that of “an insistent psychic conflict” (*AD* xxv), as the poems often depict a persona in intense existential struggle. It is within these broad thematic categories that such studies have identified and commented on Nortje’s interest in the physical world in different degrees.

One of the most outstanding themes in Nortje’s poetry is that of exile and it is arguably the most explored by critics. The idea of exile embodies the interactions of the convergences and contradictions that characterize the poet’s works and life. In the idea of exile alone, a number of studies on Nortje have been carried out from both the socio-political and psychological angles in conversation with other central themes. Sarah Nuttall and Rebecca Fine Romanow have, for instance, considered the relationship of the body to the poet’s experience of exile. Richard Volk explores the image of spitting in Nortje’s poetry within the larger framework of Nortje’s sense of alienation and exile. Grant Farred’s exploration of Nortje’s struggle with identity also considers the place of exile in Nortje’s life and poetry. In connection

to his wider context of the marginality of coloured identity, Farred notes that Nortje's poetry shows "how the experience of being coloured is integral to [...] [his] exile" (78). Charles Dameron's article is based on the view that the "bulk of [Nortje's] later work reflects his deep concerns as an exile and wanderer: with the turmoil in his distant homeland, with his experiences in new environments, and with the introspective demands of his poetic craft" (155). This gives the poetry not only a political dimension, but also a biographical dimension, covering the issues of "shackles on free speech that bind the outraged black dissident" (155), and of "spatial estrangement" (156). The poetry provides evidence for Dameron to see Nortje's exile as "his lack of belonging and his artistic sensitiveness" (157). What is significant about this early reading of Nortje's poetry is the identification of the personal and the public at work within the poetry and the movement between the personal, the political and the creative as influencing one another.

Chapman's analysis of Nortje's exile generally seeks to capture the poet's exile in the psychic sense, with a slight attempt at depoliticizing the exile experience. Noting that Nortje's poetry is full of "the consequences of exile" ("Exile" 60) seems to tilt more towards the psychological dimension of exile at the expense of the externality of the condition. To him, therefore, Nortje's sense of "alienation is ultimately not a matter of geography, but of temperament: an inability to form enduring personal relationships" (60). Although he tries to tone down the geographical primacy of Nortje's exile, Chapman does reference the place of politics and the physical world in Nortje's exile imagination, describing the experience as "initially, exile from the South Africa which had denied him human dignity" (60). He also points out the poet's consciousness of a "nightmarish" urbanity (61) while in exile, and his aestheticization of the South African township in his poetry (67). He remarks that, "Nortje, in fact, is one of the first poets to present a black man's view of the South African urban situation: he observes slums billowing woodsmoke, prison cells and secret police interrogation rooms" (67). The article ends with an emphatic line on how Nortje's "mythic imagination transforms the city into a terrifying labyrinth, a motif of metaphysical exile" (70), in which Chapman is unable to separate the physicality of the city from his quest for the threads of 'metaphysical exile' in the poetry. Jacques Berthoud, on the other hand, discusses the motif of exile in Nortje's poetry in the context of Nortje's social-historical condition as a coloured in apartheid South Africa. The exile experience is viewed more as a "pressure of history" (6) rather than temperamental. Berthoud's foundational assumption is that which sees the self not as a construction or even a vacuum, but "a potential, to be roused, energised, transformed and emancipated – and not only disturbed, distorted and mutilated – as it acquires historical

density” (9). This view informs his exploration of the motif and experience of exile in Nortje’s poetry as a way of bringing “historical predicament” (13), “personal pain” (13) and language together to complement political action. Commenting on the same poem as Chapman, “Waiting”, Berthoud also brings attention to the physicalities contained in Nortje’s poetry of exile as opposed to allegations of the poet being mainly a subjectivist writer. According to him, “[t]he warehouse, the waterfront, the wharf, the ruined wall of the opening lines, like the semi-snow and the early-warning system of the conclusion, are simultaneously images of environment and notations of inner state” (5) so that it is “impossible to decide where the world ends and the self begins” (5).

On the other hand, Annie Gagiano contends that the term ‘exile’ can only be applied to Nortje in the broader sense of lack of sense of belonging, which began when he was in South Africa, as she attempts to uncover both the psychic and political dimensions of his exile and sense of loss. She reads Nortje’s exile primarily in terms of a “lack of belonging” (125) rather than a spatial removal, basing her views on the idea that Nortje’s pre-exile poems reveal the same sense of rupture that the exile poems express. Although arguing for the idea of exile in that sense, Gagiano’s rather panoramic analyses from numerous poems do not only fish out images of internal estrangement, they are unable to avoid the constant images of the physical world in connection with exile. She has, therefore, covered such poetic images ranging from those that refer to the physical dimension of apartheid (127), nostalgic references to the homeland (130) and the landscapes of the place of exile (132-133).

The above studies have in common the idea of exile as separation in different senses, psychic, social, political and spatial. Klopper’s reading focuses on this idea of alienation to show how the poet stands in relation to the social environment. Resisting the view that Nortje’s sense of alienation is largely due to his exile or political experience as presented by Berthoud, Klopper in his paper, “Self and Community in the Poetry of Arthur Nortje”, conducts what he calls a symptomatic reading of Nortje’s poetry and argues that because Nortje’s use of “figures of division, separation, and loss precedes his actual exile” we should be cautioned against seeing exile “as the chief source of Nortje’s alienation” (135), as they only point to the subject’s life-long struggle. This concurs with Chapman and Gagiano’s view that Nortje’s exile is primarily not a matter of geography, but something embedded in the person, in his particular psychic structures. In “Arthur Nortje and the Unhomely”, Klopper maintains that in the preponderance of images of lack and absence in the poetry, Nortje’s “loss of community and loss of self are not causally but dialectically related” (167). In his view, Nortje’s experiences of alienation illustrate Bhabha’s idea of the unhomely, a condition that cannot be fixed to a

single cause, but to various ruptures in both the personal and the political spheres. This kind of reading, while acknowledging the public dimensions of the poetry and the poet's personal experiences of such, serves to problematize the readings that would seek to peg the poet to a homogenized storyline. Klopper's psychoanalytical reading of Nortje's poetry in the article "Politics of the Self", especially in responding to what he views as Berthoud's "essentialist view of the self" (27), seeks to engage with Nortje's problematization of racial categories and explains the poetry as "essentially poems of desire" (27) which show internal separation from country, lover and self as somewhat impossible to overcome, a desire "permanently split between the promise and the despair of love" (27). Klopper reasons that insisting that "a simple internalization of racial inferiority lies at the basis of Nortje's alienation" (29) denies the complex manner in which Nortje handles racial identity.

The implication of these readings of exile for this study is very important. The critics have incisively delved into the psychological and political aspects of Nortje's exile experience, inspiring further investigations into the spatial dimensions of exile as a medium for engaging place and displacement as concepts in postcolonial environmental criticism. If the postcolonial subject is such an unstable subject in terms of place as imagined by Nortje and others, what does the idea of a sense of place mean to him or her and how would that impact postcolonial environmentalism? Exile, and other forms of displacement, thus becomes useful for communication between environmentalism's emphases on a sense of place and postcolonialism's recurrent engagement with spatial dislocations and fundamental dependence on history. It is noteworthy that while these studies have viewed the poet's relationship with the outside world in terms of his exile, their scope did not allow them to dig deeper into the physicality of the world that Nortje recreates. Two studies, by David Bunn and Amanda Bloomfield, however, focus on this in their different approaches.

Bunn's paper is a treatise on the "tyrannical Verwoerd years" (33) approached "through reference to imaginative geography, considering the problem of space, landscape, and the body in the work of Arthur Nortje" (33). It is this focus on spatiality that sets Bunn's work apart from the others. He sees a deep interaction between the politics of the day, racialization of space and the poet's imagination of the landscape. Formulating such a triangle that connects land, the poet's experience and the poetry automatically places experience as a link between the topography and the poetry. The same landscape, for instance, provided the white South African poet a paradigm very different from what a coloured poet like Nortje could find in it (35). It is in this different experience of the landscape that Bunn discovers Nortje's aesthetic challenges. This dilemma lay in Nortje's desire to reproduce the kind of pastoral lyric poetry

he had 'inherited' from the English literary tradition and the realities of the politicization of the landscape. According to Bunn, "the self/landscape reciprocity desired by the lyric genre Nortje knew stands in complete contradiction to the generalized displacement suffered by urban and rural Coloured communities" (35). Arguing that the politics of the land denied Nortje entry into the kind of lyric he had longed to create, Bunn remarks that "apartheid undermines [...] [Nortje's] ability to use conventional landscape paradigms in his lyric poetry" (34). In the background of this crisis is the racialization of space through the Group Areas Act of 1950 which removed black communities into townships characterized by poverty, squalor and violence. Bunn writes that "the rural Coloured community is displaced from the land to the city, there to forge another deeply alienated identity that does not have access to the contemplative lyric moment" (35). Partly due to the frequent intrusion of apartheid geography, which fights the lyric potential of Nortje's poetry, Nortje turns to the more urban-inclined modernist tradition. So, unable to achieve the "effacement of labour and the historical meanings of landscapes" (35) associated with the lyric, Nortje finds himself unable to fit into the tradition of South Africa's white writings on the country's topography. He has to find ways to "create a form of transitional landscape that can accommodate political and epistemological contradictions" (39). This leads to the repeated depiction of the body and the appetites associated with the body in relation to landscape and history in the poems. For Bunn, Nortje's depiction of the body, which can be read politically, goes beyond the merely tropological to "a terrifying literalness" (41), especially as it relates to the poet's eating and drug abuse

While Bunn concentrates on the relationship between genre and landscape in Nortje's literary development, Bloomfield focuses on Nortje's use of nature in his writing. Comparing Nortje's works with those of the Romantics, Bloomfield points out Nortje's deep interest in and conscious observation of the physical world around him. She, however, notes that Nortje's writing does not focus on the beauty of nature as do the works of the Romantics, but uses this focus to accomplish two major things: to establish the background setting for his actions, and to use nature as a metaphor or a means to deal with 'deeper' issues such as race problems in South Africa and elsewhere, and his personal identity battle. She studies two poems, "A house on Roncesvalles, Toronto 222" and "No Change" to explain how Nortje uses nature to talk about race issues. This discussion is done with a focus on the wider society without delving into Nortje's personal struggles with the matter. Then she discusses "Wayward Ego" and "Chelsea Visit" as poems that picture Nortje's identity crisis using nature as a metaphor. Bloomfield's work is, however, underpinned by an understanding of nature as essentially opposed to human culture. The middle ground between the literal depiction of nature for the

sake of creating a setting and the symbolic use to talk about race and identity is not explored for the complex overlap of the literality of nature, history and subjectivity. Limiting Nortje's recurrent use of nature to background and metaphor only points to the possibility of an environmental criticism. Nevertheless, Bloomfield has succeeded in breaking into an area of Nortjean studies that has not been taken up by other scholars.

In addition to Bunn and Bloomfield's exploration of the physical world in Nortje's poetry, Nortje's weaving together of his sense of the world along with the consciousness of his own physicality has also been looked into. Bunn has already pointed out that Nortje's failure to create his desired pastoral lyric informed his turn to the body as landscape, in which "the writer's own body takes the place of extended geographic reference, becoming a site of complex symbolic embellishment" (33). And beyond the political symbology of the body as the "national symbolic body" (40) facing dismemberment, Nortje's references to the body gravitate towards, via self-loathing, "a terrifying literalness" (41). While Bunn, also Klopper ("Pursuit" 873) and Romanow (76), view the body more in the political and psychic crises of the poet, Sarah Nuttall explores the corporeal literalness hinted at by Bunn even more and much closer to the poet's environmental consciousness. Against the more common tendencies in postcolonial analysis to concentrate on the body as a political whole in its relation to other bodies, Nuttall chooses to study "the body as lived flesh in its fully anatomical dimensions – as a body in parts, made up of sensory organs" (37). Analysing Nortje's references not only to external organs but even to visceral ones, she reasons that Nortje's writing defies a stable notion for the body, and shows how it performs different roles as "a site of 'discovery'" (45) and as a container of transgression. Drawing largely on Merleau-Ponty, aside others, the study is partially based on a phenomenology that views the body as 'lived', a body in the context of the world rather than the empiricist view of the body as a separate object from the world. She reasons that the "living body is not a separate entity in a world external to it but rather is of the same stuff as the world" (48). Nuttall's study, therefore, brings to the table the need to question the ideas of separation between humanity and the world within frameworks of postcolonial ecological criticism. Her study points to the need to investigate further the place of the body as environment, which a section of this thesis looks at.

Richard Volk provides an angle to the body as a producer of waste which also serves a symbolic purpose for the poet's voice. His focus on recurrent spitting images in the poems is not centred on the body itself, but on what the body produces. He points out that the poet's use of spitting images symbolizes the projection of the self, and that this works with other oral images (56). In other words, Nortje is always trying to get something out of his system through

‘spitting’, which is an act of expression not unconnected, Volk argues, with his “political responsibility as a writer and herald of truth” (57). He points out the way scatological images are joined with ‘palatable’ images to create conflict or tension. Volk notes that Nortje, as a marginal figure, both as a coloured and an exile, employs the image of spitting in three ways: it works as a voice of political resistance, as an expression of Nortje’s bitterness and melancholy, and as a way to shock the reader by unsettling hierarchies. He reasons that by “delving into the vulgar, antisocial, and even taboo aspects of bodily fluids and orifices Nortje is able to establish a repertoire with all people, creating a lowest common denominator, a platform upon which his message may be understood more easily if not with increased interest” (60). Volk’s analysis is enclosed in the symbolic only, without consideration of the “terrifying literalness” identified by Bunn (Bunn 41). He, however, as Nuttall, points the way to further investigation into ideas of the ecology of the body and the interactions of the body’s wastes with other kinds of physical wastes.

Other scholars tend to focus more on the political thread by, for instance, emphasizing the colouredness of Nortje in their study. Grant Farred, for instance, explores how Nortje’s writings reflect the hybrid and “impure” racial position of the coloured subject in apartheid South Africa. Diana Adesola Mafe’s exploration, using the concept of the ‘tragic mulatto’, follows in Farred’s direction which gives central place to Nortje’s agony over miscegenation. Kwadwo Osei-Nyame Jr reads Nortje’s poems as primarily works of protest with a very public and ideological dimension, and describes Nortje as an “angry young black man” (63). I particularly find his emphasis on Nortje’s nationalism interesting as it points to a relationship with not only the idea of country, but a sense of place, albeit disrupted. Osei-Nyame contends that, even though Nortje was not an activist or a member of any political organization, his writings show inspiration from the black consciousness movement of the day. He does not limit Nortje to just a personal existential struggler as other scholars tend to do, identifying nationalism as the basis for Nortje’s commitment to South Africa as expressed by his nostalgic writings about the country. He argues that although Nortje’s “poetic itinerary derives first and foremost from a personal experience of exile and isolation, the sense of community and nationness in his poetry is also very largely foregrounded” (68), which shows that displacement and emplacement run simultaneously in the poetry.

Another reading of Nortje as a political poet comes from Abu Solomons whose paper focuses on Nortje’s life and works in Canada from 1967 to 1970. Noting that many earlier scholars of Nortje’s works “did not have a clear perspective of his work and social vision” (10), and pictured him as “a disadvantaged, indulgent intellectual who had voluntarily disengaged

himself from cultural struggle” (10), Solomons asserts that such a view results from the failure to read the dominant journey motif in the poetry, and the concomitant failure to discern the poetry as “work in progress” (10). By paying attention to the writing as a journey, one would see the clear intention of the poet to create a connection, says Solomons, between his poetry and society. For Solomons, reading through the Canada poems, one discerns a significant stage in the development of Nortje’s political maturity. He argues that Nortje’s sojourn in that country exposed him to an “aggressive consumer culture” (10) and a level of capitalism that enabled him to link “political insights about Northern America with political and economic exploitation in South Africa” (10). The poems written in Canada, therefore, present Nortje as a “deeply concerned social commentator and the poet wrestling with himself and the politics of power” (10). While Solomons points to Nortje’s growing political consciousness in the Canada poems, and points to the poet’s realization of North American consumerism and emerging global nuclear culture, he does not delve into these issues in detail. Neither does he acknowledge the poet’s overwhelming concern with the decaying urbanities of the North American country.

From this review, it is clear that one area that stands in need of close study is the environmental dimension of Nortje’s poetry as the studies consistently point to a relationship between the poet’s personal concerns and the world outside him without providing the perspective of environmental criticism. Bloomfield’s work, for instance, traces the place of nature in the poetry but not from an environmental-critical angle. Bunn’s work, on the other hand, which is a historical-biographical approach to Nortje’s Oxford journal and poetry, examines Nortje’s writing philosophy as a coloured South African in the 1960s and the realities of politicized and racialized landscapes. Others also provide useful linkage points from the ideas of the body, exile and political dimensions of Nortje’s poetry. My research intends, therefore, to build on these insights to explore the environmental representation and consciousness in the poetry more fully.

1.4 Ecocriticism and the Postcolonial Response

Ecocriticism is not a simple linear system, but a highly multidisciplinary field drawing from science, anthropology, literature, philosophy and other fields. It is no surprise, therefore, that Cheryll Glotfelty’s definition of ecocriticism as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (xviii) has become the classic definition because of both its simplicity and its ability to accommodate the multifarious nature of the field. Lawrence Buell is similarly terse when he describes ecocriticism as “the commonest omnibus term for an

increasingly heterogeneous movement” (*Future 1*). The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE), formed in 1992, has played an important role in transforming ecocriticism into a recognizable movement by creating a community of previously unconnected literary scholars with a shared interest in environmental criticism (Glotfelty and Fromm xviii). The rise of ecocriticism, however, does not deny a pre-ecocriticism relationship between literature and the environment. Before ecocriticism, Buell writes, “creative art and critical reflection have always taken a keen interest in how the material world is engaged, absorbed, and reshaped by theory, imagination, and *techne*” (*Future 1*). He highlights such engagements in works ranging from folklore, the Bible, Romanticism, to American nature writings. He also observes, however, that ecocriticism has key features that differentiate it from the previous relationship between art and the environment. First, ecocriticism is a response to the “malaise about modern industrial society’s inability to manage its unintended environmental consequences” (5). Second, the burden of speaking for the environment has made ecocriticism an activism, a fighting movement, instead of a form of sentimental idyllicism. Glotfelty has outlined a list of questions that ecocritics ask which concern such areas as representation, the physical setting, ecological wisdom, nature writing, place, gender, wilderness, popular culture, science of ecology and interdisciplinarity (xix). Of course, she does not intend for the list to be exhaustive and closed; it only points to the variety of interests and approaches that exists in the field.

The role of the science of ecology on the development of ecocriticism, as is obvious in the name, cannot be ignored. The term ‘ecocriticism’, short for ‘ecological literary criticism’, suggests an engagement based on the scientific and advocacy strands of ecology. The choice of the coinage ‘ecocriticism’ was because, “analogous to the science of ecology, ecocriticism studies the relationship between things, in this case, between human culture and the physical world” (Glotfelty xx). William Howarth, tracing ecocriticism’s roots back to the science of ecology, notes that ecology crossed over from mere “description to advocacy after 1960, as its stories present ethical choices that affect land and people” (75). Ecology’s direct relationship with the world of the physical is clearly, therefore, a major factor in ecocriticism’s dominant realist mode, finding connection with Romanticism’s pursuit of a relationship with nature through the imagination and communion.

Ecocriticism, however, only found roots in those areas, but has evolved through different stages to what it is today. When literary scholars plunged into environmentalism, the

early voices relied on deep ecology's² emphasis on wilderness and nature as pristine, thus creating what Buell terms the first wave of ecocriticism (Buell, *Future* 18-21). This wave sought to decentre 'man' in pursuit of a more egalitarian ecosystem. It "was often preoccupied with nature writing, wilderness, and texts such as Thoreau's *Walden*" (Hiltner 131). The second wave refers to the later turn to the social dimension of the environment. What Buell calls the second wave of ecocriticism is supposedly the outcome of the questions raised about ignored urbanities, how social groups are affected by the activities in their local environments. The second wave is thus viewed as a move to include culture, in other words, to question the earlier separation of nature and culture, and to have more inclusive canon where minority voices can also contribute to the thread. The second wave "has so far concentrated strongly, for example, on locating vestiges of nature within cities and/or exposing crimes of eco-injustice against society's marginal groups" (Buell, *Future* 24). Glotfelty has earlier offered an anatomy of ecocriticism, albeit American-centred, somewhat different from Buell's, as it is based more on the trajectory of method from critiquing representations of nature in literature, recovering previously neglected nature-centred writings, to the stage of theorizing about the environment (xxii-xxiii). One important aspect in ecocriticism's development also worth mentioning has been the debate about the importance of theory and the struggle to find common ground for ecocriticism and literary theory.³

While there is frequent reference to its multidisciplinary and 'chaotic' terrain (Glotfelty xix; Buell, *Future* 1), ecocriticism is generally carved in an arborescent image, in which there is one trunk from which every other branch issues, as demonstrated by the anatomies presented by both Buell and Glotfelty. Buell's structuring a history of first and second waves, for instance, assumes other forms of ecologies to be late-comers only grafted into a western-rooted structure. The western-centredness of ecocriticism is, however, understandable since ecocriticism as a movement originated in America and is rooted in the study of the classic American nature writing canon. Most of these writers were in turn influenced by British Romanticism, a movement reputed to have exalted nature over human culture, and the

² See Arne Naess, "The Deep Ecological Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects", *Ecocriticism: The Essential Reader*, 47-61, ed. Ken Hiltner

³ Sue Ellen-Campbell's "The Land and Language of Desire: Where Deep Ecology and Post-Structuralism Meet", originally published in 1989, and reproduced by Glotfelty and Fromm in their famous anthology, shows early struggles of ecocriticism with theory (post-structuralism, to be precise), much in the same way that ecocriticism and postcolonial criticism have later struggled to have a suture of some sort. According to her, "It was the right moment to think theoretically about the natural world, to be post-structuralist and ecological at the same time" (126). Dana Philips suggests that ecocritics' aversion is not necessarily due to theory's "excesses" and "attack on canonical Western literature", but about "theory's contention that nature is constructed by culture" ("Truth about Ecology" 578).

individual over society, and to have created the kind of glib pastoralism that Leo Marx identifies in *The Machine in the Garden*. As such, early or traditional ecocritics also emphasized the wilderness over urbanity, nature over culture, coupled with the fact of increasing ecological crisis and the need to save what remains of the natural world. Michael Bennett rightly notes that ecocriticism has developed along

academic interest in nature writing, American pastoralism, and literary ecology. The resulting body of critical work claims rural environments and wild nature as its domain, meaning that most ecocritics in the United States have focused their attention on America's rural past or on the remaining wide open spaces of the Wild West. ("Wide Open Spaces" 31)

Glotfelty, writing in 1995, comments that ecocriticism has been "predominantly a white movement" (xxv) and 'predicts' an ecocriticism that will become "a multi-ethnic movement when stronger connections are made between the environment and issues of social justice, and when a diversity of voices are encouraged to contribute to the discussion" (xxv). While Glotfelty's 'prediction' is well-meaning, it nevertheless reinforces the notion of a western-centred tree of ecology and ignores the heterogenesis of the environmental imagination in diverse global literatures and criticisms. By using the definite article in the phrase "the discussion", she side-lines other discussions that were already taking place around land and geography in postcolonial spaces and imaginative and critical works originating from there.

Advocates of the postcolonial approach to environmental criticism, therefore, view this kind of environmental criticism as insufficient to handle ecological concerns globally, especially with the complexities of colonial histories that involve displacements and dispossessions on varied levels and the current inequities resulting from ever-expanding global capitalism in the background. While social ecology takes care of the move for the inclusion of the urban and social spaces in American ecocriticism, especially as it concerns minority groups, 'postcolonial ecocriticism' is basically a form of social ecology concerned with the history of colonial domination and how it relates to the present global ecological crises. In other words, postcolonialism goes beyond collapsing the boundaries between the rural-wild and the urban in the western world to a more global approach that defines ecological crises in terms of the power relations that operate within the framework of colonialism and neo-colonialism.

Postcolonial studies, with early roots in environmental concerns such as land matters, displacement, marginalizing town planning and resource exploitation, has extended into the exploration of specifically environmental concerns, not as a new area, but as an evolution of what is a part of its foundation. The rise of ecocriticism has, therefore, only opened up a new

level of engagement producing such hybrids as ‘postcolonial ecocriticism’, which Elaine Savory defines as “deeply concerned with ways in which empire has abused and exploited both people and their environments” (81). This expansion, or rather, renewal, of the postcolonial environmental concerns has also generated important discussions regarding the origin or genealogy of the environmental in postcolonial writing and criticism and also on the need or the difficulty of bringing the two critical regions of ecocriticism and postcolonialism together. Rob Nixon, writing in 2005, sees two ironies that characterized the scene at the time of his writing. The first is the refusal of American ecocritics, as demonstrated by Jay Parini’s *New York Times* article,⁴ to acknowledge the environmental activism of non-western countries by figures like Ken Saro-Wiwa (who fought against the degradation of Ogoniland in Nigeria by oil companies and the health endangerment and economic deprivation suffered by the voiceless inhabitants). The second irony is what he calls postcolonial critics’ “scant interest in environmental concerns, regarding implicitly as, at best, irrelevant and elitist, at worst as sullied by ‘green imperialism’” (“Environmentalism and Postcolonialism” 235).

The move to bridge the gap between postcolonialism and ecocriticism has been viewed as “hedged about with seemingly insurmountable problems” (Huggan and Tiffin 2). Nixon, for instance, is known to have identified four schisms between the two areas. He argues, as worded by Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt, that “postcolonialists emphasize hybridity, while ecocritics emphasize purity; postcolonialists study displacement, ecocritics focus on place; postcolonialists tend toward cosmopolitanism, ecocritics towards nationalism; postcolonialists work to recover history, ecocritics seek to sublimate or transcend history” (4-5). The first challenge Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin note is that of the difficulty to define both fields and the existence of internal divergences in “their most basic interpretive methods or fundamental ideological concerns” (2). This emphasis on philosophical differences of the areas could be said to be an extension of the old debate about ecocriticism’s aversion to theory. Postcolonialism’s poststructuralist foundation has been seen as the ground of friction with ecocriticism. While ecocriticism tilts more towards realist and positivistic assumptions seeking to address an exterior world, postcolonialism is prominently concerned with discursivity, based on the assumption that reality is constructed or mediated by language and culture. Vital argues that although critical discussions have opened up important areas of attention for the interaction between the two areas concerned, they have not been able to discern and address the underlying

⁴ Parini, Jay. “The Greening of the Humanities.” *New York Times*, October 29, 1995. In this article, Parini, an American professor of English, describes the rise of environmental criticism as an American event. Towards the end of the article, he makes a list of readings and gurus in the area, all of whom are American.

philosophical assumptions of the two areas (89). Another area of friction, in addition to the conceptual and political differences, is in what Susie O'Brien points out as the division by "aesthetic orientation" (144), by which she means a deliberate choice of the critics on each side of the divide to focus on texts that simply support their critical positions.

A number of suggestions has been made as to how to reconcile the two areas. Vital's solution to the 'problem' is "an interpretive strategy that does [...] rest on the assumption that all understanding of the world [...] is always delivered through language" (91), which in turn is both various and further mediated by culture and society. At the centre of this language-based approach is history, "histories of change" and the "historicity of ecology and modern science" (91). That way, discourse can be connected to the exteriority of the environment. Another approach is provided by Roos and Hunt, who, in their book *Postcolonial Green*, offer "a hybrid approach to postcolonial green" (8) based on Homi Bhabha's idea of hybridity. They want to be as inclusive as possible and "responsive to ongoing political and ecological problems and to diverse kinds of texts" (9) without universalizing since postcolonialism is a convenient term for diverse geographies and contexts. Huggan and Tiffin see a way out by a connection forged between the roles of aesthetics, advocacy and activism which are aspects mutually shared by the two areas (11-22). The idea of a reconciliation, however, seems to generate further problems. It assumes a sort of insularity between the two areas of inquiry giving the impression that they are both completely homogenous and static. We have already seen the variegated nature of ecocriticism, the diverse influences that characterize it. Postcolonialism, on the other hand, cannot also be said to be a perfectly simplified system that bars itself within textuality without looking at the exterior world.

Texts that form the foundation of postcolonialism, like those of Fanon and Edward Said published before ecocriticism took shape, are, in fact, rooted in a consciousness of the environment. Fanon's writing on decolonization in *The Wretched of the Earth* takes into account not just political and social dimensions, but the centrality of land, which stands for the material world as a space for contesting power, identity and culture. Fanon recognizes that "[f]or a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity" (34). Working from this critical paradigm, Fanon forges a connection of the social and political to non-human exteriority. Through his exposition on what he calls the colonial world, he shows the inseparability of colonialism and environmental change in the ways the settler and native quarters display the role of power in altering the environment. Said's work follows Fanon's to set the foundation for the development of postcolonial thought. He shows that his *Orientalism*,

though focused on the western representations of the Orient, is not a discourse that is completely cut off from the material and exterior Oriental world that is the object being ‘Orientalized’. He sees a relationship between the independent exterior and the use of language to create a representation of that exteriority. This results in an “imaginative geography”, which is a way in which power and knowledge are employed to create imagined spaces that stand as the polarized other of the metropolises. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said points out that surrounding his discourse is a material context. He returns to the idea of land as being at the centre of imperialism, which shows “actual contests over land and over the land’s people” (7). He further states that “[e]verything about human history is rooted in the earth” (7). If postcolonial thought already factors in the external material world, the land, it would mean that understandings that depict postcolonialist neglect of the environment, as suggested by Nixon in “Environmentalism and Postcolonialism”, might not have given attention to this ‘genealogy’ of postcolonialism. Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley also trace the environmental vision in the postcolonial imaginary, referencing such works as the poetry of Guyanese writer Martin Carter written in 1951, Pablo Neruda’s 1950 poetry, and Chinua Achebe’s 1958 *Things Fall Apart* as evidence “drawn from earlier works in the postcolonial literature to suggest that the global south has contributed to an ecological imaginary and discourse of activism and sovereignty that is not derivative of the Euro-American environmentalism of the 1960s and 1970s” (8).

1.5 Towards a Transversal Postcolonial Criticism

Reading Nortje’s environmental imagination, one is confronted with the requirement of a critical perspective that conventional ecocriticism would not be able to handle adequately because of its constrained focus on nature over culture and history. Any of the postcolonial approaches would be sufficient to address the fusions of land, history, displacement and trauma in the poems, but the mixed nature of the poems require much more; they require a tool that would factor in the poet’s assemblage of diverse domains without necessarily depending on an imposing teleological vision. Therefore, instead of working to hybridize, as proposed by Roos and Hunt, I propose a ‘post-hybrid’ engagement patterned after Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s rhizomatic discourse, also applied as transversality in Guattari’s works, which does not privilege one ‘plateau’ over another. I do this through Félix Guattari’s ecosophy of the three ecologies model. Going beyond Roos and Hunt’s application of Bhabha’s hybridism, which inadvertently assumes binaries, I shall be engaging Nortje’s poetry from an assumption of multiplicities and heterogeneity. Earlier studies have worked not only to disrupt the space

between postcolonialism and ecocriticism, but to collapse the artificial walls between nature and culture, stability of place and displacement. So, while some hold that the “interconnections between global biogeoclimatic and anthropogenic processes are no longer seriously contested, and critics no longer view the two fields as irreconcilably opposed” (Mason, et al 1), a transversal approach will further open up boundless engagements towards free interactions among the multiple intersections that characterize the fields.

Guattari was a psychoanalyst who worked at the LaBorde Clinique in France until his death in 1991. He was trained by the renowned psychoanalyst and theorist Jacques Lacan and wrote most of his important works with Deleuze, who was a university professor. In *The Three Ecologies* he acknowledges that the “Earth is undergoing a period of intense techno-scientific transformations. If no remedy is found, the ecological disequilibrium this has generated will ultimately threaten the continuation of life on the planet’s surface” (19). He, however, points out that along with these environmental crises, “human modes of life, both individual and social, are also deteriorating” (19). The effort made to handle environmental crises by the authorities concerned by focusing exclusively on the immediate physical crises through technocratic means is inadequate, he says. This keeps failing because what is actually at the centre of the environmental issues is not the ecological crises themselves but our way of living. This all-inclusive reading of the ecologies is viewed transversally. Ecosophy transcends the view that the problem of the environment is something that can be tackled mainly by techno-scientific means. Such an approach to the environment ignores the fact that the problem of the environment is neither a simple nor an isolated matter. Guattari notes that the environment is being destroyed because of what is happening to human subjectivity and social relations. He argues that human subjectivity is being eroded by the vectors of subjectification, which are products of global capitalism’s use of the mass media to erode human individual uniqueness or ‘singularity’. So he proposes “an ethico-political articulation [...] between the three ecological registers (the environment, social relations and human subjectivity)” (20) implying that to view the matter from an industrial point of view only is to deny the human factors, the politics and the economics behind the technology.

Action towards the ecological crisis must also be taken on a global scale without jeopardizing, Guattari says, “molecular domains of sensibility, intelligence and desire” (20). Homogenizing social labour internationally by capitalist forces and political powers would only be counter-productive. Already the present threat and other political inequities around the world are a result of this way of thinking and practice. The present global market encouraged by capitalism “destroys specific value systems” (20). The culprit in all this is global capitalism,

which Guattari calls Integrated World Capitalism (IWC). This form of economy driven by profit is responsible for the global ecological crisis which includes a mass manipulation of mental ecologies and a destruction of social life. According to the translators of the work, “Guattari’s contention is that IWC is not only destroying the natural environment and eroding social relations, but is also engaged in a far more insidious and invisible ‘penetration of people’s attitudes, sensibility and minds’” (4). Guattari is particularly interested in the way in which subjectivities are made to lose their uniqueness or ‘singularities’. Individuals are supposed to be different and singular, while at the same time cooperating with the wider society in ways that ensure individual uniqueness is not lost.

Underlying the arguments of Guattari is the concept of transversality, which defies vertical hierarchies of difference and prefers a horizontalized interaction of difference. Michael Goddard describes transversality as “the non-linear and non-hierarchical connections between distinct fields” which, he says, is “such a key concept in Guattari’s work” (271). Gary Genosko notes that transversality has been a very significant concept in the whole of Guattari’s political and theoretical thinking (46). Although the root of the concept has been traced to Louis Althusser and Jean-Paul Sartre, its development and application came through Guattari. Guattari developed the concept while working at La Borde as a psychoanalyst. He became dissatisfied with the traditional method of attending to patients at the institution, derived from the conventional dualist structure in which the relationship between the analyst and the analysand is based on transference. According to Genosko, Guattari views transference as “fixed, insolubly mechanical [...] obligatory, predetermined, ‘territorialized’ on a role, a given stereotype, making it worse than a resistance analysis [...]. [I]t is an artefact of the analysis, and hence artificial” (46). In this dualist relation, Guattari discerns an approach to treatment that works against the patient’s recovery. He thus proposed an approach to treatment based on transversality instead of transference, taking into the picture the “institutional object” which means “an analysis of the subjectivity of groups [...] [which] involved the understanding of how places of treatment [...] may themselves prevent treatment” (49). This plainly means introducing a group approach in which the analyst is also willing to let go of the power enjoyed in the dual vertical setting of the transference. This decentring of the analyst proposes a somewhat egalitarian approach in which the analyst ceases to be the master and creates a situation where even the least person in the group could make an important contribution. The introduction of the “institutional object” is based on the idea that “[h]ospital/clinic-based psychotherapy requires a critique of the institution” (50) and transversality “foregrounds the

institutional context, its restraints, organization, practices, etc., all those things which normally exist in the background” (50).

While La Borde was the place where Guattari developed these ideas around transversality, the concept permeates his thinking beyond psychoanalysis. In his thinking about ecology, the application of transversality results in the foregrounding of human subjectivity and the social sphere along with the environment. To develop a transversal postcolonial approach to the environment based on Guattari’s thinking does not, therefore, mean a displacement of what has been going on in the conversations, but an expansion. The idea at the centre of the discussions about postcolonial environmental reading has consistently been about the theoretical and philosophical assumptions that seem to divide the two areas of postcolonialism and ecocriticism. Scholars have considered the incompatibilities of postcolonial critique and western ecocriticism and have seen the need to find ways of bridging the gap or converging them. The common logic behind most discussions is that of a binary in which the two areas stand apart from each other ontologically. The convergence, on the other hand, is seen as important so that environmental concerns can extend from its western parochialism to include marginalized groups and their relationships to their environments. The approach presented here, therefore, takes into account the diversities that exist within and between both fields of enquiry, accepting the heterogeneities and multiplicities that exist within and between them as valid for the conversation. To think about the environment in terms of a rhizome (explained below) rather than the traditional hierarchies and categories that usually result in dualist structures means a more expansive way to engage with interconnectedness, which supposedly forms the basis of ecology. It provides a framework for a complex inclusiveness that ignores the limitations of the old hierarchies between paradigms upon which postcolonialism and ecocriticism are based. The division of ecocriticism and postcolonialism is a dualizing project, which if not decentered will further the divide between the two areas of thought concerning the material world. In order to open up a transversal view, postcolonial thought must be considered as not entirely discursive and severed from the extra-textual world; its historical paradigm and language centeredness are not a denial of a world without, as shown in the thoughts of Fanon and Said.

Transversality is a function of the rhizomatic way of engagement that Guattari and Deleuze have developed in their works together. An approach to postcolonial ecocriticism patterned in a rhizome would no longer struggle to subject one zone to the other, or struggle for reconciliation, as that is no longer necessary. Thinking transversally would allow both domains to operate without resorting to a binarized way of thinking. It would open up the

domains of nature and culture and the domains of thinking about them, and allow an engagement between the realist paradigm and the historical one. This inclusiveness does not suggest hybridization or the formulation of a new category, but takes in what would normally be considered as discontinuous or fragmented as part of the rhizome as explained in Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*. This model is derived from the image of the rhizome to project a way of engagement that is non-traditional in the sense that it is non-linear and non-hierarchical. What the rhizomatic approach resists is thinking in arborescence, that is, in terms of unity, structure and dichotomies. The arborescent model is patterned like a tree with one trunk and branches all linked to one source. This kind of thinking is said to characterize most western thought. The rhizomatic approach is described as being "about multiplicities, lines, strata and segmentarities, lines of flight and intensities, machinic assemblages and their various types, bodies without organs and their construction and selection, the plane of consistency, and in each case the units of measure" (4). A transversal-rhizomatic postcolonial reading would, therefore, forge interconnections among nature and culture, place and displacement, history and nature's temporality, cross-culturation and purity, cosmopolitanism, transnationalism and nationalism, rural and urban, local and global, subjectivity and community as part of the multiplicities and heterogeneities that exist in and between postcolonialism and ecocriticism.

1.6 Outline of the Study

This research is carried out in three central chapters, intended to follow a trajectory of the three major stages of Nortje's life and works, namely South Africa (1963-1965), Britain (1965-1967) and Canada and Britain (1967-1970). This obviously will not be a perfect categorization of the poetry because thematic preoccupations and issues overlap. However, there are distinct moods and emphases in connection to spatiotemporal settings, and the structuring is not intended to serve as a strict biographical reading of the poetry.

The first of the three central chapters will deal with the concept of place and place-attachment and how these notions speak to the preponderance of images of separation and displacement that fill the poetry. Through a postcolonial reading of place, I shall be engaging Nortje's poetry famously known for its recurrent use of motifs of alienation, loss and loneliness in connection to the displacements, dislocations and removals ordered by apartheid laws. I shall explore the complex representations of the room space and exile as concepts that need exploration for articulating a postcolonial environmental reading. This focus on place is intended to draw an engagement with the supposedly opposed paradigms such as the frequently quoted Nixonian schisms, which identify ruptures in views of place and displacement, global

and local, rural and urban. I shall explore how Nortje's poetry questions such categories and draws us into alternative ways of thinking about the environment. My postcolonial reading of place works rhizomatically along diverse lines of thought to explore the way Nortje himself problematizes received divisions.

The second of the three central chapters will analyse Nortje's treatment of the natural environment in the poems, paying attention to the natural environment's significance and manner of representation in relation to the poet's awareness of the Romantic heritage and his personal existential struggles. The chapter explores Nortje's interest in the natural environment in a way that interrogates the conventional idea of nature in opposition to culture. Along with Guattari's theory of three ecologies, I draw mainly on Scott Hess's idea of everyday nature, which, as will be seen in the chapter, resists traditional ideas of nature as removed from the ordinary and the urban, as a means to a more transversal reading. I discuss Nortje's representation of everyday nature in relation to the urban and industrial and his representations of water and animals.

In the third of the three central chapters, I explore Nortje's environmentalist concerns, which show the effect of human activity on the environment. In the chapter I particularly argue that Nortje's poetry is engaged in 'speaking *as*', rather than 'speaking *for*', the environment in the ways that he challenges the assumptions that divide humanity and the environment. My discussion explores his handling of images of waste, decay and pollution as products of the consumerist-capitalist culture that he encountered in Canada, and how this also influenced the way he would think about the environment in apartheid South Africa. I also consider his global interest, how he treats the effects of global political crises on the environment and the theme of bodily and mental pollution as ways of speaking as the environment.

The concluding chapter, Chapter Five, ties the discussions of the whole thesis together around the recurrent appearance of pliatality and platial displacement as ideas that will continue to be of interest in postcolonial environmental criticism. I consider the potentials that the imagined postcolonial domestic space carries for engaging the complexities that are contained in the interpenetrations of colonial history, postcolonial displacements and the literality of place. Drawing from Nortje's treatment of exile, I also raise questions about the impact that migration, diaspora and transnationalism can have on how we continue to think about the environment.

Chapter Two

Place in the Poetry of Arthur Nortje

2.1 Introduction

Even the most superficial encounter with Arthur Nortje's poetry reveals the poet's deep interest in the idea of place and situatedness. This idea runs throughout his works from his pre-exile South Africa days to the period of exile in England and Canada. However, instead of merely celebrating place and attachment to such spaces, the poetry reveals ambiguities around the poet's consciousness of the entanglements of situatedness and unsettlement, thus raising questions concerning the interactions of home, identity and nationhood. That being so, his readers witness a back and forth movement between deep subjectivity and an acute awareness of the surrounding world, whether familiar or not. The major thrust of this chapter is to engage with the ways in which the poet's 'nomadic' life and sense of rootlessness influences his depictions of place and present a disturbance of the conception of place built on the ideas of stasis and genealogy.

Three things are important to the study of place in Nortje's works. The first is Nortje's personal accumulation of place-experiences and the alternating or simultaneous experiences of discordant places. The second is the role of land in South African politics and history, especially of the 1950s and 60s, the period when Nortje produced his works. The third is the question of Nortje's relation to what has become known as postcolonial environmentalism. As seen in the previous chapter, Nortje's childhood involved many changes of locations. Much later, as a young man, his life became one lived between the poverty of his family in Port Elizabeth and the intellectual environment of the University College of the Western Cape (now the University of the Western Cape) where he studied. His life and poetry reveal the centrality of space to a person caught between diverse, and even contradictory, economic and social worlds. His consciousness of place undergoes torsion with his departure from South Africa. In his exile poetry, he consistently develops complex interactions with both immediate places and places of memory, especially his home country of South Africa. McLuckie and Tyner comment that Nortje's "nomadism of childhood and later exile of adulthood are not, of course, identical, but there is a continuity, a general pattern of behaviour" (5).

Land has been the major source of contention along with race in South African history. In the 1950s, South Africans witnessed a series of legislations including the Group Areas Act of 1950, which sought to, and did, divide the country into 'strict' racial categories and to divide up the land along racial lines. As a result most of the arable and productive land went to the

governing white race from whom the law originated. The other races found themselves in spaces that were agriculturally depleted or that bred urban slums, crime and poverty. The apartheid laws, underpinned by a worldview based on racial and class hierarchization, did not only create such divisions, but restricted movements across racial lines. Nortje grew up amidst the restrictions, the removals and proliferation of slums that characterized the South Africa of his day, witnessing the development of the two different worlds of affluent whites and impoverished non-whites. As seen in the previous chapter, Bunn analyses the way in which Nortje has tried to relate to the South African landscape as a coloured poet raised in the Romantic tradition. The result is an engagement with estrangement and a creation of motifs of precariousness.

This section of the study seeks to contribute to the growing thread of discussions around postcolonial displacements resulting from colonial violence and globalization. The reading of place postcolonially in the context of ecology is meant to create a space where current environmental issues converse with the construction of history and such history's construction of the environment and to reverse "ecocriticism's historical parochialism" (Roos and Hunt 5). In other words, western ecocriticism's advocacy for place commitment has mostly considered the side of privileged populations without giving adequate attention to the impact of colonialism on how place is experienced by the marginalized and how that would impact their understanding of the ecological crisis. To discuss the concept of place as represented by Nortje in relation to his instabilities, along with transversality, I appeal to the theoretical writings of Bhabha on the concept of the unhomely and Buell on the five-dimensional phenomenology of place attachment. The chapter is planned in three broad conceptual movements across several sections. The first briefly provides background explanation of the role of place in both ecocriticism and postcolonialism. The second studies the recurrent image of the room as place in Nortje's corpus. The third is a study of the relationship between sense of place and exile. In a rather loose manner, the structure follows the trajectory of Nortje's life from South Africa to England, which also works with the idea of a gradual broadening of the poet's experience of space from the compactness of the room space to a global one.

2.2 Place, Environmental Criticism and the Postcolonial

The importance place has assumed as an area of enquiry within the coverage of environmental criticism cannot be overemphasised. Glotfelty includes the question "should place be a new critical category?" (xvix) in her list of questions that ecocriticism engages with. Her question implies the idea that in the relationship between place and people, the role of place cannot be

left as a mere passive setting for the human story, but must be viewed as an active category like race, class and gender. Such a question became necessary to ask because most of the early works of environmental criticism were based on works of writers who were committed to a place for a prolonged period. But beyond that, the idea of the environment itself implies location and situatedness, or being in a world. Buell asserts that interest in the relationship between “being and habitat” (*Future* 62) emerged with the growing awareness of the environment as emplacement, arguing that “[e]nvironmental criticism arises within and against the history of human modification of planetary space” (*Future* 62).

The practice of environmentalism has been connected with commitment to place. There is a pervading belief that by reintroducing a sense of place and an awareness of the aesthetic qualities of local places, there would be more commitment to taking care of the environment and, as David Harvey puts it, “a deeply spiritual concern for the preservation of the ecological diversity and uniqueness of each place” (302). Neil Evernden’s essay, “Beyond Ecology: Self, Place, and the Pathetic Fallacy”, presents a view of the role of place as rooted in the individual’s experience of and emotional attachment to a place. Drawing a contrast between the “resident” and the “tourist”, he writes that “[t]he whole world is simply fodder and feces to the consumer, in sharp contrast to the man who is in an environment in which he belongs and is of necessity a part” (99). Evernden’s intention is to provide “an open endorsement of the value of the experience of landscape to counteract the prevailing attitude favoring only the consumption of landscape as a commodity” (102). He says, “[t]he tourist can grasp only the superficialities of a landscape, whereas a resident reacts to what has occurred. He sees a landscape not only as a collection of physical forms, but as the evidence of what has occurred there” (99).

Place also plays a key role in the environmental justice movement. Resisting pollution and degradations taking place in localities is done from a local place *for* that local place. Buell rightly describes the environmental justice movement as a “series of community-based resistances against toxification of local environments and the siting of waste dumps and polluting industries that discriminate against poor and otherwise disempowered communities” (141). Places are the particular centres of these pollutions and they are centres of dwelling that these movements are fighting to protect. In this, place begins to look more like an intersection of the physical and the social as site for both nature and humanity.

Buell, trying to move on from a rigid traditional view of place, identifies three important areas that place has opened up. They are “environmental materiality [...] social perception or construction [...] and individual affect or bond” (*Future* 63). Place thus becomes a relationship or dynamic physical environment, society and subjectivity. But that is not an easy formulation

since differences in ontologies have to be factored in. To understand the role of place in environmental criticism, the “earth-centered approach to literary studies”, according to Glotfelty (xviii), must be taken into account. This approach to literature has been viewed as a necessary development in taking literary scholarship from its logocentrism to a discourse that connects with the outer physical world and even attempts speaking for it. As a result of the explosion of poststructuralist critical theory, literary studies had become increasingly a game of words around words that was divorcing literature from the outside world. This, therefore, means that place becomes the convergence of this externality sought in environmentalism and engaged with human existence through literature and criticism.

The word ‘place’ itself, however, is somewhat slippery when it comes to seeking a definition. Encountering words like ‘world’, ‘location’, ‘habitat’ and ‘community’ used in connection to place, or even as synonyms of place, indicates the intricate nature of the concept. According to Tim Cresswell, it is the term’s familiarity that makes it challenging to transcend its ordinary sense, which then makes the idea “both simple...and complicated” (1). Cresswell identifies that in commonly used parlance, place is used to denote ownership, a relationship between a person and a specific location ranging from a house to a city. It can even refer to “a sense of position in a social hierarchy” (2). He provides illustrations from “a child’s room, an urban garden, a market town, New York City, Kosovo and the Earth” (7), and tries to point out the particular quality that makes them places, concluding that they are “spaces which people have made meaningful [...] [or] spaces people are attached to in one way or another” (7).

Beyond linking ideas of place to experience and attachment or meaningfulness, and focusing mainly on its locational dimension, temporality is also an important element whose impact on the construction of place must not be ignored. Harvey, for instance, emphasises that place can be effectively defined only in the context of space and time, and can be viewed as possessing a two-fold meaning: “(a) a mere position or location within a map of space-time constituted within some social process or (b) an entity or ‘permanence’ occurring within and transformative of the construction of space-time” (294). In the second meaning, a place is produced when space is transformed through place-making acts such as naming and building. On the whole, Harvey emphasises that place is a social construct which is a site of “internally heterogeneous, dialectical and dynamic configurations of relative ‘permanences’ within the overall spatio-temporal dynamics of socio-ecological processes” (284). Yi-Fu Tuan, describing places as “centers of felt value” (4), also views place as a “pause”, an openness and freedom of space which allows movement. He writes that “each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place” (6).

Place, from all the views seen above, is generally apprehended in relation to human activity. Cresswell identifies place-making practices as “when humans invest meaning in a portion of space and then become attached to it in some way” (10). According to him, people all over the world are engaged in place-making activities. For instance,

[h]omeowners redecorate, build additions, manicure the lawn. Neighborhood organizations put pressure on people to tidy their yards; city governments legislate for new public buildings to express the spirit of particular places. Nations project themselves to the world through postage stamps, money, parliament buildings, national stadia, tourist brochures, etc. (6)

Place and space are sometimes used interchangeably, but differences have been identified between the two ideas. Buell, for example, states that the two terms are not “simple antonyms” (*Future* 63): “Place entails spatial location, entails a spatial container of some sort. But space as against place connotes geometrical or topographical abstraction” (*Future* 63). People generally have a sense of place or place-attachment, which they do not have to space. Place is also experienced through sensory encounters and so can be an object of both conscious and unconscious imagination, which space simply cannot. People therefore cannot feel the sense of belonging, ownership and intimacy concerning space as they feel about place as “[p]lace is associatively thick” (Buell *Future* 63).

Much of this kind of thinking can be traced back to Martin Heidegger, who classifies space into two aspects. The first one is space as “something that has been made room for, something that is cleared and free, namely within a boundary” (154). The connection of this kind of space with location and boundary resonates with the description of place as a marked position. He further describes space as “interval” (156), as the distances “among things and locations” (157). On the other hand, there is what he calls “space as pure extensions” (156). This kind of space “contains no spaces and places” (155); it exists as “the purely mathematical construction of manifolds with an arbitrary number of dimensions” (155). Heidegger’s comparison is re-echoed by Cresswell thus: “Space is a more abstract concept than place. When we speak of space we tend to think of outer space or the spaces of geometry. Spaces have areas and volumes. Places have space between them” (8). However, the meaning of place cannot be effectively articulated without the concept of space. The intricate relationship between the two, while they are not the same, are intertwined. As Tuan says, “the meaning of space often merges with that of place” (6) and they “require each other for definition” (6).

We would, therefore, have to agree that place is a bearer of “infinite meanings and morphologies: it might be defined geographically, in terms of the expression of empire;

environmentally, in terms of wilderness or urban settings; genealogically, in linking communal ancestry to land; as well as phenomenologically, connecting body to place” (DeLoughrey and Handley 4). It can then be conceptualized as “subjective, social and material dimensions” (Buell, *Writing* 60). Harvey also captures the different ideas that place stands for, such as: place as site of capitalist expansion, as site of being, as site of environmental qualities, as site of collective memory and site of community. Place thus becomes a multi-layered experience with the potential to resist being narrowed down to only one aspect.

The Guattarian three-ecologies model, corresponding with Buell’s three-dimension understanding of place, provides us with a transversal approach to ecology embracing environment, *socius* and subjectivity. Here the model will influence the conception of the flux of place, subjectivity and history. While this chapter analyses place on different scales and dimensions in the poetry of Nortje, and appeals to a variety of theoretical literature, the overarching framework is that which allows exchange among the differing domains of materiality, subjective experience and the socio-historical that make up place.

The schisms explained by Nixon as existing between ecocriticism and postcolonialism are deeply connected to the crossings of time and space. The oppositions of ecocriticism’s inclinations towards stability and wilderness to postcolonialism’s focus on displacement and cosmopolitanism reflect biases exercised by the different schools with respect to time and space. I therefore assume that attention paid closely to the concept of place in a postcolonial ecology would generally question the idea of place as a de-historicized fixity which disregards the molecular instabilities that normally characterize a place. A postcolonial ecology necessarily reads the intersection of environment with history and subjectivity, so that the social environment is viewed not only in its relations to topography, but also as a site for self-definition in the light of history. DeLoughrey and Handley comment that “[i]n emphasizing the production of history in the making of the global south, postcolonial studies has utilized the concept of place to question temporal narratives of progress imposed by colonial powers” (4). So one of the questions raised by postcolonial ecological criticism is “what becomes of this need for a renewed sense of place when colonialism and globalization deny local land sovereignty, and when pollution, desertification, climate change, and other forms of global environmental degradation remind us so forcefully of the ecological interdependencies of any given place?” (DeLoughrey and Handley 4). Postcolonialism’s engagement with place also seeks to check the tendencies to develop an “environmental orientalism” arising from “the ways in which dominant American forms of ecocriticism have sidestepped questions of empire and privilege in the fashioning of a sense of place” (20).

Reading place postcolonially, therefore, has a major impact on forming a more viable environmental discourse for groups of people around the world who bear the trauma of colonial histories. It presents an opportunity for a conversation between the earthliness of ecological discourse and the textuality of postcolonial critique. Reading place in this sense would give us the chance to place side by side the projections of place as a real site of experience, environmentality and advocacy and place as a discursive category. Real place as the site for both nature and society necessarily invites a reading around history. Vital states that both ecology and postcolonialism issue out of a social history, and it is this history that makes an effective lens for examining the environment in the African imagination (91). As DeLoughrey and Handley put it, “[h]istoricization has been a primary tool of postcolonial studies and, as Said and Fanon imply, it is central to our understanding of land and, by extension, the earth” (4). In fact, the view of place as not merely spatial, but as possessing temporal dimensions as well, attested to by the fact that place itself is subject to change, has prepared the grounds for place to be viewed as intricately implicated by history. Buell has noted that the temporal dimension of place is marked by “accrued platial experiences” (*Future* 73) resulting in “a kind of palimpsest of serial place-experiences” (73). These ideas of place as a process rather than a stable location open up the important relationship with place as not only a venue of, but also as an actor in history. Buell shows that history is actually the story of “space becoming place” (63) and of further modifications of place through conquests and colonializations. Harvey presents two important ways among others by which place production has occurred which help us in examining the relationship between history and place. The one is about the construction of place under capitalism and the other is place as a centre of collective memory. The former explains “how places get erected as permanences within the flux and flow of capital circulation” (295), or what he calls “capitalism’s historical trajectory of geographical expansion” (295). These happen because capitalism is “necessarily growth oriented, technologically dynamic, and crisis prone” (295). The latter point is about the “strong associations between place, memory, and identity” (304) in terms of a group of people who have occupied a particular location within a time frame long enough to build shared memory and connect their identity to the place. Harvey’s quotation of Bruggerman captures these ideas clearly:

Place is space which has historical meanings, where some things have happened which are now remembered and which provide continuity and identity across generations. Place is space in which important words have been spoken which have established identity, defined vocation, and envisioned destiny. Place is

space in which vows have been exchanged, promises have been made, and demands have been issued. (304)

A historical approach to a matter works with an assumption of the present being in both connection and dialogue with the past. Essentially doing that also assumes a definition of humanity being and becoming in relation to time, which in turn implies history as a process. Postcolonialism's inherent dependence on history is articulated by Said in *Culture and Imperialism* as one of the "commonest strategies in interpreting the present" (3). These exhumations of the past play the role of questioning the truth of 'official' history - the power play involved in its construction and its consequence on groups denied access to the formations of such narratives. Said sees this approach as a viable connection to the question of the future of a group of people. In fact, "[t]he main idea is that even as we must fully comprehend the pastness of the past, there is no just way in which the past can be quarantined from the present. Past and present inform each other, each implies the other and... each co-exists with the other" (*Culture* 4). Although T.S. Eliot's idea of history as what brings together the different division of time to the present for the present to fully grasp its meaning provides Said with a structure to look at history, it is "idealistic [in that] its conception of time leaves out the combativeness with which individuals and institutions decide on what is tradition and what is not, what is relevant and what is not" (4). In this Said purports that history is a selective formulation.

Attempting to marry culture and the history of imperialism, Said brings us to a very important aspect of the study at hand. In order to achieve this, it must be recognized that art (culture) must be viewed in its "earthly contexts" (7). By earthly contexts, Said implies the existence of history and geography outside art that art necessarily apprehends:

Everything about human history is rooted in the earth, which has meant that we must think about habitation, but it has also meant that people have planned to *have* more territory and therefore must do something about its indigenous residents. At some very basic level, imperialism means thinking about, settling on, controlling land that you do not possess, that is distant, that is lived on and owned by others. For all kinds of reasons it attracts some people and often involves untold misery for others. (7)

In the quotation above Said makes an important link between history and imperialism, and imperialism and place, otherwise projected as "the earth", "habitation", "territory", and "land". Involved in this are "indigenous residents" and "others". He implies that history is generally a strategy of interpreting the present which raises questions about the reliability of what is said to have happened in the past and its effect (or even continuity) in the present. Said's intention is to conduct a "geographical inquiry into historical experience" (7).

According to him. “[t]here are several varieties of domination and responses to it, but the ‘Western’ one, along with the resistance it provoked, is the subject of this book” (10). Said understands that European imperialism was indeed a capitalist move in which “profit and hope of further profit were obviously tremendously important, as the attractions of spices, sugar, slaves, rubber, cotton, opium, tin, gold, and silver over centuries amply testify” (10). But despite the economic success, this was not the primary reason Europe had for her expansionism. Europe wanted to rule the colonies based on an idea that polarizes the colonizer and colonized, and shows that the colonized was an inferior group of people that needed to be ‘supervised’. Said sees that this was done by developing a mentality in “decent people” to accept the imperialist process more as an obligation to the weak, a will to power rather than merely a form of exploitation or oppression. Said further describes this action in a way that shows colonialism with all the risks and sacrifice involved as a rather frivolous venture, stating that “the enterprise of empire depends upon the *idea of having an empire*” (11).

In *Orientalism*, Said explains that knowledge is the basis for Western imperialism. Westerners engaged in in-depth study of the cultures and languages of non-Westerners in order to homogenize them for domination. The homogenization of these geographies and cultures, as expressed in centuries of Western literatures, is what Said terms “imaginative geography”. This for him is the assumption that underlies the practice of imperialism and colonialism. The use of the word “imaginative” is deliberately employed in the attempt to question the relationship between what exists in the mental realms and what is out there. The Orient in Western culture is largely a product of the mind, since “some objects are made by the mind, and [...] these objects, while appearing to exist objectively, have only a fictional reality” (54). The imperialist imaginative geography has thus succeeded in creating boundaries between Europe and other places. The far-off land is viewed as “the land of the barbarians” (54). This “practice of designating in one’s mind a familiar space which is ‘ours’ and an unfamiliar space beyond ‘ours’ which is ‘theirs’ is a way of making geographical distinctions that can be entirely arbitrary” (54) because these boundaries were not agreed upon by people on both sides. This process is built on an emphasis on difference, which translates to the binary of superior-inferior. As “[a]ll kinds of suppositions, associations, and fictions appear to crowd the unfamiliar space outside one’s own” (54), identity is thus defined in negative terms, that one is what they are because they are not the other, the foreign, the barbarian, or whatever names they choose to give the other. The European view of the Orient, which is “not quite ignorant, not quite informed” (55), assigns Europe the position of being “powerful and articulate” (56) and the East as “distant and defeated” (56). There is also the representation of the Orient as dangerous.

The imaginative geography of European imperialists functions in tandem with or even as an off-shoot of the knowledge passed on by respected figures like Hegel and Kant. Hegel's work, for instance, divides Africa into three: Africa south of the Sahara, which he calls "Africa proper" (109); "the north of the desert" (109), which he describes as European Africa. The third division of Africa he calls "the river region of the Nile" (109) which connects with Asia. In this we note a pattern that shows the closer the place is to the centre, Europe, from where Hegel wrote, the more acceptable, such as in the designation "European Africa". He describes "Africa proper" as having no connection with the rest of the world, "the land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night" (109). Hegel makes an interesting connection between this disconnect and the geography of Africa. The geographical condition is described in terms that emphasize the otherness of this part of Africa as dangerous nature, a "home for ravenous beasts, snakes of all kinds – a border tract whose atmosphere is poisonous to Europeans" (109). The geographical features are described as a body of incongruous features forming at best an image of "wild confusion" (110). In fact, Hegel's description of the landscape of Africa is meant to reflect the imagined barbarism of the inhabitants of the said locations. Such a history ignores the meanings and significations held by the 'Negroes' of Africa at that time and regards their way of life as the negative of European culture. This is an example of the view of Africa which informed the mission of the colonial project. According to DeLoughrey and Handley, this "determinist discourse of colonial (tropical) place was often used to justify the practice of slavery and the denial of citizenship and subjectivity to non-Europeans" (12).

The othering of the African landscape as a site of backwardness took another turn with the expansion of empire. Fanon offers a description of the typical colonial world in which the spatial binarism continues. The colonial country was a site for violence on the natives as opposed to the more civil treatment the oppressed in capitalist countries (the mother countries) were given. In the "colonial world", the difference between the native areas and the settlers' areas were incomparable: "The two zones are opposed, but not in the service of a higher unity. Obedient to the rules of pure Aristotelian logic, they both follow the principle of reciprocal exclusivity. No conciliation is possible, for of the two terms, one is superfluous" (*Wretched* 30). The place-making process involved in producing the settlers' towns were set to emphasize difference and inequality. Such towns had structures built with strong and durable material, had electricity and streetlights, had good roads made with asphalt and made to look clean with the provision of facilities like the garbage-can. In contrast to that, the "town belonging to the colonized people, or at least the native town, the Negro village, the medina, the reservation, is

a place of ill fame, peopled by men of evil repute” (30). The native town is characterized by shortage of space and overpopulation, hunger, poverty, darkness and poor sanitary conditions.

Thus, in the colonial world, the other world is created to polarize the space taken by the colonizer, an execution of the underlying mentality of disparity held before conquest and its embedded sense of racial superiority. As seen in the case of Hegel, the connection between place and race cannot be ignored. The settler’s description of the native in “zoological terms” (*Wretched* 33) informs the construction of the kind of settlement that would ensure a correspondence between being and habitation. Fanon’s emphasis with regard to the colonial world is on segregation, which he describes as a “world divided into compartments, a motionless, Manichaeistic world, a world of statues: the statue of the general who carried out the conquest, the statue of the engineer who built the bridge...the native is hemmed in; apartheid is simply one form of the division into compartments of the colonial world” (*Wretched* 40). In this we see that colonialism involved a process of place-making which included not just compartmentalizing, but even erasure of symbolizations upheld by the indigenous peoples of conquered territories.

Fanon’s mapping of the “colonial world” was demonstrated in apartheid South Africa. In 1950 the Group Areas Act was enacted to lawfully divide the society racially. Land was at the centre of everything. According to Bunn, “[t]hroughout the 1950s and 1960s the South African landscape was remade according to a series of legislative, juridical, and political imperatives that constituted a new landscape semiotics of race, class, and gender” (35). These series of legislations included the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949, Immorality Amendment Act of 1950, the Population Registration Act of 1950, the Group Areas Act of 1950 and the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act of 1953. The Group Areas Act particularly meant a segregation of residential areas according to race as identified by the Population Registration Act. Since urbanization had earlier brought the races together in towns and cities, the new law meant total separation based on the identified races. People were therefore relocated, or forcefully removed from their towns to other places assigned to them by the law. According Adhikari, under “the Group Areas Act of 1950, well over half a million Coloured people were forcibly relocated to residential and business areas usually on the periphery of cities and towns. The 1953 Separate Amenities Act, which introduced ‘petty apartheid’ by segregating virtually all public facilities, also created deep resentment” (146). Nortje was raised in such an environment witnessing these marginalization and restrictions in both Port Elizabeth, where he grew up, and Cape Town, where he went to university. Bunn, describing the process of transformation that took place in Nortje’s time under apartheid, claims that “Crawford, in

Cape Town, is one of those older suburbs which, prior to the promulgation of the Group Areas Act, continued a variegated population of Coloured and white working-class families” (34). Quite a great amount of violence, however, went into the process of removal and resettlement in a place like Crawford, which was the pattern in many other cities in South Africa. The result of these removals included displacement of the rural coloured people to the city “to forge another deeply alienated identity” (35).

In examining place postcolonially from the angle of transversality, a concept borrowed from Guattari to contain the fact of diverse ideas and domains as relating in non-hierarchical ways, this study takes into account the effects of colonialism on the postcolonial subject as it relates to the subject’s relationship to place. Postcolonialism has been a form of identity politics carried out in the light of colonial history. It has taken the responsibility of theorizing the manner in which the past affects the present in the psychic dimensions of the colonized person. Amal Treacher writes that “[o]ne strong and intractable strand of this theoretical and political body of work is a concern to understand the subjectivity of colonised and coloniser, a wish to transform the political and psychological conditions of the countries that can crudely be termed the Rest as opposed to the West” (44). That is to say, this space is where collective history and the individual present cross paths. If place is the venue of collective memory, the site of history that invades the present mind, it stands in a relationship, with all that it signifies, to the self-perception of the colonized person. Treacher points out that the “past is relentlessly in the present, inexorably in the here and now” (50), shaping subjectivity.

Said refers to Gramsci’s *Prison Notes* which points out the need for knowing oneself “as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces” (*Orientalism* 25). Said discloses his personal subjective struggle as an ‘Oriental’ in a world dominated by the West’s constructions of the Oriental identity: “In many ways my study of Orientalism has been an attempt to inventory the traces upon me, the Oriental subject, of the culture whose domination has been so powerful a factor in the life of all Orientals” (25). Clearly the self is here viewed as shaped by the process of history, like a repository of events that have taken place even before such a self came into existence. Said’s view of these traces he has to deal with implies a burden on the postcolonial subject to consciously or unconsciously develop strategies of living as a carrier of history’s assigned designations, which draws attention to the interplay between place and history with the individual in the centre.

Fanon has attempted to capture the psychic dimension of the colonial project. In describing the compartmentalized colonial world, he shows that the use of violence by the colonizer to attain such a division is not just a physical activity, but one that is also meted out

on the mind of the native, to use Fanon's term. The simple idea of segregating settlements and then privileging the settlers' side of the line leaves the native in a position of self-resentment. He/she becomes a person dissatisfied with who they are in their desire to attain "whiteness", for the settlement of the European symbolizes the perfectly desirable. The intensity of this psychic displacement is couched in the words "lust" and "envy": "The look that the native turns on the settler's town is a look of lust, a look of envy; it expresses his dreams of possession – all manner of possession: to sit at the settler's table, to sleep in the settler's bed" (*Wretched* 30).

Considering Nortje's grappling with a sense of rootlessness in relation to his disconnect from South Africa's motherly love (of course, along with his fatherlessness, loss of lover and personal existential discomforts), the native's precarious existence can be read through Heidegger's concept of dwelling, which transcends the idea of staying in a building. Dwelling has to do with the way to be human, for to dwell means "the manner in which we humans are on the earth" (147). Dwelling, therefore, is simply equated to being. That is what makes it precede building: "We do not dwell because we have built, but we build and have built because we dwell, that is because we are dwellers" (148). Heidegger further explains the nature of dwelling as "to be set at peace, [...] to remain at peace within the free, the preserve, the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its nature" (149). What does dwelling, however, mean for the colonized subject like Nortje in what Treacher describes as the "struggle to inhabit a world, which has been made for others" (50)? Bhabha applies this to the postcolonial realities as the concept of 'unhomeliness'. To be unhomey is a psychic condition which does not mean physical homelessness. It is the uncertainty that the colonized subject has to deal with in the absence of the peace, freedom and preserve identified by Heidegger as the intrinsic ingredients of dwelling. Unhomeliness becomes the postcolonial condition that shows the sense of uprootedness suffered by the bearer of humiliating history, in a globalizing world where categories become blurred and authenticity is out of reach.

2.3 Private and Public Spaces in Arthur Nortje's South Africa Poems

Nortje's poetry, in its typical way of merging items belonging to diverse domains in one piece, has placed the room space in intricate conversation with the interiority of the self and the outside space as site of politics and ecology. This calls for a reading that would draw attention to the most basic idea of the environment as habitation, the root idea of the word ecology as home, and how they impact on the intersections of the psyche, *socius* and environment as identified by Guattari. In this section, I examine Nortje's representations of the room space and

public places as they relate to his problematic political position in contesting the borders of the public and the private and its implications for a postcolonial ecology. In the first part of the discussion, instead of the house structure itself, I shall focus on the depiction of the interior space as frequently represented by Nortje in his poetry. I structure this part of the discussion in stages that deal with the interpenetrations of the self, the room and the exterior world, the relationship between the room space, dreams and repose, and the relationship of the room space to the ideas of desire and search in the poetry. The second part of the discussion focuses on the poet's treatment of spaces outside the home considering their significance in the way they bear witness to history and impact on the psychic dimensions of the postcolonial subject.

I shall draw largely on Bhabha's explanation of unhomeliness, which is rooted in phenomenology, to engage the transversalities that exist in the relationship between spaces. Bhabha's work generally seeks to engage the *present* results of the past, the complex collisions of cultures and diverse temporalities, and the forging of identities across borders where it is untenable for opposites to be seen as pure essences. In expounding the concept of unhomeliness, he does not only emphasize the *experience* of space over its materiality, but even focuses more on the experience of *failure* to enjoy the promise of such space as a result of the blurring of borders between the inside and the outside. In describing unhomeliness, he writes that "to be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the 'unhomely' be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres" (13). Bhabha sees the idea of the unhomely not only in terms of location and spatiality, that is physical displacement, but also in terms of the intersection of such space and the temporality of history and its bearing on the psyche. It is, therefore, the point where the home and the world converge, where the public and the private collide, where the past and the present meet. For him, the postcolonial subject is already a "dispersed being", to use Gaston Bachelard's expression (*Poetics of Space* 7), as a result of colonialism and the imbalance in globalization. Being what Bhabha calls "a paradigmatic colonial and postcolonial condition" (13), unhomeliness counters a view of the private space as that which is entirely free from the world, entirely divorced from "historical trauma" (17). The concept of the unhomely generally operates within Bhabha's wider engagements with the ideas of transition and the in-between. For him history has rendered the postcolonial subject unable to find repose in the ideas of neat divisions of space into private and public. The private ceases to be able to stand opposed to the outer world. The postcolonial subject experiences the unhomely as the "traumatic ambivalence of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence" (15). In this process "the recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions"

(13). The motifs of the room and public space will be studied mainly in relation to Nortje's pre-exile poetry, in which case they work as a medium by which to engage the tension of apartheid and a sense of place in the poems analysed.

I shall begin this analysis by examining the ways in which the room poems imagine interpenetrations of the self, the room and the world as a study that is interested in the transversality of domains as a progressive approach to literary ecology. Although Nortje's representations of the room space have come to us in diverse forms and moods, it is the vision of being under the pressure of an intrusive, yet distant, world, and a broken self in compact space that protrudes the most. There are poems about a bathroom, about a kitchen, and about a sitting room, but most of the room poems focus on the intimacy that can only logically be attributed to a bedroom. The room does not come to us primarily in terms of its concrete materiality either, but more in the effect of its presence, in the experience associated with the space. We are not so much confronted by the room's physicality as we are by the claustrophobic impact, its alienating force in collision with the poetic subject's conflicted sense of loss and desire. In the poem "My Vacant Self", Nortje forges a vision of the room space occupying a sort of middle space between the self and the world. The entire poem is permeated by a sense of loss and estrangement. It begins as follows:

My vacant self confronts the window.
Day's rain slants its wires
of sad pathetic silence.
Above the bowed and huddled houses
manoeuvre the endless veils of cloud:
tissues that drift and fade but never surrender. (1-6)

In this portion, the room is the space where the speaker is entrapped in himself, a self that is presented as both split and "vacant" (1). The paradox embedded in the idea of the vacant and split self shows a troubled or restless psyche. The room then becomes an extension of this sense of entrapment and separation. The opening line of the poem is packed with the speaker's absence of self-knowledge, a sort of subjective disavowal. Note the tension between "my" and "self", the extrapolation of the adjective "vacant" between the two words, which originally would be one word ('myself') signifying wholeness. The vacancy of the self suggests, rather than a loss of consciousness, a sense of loss in the ontological sense, which provokes a confrontation of the 'reality' that lies beyond the room. The window is a recurrent image in Nortje's poetry, which Klopper identifies as a "metaphor of the division between self and

society” (“Nortje and the Unhomely” 170) and as closely associated with Nortje’s “use of the image of the mirror as metaphor of the entrapment of the self” (170).

Confronting the window here is, however, also both an act of belonging and detachment. It presents an opening, an intrusion of the outside world into the room space, the impossibility of the private to be free of the outer world. Being that part of the room that connects the speaker with the world and at the same time prevents him from reaching that reality, the window stands between the troubled self and the world that he belongs to and fails to belong to simultaneously. What comes to the speaker through the window is a mixed image of nature and urbanity in “sad pathetic silence” (3) and “endless veils of cloud” (5). The houses outside are “bowed and huddled” (4), a vision of humiliation, fear, collective suffering and a sense of belittlement. The stanza itself reads like an attempt to simultaneously find an ahistorical space in which to shut the self from the ascriptions of history, and yet respond to the pull of the exterior to “confront the window” (1). The juxtaposition of houses and clouds indicate the heterogeneity of place as site of diverse experiences particularly as a site where culture and nature intersect with each other even in very asignifying ways. However, we can also read the very lack of innocence of nature from participation in history. Here, subjectivity is entrapped in a world of multiple crossings of natural and cultural domains and witnessing each other’s plights. Nature witnesses the plight of the houses huddled and bowed. The detachment from the outside world also serves as a point from which to gaze on the complex interweaving of nature and culture in the intertwinement of the “Day’s rain” (2), “bowed and huddled houses” (4) and “endless veils of cloud” (5). These images show a crossing of the physical and social environments working within the tensions of historical time and the time of nature.

Conveying a force of desire in the midst of uncertainty and a level of claustrophobia, confronting the window could be an attempted act to find a connection for the autonomous individual self, withdrawn from the world. The second stanza introduces other characters into the picture seen through the window:

Gutter trickles gain attention
And fresh probes of the glass distort my view
Of money traffic, Friday police, black people.
The raindrops grope and cling but cannot enter,
And where my breath is eager scenes are blurred. (7-11)

The window becomes rather more unreliable in its delivery of the images as rainwater and breath steam cloud the vision of the world beyond the room. The world outside is that of

“money traffic, Friday police and black people” (9). These images suggest the outer world’s social and political realities of racial separation and the use of police force in the urban setting of the speaker, an image of the township the speaker belongs to. Situated in the room suggests the speaker’s withdrawal from a world that alienates him from political belonging and freedom. The relationship between the self and the social world is established as unified and separated in one breath, resulting in what Bhabha calls “the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world” (9). Bachelard has pointed out the role of the house or room as the safety space from where to escape the storms of the outer world. He writes the house “maintains [the human being] through the storms of the heavens and through those of life” (7). In this poem, we see the poet in the most intimate space that can afford him such safety and enable him to view the outside world from a safe distance, but that is not the case. The poem, written in 1965, was most probably written in Cape Town when Nortje was a student there. As earlier noted, Cape Town of the 1960s, was a site of traumatic dislocations and restrictions for the black and coloured populations. Bachelard and Buell note that coming to a new house, the subject does not come to an entirely new space, but comes in with the accumulation of experiences of old places (Bachelard 6; Buell, *Future* 73). Accordingly, Nortje’s experience of Cape Town’s townships must have come in contact with his previous experiences of Port Elizabeth, where he had also grown up as a marginal figure. It is, therefore, hard to read the room space in isolation from the wider geo-political world outside. In the poem, the room is invaded by the storm outside and so is the psyche. Although Bachelard, according to John Stilgoe, refers to natural storms such as “[g]ales, hurricanes, and downpours” (x), the storms in this poem are the social and political oppression and violence that characterize the social space in South Africa of the 1960s.

The third stanza of the poem speaks of an entrapped subject:

My deepest life when rising to the throat
 blows hard against dividing surfaces,
 marring my love of gentle vibrant strings
 because the cold makes vapour of what’s vital. (12-15)

The lines depict a subject whose breath, “rising to the throat / [...] blows hard against dividing surfaces” (12-13), expressing a yearning for articulation, for understanding, for meaning, for self-representation and for the chance to transcend this alienating space. This alienation, he complains, results in ruining an experience with nature, his “love of gentle vibrant strings” (14), referring to rain. This naturally leads to the last three stanzas’ depiction of the speaker in a sort of resignation:

Drizzle ceases and the evening wind
Walks along windows clearing the drops,
The last few ones a streetlight diamonds.

For dusk has intervened: I draw the curtain
And shift my numb lumped loins across the parquet.

Who hears the dark drunk heart affirm the rhythm? (16-21)

The closure with the intervention of dusk and a drawn curtain does not signify a finality or resolution in the tension between subjectivity and exteriority, between room and outside world. Rather the tension is even furthered by the withdrawal. The room is not enough escape; it is intruded by the unpleasant external world and requires further withdrawal from.

Sometimes Nortje turns to the motifs of dreams and sleep in relation to the room. The room is generally thought of as antithetic to the public space, where people can retreat from history, from politics to daydreaming and fantasy. Bachelard, for instance, thinks of the domestic space in connection with daydream and repose, seeing the house as “our corner of the world [...] our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word” (4). According to him, “the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace” (6), and is thus experienced both in its reality and virtuality – its materiality and the imagination. He reasons that “the house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind. The binding principle in this integration is the daydream. Past, present and future give the house different dynamisms, which often interfere, at times opposing, at others, stimulating one another” (6). This integrating factor of the house is what prevents man from being “a dispersed being” (7). Bachelard’s overall view of the interior space is one that places experience at the centre of the kind of atmosphere that such a space acquires. Said words the idea as follows: “The objective space of a house – its corners, corridors, cellar, rooms – is far less important than what poetically it is endowed with, which is usually a quality with an imaginative or figurative value we can name and feel: thus a house may be haunted, or homelike, or prisonlike, or magical” (*Orientalism* 55). The question, however, is, what happens to the unhomely postcolonial psyche’s dream and imagination in an intimate space that is already politicized by historical violence?

In the poem “There Is This Dream”, the speaker faces an interruption and an inability to return to the internal rest that sleep and the room represent. The first three lines of the poem read as follows:

Unravel why the iron demon flees!

These passing trainwheels slaughtered sleep
which used to frolic in the brain. (1-3)

The speaker in these lines raises questions about the interruptions of technology, “the iron demon” (1) in human life. This works in two ways. On the surface, it is a complaint about how the “trainwheels slaughtered sleep” (2) which was beginning to settle in the speaker’s mind. On the second level, however, is the clash of technology’s impact on time and the time of the human mind and body. The verb “flees” (1) speaks effectively to that.

In the second stanza, a melange of ideas runs through the speaker’s mind to further keep him awake with disturbing questions which concern race, religion or metaphysics and some trivia:

The wind barbs questions through the skin
wants me to ask what colour is
or else how tough can granite be,
whose god is right, and why the sky has rainbows. (4-7)

Asking “what colour is” (5) calls up the colour politics of the day and its impact on the speaker’s racial identity. This subtly connects with the racialized outside world inhabited by the poet. Religion in the context of divided races might have been a vexed question about the genuineness of religion practised by people who share the same doctrines but cannot worship in the same places because of colour difference. Asking “whose god is right” (7) points to that. This is shown as a destabilization of nature’s arrangement of races meant to be as beautiful as the multiple colours of the rainbow.

The third stanza focuses on the place of dream:

Tonight there is this dream
buried in the lame limbs
that sleep will never come
which you in me or steel or rock can’t shatter. (8-11)

Although dreams can be disturbing also, the speaker sees them as a window of escape from reality, a journey from the disturbing realities that surround the human subject in the external world. In this stanza, the speaker is unable to transit into that world as the dream is still “buried in the lame limbs” (9). In the poem, the possibility of Bachelard’s sheltered dreamer is denied because of the intrusion of the outer world – industrialization, capitalism and a political system that establishes division of people and legitimizes inequality. It is also denied by the questions about race and religion. This is when the “unhomely moment relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence”

(Bhabha 15) furthered in the last stanza which concludes with the speaker resigning to a state of inaction:

So bitterness proliferates
as I lie breaking wind
swallowing my spittle. (12-14)

The room becomes a space where “bitterness proliferates” (12), where the external world and the disturbed subject’s response meet. The response is captured in the form of “breaking wind” and “spittle”, portraying the release of an inner troubled self. It also suggests further disconnect, leaving him as a lonely bearer of his troubles. Also noteworthy is the speaker’s use of the words that point to the body directly or indirectly, such as “the brain” (3), “the skin” (4), “the lame limbs” (9), “breaking wind” (13) and “spittle” (14). These somatic terms point to the failure to transcend the physical and the political into the temporality of sleep and dream which would offer him a break from history and modernity’s burden.

The room as the site of the unhomely must not be limited to ideas of alienation, however. Embedded in the idea of the unhomely are its ambiguities. For instance, the room is not only a space for separation, but for expressing desire as well. The idea of the window earlier seen has already pointed us to a desire to connect with something outside the self, which also points to both ecological and social connections. Bhabha argues that to “live in the unhomely world [...] is also to affirm a profound desire for social solidarity” (27). Nortje’s room is sometimes occupied by another, mostly a lover. In some of these poems the poetic subject attempts conversations with the other, but ends up complaining about silence and loss. These scenes develop the idea of the room as unable even to contain the poetic subject’s searching. And so the encounters often turn to wordless erotic engagements with the other presence, a turn to the corporeal. Picturing the room as the space for sexual escapades, which he sometimes describes as orgies, Nortje disturbs the vision of the room as a sufficiently intimate, separate space from the outside world, showing that these bodily engagements are simply the failure of the room space to provide the much needed protection. In the background of this discussion is Simon Gikandi’s observation that, “[u]nder the regimen of apartheid, its laws and customs, the domain of the private, which is supposed to be driven by desire and to operate outside the regulatory order, were effectively colonized by the state” (487).

In the poem “Recovery”, Nortje returns to the idea of vacancy, but this time around it is the house space that is regarded as empty instead of the self. The fissure projected is in the context of a romantic affair between the poetic subject and another. The separation is, therefore,

internal within the walls of the room, instead of the walls of the room separating the speaker from the outside world. The first stanza captures it as follows:

Empty houses are the grief beginnings
to those who've wanted to be reconciled.
Slickly the chances slip beneath
hands which waste the golden hours
under this brooding quiet sky. (1-5)

The image of the empty house connotes a broken relationship and a lover's absence, especially to "those who've wanted to be *reconciled*" (2, emphasis mine). The idea of reconciliation points to relational rupture and the desire to reconnect. However, the speaker regrets the loss of "golden hours" (4), moments when a reconnection could have been successful. In this, the house has failed to provide a space where the subject feels protected from the forces of rupture. The speaker feels a sense of incompleteness in the painful absence of his object of desire, the lover:

From you and you I bear these memories
of tenderness and violence, quick bright laughter.
An autumn day with milky cloud
returns the scenes, now edged with wisdom.
Room of ash and brandy fumes. (6-10)

In this stanza, the speaker is left with nothing but conflicting memories of "tenderness and violence" (7), of union once enjoyed and the pain of separation. These memories are connected to images of nature outside the room which remind the speaker of the scenes that might have led to the current separation, but these scenes are now "edged with wisdom" (9) as the speaker resolves to behave better in the future. The room space also becomes an uncomfortable space where the "ash and brandy" image points to the speaker's continual loneliness. The room itself is shown as angry at this condition. Note the speaker's placement of interior and exterior in both stanzas, how the internal space of the room affects the view of the sky outside as "brooding quiet" (5) and how the "autumn day [...] / returns the scenes" (8-9) reflected by the "Room of ash and brandy" (10). The unhomely moment caught in this stanza shows, however, that the "room of ash and brandy" is insufficient to handle the impact of the memories of "tenderness and violence" (7), which create a fusion of daydream and nightmare, rendering the house haunted. The room space is linked in the last stanza of the poem to a sort of pre-given or primal connection with love, rest and peace:

What is love but hunt
for peace from restless longings, throngs

of desolate desires. – What is love?
To love the stranger is one's only way,
To be alone is thus our destiny. (11-15)

The connection here becomes impossible as the search is continual and the object of desire taken further away from the poetic subject's fulfilment, remaining "the stranger" (14). The last two lines, "To love the stranger is the only way, / to be alone is thus our destiny" (14-15), mourn the impossibility to unite with another soul, the individual remaining interminably alone and the object of desire a stranger.

In "Exploration", Nortje explores the idea of the room and outside in terms of desire to reach outside the self, to reconnect through that with the self and society. The first stanza reads as follows:

in the barren mornings of the winter i try
to shake out the cobwebs of nightmares,
to belch that room's miasma. i
try to laugh and my lips feel dry
above the heart that thumps regardless. (1-5)

This stanza conveys a desire to escape from what the poet calls "that room's miasma" (3) and "the cobwebs of nightmares" (2). This claustrophobia suggests a haunted space from which the speaker seeks flight. The image of "barren mornings of the winter" (1) conveys ideas of dissatisfaction and boredom. Speaking of the room in terms of miasma and nightmares depicts the intimate space as having lost its warmth and protection and has become harmful to the soul of the speaker. The room is thus shown to be polluted and harmful as a failing environment will be spoken of.

Different from the resignation of the other room poems, the speaker takes the step to leave the discomfort of the room. He joins queues at "employment agencies, departments, bureaus, / standing long in the rag-and-bottle queue" (6-7), but each time he returns for feedback, his "face", his racial identity, disqualifies him. Even the public space where he could relax, "the lush park of the city council" (10), alienates him racially. The following lines further show the depth of the speaker's sense of alienation in the public space:

under the Board of Executioners sign
a blond policemen [sic] with his leather holster
in the grounds of their houses of parliament

in the barren mornings i try (12-15)

The symbols of government, the “*blond* policemen” (14, emphasis mine) also create another level of a sense of marginalization of the speaker in public space. It is, however, obvious that the speaker returns to the room since the outer world that seemed to hold promise of freedom from the room’s noxious atmosphere and invocation of the nightmares has also failed him.

So far the references to public or outside spaces have been pointing to the historical fact of the South African spatial crises, what Gikandi describes as the “systematic control of public spaces and the management of aspects of human experience” (487) created by the apartheid government. The paradox of the situation lies in the intersection of this “uneasy marriage” (487) of the public and private and the official fragmentation of spaces. Such intersection, as told by Preben Kaarsholm, results from “a powerful historical legacy of colonialism, segregation and apartheid, which has contributed strongly to making separate publics of people with different claims to citizenship” (411). At this point, I shall turn to a few more poems that are centred on the public space.

In a number of Nortje’s poems, spaces of transit or transport, either a bus or train, what Marc Augé describes as “mobile cabins” (79) are explored. The “traveller’s space” (86), which Augé reasons may be “the archetype of non-place” (86), whose transitional nature is embodied in the idea of travel in this period of supermodernity,⁵ is of particular interest to Nortje’s poetic imagination. Amidst what they mean for the poet in terms of self-identity and the wider society’s political tension, the transit images speak of in-betweens, margins, liminalities and passages. They work like Renee Green’s staircase that Bhabha describes in *The Location of Culture*:

The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that ensures difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy. (5)

The poem “Rondebosch” describes an experience in a moving vehicle from which the speaker observes the physical world outside:

Stillness grows in pregnant on common air

⁵ By ‘supermodernity’, Augé is referring to the present stage of modernity which is characterized by excesses of time, space and the individual, in other words, an increased access to multiple temporalities, a compression of space through technology’s provision and increased solitude that individuals experience. Non-places, according to him, are a product of supermodernity (77-94).

public space during apartheid in terms of deliberate systematic control (487). The separation that was the major mark of the South African society at that time did not affect only people and races; it also affected public spaces and, in fact, inscribed the history of the country on it. Nortje's poetry contains imagination of this kind of spaces in connection to both the politics of the day and individual disturbances. The kind of spaces I am referring to differ from non-places in that they are open to all members of the society without requiring payment for access such as beaches, parks and open streets. While public spaces denote freedom and equality, the South African society in the days of apartheid did not accord it much of that as those spaces were racialized. The poem, "Under Lansdowne Bridge" below depicts how the South African public space speaks of the political tensions of the society:

After the swoosh of doors slid shut
at Lansdowne Bridge I swim in echoes.
Who fouled the wall o people?
FREE THE DETAINEES someone wrote there.

Black letters large as life stare you
hard by day in the black face;
above the kikuye grass to the sandflats
goes the boorish clang-clang of railways.

Darkness neutralizes the request
till dawn falls golden and sweet,
though a sudden truck by night
cornering, holds it in spidery light. (1-12)

Nortje wrote this poem during his Cape Town days in 1964 to capture a moment of observation that speaks beyond a moment at a railway station. The railway system has come to function in South African literary imaginary as a metaphor.⁶ Stepping out of the train, the speaker is stepping out of the non-space as categorized by Augé, into a truly public space, the area that is open for free access to the public. Instead of the freedom identified with open spaces, the first thing the speaker encounters at Lansdowne Bridge is the writing on a wall "FREE THE DETAINEES" (4), which have much to say about the space in question. First, it is not known who wrote those words; it is just attributed to "someone" (4). Second, the person who wrote them only "fouled the wall" (3) – a sarcasm about the way marginalized voices are rendered obscene. Third, the unidentified source of the statement proves it to be an act of subversion, not from the authorized body that was responsible for public signs and instructions.

⁶ See L. Wright. "Third World Express: trains and 'revolution' in Southern African Poetry." *Literator* 31.1 (2010): 1-18.

Fourth and most importantly, the statement brings in a whole matter of the history and politics of South Africa. It speaks about the issues of freedom, which the racially marginalized faced in terms of movement, economy and education. The word “detainees” calls up images of resistance and incarcerations of the vocal, which was a common pattern in the South Africa of those days.

Public graffiti is significant in a few ways. The South African society, like America of the earlier years of the twentieth century, had public signs that alienated non-European races, preventing them from accessing certain public spaces and utilities in their country. In such societies, where the authorized office could place in public ‘Whites Only’ signs as the text of public communication, the way to respond in addition to public protests, would also include public graffiti. So this is both a response to the unjust system of the day and an act of subversion. Of course, the poet is only being sarcastic, asking in the voice of the dominating group “who fouled the wall?” (3), demonstrating that every-day public places can become centres of inter-group exchange even through the non-personal anonymous public texting. The lines “Black letters large as life stare you / hard by day in the black face” (5-6) are a minimalist way of speaking about the race situation in South Africa at the time. The expression “Black letters” suggests not only the colour of the letters but also the racial-social source of the text, standing for the suppressed voice of a community deprived of the right to speak about their maltreatment.

Nortje’s imagination of public spaces also plays a role in his imagining of personal and social salvation. In the poem “Athol Fugard’s Invitation”, Nortje projects the public place as a site of negotiation and common ground for people of different races who would want to see the country change. The speaker refers to an invitation to hold a conversation with the foremost dramatist Athol Fugard “to discuss the country over wine and curry / red and strong to give [...] courage” (5-6). In this public space, the coloured speaker and the white dramatist meet both as individuals and as representatives of their different races. While this looks progressive, it is not without its complexities. The quick change in weather from a hopeful sunny one to harsh rainfall symbolizes the tension that surrounds the issues of politics and race at the centre of their meeting and rings with the poet’s cynicism:

Rain beats hard against the glass,
linen flaps on a drab balcony.
Boreas batters the walls – a windy conceit
because I lack the Nordic light
illuminating a surface force. (15-19)

The speaker's self-consciousness about his racial identity as opposed to that of Fugard is also projected. The last stanza speaks of "cobbled multiracial pavements" (24), possibly speaking of the cobble being of different shades of colour and thus pointing to the South African racial situation. Even with that, "white rain [still] beats in stinging torrents" (25) meaning that white domination is felt with all its demeaning effects in public spaces just like the rain.

From these discussions of Nortje imaginations of private and public spaces, it is clear that it becomes difficult for the poet to separate the public and private, the political and the personal, and the ecological and the historical. These separate domains find themselves overlapping one another intricately so that the public space, with its sense of anonymity and promise of freedom, becomes claustrophobic in a sense for the black subject in a South Africa of separations and restrictions. The handling of the outside world by Arthur Nortje has been a search for equilibrium between the private and the public, which remains at the mercy of slippage throughout the entire body of his poetry. The poet demonstrates a very personal dissection of the political and public in a way that complicates the boundaries in a country and space where boundaries were the language of governance and politics. The fusing of private spaces, open urban spaces and transitory non-places all combine in the poetry to intersect with history and multiple temporalities that have come to characterize the postcolonial as forming, as Bhabha puts it, a "moment of aesthetic distance that provides the narrative with a double edge, which like a coloured South African subject represent hybridity, a difference 'within', a subject that inhabits the rim of an 'in-between' reality" (19).

2.4 Homeland and *Flânerie* in Arthur Nortje's Exile Imagination

Engaging the concept of place in environmental criticism would not be complete without giving room to the significant relationship between place and mobility. While certain ecocritics have advocated place commitment as the route to deeper love, respect and responsibility towards the environment, as discussed earlier in this chapter, it would seem that such a proposal, perhaps inadvertently, ignores the fact of involuntary (and voluntary) human dispersion. Human history can be said to be a stack of narratives not only of turning space into place, but of dislocations as well. Such realities have continued to locate place in a position of constant redefinitions, which have questioned the idea of stasis identified with deep ecology. People have moved, or have been moved, for economic, social, political and personal reasons. In the streams of these movements are artists who have left their homes for other places which would seem to offer them political or creative freedom or, most of the time, both. Nortje left South Africa at the age of twenty-two to seek an atmosphere of intellectual and social freedom from the country he has

described as “the land of problems” (“Song for a Passport” 18). In the following sections, I am looking at the poet’s reinvention of the homeland, how his imagination both before and during exile works to convey the antinomies that the homeland means to him in order to unravel how the poetry unsettles normative ideas of the sense of place in ecocritical studies. This is followed by an exploration of the postcolonial exile figure as a *flâneur* in the British public space, which is a recurrent motif in Nortje’s England poems. The concept of the *flâneur* is discussed extensively in Part 2.6. At the centre of this study is how the speaker in Nortje’s poetry cuts a figure, as Bhabha puts it, “caught in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion” (*Location* 1). The implication of this reading is what postcolonial exile and its inherent continuous struggle with identity and belonging mean for the environment in an age of increasing global ecological anxieties and increasing fragility of place.

My discussion is informed by Buell’s “five-dimensional phenomenology of place-attachment” (*Future* 72). This model offers a means to engage instability and its implications for the environment through its coverage of the relationship between place, subjectivity and movement. Buell sees the need to accommodate the instability of the modern world which is characterized by varieties of human mobility such as the “experience of displacement, diaspora, exile, expatriation today” (*Writing* 70). This theory of place-attachment is based on a phenomenology that projects the inseparability of being and emplacement. Place is not just a background for human activities, but an active part of who we become. The five points of the model include an acknowledgement of the more traditional structure of sense of place likened to the widening of concentric circles with the home in the centre. The second point is the modern world’s departure from that conventional view so that “place attachment spreads out to look more like an archipelago than concentric circles” (*Future* 72), in that people find they are attached to multiple places at a time. The third point shows that place is not stable in itself; subject to time and movement of people or natural processes, a place never remains the same. This is followed by the point that “place-sense is a kind of palimpsest of serial place-experiences” (*Future* 73). We understand a new place in terms of previous place-experiences and previous place experiences are, in turn, modified by the new place. The last point says that attachment to place can also be achieved by imagination even without physical presence. By positioning place-attachment as a function of temporality, experience and change, Buell makes us see that even the idea of home can no longer be pegged to the conservative concept any more in a world of “postmodern transnationalism, mobility, and diaspora” (*Writing* 64). Although Buell is not a postcolonial theorist, his five-point phenomenology of place-

attachment offers a valid tool for a postcolonial analysis of place. Reminded of Nixon's identification of postcolonialism's emphasis on displacement, urbanity and internationality as opposed to ecocriticism's focus on stability and locality, Buell's inclusion of the fact of movement and the changing nature of place as a result of personal and political factors provides a place where postcolonial concerns and environmentalist considerations of place can converse. It is, therefore, flexible enough to allow us engage the concept of place along with the burdens of colonialism and globalization.

Nortje has been viewed both by critics and himself as a poet of exile. But is the term 'exile' appropriate for describing Arthur Nortje and his poetry? The Latin original of the word, *exilium*, means 'banishment' and *exul* means a banished person⁷. Biographical writings on Nortje have not portrayed him as a political activist not to mention being a political 'nuisance' that the government was aware of and then sought to ban or banish. Said, connecting exile to the "age-old practice of banishment" in *Reflections on Exile* (144), describes exiles as those prevented from returning to their country. The expatriate, on the other hand, is a voluntary immigrant. Both, however, possess "a touch of solitude and spirituality" (144). Andrew Gurr's notion of the creative exile, the artist who leaves the "colony" to pursue greater artistic freedom in the "metropolis", is tempting, but Nortje cannot be said to be completely such a figure. Tanure Ojaide's conspicuous avoidance of the word "exile" in preference for "expatriate" and "expatriation" also seems appealing, but can we say Nortje fits that image properly? Gagiano points out the problem of the term 'exile' as used to describe Nortje. She says Nortje "could not be said to have experienced this condition, particularly as he was still legally free to return to South Africa at the time of his premature death" (125). However, his lack of creative or intellectual freedom in South Africa is inseparably linked to the political atmosphere of his country.

Finding a place for Nortje in the wide range of meanings associated with immigrant status would therefore be somewhere between banishment and expatriation: banishment, because by simply stepping into the identity of a writer, he, as a matter of course, became a part of the already persecuted community of writers who faced bans and banishments. Gurr writes that while the exile is "political in that he has suffered the chill of official displeasure in some form or other, or at least feels unwelcome, and waits passively for the weather to change" (18), the expatriate is "rather a hedonistic escaper [in] wholly voluntary detachment from their original home" (18). Even though the speaker in Nortje's poetry makes a distinction between himself

⁷ See <www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=exile>

as a “nominal” exile and those he considers the real exiles (“Autopsy” 2), he blurs this distinction as a figure who synchronously feels unwelcome in his homeland and fits Gurr’s image of the “hedonistic escaper” (18). In this way, he might be seen to be in what Bhabha describes as a “complex on-going negotiation that seeks to authorise cultural hybridities that engage in moments of historical transformation” (*Location* 2). Nortje’s exile figure is, therefore, one that struggles primarily with psychological estrangement caused by an idea of nation that constructed his problematic identity and was further reinforced by physical detachment. Placed side-by-side with Buell’s progressive model of place-attachment, Nortje’s exile as an experience demonstrates quite well Buell’s point about the attachment to multiple places, the instability of place itself and the centrality of the imagination in the sense of attachment. While Buell has usefully provided the vocabulary for our analysis, it is clear that, rather than attachment, we shall be dealing more with a subject confronted with multiple detachments. I shall, therefore, discuss Nortje’s construction of the homeland in connection to his exile poetry, the employment of the female figure as metaphor for the homeland, the way in which he imagines the homeland from a distance, and his exploration of the British public space as a flâneur figure in exile.

2.5 Ambivalent Female Figures

The complex relationship Nortje had with the land has found expression via the image of the woman – to show both attachment and justification to leave the country. If exile is the “unhealable rift forced between...the self and its true home” (Said, *Reflections* 137) or a “condition of terminal loss” (Said, *Reflections* 137), Nortje’s early poetry certainly already conveys this sense of rift and loss even before he is a physical exile. His poetry written before he left South Africa in 1965 reveals a troubled relationship between the self and the land. These conversations with himself and his homeland are conveyed in the language of love and rejection. In framing his five point theory of place attachment, Buell’s overarching assumption is: “There never was an is without a where” (*Writing* 55). The way in which place shapes subjectivity does not have to be only in the positive sense; it can be equally negative. Experience happens when “bodies are physically located somewhere, in particular locations” (*Writing* 55). The ‘fragmented’ nature of Nortje’s poetry, therefore, suggests a broken subject who in turn reflects a dysfunctional relationship with place, his country, particularly, which is crafted in the poems in the image of the woman, both lover and mother.

In his poem “Mother Republic”, one of his earliest works, Nortje creates an imagination of conflict that is both psychic and social. By reinventing the homeland as mother, he explores

an image that would make his unhomeliness even more poignant. Tuan explains that “[t]o the young child the parent is his primary ‘place.’ The caring adult is for him a source of nurture and a haven of stability. The adult is also the guarantor of meaning to the child, for whom the world can often seem baffling” (138). This motif of ‘parent as place’ and parents as the source of meaning to the young mind is what Nortje explores in this poem from the position of a dissatisfied child. He writes,

I clutch so grimly something, mother –
Some sentiment, or hopeless hope beyond
My means, for I wax dumb
Lately, dumb (1-4)

In these opening lines of the poem, the speaker establishes a form of overwhelming psychic helplessness. The metaphor is quite clear as the title shows that the speaker is addressing the republic, the country. But speaking to it as mother conveys a sense of troubled intimacy. He is able, though with difficulty, to speak his mind about the hidden sentiment “or the hopeless hope” (2) that lurks within his mind. The communication, however, still remains broken as the sentiment or hope cannot be clearly identified and the speaker remains “dumb” (2,3). The meaning drawn from the parent spoken of by Tuan is, therefore, foreclosed by this elusiveness and broken communication.

The second stanza turns from the interior dimension of the first stanza to an outward one. The reader is quickly confronted by the images of violence and suppression in the stanza through words like “dungeon-mesh” (5), “barbed wire” (5), “spikes” (5), “toil-potatoes” (6) and “rains of blood” (7). In these images of brutality, the poet points not only to physical violence but to the exploitation of black labour to signal a national economy that is built on oppression, exploitation and inequalities. Relating this to the mother image in the first stanza delivers an image of a nation that is a mother who fails to be a true mother. The impact of this on the speaker is conveyed in the words “blind” (7) and “numb” (8) signalling personal trauma and deterioration caused by a deep sense of rejection. The ensuing stanza furthers the motif of violence:

Me slash with whip, till pain can merge
With dungeon black, I am your property:
Mother, my muscles feel nothing, but temptation
To succumb ... (9-12)

In these lines, the speaker embodies the collective pain and loss of the black race. He voices out personal pain doubling as a voice for the years of maltreatment that the black race has suffered in different ways. The mother is carved in the image of a slave-master whose victim

the speaker has become as he faces corporeal and psychological violence. These lines are, therefore, an expression of his frustration at the absence of maternal nurture and stability or rootedness. Instead of maternal love, the speaker receives the kind of “slash with whip” (5) associated with slavery. Being maltreated in this way is a denial of the genuineness of the speaker’s narrative of existence and pain. The result of this treatment is a feeling of estrangement which the poet equates to death. Tuan’s idea that the child sees the parent figure as source of meaning comes into play again. Production of meaning for Nortje is not restricted just to knowing the external world, but also to understanding the self. The negotiation of identity is strongly linked to the motherland as source, but in order to succeed in creating this connection between the self and the land, the land has to be maternalized. This way the impossibility of true place attachment in a politically turbulent location is explored. In his typical fashion, Nortje’s self-identity straddles his biological descent and sonship-as-citizenship of South Africa, the motherland. The mother image is particularly linked to his self-identity in such a way that mother and land interpenetrate almost imperceptibly. Even within the preponderance of maternal violence and deprivation in the poem, the ambiguity must not be missed in the mother image. The emphasis on the maternal image combines the tension of a son’s love and a yearning to be accepted as his mother’s son and a mother’s outrageous rejection. It is, therefore, possible that the unnamed sentiment and the hopeless hope in the first stanza refer to the desire to leave the country.

Years later when Nortje was eventually in exile, he would still think of his country in maternal terms forming part of his palimpsestic experience of place, as articulated in Buell’s fourth point about place-attachment. The poem “Affinity (for Maggie)” was written in 1965 in London. It is addressed to a lover from whose absence the speaker is hurting. In the poem, Nortje places his “blood mother” in conversation with the land-as-mother. He writes:

my blood mother mourned
the damp and gloomy evenings of our country
whose womb hurt with deadweight. (1-3)

This stanza is about the failure of the motherland to mirror the “blood mother”. The ambiguity in these lines lie in the implication of the biological mother as place that is warm and loving experienced by the speaker, but which has failed to extend to the country’s womb. The blood mother mourns “the damp and gloomy evenings of [...] [the] country” (2) on behalf of her child who would have to struggle his way through a motherland that remains cold towards him. This deadweight referred to in the stanza has produced in the speaker a “lack of belonging [...] the

root of hurt” (7) which then leaves him with no choice but to seek escape: “the quick child, he must travel” (8).

Interspersing these stanzas are stanzas about the speaker’s hurt from his previous lovers’ absence. In one of them, he writes, “my seeds have fallen in absences / sunlight dried them like / spittle on asphalt” (4) and ends with a hopeful note towards the new lover he is addressing. Looking at the connections made to his motherland and exile as a search for a certain kind of rootedness, it is possible the speaker is speaking to the country of exile in the image of the new lover.

It is worth noting that Nortje does not usually address the country in paternal terms. He has found the mother image adequate to mirror his conflicted nationalism. In this view, I find Kate Soper’s contrast of the concepts of fatherland and motherland quite useful. She writes that while fatherland is mostly used to speak of the nation “in its history and tradition, in its existence as sedimented stock of customs and values, and as a temporally inherited and transmissible ‘culture’” (108), motherland “invokes nationality in its supposedly eternal territorial fixity as land or earth, as ‘natural’ precondition and spatial background to its historical and cultural existence” (108). The foregrounding of the mother image as homeland in Nortje’s works is understandable when his background of fatherlessness is also taken into consideration. Unable to draw stable identity and meaning from the father, who is problematically both white and absent, leaves Nortje a young man who feels rootless even in the homeland. Where eventually Nortje speaks of fathers in “Native’s Letter”, he only refers to historical figures to negotiate his identity in their shadows. The mention of “apocryphal” (13) in the poem, for instance, shows that this is just a personal construction of paternity through which to create a sense of rootedness, an “apocryphal” genealogy.

Soper finds that “[n]ationalism very frequently makes use of the iconography of the land as female” (111) underpinned by the idea of family or home. This is created in order to generate “patriotic loyalty”. But this said nationalism of Nortje’s is rather problematic in a land regarded as a mother who is loved and hated simultaneously; a mother who prefers some of her children to others. In “Affinity”, Nortje speaks of “lack of belonging” (7) in a landscape characterized by “absences” (4), “damp and gloomy evenings” (2).

“Affinity (for Maggie)” also demonstrates, apart from the maternal motif used in depicting the land, Nortje’s national love in very private and libidinal terms treating “patriotic and personal love in terms of each other” (Berthoud 5) so that sometimes it is difficult to discern if the speaker is addressing a lover or the country. Not only does Nortje’s employment of “these non-mimetic or non-realistic procedures convey [...] a highly realistic sense of the

interpenetration of the private and the public” (Berthoud 5), it also involves the depth of even the psychic and existential wrestling involved in the poetry. Just like in “Affinity (for Maggie)”, in the poem “So Much Speech” Nortje’s addressee is a feminine figure that hangs between country and personal lover, but here the figure is situated in the context of communication. The first stanza of the poem begins by addressing the silent lover who does not respond to the speaker’s talk about issues as mundane as the weather. He complains, “It seems me speaking all the lonely time” (1). The hurt of the one-sided communication is wrapped in the idea of loneliness. The poet conceives of words as powerful enough to forge a connection between lovers and where only one lover speaks alone, the relationship is problematic. It also turns out the speaker is not only addressing a female lover, but the country as well. This is demonstrated in the second stanza:

All one attempts is talk in the absence
of others who talked and vanished
without so much as an echo.
I have seen men with haunting voices
turned to ghosts by a piece of white paper
as if freely spoken words are black magic. (7-12)

Suffering separation and loneliness, the speaker is trying to find connection through his words to his addressee. However, the stanza also speaks beyond private matters into political ones. The motif of speaking to a lover graduates into the idea of the men trying to woo their country without success. In this case, they are not only ignored, they are eliminated. The lines say, “others [...] spoke and vanished / without so much as an echo” (8-9). This is clearly a reference to people who had been banned or even imprisoned for speaking out against the injustices of apartheid. Such people who chose to use their words, including writers and political activists, spoke in clear terms to the government of the day with their “haunting voices” (10), but even that did not prevent them from being “turned to ghosts” (11) by the law and policies of the government. The poet uses a pun on the race issue of the country by referring to the apartheid law as “a piece of white paper” (11) and voices of protest and resistance as “black magic” (12). South Africa is, therefore, to Nortje a lover who hears her partner’s voice without responding; a lady who also actively silences the voice of her lover.

The poem “Synopsis” also addresses this kind of silence in the lines “We’ve spoken. You / ignored the syllables. / Between the sentences / amass the silences” (13-16). Instead of attention or even a respectable response, the speakers of these words suffer for their words. The last stanza of the poem refers to the martyrs, prisoners and exiles of the protest, asking “[w]here have the men gone / who fought colour / theories, cracked spectrums - / back to the prisms?”

(17-20). The motif of silence in relation to the country is further explored in the poem “The Long Silence”. This time, however, it is not referring to the silence of those in government but that of the protesting communities which is a result of “deaths and removals... / [r]estrictions, losses” which “have strangled utterance” (1-4). The history of unjust laws and racial discrimination is compressed within that metaphor in order to blur the lines between personal emotional turbulence and socio-political instability. In the sexual imagery, the speaker communicates the loss and inability to understand the rejection by asking “[h]ow shall I now embrace your rhythms?” (5). He communicates the intricate interweavings of personal love and patriotism in a way that communicates psychological exile and sets the stage for physical exile as conveyed in the following lines: “New developments / filter in / or even you with measured love / may break my tone of no response: / the loveless essence / remains the empty / nights and years, husks of the exile” (12-18). The ambiguity of lover-country becomes even stronger in these lines with the focus becoming more intimate, pointing to “love” and ideas of exile together. It is quite interesting to note how the poet refers to himself in terms of exile in this pre-exile poem written most probably in his Cape Town days.

Poems written shortly before Nortje’s departure from South Africa express a longing to leave the country and also the normal pain of separation. “Song for a Passport” combines these sentiments as the speaker prepares to leave South Africa finally. In the first stanza he is in front of a mirror shaving, which he describes in some detail, celebrating the preening process for what lies ahead: to take a photograph for his travel documents. Describing how “[t]he nimble razor smoothed the skin” (1) and how “in the new September tide / [he] gravitate[s] to what is comely” (5-6), combines images of interaction between implement and body to point to a new beginning. The process of shaving itself is celebrated and made to look like a shedding of an undesirable past. This past has to do with the subject’s emplacement and the experience of such a place. The excitement of leaving and the image of renewal point to unpleasant experience in connection to the place about to be left.

The second stanza, however, becomes more complex. The speaker begins to address a lover who would have commented on his new look. He is thus caught between staying with his love and travelling the world. In this brief moment, he writes about how “[p]arting of ways exposed / love’s tattered fabric / but the world rose / larger through the tears in bright enticement” (13-16). The image of the loose love fabric indicates the truth that, beyond running away from issues in the country, human beings are always able to tear away from familiar places to take root in newer places. As such the world outside looms larger in the speaker’s mind (15-16). While it becomes an emotional moment to tear away from what has been

familiar, problematically familiar, for that matter, the future outside the country looks more enticing than staying back. These lines reveal the idea that even though the speaker witnessed traumatizing occurrences, it would be unfair to judge the postcolonial experience of the colonized space as totally displaced, as the subject has a level of attachment to place in terms of its familiarity and the relationships formed in that space.

The third stanza reveals further the speaker's mixed feelings about leaving: "Who loves me so much not to let me go, / not to let me leave a land of problems?" (17-18). The speaker's experience of South Africa, is shown to include love on micro levels and problems on macro levels, making it difficult to rule out sense of place completely based on the experience of spatial displacements. Despite these feelings the speaker ends the poem, with "O ask me all but do not ask allegiance!"(32). This gives the poem a kind of closure that speaks of the permanence of his exile even before he leaves. Also, by treating his exile as "swelling dreams" and "bright enticement", reveals that he has already constructed a somewhat utopian vision of his future abroad. He has already begun to exhibit the kind of place-attachment to a place experienced only through the imagination, as shown by Buell. Treating place as a site of memory and experience for Nortje is very significant in the sense that it represents everything that he has to leave behind, a sort of antithesis to the better life that supposedly awaits him abroad.

2.6 Writing from the Other Side

Buell considers movement from one place to another not in the sense of discontinuity, but as an accumulation of varied memories of places previously encountered. A present location would therefore be understood in terms of "how rooted or peripatetic my previous life has been, what kinds of surrounding I am conditioned to feel as familiar or strange, and so forth" (*Future* 73). Looking at such an accumulation of places in Nortje's experience and memory and how they are played out in his poetry, would the idea of exile as discontinuity be applicable to him in the strict sense of the word? The disenchantment that he encounters in exile and the sense of alienation that accompanies his speaker goes on to show that he left South Africa only physically; South Africa and her problems had not left him. Being away has ironically deepened the wound and intensified the sense of alienation. Recalling the words of Said that the experience of exile is "the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home" (*Reflections* 137), one cannot but notice that Nortje's poetry exhibits this unhealable rupture between the self and homeland even before exile, as earlier seen. Exile has, therefore, only become for him a physical discontinuity rather than a

psychological one. His lover-country poems express a passionate desire and a painful inability to close up the fissure between the individual and his native country. Since, as Bhabha has made clear, unhomeliness is not absence of physical abode, but a psychic sense of dislocation and displacement, Nortje's unhomely condition is not primarily a consequence of his spatial exile, but of the different experiences of ruptures in his relationship with absent father and his mother country, where his father does not stand alone, but as representative of the marginalizing group.

In the poem "Waiting", written in England in 1967, Arthur Nortje writes about the "isolation of exile" (1), showing the development in his exile condition as it climbs up to where he develops, in Gurr's formulation, a "commitment to create a fresh sense of identity through the record of home" (15). In this moment Buell's description of place-attachment through the imagination comes into play, except that this time, it is not a projection into the future or a fantastic place, but a reinvention of the place left, the past left. So in the poem "Waiting", we have a personality caught between two worlds to which belonging seems extremely elusive, between memory and the present, nostalgia and fear. It is very much the way Salman Rushdie describes the feeling of the immigrant as "sometimes we feel that we straddle two worlds; at other times, that we fall between two stools" (15). This poem sounds more like the second part of Rushdie's description. It is a feeling of fallenness, of loss, of instability and unbelonging. The first stanza of the poem captures the "isolation of exile" (1), which is a primarily a psychic state, but is captured in the language of the physical world outside the speaker, in fact, the British urban space. He writes,

The isolation of exile is a gutted
warehouse at the back of pleasure *streets*:
the *waterfront* limbo stretches panoramically –
night the beautifier lets the *lights*
dance across the *wharf*. (1-5, emphases mine)

Through these words signifying concrete or visible objects outside the mind, the speaker points to the outside space as a reflection of his loneliness. Again, we are faced with the poet's struggle with a sense of detachment carried over from South Africa and not being able to take root in the land of exile. The second stanza moves on to develop the in-betweenness of the speaker, the accumulations of place-detachments intermingling with a sense of attachment:

Origins trouble the voyager much, those roots
that have sipped the waters of another continent.
Africa is gigantic, one cannot begin
to know even the strange behaviour furthest
south in my swastikaed xenophobic department.

Combe back, come back mayibuye
[...]
mayibuye Afrika. (13-21)

The images of place serve as holders of memory of the past. Of importance to the point here about discontinuity is the speaker's disturbance about origin. The sense of loss expressed in these lines resides between the different domains of home and exile, but which further deepens the speaker's already shaken sense of identity, what Bhabha calls "originary and initial subjectivities" (1). It would, therefore, seem safe to say that a sense of place, or a lack of it, is not an isolated experience, in that it is a palimpsest of other place-experiences. Nortje can only define his new host communities and his identity in terms of accumulated memories of South Africa. So, in the lines, the speaker feels a tension between "origins" (13) or "roots" (13) and the "waters of another continent" (14), between the "strange behaviour furthest / in my xenophobic swastikaed department" (16-17) and the call to return to Africa, "mayibuye Afrika" (21). However, instead of creating a series of negations, the poet is rather depicting himself in a complex middle where he has to negotiate. Already, South Africa for him is not a homogeneously flat "swastikaed department", speaking of the intensity of racism in the country, but a place where "breakers of stone" (19), the exploited working class, and the "crowds" (19), the majority expelled from the choicest portions of the country's land and economy, are also calling for a return of the exiles. The picture thus becomes that of a conflicted sense of place, a mix of detachments and attachments.

Reimagining South Africa in exile also comes to the speaker in recalling ideas such as the "loneliness of lost / beauties at Cabo de Esperancia" (22-23) and "spring's / miraculous recrudescence in the sandscapes of the Karoo" (23-24). While "lost / beauties" (22-23) could be referring to both humans and flora, the key idea seems to be to marry landscape with people, with the multiplicities of history and diverse human communities described as "multi-humanity" (26). The depletion of these landscapes and even their renewal are connected to human suffering as signified by the image of "strangled throat" (26). Having looked at these troubled relationships with both places of exile and origin, the poet quickly turns to a more private world, now addressing a lover as yet another failed means of salvation from his intense loneliness: "You with your face of pain, your touch of gaiety, / with eyes that could distil me any instant / have passed into some diary, some dead journal" (28-30). This lover herself is an exile like the speaker, for he says, "You yourself have vacated the violent arena / for a northern life of semi-snow" (37-38). This shared suffering and displacement has not, however, served

to bring the two together to deal with the loneliness of separation from native land and foreignness in another continent.

The closing of the poem, however, brings us closer to the poet's ecological consciousness: "I suffer the radiation burns of silence. / It is not cosmic immensity of catastrophe / that terrifies me: / it is solitude that mutilates" (41-44). The poet places two dangers together, that of environmental catastrophe and psychic depletion in which he feels the pressure of the latter much more because of its immediateness. Again, we are drawn to Guattari's thought to look at the issues of the environment transversally by considering even matters of subjectivity. Here, the poet shows that the emphasis on impersonal environmental crises must not overshadow what individuals experience, the crises that happen in the ecology of the psyche. Looking at the whole poem, we must not forget that the "solitude" (44) he speaks about does not merely refer to brief moments of loneliness, but a whole condition referred to recurrently as loneliness in reference to sense of belonging to a country and alienation in another country. It is a political condition as it is a psychic one. It is an ecological condition also, as it is a psychic one.

Shortly after his arrival in England, Nortje's brief excitement in exile and attempting to take root in the country of exile is expressed in a couple of poems that speak of his social activities to befriend people and have intimate relationships with women. In "Jesus College Bar", the speaker is shown socializing, attempting to establish friendships and redefine his identity in this new place. He writes, "Relax among people: I am new!" (20). This is conveyed with the feeling of new-found freedom.

This leads us to the poet's treatment of the English public space in connection with the concept of the *flâneur* in exile. In addition to Nortje being "one of the first poets to present a black man's view of the South African urban situation" (Chapman, "Exile" 67), he clearly also cuts a figure of the *flâneur* in some of the poems written in England. Being the artist in exile, this makes his *flâneur* gaze perhaps not primarily political, but rather the gaze of the artist. However, it is impossible to read that gaze as pure artistry not least because of the political readings of the English urban spaces. This argument will be narrowed to his representations of the urban space in England as a result of his *flânerie* in that space. In the background of Nortje's *flânerie* in England is the image of England shaped by exposure to English literature as "sweet little island" (8) against the "blond-bossed kingdom" (11) of South Africa in the poem "At Mowbray Waiting". He betrays this feeling of resentment towards South Africa by associating the English space with freedom in the line, "I have not been to London to announce my freedom" (16). The *flâneur* poems express elements of the urban wanderer who observes

people, buildings and events in a detached anonymous manner. While documenting these observations in poetic form, it becomes impossible for the poet not to comment on the race situation, the politics and the injustice embodied in the landscape.

The *flâneur*, “the embodiment of modernity” (Boutin 124), is a concept that Walter Benjamin made popular as his description of the urban stroller and observer originating in the city of Paris in the nineteenth century. It is instructive to note that Benjamin’s ideas of the *flâneur* were influenced by Charles Baudelaire who is mentioned in Nortje’s poems, such as “Pornography: Campus”. At the heart of Benjamin’s formulation of the concept of *flânerie* is modernity as symbolized by the modern city. The *flâneur* was connected with three characteristics that Benjamin identified: observation, reading and producing texts, all centred on the modern metropolitan scape (Frisby 28-29). However, I am interested in exploring the *flâneur* motifs in a context outside the period and place that Benjamin wrote about. Nortje’s exploration of this pattern in the 1960s as an African exile in the European metropolis calls for a revision of the concept as a postcolonial strategy for engaging the subject’s sense of displacement and historical dislocation. Already Estelle Murail, in her detailed historical study on the *flâneur*, has argued for the idea of the *flâneur* as an intersection, what she calls a *croisement*. She establishes that the *flâneur* has to be understood as being all the time an unstable figure: “His Protean nature means that he is a figure who can export himself very easily and the fact that he travels fuels this polymorphism. In other words, he changes and is constantly being constructed and reconstructed through exchanges” (220). The application of the word *croisement* to the concept of the *flâneur* is built on the idea of the figure crossing bounds spatially, socially and even textually. To Murail, the *flâneur* is a “crosser [...] whose work is one of a *croisement*” (223), also functioning in a palimpsestic sense across spaces and temporalities, harmonizing and disharmonizing. She writes, “The *flâneur* is thus both a cross, a hybrid creation, and one who can perform these *croisements*, move across different geographical, symbolic and aesthetic spaces and thresholds” (228).

In addition, I am also drawn to Jacob Edmond’s “*flâneur* in exile” which “emphasizes collision, encounter, and touch, rather than mimetic models of comparison that claim equivalence or commensurability” (376). Edmond’s postcolonial reinvention of the *flâneur* is built on the idea that the *flâneur* was never separated from Europe’s practice of imperialism; he “was a product of the nineteenth-century European imperial capital; while he was acutely self-conscious of his place at what he perceived to be the center of modernity, his sense of European particularity was nevertheless also born out of his relation to non-Europe” (377). Like Murail, he insists that “the *flâneur* is always already hybrid, estranged, uprooted (despite

its supposed European origin)” (378). These understandings of the *flâneur* provides a means to engage the walk and observations of the postcolonial urban stroller in the European metropolises.

Nortje particularly carves himself in the image of the stroller who is engaged in observing the city and writing about it in dialogue with the urban township spaces that he left behind in South Africa. Edmond’s term, ‘the *flâneur* in exile’, therefore offers us an adequate platform on which to engage Nortje’s works, such the lines below from “Speaking Out”:

I have leaned in on half-doors, wryly regardant,
Observing events, reactions, atmospheres –
And resigning myself to the pen’s cool guidance,
Thinking it fine for a poem to please my peers (7-10)

Nortje finds material for his poetry in these urban environments. These lines demonstrate Benjamin’s three activities associated with the *flâneur* – observation, reading and producing. They convey the contradictory relationship of the *flâneur* with the streets in terms of participation and distance; he is at once a part of the world and a removed observer of the urban world. In the poem “London Impressions”, for instance, the speaker’s *flânerie* comes to play with his voyeurism, the gaze on strangers. The poem is set in open city spaces like Trafalgar Square and Hyde Park in London. The speaker’s aimlessness in those open spaces speaks of a desire to find both a hiding and viewing place in the public space. The result is references to statues, urban waste, cosmopolitanism and animals. The yoking of the particular and the anonymous is also captured in the poet’s sense of familiarity with Whitehall, Nelson’s statue, Trafalgar Square and Hyde Park, and the distance in the reference to “a beatnik” (4), “Foreign Noises” (13), “A girl” (17), “the ugliest bloke” (23), “the nymph” (26) and “the gentleman” (31). In this, the *flâneur* occupies a space where he straddles familiarity and anonymity; thus this city space produces him as “a cross, a hybrid creation” (Murail 228). Nortje’s familiarity is expressed in the way he invokes particular place names that show repeated encounters with the space in question. This also shows a level of acquaintance and attachment while at the same time showing it as a space for people to be ‘lost’ in anonymity. The use of common nouns for other occupants of the space points to the regular encounter of strangers and being unrecognizable in this familiar space. Nortje’s familiarity is also expressed through his observations of small details such as “Nelson’s patina of pigeon shit” (5) and “Foil tins float[ing] on the dusty water” (9). While these details evoke the sense of the everyday and familiar, they also bring together the poet’s interest in the physical world’s diversities as a site of the social and ecological together. For instance, the image of pigeon waste on Nelson’s statue is a fusion of nature and art commenting symbolically on the interaction between nature

and history and between the pastness and the progress of time. These observations also afford the poet a view of England's cosmopolitanism and history against the background of apartheid's contradictory topographies expressed in the line "young and shackled for my sharpness / in the Union of South Africa" (39-40).

What then is the role of a member of the peripheral group playing the *flâneur* figure in the 'centre'? What impact does this have on our discourse? The last stanza of the poem opens up to this:

And big red buses, I thought I would never catch
Sight of the gentle monsters
When I was young and shackled for my sharpness
In the Union of South Africa. (37-40)

In this stanza Nortje comes up as the "*flâneur* in exile" or the *croisement* that Murail talks about. He brings the history of the empire to the centre. As a *flâneur* figure, he is engaged in the merging or crossing of temporalities, thus creating an accumulation of experiences and also speaking of England's urbanities in terms of her colonial legacies. The postcolonial *flâneur* would thus be engaged in comparativisms and a flux between identities, landscapes and temporalities. In these lines, Nortje places South Africa in antithesis to England's freedom, towards which he is even sceptical. He links the freedom with tourism, a cynical way of proposing that England's borders are open to "Foreign Noises" (13) for purely economic reasons.

In these poems, the motif of exile in modern poetry has shown that the relationship between subjectivity and place can be rather hydra-headed, but engaging the nature of that relationship can serve to create avenues for the exploration of newer ways of seeing and treating the environment. An environmentalism that severs the land from the politics and history that surrounds it would ignore the fact of how individual and group differences complicate the idea of place and how this can be an enriching way of reading the environment. This has been the vision of postcolonial eco-criticism: to extend the scope of environmental criticism to cover the social-historical, especially as it concerns the imbalances in power relations and their impact on both marginalized society and individuals. The focus on exile in relation to place-attachment therefore becomes a way to further discussions on the tortuous engagements of the marginalized subject with the sense of belonging and self-identity. Exile endows the concept of place with the status of engaging in the debate about the possibilities of reconciling conventional ecocriticism and postcolonial critique in order to expand the scope of environmental criticism. Referring again to the difficulties listed by Nixon as encountered in

attempting to forge a union between the two areas is the tension of the prominence of commitment to a local place in ecocriticism and the foregrounding of displacements in postcolonialism. By conceptualizing exile not just as a change of place, but taking in the psychic struggles and sense of alienation that accompany such experience, environmental study is even more enriched with the social, historical and political dimensions of the physical world.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to delve into Nortje's exploration of place in relation to South Africa's apartheid laws and his exile condition. In the first part of the discussion, the tension between private and public spaces is explored. The poems have revealed a difficulty to achieve total privacy in the context of apartheid, whose marginalizations have found a way of encroaching upon the private space through the physical means of the window which reveals the troubled world outside, and through the imagination, which opens up the troubled postcolonial psyche. In other words, the colonization taking place in the public space does not in any way exclude the private space; rather the private space has come to be victimized by such political decisions and practices. The opposing space, the public one, on the other hand, does not offer the poet total freedom as it always bears the symbols and language of segregation and alienation. In these poems about the private and public, Nortje has also shown an ecological dimension in which the entrapped subject is not only alienated in his room, he is also caught between gazing on natural entities and being separated from them. The second part of the chapter explores the idea of exile, both as a psychic and spatial condition. The concept of exile in Nortje's poetry reveals the intricacies of the attachments and separations that exist between the postcolonial subject and the homeland and the foreign space of exile. Exile in the poetry has, therefore, not only provided a means to engage the political-psychic dimensions of the colonial and postcolonial worlds, but is also a platform for exploring the relationship between the colonized subject, topophilia (or a lack of it) and ecological matters.

Chapter Three

Nature in the Poetry of Arthur Nortje

3.1. Introduction

In her essay “Nortje and Nature”, Bloomfield studies how Nortje deploys an aspect of nature in his poetry. She compares him to the Romantic poets in the way “he utilizes all four seasons throughout his poetry” (29). Bloomfield has not, however, attempted to theorize nature or to define a scope of possibilities for nature. This silence complicates the matter, although at first one is tempted to think she uses the word in a one-way sense “to mark off that part of the material world that is given prior to any human activity, or from that which is humanly shaped or contrived” (Soper 16). A closer reading indicates how she has connected nature with Romanticism and has used “environment” as a synonym for nature (35). Instead of simplifying, this points to the word’s complexity. One is therefore moved to revisit the Romantic idea of nature. Is it limited only to the external and the physical as Bloomfield’s use of the word “environment” seems to suggest? It may seem so if we neglect the entirety of her analyses. Reading her article closely, we get the sense of the idea of nature’s elusive wandering between an abstract concept and a tangible world. In fact, the focus on seasons to represent nature leaves one wondering where to draw the line. Is winter the same thing as snow? Is spring the same thing as flowers? So are seasons the physical natural world or the principles and operations that underlie the physical?

In this chapter, I examine the representations of nature in the poetic imagination of Arthur Nortje. I take into consideration his Romantic-modernist influences and examine how they function in the works. I argue that Nortje’s middle position is a modernist disruption of traditionally held categories such as nature, technology and humanity, a disruption which has resulted in what I would call a form of post-romanticism. As a postcolonial environmentalist reading, the discussion centres on the engagement of the external natural world with the socio-political context and the poet’s self-representation. The general theoretical background for this engagement is provided by Guattari’s ecosophy, the assertion of a transversal view of the ecosystem as necessarily including society and human subjectivity. It is a reading that is very much rooted in viewing the subject as a historical and social being, working from “an understanding of the complexity of African pasts” (Vital 89).

The chapter is divided into five broad conceptual movements across several sections. In the first movement, I examine Nortje’s work as an embodiment of the Romantic-modernist tension. I discuss his post-romantic handling of nature in view of his location in South Africa’s

unique geography and history. I do this based on James Corby's idea of post-romanticism as a return to the everyday world and on the concept of "everyday nature" as used by Scott Hess to describe the place of nature in urban life and imagination. The second conceptual movement looks at Nortje's depiction of nature's autonomy as both silent and voluble and as alienated via the use of realistic and anthropomorphic devices. In the remaining movements, I explore Nortje's use of the motif of water and animals respectively. These motifs deserve to be explored for their significance within the framework of understanding nature in its connection to surrounding history. Before I get into the discussion proper, I should like to lay a theoretical foundation which addresses the fundamental question of the definition of nature in conversation with the major shapers of the definition such as Romanticism, modernity and postcolonialism. I shall discuss the problem of defining nature and the role of Romanticism in shaping dominant views of nature. My purpose is to formulate a model that takes into cognizance the heterogeneity of nature and its inseparability from history. I depend on the views of Guattari as articulated in his *Three Ecologies* in an attempt to conceptualize nature as resistant to homogenization and as in constant engagement with history without placing nature and history in a hierarchical relationship.

3.2 Defining Nature

"What is nature?" is a simple question without a simple answer. In her book *What Is Nature?*, Soper finds that the term *nature* is complex to define because "it is at once both very familiar and extremely elusive [...] so various and comprehensive in its use as to defy our powers of definition" (1). The difficulty in defining the word lies not only in its varied use to signify different things and ideas, but even in the fact of its being a commonly used word. This shows that defining nature is not necessarily about a signified called *nature*, but mainly a matter of perception and language. To illustrate the elusiveness of the term, Soper identifies how the word is used to refer to "'nature' of rocks or to rocks as part of 'nature'; to that 'great nature that exists in the works of mighty poets' or to the humbler stuff of 'natural' fibre; to the 'Nature' park or the nature encroaching on our allotment; to the rudeness of 'nature' or to the 'naturalness' of manners" (1). Raymond Williams attributes this difficulty to the fact that 'nature' is a "word which carries, over a very long period, many of the major variations of human thought" (224).

In order to further show the multifarious dimensions of the word "nature", Soper outlines what she calls the three ecological discourses of nature, namely the metaphysical, the realist and the lay (or 'surface') ideas of nature. The metaphysical idea of nature is "the concept

through which humanity thinks its difference and specificity” (Soper 155). The realist idea of nature is “the structures, processes and causal powers that are constantly operative within the physical world, that provide the object of study in the natural sciences” (155), which is the idea of nature usually referred to as the laws of nature. The lay or surface idea of nature simply refers to “ordinarily observable features of the world” (155). This is the idea of nature that is usually placed in opposition to industrialism and urbanism. It is the nature of “immediate experience and aesthetic appreciation; the nature we have destroyed and polluted and are asked to conserve and preserve” (156). Williams also identifies three areas of meaning for nature:“(i) the essential quality and character of something; (ii) the inherent force which directs either the world or human beings or both; (iii) the material world itself, taken as including or not including human beings” (224). According to Buell, Cicero was the first to articulate a distinction between what he called first nature and second nature, which respectively refer to primordial nature and nature as modified by humanity “by irrigation, damming, and so forth” (*Future* 143). A third nature is later added to the groups to mean “nature as technologically reproduced” (144). Central to these ideas about nature is the movement between nature as an abstract idea, as materiality and as an entity that stands either in relation or opposition to humanity. Jonathan Bate comments that “it is impossible to hold to the three senses fully apart” (34). Landscapes commonly viewed as natural could actually be results of not only “millions of years of geological activity, but also because of thousands of years of human agricultural and arboricultural activity” (34).

Soper has also identified the most commonly used definition of nature as that which “refers to everything which is not human and distinguished from the work of humanity” (15). In the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, the transition in meaning is clear. The first definition, which can be read as the primary meaning, says nature is “all the plants, animals and things that exist in the universe that are not made by people” (983). This emphasis on the separation of nature and culture contrasts with Johnson’s writing in the sixteenth century; the whole of his eleven definitions did not include nature as the physical nor was there emphasis on the human/nature divide (Woodring 9). There is a clear movement from the sixteenth century view of nature as an “imaginary being” to the primacy of the physical, and a clear categorization of nature and culture as separate ideas. According to R. G. Collingwood, defining nature as “something within, or intimately belonging to, a thing, which is the source of its behaviour” (44) is the “original sense of the English word ‘nature’” (44). The other sense is “the sum or aggregate of natural things” (44). Carl Woodring notes that there is a movement between the various meanings, for instance, in the works of Wordsworth. He claims that

“[e]ven Wordsworth, known to the Victorians as Nature’s Prophet and Nature’s Priest, begins with this neutral sense of the word as the collective, underlying laws of existence, whatever that may be, rather than the country, the outdoors, or phenomena available to the senses” (6).

3.3 Romanticism and a View of Nature

If nature used to be seen as not necessarily opposed to humanity or culture (Collingwood 3) before it reached the now common definition of being positioned against human culture, what is responsible for the transition? According to Scott Hess, today’s view of nature is largely shaped by Romanticism (88), which, according to Buell, also laid the foundation directly or indirectly, for ecocriticism as we know it today (*Future* 3). British Romanticism, active in the late eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century, is commonly viewed as a reaction to the Enlightenment, which promoted a view of nature as “utility to be mastered by ‘man’ and brought under his control” (Argyrou 4). The Romantics viewed nature as self-thrusting, self-unfolding and self-creative, a “process essentially beyond rational human knowledge and outside human control” (Argyrou 10) but of which humanity was part of and to which it needed to return. This movement, developing alongside the utilitarian view and treatment of nature, questioned the place of reason in society. As far as the Romantics were concerned, the Industrial Revolution taking place at that time was a violation of nature. Writing about William Wordsworth and Samuel Coleridge’s *Lyrical Ballads*, Aidan Day states that the work contains a “sense of the health and integrity of nature, in contrast with the depredations wrought by humanity” (34). That way, Romanticism proclaimed humanity’s affinity with nature and rejected humanity’s exploitation of nature through industrialization and urbanization. Apart from depicting the “contrast between the peace and fullness of nature and the evil generated by and between human beings” (35), Romantic writers viewed nature as transcendent and sublime, access to which was possible through the imagination and subjectivity. Andrew Bennett, writing that “what is important in a [Romantic] poem...is not nature as such but the poet’s perception of it” (656), shows that the Romantics brought to literature and thought the exaltation of imagination over reason, which was earlier glorified by Neoclassicism. Day notes that a “number of Romantic writers suggest that the mind possesses a faculty that enables it to see through the forms of the material world to a greater, spiritual reality behind it” (51).

This view of nature was perpetuated by the American version of Romanticism, which took place in the mid-1800s and was a direct influence of the British version mixed with American exceptionalism, as noted by Day (190). The Transcendentalists were a subgroup of

the movement and were led by Ralph Waldo Emerson. Buell describes Emerson's *Nature* as "the first canonical work of US literature to unfold a theory of nature with special reference to poetics" (*Future* 13). This book of unreserved praise for nature was written after Emerson returned from a sojourn in Europe where he was entranced by sights of nature and German Romanticism through his meeting with Thomas Carlyle. His descriptions place nature as sublime, exuding endlessness and terror, inspiring both fear and admiration. Emerson's elaborations on nature's superiority also connect it with spiritual renewal, rejuvenation and a sort of divinity. He also advocates separation and solitude in order to experience nature. For Emerson, nature is thus more important and satisfying than human friendship or interaction and nature out-there is of more value than human community.

Henry David Thoreau's *Walden, Or Life in the Woods* is another important work of nature writing from the Transcendentalist movement. The book reflects how the author had to leave his normal everyday life to spend time with nature, i.e. wilderness. "Unswervingly," according to Day, "he refuses the values and practices of an industrial, commercial society that, at its base, compromises even the means by which people dress themselves" (193). Thoreau constantly contrasts society and nature. His passion, in his own words, is "to anticipate, not the sunrise and the dawn merely, but if possible, Nature herself [...] watching from the observatory of some cliff or tree [...] or waiting at evening on the hilltops for the sky to fall" (16). He finds the culture of the day in an industrializing society rather appalling and unpalatable, and expresses distaste for the vanity of fashion and exhibits reservations for technologies like the railway system. Nature, instead, provides him "pasture enough for [his] imagination" (71), and excursions into nature afford him the opportunity "to make [his] life of equal simplicity, and [...] innocence, with Nature herself" (72).

Romanticism is, however, not everyone's chosen way of looking at the world. For many scholars, it represents a separation of the individual from the social. Richard Eldridge comments that "Romantic works are thought to suffer from overweening sentimentality and to retail a stale plot that is at least trivial and at worst a sham that distracts attention from the real forces that shape most human lives" (1). Such anti-romanticisms have described Romanticism as merely evasive of the realities of the human condition and as dwelling on unrealistic imagination and envisioning. Eldridge observes two strands of anti-romanticism. The first view criticizes Romanticism for "sentimentalism, or wallowing in the personal, at the expense of a due respect for social convention, social order, and the classic" (5). The second criticism of Romanticism is the one that sees the movement as serving the interests of only the

white/western middle class and menfolk instead of the generality of humanity, and at best an evasion of social and political involvement.

According to Nicholas Roe, modernists are known to be very vocal about their rejection of Romanticism; they “tended to prize impersonality, directness of presentation, and often, as one finds in Pound, the analogy of mechanical or sculptural form, as opposed to organic form” (666). It would, however, not be fair to the Romantic Movement to conclude that it was one homogeneous sentimentalist movement. Argyrou, for instance, writes that “Romanticism testifies to the strength of the utilitarian vision, its dominance over other ways of understanding the world” (10). It would also be too simplistic to conclude that the current view of the separation of nature and culture stems only from Romanticism, when exploitative views of nature have persisted through the centuries.⁸

The lifestyles influenced by Romanticism, which place the rural and the wild above urban industrialized locations, and promote a sort of isolationism, as dramatized by the Romantics and Transcendentalists, have been viewed as counterproductive in achieving victory in the environmental fight. Leo Marx, in *The Machine in the Garden*, describes this idea of separation from human community to find closeness to nature elsewhere as originating from what he calls “the pastoral ideal” (3), noting that the “ruling motive of the good shepherd, leading figure of the classic, Virgilian mode, was to withdraw from the great world and begin a new life in a fresh, green landscape” (3). Marx points out that most Americans hold to the rural-urban dichotomy, a glorification of the rural over the urban as a result of the discovery of “the new world as a possible setting for a pastoral utopia” (73), a “mere landscape, remote and unspoiled, and a possible pastoral retreat” (36). Using the pastoral as a model, he traces the origin and history of the literary genre to Virgil’s *Eclogues*, and proves that the poem does not necessarily deny or reject the place of human civilization in society, but acknowledges that reality. He captures the same pattern in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “Sleepy Hollow”, in which the writer describes a serene experience with ‘nature’, which is then disrupted by the sound of the locomotive. But instead of seeing the locomotive as an interruption, Hawthorne acknowledges that it is all part of the picture. Showing that great writers of the pastoral have acknowledged a place for technological development, Marx makes a clear distinction between a sweeping sentimental rejection of urbanization and a mature literary pastoral that takes those realities into account.

⁸ See Raymond Williams’s “The Country and the City” in Ken Hiltner: *Ecocriticism: The Essential Reader*. London: Routledge, 2015. 35-38.

Early ecocritics, following in the Romantic steps, have fought for the preservation of 'nature', thus creating the semblance of a clear separation between nature and culture. Buell anatomizes the development of ecocriticism, beginning with the "first wave" which is basically an ecocentric privileging of the idea of nature as removed. Material for such activism came from nature writers like Emerson and Thoreau. He points out "early ecocriticism's partiality for texts and genres that put human figures at the margin and engage in thought experiments that defamiliarize landscapes in tacit suppression (if not downright reproach) of anthropocentrism" (*Future* 99). The "second wave" of ecocriticism, however, is the movement that questions what the first wave stood for. This movement stands for "a mature environmental aesthetics – or ethics, or politics – [which] must take into account the interpenetration of metropolis and outback, of anthropocentric [human-centred] as well as biocentric [privileging all life-forms] concerns" (22-23) by "locating vestiges of nature within cities and/or exposing crimes of eco-injustice against society's marginal groups" (24).

3. 4 Thinking Post-Romanticism

There are poems [in Nortje's collection] of wonder at the multiplicity of sensory existence, poems that pay loving attention to the varieties of weather and mood, the nuances of romantic liaisons, and the quiet but resonant pleasures of the intellectual life. (Klopper, "A Life Story" 16).

If the jargons of our times – postmodernity, postcoloniality, postfeminism – has any meaning at all, it does not lie in the popular use of the "post" to indicate sequentiality – after-feminism; or polarity – anti-modernism. These terms that insistently gesture to the beyond, only embody its restlessness and revisionary energy if they transform the present into an expanded and ex-centric site of experience and empowerment. (Bhabha 6)

Bloomfield and Bunn, considering Nortje's relationship with nature, landscape, poetics and history/politics, mark Nortje's relationship to European poetic traditions of either Romanticism or the pastoral poetic form and how that crosses paths with the socio-political realities that surrounded Nortje's writings. In Bloomfield's essay, Nortje finds material in nature for articulating the realities of the South African society – apartheid, racism and poverty (30). Bunn, on the other hand, unravels the poet's disillusionment resulting from an inability to find in the South African landscape – a container of violence, racism and oppression – suitable material for his favoured pastoral genre and has to turn to modernism to project his realities (33-34). Central to both thoughts on Nortje, however, is the overlapping of nature and society, their involvement with each other. The question thus becomes, how do we formulate a reading

of nature considering different temporalities of nature and human society and their interactions? DeLoughrey and Handley recognize the temptation to emphasize one over the other and, therefore, propose an approach to understanding nature that projects “the landscape (and seascape) as a participant in this historical process rather than a bystander to human experience” (4). They seek an approach that “reflects a complex epistemology that recuperates the alterity of both history and nature, without reducing either to the other” (4). In this section I am interested in Nortje’s intermingling of nature and history to produce a postcolonial and post-romantic vision of nature.

In the introductory part of her essay, Bloomfield inspires us to think about the difference between a Romantic poem on the seasons and those of Nortje’s. Transcendentalist tendencies, if we follow Bloomfield’s argument, are absent from Nortje’s poetry (29-30). She establishes from the beginning that his use of nature is allegorical, which enables him to express his feelings about the external social world around him. The celebration of nature, at least as it is in Wordsworth’s poems, is virtually absent in Nortje’s poetry. Instead, one comes across lines like “occupying the peeling bench of an autumn day” (“Wayward Ego” 25) which presents a tension between the reality of the external world as signified by the ordinariness of a “peeling bench” and the idea of autumn generally associated with beauty. The idea of decay also works to connect nature and culture as autumn sheds its leaves and human material culture wears out. Bloomfield’s article has, therefore, invited us to a conversation around “Romanticism”, “nature” and “environment” vis-à-vis “race, politics and exile” (29). Bloomfield is not the only one to connect Nortje to Romanticism. Chapman describes Nortje’s writing as of “the romantic-symbolist city of solitudes” (*Modern Perspective* 243). Mafe describes Nortje’s poetry as “a blend of Romantic melancholia, bravado, and despair” (6). While Bloomfield’s connection of Nortje with Romanticism is in relation to nature, the two others connect him with other lineaments of Romanticism such as the projection of the self or subjectivity and solitude. This raises the question of locating the nexus of nature, Romanticism and modernism in Nortje’s art.

Viewing Nortje’s poetry as distinct from the public-oriented poetry of major protest poets, and highlighting his retreat into the subjective individualistic mode, is to cut him out as a Romantic poet who evades the socio-political matters of his day (Berthoud 2). This casts him in the image many scholars have of Romantics. The elements of sentimentalism and even narcissism, which are used to criticize Romanticism, are the same ones used to describe Nortje’s poetry as “mainly concerned with self-pity resulting from loneliness in exile and general racial discrimination” (Berthoud 2). The implication of this description is a poetry that

is viewed as a weak response to the external realities of apartheid. It shows a sort of internalization and self-consciousness that separates the poetic subject from the rest of society. This position is clearly one that holds to the use of literature to affect outward realities in a direct manner, very much like the protest or Soweto poets would do. Berthoud, however, contends with this disappointment. He excuses Nortje's poetry because "it is the genre to which it belongs that is partly to blame" (2), describing him in terms of post-romanticism and modernism and insisting that not all Nortje's poetry cuts the subject from the exterior world (2). This placement of Nortje between the protest poets and western literary traditions tampers with the boundaries that he also unsettles in himself as a mixed race person in a country where race is the most important mark of identity. His poetry thus becomes the place where contradictions and paradoxes play themselves out in both content and form. I should like to conceptualize post-romanticism in the transversal sense with the support of Hess and Corby.

Falling back on Guattari's theory of three ecologies, which combines a view of the natural environment with the place of subjectivity and the acceptance of industrialization, offers a way to look at nature in connection with the socio-historical and then with the psychological. According to Guattari, "[n]ow more than ever, nature cannot be separated from culture; in order to comprehend the interactions between ecosystems, the mechanosphere and the social and individual Universes of reference, we must learn to think 'transversally'" (29). Taking into account the social and the subjective gives one room to examine nature in connection to history and individual differences, thereby asserting the impossibility of imagining nature as pure in itself. Guattari's thought is underpinned by the concept of transversality which seeks to deconstruct the valorization of nature by placing nature on the plane of consistency along with other domains such as human culture. Transversality affords us the platform to free nature from a hierarchical relationship with human culture and accept its lines of flights, its heterogeneities, its refusal to be restricted to certain paradigms and locations. Guattari insists that his ecosophy is not based on scientific totalizing or binaristic thought systems, but rather on another kind of logic, "logic of intensities – or eco-logic – [which] concerns itself solely with the movement and intensity of evolutive processes" (136). Viewing nature in this way allows room for the complexities that have already been formed around the nature-culture dialectics to be given legitimacy, thus producing a rather progressive view of nature based on the principle of irreversality (134-135), which disavows the idea of a sentimental return to nature or a former state.

With that in the background, I shall delve into Nortje's poetry which problematizes the nature-culture divided very much in the same way that considers the interminglings of

aesthetics and paradigms, of history and nature, of society and the psyche. In the discussion, this theoretical framework will be supported by Hess's concept of everyday nature and James Corby's idea of post-romanticism as a quotidian turn.

James Corby conceives post-romanticism as a rejection of Romanticism's "aesthetics of failure" (119) and a shift from transcendence to *poesis*. By "aesthetic of failure", Corby means the Romantic dilemma of being aware of transcendence but unable to access such. There is a beyond that is assumed to exist out of the reach of thought, but which still ought to be reached. Romantics, therefore,

cultivated the belief that although this "beyond" apparently cannot be accessed by philosophy, by artistically performing the *failure* of reflective thought and thereby rupturing the subjectivism of thought's finite, conceptualizing grasp, a space might be created in the artwork in which that which exceeds ordinary consciousness – variously referred to as the absolute, being, or the unconditioned – may come forth and show itself in all of its strangeness and ungraspability. (119)

Post-romantic rejection of this "failure", this crisis, is not just an aversion to an aesthetic, but even more a shift in metaphysics that holds that "there is no absolute truth or ultimate principle to be discovered and that man is inherently limited and finite and that this is not a tragedy" (123). Corby thus defines the post-romantic as a "turn to the ordinary and everyday" (125). Important to this is the idea of poetry as *poesis*, the Greek root of the word "poetry", which, rather than making things happen, is itself "a way of happening"(124). Romanticism relied on "*praxis*, or ability to make things happen" (124) rather than *poesis*.

It is clear that Corby's concept of the post-romantic is that of a rejection of Romanticism. Hess, on the other hand, lumps Romanticism and post-romanticism together, obviously conceiving of the latter as a continuation of the former as both define "nature as opposed to the human" (92). He also writes that as "post-Romantic subjects, we have become used to defining our identities apart from the everyday, through various forms of leisure and imaginative escape" (97). While Corby uses post-romantic to mean a return to the everyday, a departure from transcendentalism, Hess uses it to mean the impact of Romanticism on subsequent generations. I, however, would like to use the term borrowing the idea of the prefix "post" from Bhabha's understanding of the term to mean neither *after* nor *opposition* (6). I would like to use it in terms of its unsettling power in relation to the headword and its counterviews. That means I am thinking of both the rupture of modernism and Romanticism and their imbrications. I am, therefore, not referring much to the Victorian period commonly called the post-romantic period, but an idea that problematizes the continuation and rejection

of Romantic aesthetics and paradigms. As in Bhabha, it is about the moment or the process of crossings, rather than a past or a beyond. I shall use Corby's idea of post-romanticism as the everyday along with ideas of everyday nature by Scott Hess to discuss Nortje's imaginations of nature. For me, this kind of post-romanticism finds resonance with the core questions of postcolonialism, and is useful in the way it problematizes categories of nature and culture, wild and urban, sublime/picturesque and mundane by decentring what traditional views have valorized based on the logic that the pristine is worthier than the 'artificial'.

Hess is an ecocritic who has challenged the view of nature as removed from human community. He had, for instance, practised detachment from community himself in order to commune with nature, but later realized nature does not have to be limited to an out-there location without human presence. In reaching that conclusion, he writes about how much fuss is made about protecting wilderness at the expense of everyday nature. His opening paragraph reads:

Nature in environmental writing and culture today often appears as a form of refuge—for biological diversity, endangered species, and equally endangered forms of sensual, aesthetic, and spiritual life, all threatened by an increasingly destructive and all-pervasive world economic and social order. Nature is the place where we go, both imaginatively and physically, to escape from this modernity, as well as the place from which we seek to protect it. In providing this sense of refuge, though, our ideas of nature too often lead us away from where we actually are, promoting a model of Romantic imaginative escapism and autonomous individualism that in many ways actually supports the same modern consumer order that it claims to oppose. (85)

The key idea to note in Hess's view is the questioning of the view of nature as separate from human community, an essentialization that he views as dangerous. In such cases, nature then becomes a place of escape for human beings. Instead of a dialogical relationship, which ecology technically proposes, this split view estranges humanity and 'nature' from each other, and then divests nature in human community of its inherent importance as nature. Some places fail to receive "commitment, love and intimate attention" (88) because they are not regarded as nature sites like the Sierra or Western Montana. The idea of everyday nature, therefore, serves to disturb this division of nature and culture. It accepts the role of complexity in the relationship between these various aspects of existence. In addition, Hess asserts that everyday nature "is not just a location, but rather a kind of attention, or better yet, a way of defining our identities and values through local relationship rather than through imaginative escape" (91).

3.5 Nature in the Everyday City

Michael Bennett complains that “the word ‘nature’ often calls to mind open spaces, perhaps with a few trees, wild animals, or bodies of water. We often forget that these gifts from Mother Nature are also found in the midst of cities” (5). While Nortje, being an urban-dweller, wrote about the poor townships and the unneglectable presence of industrialization, he hardly wrote a poem that does not refer to ‘natural’ entities dwelling or operating alongside people or technology. He wrote about darkness and light, about trees, about animals, and rivers, seas and rain. He did not need to leave his familiar environment in Thoreauvian fashion to write about birds; they flew in his immediate environment. He did not need to retreat to the wilderness to write about flowers or trees; these were present in his immediate surroundings. He found nature’s presence ever close, existing side by side with humanity and technology. This is not to ignore that Nortje, at some point, sought such an excursion in order to be able to produce the kind of pastorals he admired from the English tradition, but apartheid restricted him to an unpicturesque urban landscape that made it impossible to produce that kind of work (Bunn 33-4). This way, Nortje is able to overcome what Bennett and David Teague refer to as “the self-limiting conceptualizations of nature, culture, and environment built into many ecocritical projects by their exclusion of urban places” (4).

Most notable about Nortje’s aestheticization of nature is his locating of it as quotidian – and what paradigm shoulders the quotidian better than the urban? Urban dwelling has come to be identified most closely with everydayness, with the familiarity whose diverse and rich features can be overlooked in favour of the worlds that remain ‘pristine’ outside it. Nortje’s post-romanticism thus involves a form of defamiliarization of the familiar through concentrated observation that results from an interaction of a consciousness of the pastoral ideal with the ubiquity of a different sort of exteriority. The poem below, “The Drain Is Drained with Tea-Leaves”, is an example. It documents pictorially the poet’s close observation of the different parts of a house:

The drain is edged with tea-leaves
which lead a thinning brown tangent
to the brown door

Ivy in clear afternoon climbs along a
a crumbling wall,
fierce tenderness implicit in its
dust-enveloped tendrils.

Brick-dust drifts gently through sunbeam
trajectories
as we munch fudge and biscuits behind

tattered lace curtains

Funerals of ants along their skirting board,
they in Sunday attire. Then you rouse from staring
to focus your cobwebbed eyes on nude rafters,
and the angular spider in circular web. (1-15)

In the poem, Nortje juxtaposes nature and culture in ways that explore asignifying interconnections of both entities, as in the random placements of natural items by man-made ones. Note the placement of “drain” and “tea-leaves” (1-3), “Ivy”, “crumbling wall” and “dust-enveloped tendrils” (4-7), “Brick-dust”, “sunbeam trajectories” and “tattered curtains” (8-11), “ants”, “skirting board”, “cobwebbed eyes”, “nude rafters” and “the angular spider in circular web” (12-15). In these images, natural entities and works of human effort relate unaccountably and without hierarchization. Thus, the mundane here is defamiliarized by drawing close attention to what would have been neglected by familiarity. Looking at the poem more closely one would see that the transversality depicted among nature, culture and subjectivity does not imply closed domains as each domain is also transitory, in the process of change, and also in further micro-domains. For instance, while we may group ants, spiders, and ivy as nature and drain, door, skirting board as culture, these are yet smaller domains of difference in themselves. Nortje’s appeal to these arbitrary interconnections is what aids in his defamiliarization of the everyday. Instead of seeking unity, he divorces the relationship between nature and culture from over-coding principles. The setting of the poem is a house, which I would read as a compression of the wider world’s interactions of different entities. This is shown by the way the house, instead of containing only the speaker and other human beings, becomes a space for other animals and plants. This way, it points to the whole concept of the ecosystem as a body of differences, the suffix ‘eco’ itself meaning ‘home’ in the Greek original.

In Nortje’s poetry, the urban township remains a site for nature’s operations that can even be celebrated without retreating to a countryside or the wild. The poem “Cold Spell” records the speaker’s experience with a cold spell in spring. Although the poem is set in an urban place, the speaker’s focus is on how nature behaves in such a setting. In the first two stanzas, he even plays with an ecstatic moment:

Icy spell traps me after spring bred
fig’s green rage, world’s froth of blossom.
Cream burst to the surface, rain fed
milk and yellow lilies, I got
goldenrods where twigs had scraped some
warmth and moisture from winter’s budget.

Streamers of colour in September's opulence;
water splashed laughs through my fingers, glistened,
danced my face in the element's brilliance.
Hatched eggs, flocks of new birds opened
freedom's country, offered the millions
blood's fresh chance to change and mingle. (1-12)

In these lines, which describe the 'spring world' before the cold spell, the speaker reveals his admiration bordering on ecstasy. Before the cold attack, the world was alive with beauty and colours: "fig's green rage" (2), "froth of blossom" (2), "milk and yellow lilies" (4) and more. In the second stanza, this beauty is described as "streamers of colour in September's opulence" (7). In relating with and appreciating nature, the speaker reports an ecstatic experience by saying, "water splashed laughs through my fingers, glistened, / danced my face in the element's brilliance" (8-9)

The ecstatic moment is, however, shortlived as the cold spell ruins the day with its "Ironcast sky" (19). Following this is an expression of disappointment in the third stanza, and, in the fourth stanza, a resolution to be more careful next time. While the poem's depiction of nature is undeniably literal, the political undertones must not be missed. Somewhere between his short reverie and his postcolonial urban realities, the power shows in the latter part of the second stanza that nature, represented by birds, can teach millions of human beings how to live in freedom and how to accept difference in a country of violence and institutionalized racial segregation. In the lines "flocks of new birds opened / freedom's country, offered the millions / blood's fresh chance to change and mingle" (10-12), Nortje understands freedom as respect for heterogeneities and vast interactions of numerous different existences. The words "change" and "mingle" speak against the government's struggles to keep races and social classes from spilling into one another as it is viewed as unnatural. Note again that freedom, which corresponds to transgression of boundaries and hierarchies, is the key idea rather than unity:

Hatched things, flocks of new birds fashioned
freedom's country, hope's emergence,
blood's fresh chance to change and mingle. (10-12)

The last two stanzas of the poem continue the trajectory from praise to complaint. Irony resides in the way the Romantic stance is suddenly and completely aborted by the realities of the discomfort nature can impose on humans such as "how cold snap shuts one in at zero" (13). Instead of an ode to nature's power, Nortje finds himself resenting this other side of nature that he associates with discomfort and death. Looking at the entire movement of the poem from

nature's beauty to its danger thus encapsulates Nortje's post-romantic complex continuation and rejection of the Romantic tradition.

In another pre-exile poem, "Through a Window", Nortje presents an urban setting being viewed through a window by the speaker:

Not all is diamond-hard or glitters
like plotted lawns, these ponds, new beds of flowers.
Wind is intermittent surf for instance
inspiring one with hope of reinforcement.

The still belief of boughs are so shaken
by green willow breakers, bear the onus
of attack which eyes plan on the landscape,
that they surge and surge, the blame being taken
inciting the stagnant blood, numb nerves.

Observed by stealth or sometimes fraud
how water ejaculates to spray the grass
and blots instead the spotless sidewalk.
Tough must be toughened or otherwise broken
and a new cemented route built and taken.

A pleasure, if controls maintain their hard glitter.
Nozzles are easy to manipulate
but the grass will suffer and char like a kaffir. (1-17)

The poem focuses on nature in human settlement, noting the relationship between humanity and the rest of nature. Certain lines tilt towards the Romantic vision of nature but give way to the acceptance of man's manipulation of nature. So while a little element of the Romantic or, at least, awe is applied to urban or everyday nature, the experience is mundane, and so are the objects represented. The setting of the poem is a room from where the poet observes the external world. The room space itself represents everydayness and familiarity, while the window is at the same time an opening and a separation, offering a vision of nature operating in the urban world. Simultaneously removed from and connected to the scene outside the window, the speaker observes in the environment "plotted lawns, [...] ponds, [and] new beds of flowers" (2). By presenting nature that is shaped and controlled by humans, the poet demythifies the concept of the pristine as the only nature remaining in our world. The first two lines present an almost 'magical' view of quotidian nature shaped by humanity by the way the poet compares lawns, ponds and flowers to diamonds. Attention is given to the familiar and nature is invested with the status of an urban dweller in everyday familiarities. In the midst of

buildings and sidewalks, we feel an ‘active’ presence of trees, flowers, grass, water and wind expressing an intercourse between culture and nature.

Citing this poem is not an attempt to state that everyday nature is being aestheticized in the sense of common idea of beauty versus ugly, but as an object as worthy of artistic representation as the picturesque or the sublime. While Wordsworth is enthralled by the sight of daffodils away from human settlement, Nortje shows an awareness of arranged nature in urbanity. One is reminded by Nortje’s depictions of “plotted lawns” and “new beds of flowers” (2) of how Martin Mulligan describes London’s “[h]ighly manicured gardens with segregated flowers and neatly trimmed lawns [...] [as] such a contrast to the wildness and excitement of the African bush [...] [and as] a celebration of mastery over nature” (272). Understanding that Mulligan wrote those words from a strong conservationist perspective, he seems to be perpetuating a view that favours the so-called pristine wilderness over nature in human community. This is evidenced by his praise for Wordsworth and Thoreau’s nature-centred writings (273).

The use of the derogatory word “kaffir” (17) calls up a world of significations, the social realities that contextualize this picture, the irony of the poet’s identity in interaction with the world’s varied ideas and objects. However, while also concerned about how nature and colonized groups are subdued by colonial powers, Nortje’s imagination is rather more supported by a view that does not deny ‘arranged nature’ its complete status as nature. This resonates with David Shumway’s reasoning that “[i]nstead of the nature experienced by Thoreau in his cabin or Muir wandering in the Sierra Nevada, we need an ecological perspective that begins with the assumption that human communities are as natural as those of wolves” (272).

3.6 Triangle of Nature, Machine and Humanity

In Nortje’s poetry one comes across a pattern that incorporates images from non-human nature, humanity and technology, forming a triangle of complex and, sometimes, contradictory relationships among the three to form an everyday post-romantic aesthetics. In this section, using two poems, “Thumbing a Lift” and “Pornography: Campus”, both written before Nortje’s move abroad, I shall examine this triangle of humanity, nature and machine and see how they relate to one another in Nortje’s poetic vision. Again, our attention is drawn to Guattari’s idea of transversality, which allows ‘uncontrolled’ flows of different and contradictory ideas to interact without privileging one over another.

“Thumbing a Lift”, one of Nortje’s earliest pieces, was written in September 1962. The poem captures the experience of the persona stranded outside of town and in need of a lift to get home. The first three stanzas, where my focus will be, describe a landscape that is a departure from a nature-centred style of writing by a merging of nature and machine. Landscape is not separated from the activity of humanity, but set within it, a picture of engagement and flow into each other. Instead of a call to return to nature’, the poem blends nature and industrial culture together:

Emaciated sanddunes and grease-black pylons
On afternoons teeming with impurities;
Brittle bitter-brown wire: the sky-blotching ravens
Must be September’s electrified existences. (1-4)

In this stanza we witness a rush of images from nature and technology void of sentimentalism. Nature does not wear any garment of transcendentalism as in Emerson or Thoreau. It is divested of beauty and made to appear very crude. The opening line testifies to this. “Emaciated sanddunes” (1) suggests a landscape without beauty, sick and deteriorating. Then this is followed by “grease-black pylons” (1). Pylons are symbols of human work at industrialization, humanity’s effort to modify the world by modifying nature. What is important here is the side-by-side placement of the two images of nature and industrialization as various parts of a single vision. The “and” that connects “sanddunes” and “pylons” also serves as an agent of negotiation between two entities that have been previously viewed as incompatible; it serves to recreate the interaction and the supposed tension between the two, thus invoking the impure, the loss of pure categories. The use of the two adjectives “emaciated” and “grease-black”, speaking of nature and machine respectively, rings with decay and un-beauty, a case of not privileging one over another as both have unclear borders. The second line continues the thought by directly speaking of the scene as “teeming with impurities” (2). While the line may be speaking of literal atmospheric pollution due to the objects mentioned, it also suggests a demythification of essences. The third line carries on with the juxtaposition of “wire” and “ravens” described respectively as “bitter-brown” and “sky-blotching”. The last line connects both with electricity in a rather ‘Metaphysical’ manner: wire and ravens, two very different items, are connected to one thing. Electricity, a symbol of human work and a product of nature, resists the idea of separating nature from human activities. This, rather than postulating a separation and a need to return to nature, provides a mix of images that picture a sort of inevitable heterogeneity as humans explore their environment. This stanza further challenges the nature-machine tension by introducing human presence:

I live beside sap-fired willow striplings
Yet alien to their cause, spring-exultation
Cars pass by the thin thing of my brown thumb
Rhythmically beckoning in painful indication. (5-8)

Although the machine symbolizes human activity, a human subject introduced further stirs the stability of the divisions, acting at this stage as a counterforce. The persona connects himself with trees now showing that he has not been cut off from nature. He, in fact, lives near nature, with nature. The willow tree is one that has been mentioned numerous times in Nortje's poetry, obviously a common import from Britain to the colony, where it takes root along watercourses. The fact of the tree's foreignness raises two ideas: it questions the neutrality of nature and speaks of the history of colonization that lies beyond. It also shows the proximity of humanity to nature even in the context of industrialization. Presenting the tree as "sap-fired" (5), lively, portrays the speaker's admiration for the tree. While this connection, proximity and admiration are established, they are immediately disturbed by the introduction of the next line, a suggestion of alienation and separation: "Yet alien to their cause" (6). The relationship between humanity and nature is thus shown as impossible to essentialize. There is both knowing and unknowing, intimacy and distance engaging each other in an intricate manner. The last two lines of the stanza help to show another such relationship, but this time with machine. The persona needs a lift, but the vehicles ignore him, except for the "cattle truck" that in the end "careers [him] towards the horizon" (28). (I shall say more about the poet's employment of the cattle truck where I return to the poem in a later section of the thesis). Technology thus becomes both a symbol of connection and alienation. There are human beings driving those cars and he is outside wanting to join them, but he is excluded. The introduction of his corporeal figure as metonymy of his whole self has an underlying sense of racial tension: "brown thumb" (7). Nortje's self-representation comes oftentimes in corporeal terms such as this, invoking the place of the body in connection to identity in apartheid South Africa. The body and the self often become intricately involved with each other and with the world outside. The qualification of "brown" (7) says much about Nortje's identity as a coloured, brown being a ground between white and black. The persona thus fits into the figure of a subject roaming between nature and machine (nature's impenetrability and technology's rejection) and between binarized racial colours. Bunn, noting the political undertones of this poem, points out that "[r]ather than affording that detached pleasure to the eye so characteristic of lyric geographies, here the landscape becomes a home for the corrupted body" (36).

In “Pornography: Campus”, written two years after the previous poem, Nortje creates another scene of triangulation like the first one. The first stanza begins with a moment of beauty. But instead of being set somewhere away from human settlement, as might be expected, it is in fact at a place of human busyness: a campus. It is important, I think, to highlight the background of the setting of this poem. It was obviously written at or about the University of the Western Cape where Nortje was a student at the time. This university was meant for the coloured community as part of the government’s policy of separate development along racial lines. The students resented being there knowing that they were in an institution that was inferior to others in the country. So in a complex way the campus presents for Nortje a place of development and rejection, a place to reach his dreams, but not quite.

In the first stanza of the poem, which focuses on the beauty that sprinklers create as they water the university lawns, we have images like “singing sprinklers” (1), “the feelings / of grass” (1-2), “Southern Hemisphere’s resplendent” (3) and “rainbows of crystals” (4) which give the poem a sentimental and lyrical quality. But worth noting in the beauty created, human activity through technology is not absent. The water that is pictured as beautiful is, in fact, released through human-made and controlled sprinklers. So, the lawn is representative of human effort to maintain the presence of nature in an urban settlement through mechanized means. Also important is the poet’s use of sexual imagery to talk about this relationship. In this stanza, the sexual signification of the title continues with the masculinization of technology in the lines “the metal / nozzles *ejaculate* rainbows of crystal” (3-4, emphasis mine).

The second stanza pictures the sun shining beautifully on the campus and the hills are given a feminine quality as in the words “hills / stand silent in their cactus brassieres” (8). Having shown nature as female in this way, Nortje proceeds to show the process of mowing as a form of aggression or subduing of nature in the fourth stanza. Technology, now shown as the perpetrator in the words “the moving machine’s sharp cruelty” (13), is further described as “murderous” (15) and “lascivious” (16). The feminization of nature and masculinization of technology suggests a power-play in a ‘sexual’ relationship. Already the title suggests a ‘pornographic’ relationship between nature and technology. Technology is not only masculinized, it is also pictured as ‘sexually’ aggressive and expressing power over a dormant nature. To reinforce the pornographic motif, the poet alludes to the French writers Francois Rabelais and Charles Baudelaire, who are known for their associations with sexual impudence.

But the underlying view is that of search and loss: “Continually life / is a hunt below the tousled surface / of pubic hair’s blond shock, or jet” (17-19). Concluding that “we are bastards of debauchery” (20) has a ring of marginality and identity crises or crises of belonging,

the ontological wandering of humanity in a world that we try to make sense of by shaping nature through technology and then finding ourselves continually going round the circles of searching or even ending tragically as in John Steinbeck's novel *The Grapes of Wrath*.

From the poems discussed, it is clear that Nortje does not employ an essentialized understanding in representing nature's relationship to humanity and technology. Rather, he explores the harmonies and discordances that exist in these interactions. In "Thumbing a Lift", we have seen how nature, technology and human subjectivity or community exist in one space, but redefine one another. The trees were planted by humans and the cars were also a product of human ingenuity, but they have assumed autonomy, now affecting how humans view themselves and the world. "Pornography: Campus", on the other hand, takes the idea further by exploring how the relationship includes issues of power relations and sexual dynamics between the different entities involved.

3.7 Silence and the Voice of Nature

The question of nature's autonomy and representation has been an important part of ecocritical thought as ecocriticism is supposed to renew literature's relationship to the outside world. I am bringing this up in relation to the pressure to revisit nature in order to free it up and allow it to 'speak for itself'. For instance, it has been posited that nature should be appreciated on its own terms as nature and not reduced to the associations and social ideas that have been built around it (Saito 146). This raises questions about the possibility of achieving a truly objective picture of nature through language, an entirely human enterprise. If there is an interaction between the landscapes of the mind and those of the external world, as Buell notes from Barry Lopez's work (*Future* 39), then it shows that an ability to work out an image of nature in human art that is truly objective remains a myth.

In this section, I would like to analyse Nortje's representations of nature in terms of agency and speaking. In the poetry, there are recurrent depictions of nature as active and vocal. We encounter lines like the following: "spring could not speak" ("Spell Cold and Ironic" 24), "creation / is minimum of words, huh?" (6-7), "a bird cries secret eloquence" ("Act" 11), "the bird sleeps / wordless" ("Separation" 13-14), "the wisdom of the wind" ("Fading Light" 24), "the gulls scream" ("Stream, Beach and Shadow: Scene" 40) and many more examples that represent nature in terms of communication. There are yet others that imbue nature with intention, emotion and character that are normally attributed to human beings such as "chill-faced winter" ("Winter: Oxford" 52), "sun, you are all I have: / the grass already welcomes the brown leaves" ("London Impressions" 32-33), and "the summer / strangely evading my

presence: can I befriend it?” (“For Sylvia Plath I” 21-22). I shall, therefore, look at the poet’s treatment of listening to and representing nature. My interest is to explore the means by which Nortje treats these ideas in his artistic representation of the outside world and in his explorations of the realistic and imaginative modes.

Christopher Manes, in “Nature and Silence”, remarks that “Nature is silent in our culture (and in literate societies generally) in the sense that the status of being a speaking subject is jealously guarded as an exclusively human prerogative” (15). It is different in animistic societies where “animals, plants, and even [...] stones and rivers are perceived as being articulate and at times intelligible subjects, able to communicate and interact with humans” (15), where, in short, nature is considered “a world of autonomous speakers” (15). The treatment of nature as mute corresponds to the manner in which power relations work, in which the words of more ‘important’ people in society are valued over those supposed to occupy lower stations in life. In modern society the maltreatment of the environment by humanity is a direct result of the choice to ignore the voice of nature. Manes reasons that the animism that preceded contemporary rational view of the world was changed by mediaeval Christianity’s “scala naturae” (or the Great Chain of Being) and the modern emphasis on reason. He writes:

As the self-proclaimed soliloquist of the world, “Man” is obliged to use his language as the point of intersection between the human subject and what is to be known about nature, and therefore the messy involvement of observer with the observed becomes an obsessive theme of modern philosophy. (22)

Viewing man as the only speaking subject means placing him above the rest of nature, which evolution disproves. Manes sees that evolution presents a view of an egalitarian world, of which humans are just a part. He, therefore, suggests that we need to learn a new language to change this attitude because “[a]ttending to ecological knowledge means metaphorically relearning ‘the language of birds’ – the passions, pains, and cryptic intents of other biological communities that surround us and silently interpenetrate our existence” (25). Philosopher Yuriko Saito has also repeatedly evoked the idea of nature as a speaking subject, insisting that “[n]ature...is never mute with no story of its own to tell” (146). Her proposition is to as much as possible divorce nature from impositions of human interpretations and endeavour to listen to “nature as nature” (145). Such impositions come from what she terms pictorial appreciation of nature which reduces nature to an object of beauty in human terms only, and the associationist approach which imposes on nature value from “our historical/cultural/literary events and accomplishments” (144) without appreciating the intrinsic value that nature

possesses independently of humanity. Scholars differ in their treatment of nature as speaking or even intelligible. Thomas Nagel's words about thinking like an animal, for instance, expresses a sort of scepticism about understanding the language of nature. He expresses misgivings about the question about what it is like to think like a bat. "But that is not the question. I want to know what it is like for a bat to be a bat. Yet if I try to imagine this, I am restricted by the resources of my own mind, and those resources are inadequate to the task" (qtd in Coetzee 129).

In Nortje's poem "So Much Speech", we can explore his ideas of listening to a speaking nature in a context where the persona is talking about speaking and silence in varied situations. The poem is primarily addressed to a listening lover, but spreads out to address other areas in which communication or speaking is an aspect, such as speaking out against social injustice and even risking trouble for that, given the government's suppression of freedom of speech. The third stanza draws our attention to these ideas:

Because I have wanted so much, your you,
I have waited hours and tomorrows, dogged
and sometimes doggish but you often listened.
Something speaks on when something listens:
in a room a fly can be conversation,
or a moth which challenges light but suffers. (13-18)

This stanza is about speaking and listening in which the persona draws a wider diagram of communication than only human communication, writing "something speaks on when something listens" (16) instead of limiting it to *someone*. This creates a view of the interconnectedness of nature, an encompassing view that is all-inclusive. The implication is that communication is not limited to human beings; other aspects of nature also experience or engage in communication. To specify this, the poet illustrates with two insects: a fly and a moth, both of which can engage in a conversation. The example of how a moth does this is in how it "challenges light but suffers" (18). This links with the next stanza which takes the image further to a tropological status to connect it with the oppressive atmosphere of the country described as a site for "mounting horrors" (20) and where "to be safe is [...] [the] main worry" (21). This image is linked in turn to the last three lines of the second stanza which says "I have seen men with haunting voices / turned into ghosts by a piece of white paper / as if their eloquence had been black magic" (10-12). People who speak out in that politically difficult atmosphere have been turned to ghosts just like the moth that "challenges the light and suffers" (18). Within the social context provided by the speaker's personal sense of alienation and the

oppressive political background, the pivotal line, “something speaks on when something listens” (16), transcends human borders to show that the world is a body of communicating natural entities which seem to have been silenced by simple acts of neglect. So this is not a simple metaphor or anthropomorphism, but an exhibition of the multiplicities that exist in the world and the interconnections and asignifying ruptures that also exist among them.

In a subsequent stanza of the same poem, we read the following lines: “the gulls are screaming” (19), the “waters...break forward: / without a word, this violence” (20-21). This aspect of nature is shown as silently violent. The idea of “without a word” (20), however, connects the waters with communication; it points to ability not in use at the moment. The last stanza speaks of “the wind’s voice among the willows” (25) and then says, significantly, “it echoes so much of ourselves” (27). In other words, this depiction of nature as a speaking phenomenon is somewhat multi-layered in that, along with its literality, it serves a metaphorical purpose, mirroring people and society. The violence in the waters and the wind’s voice reflects the violence suffered in Nortje’s South Africa, but also the human world as enmeshed in the natural world in order to signify more than politics. Nortje’s depiction of nature in this poem also shows an ambivalence, an admiration that mixes with discomfort. Instead of the Romantic aesthetics of failure, Nortje acknowledges an alienated speaking nature as a fact of existence without expressing a sentimental desire to ‘return to nature’ or a disappointment at not being able to do so.

As much as there is an effort on the part of the poet to represent nature, we often come across images of nature as incomprehensible, as impenetrable, as a domain whose experience we can never quite understand. In these depictions of nature in connection to speaking, the poet remains uninformed about the content of nature’s communication. In this poem, the link between the silent lover, the silenced political activists and nature’s impenetrability points to agnosis. How does this affect environmental criticism? Instead of defeat, it can be seen as serving to draw humanity towards a certain level of humility in respect of environmental diversities. Therefore, this agnosis can be positive for an egalitarian ecology in which impenetrability does not imply muteness nor does it imply inferiority. It simply shows the contingent state of nature and its asignifying components and intersections. By presenting nature as silent, on the one hand, Nortje shows an inability on the side of humanity to hear or understand or even speak for nature. And that goes on to further show an impossibility to homogenize nature. The idea of a speaking nature, on the other hand, is not to narrow it to communication, but to open up the idea of nature’s being and subjecthood.

Nortje's representation of nature, as many poets, also depends on anthropomorphizing nature. Since, as he has acknowledged, listening to nature is almost an impossible task, we have to resign to understanding nature through human experience and language. Nortje employs the use of the pathetic fallacy quite richly to engage with nature and also 'naturizes' people, that is, he speaks of humans in terms of plants, animals and other aspects of nature. His personification of nature attributes a wide range of character and emotion to nature that conveys various levels of ambivalence such as admiration and anger, beauty and hideousness, power and resistance.

The sun, for instance, appears recurrently in Nortje's poems. This image gives away the poet's complex attitude towards nature. The sun image embodies a variety of ideas for the poet which are shown in the attribution of human qualities to it. Generally, the sun is presented as harsh, aggressive, domineering and sometimes lazy. In the poem "To a Friend Departing for Canada", the speaker describes the world as being "under the drunken / flare of a bitterly-bright and eye-shattering sunset" (31-32). Describing it thus as aggressive and harsh, Nortje also pictures the sun as yielding "the terrible red wall / flowering out from the sunset / which talon and claw cannot buffet with blows" (53-54). In other lines, the sun is pictured as despotic and domineering: "Order, they say, in disorder. Dawn day dusk. / Here then is the tragic material fashioned in good taste, / Touching all men in all seasons and hemispheres" (76-78). Further down in the poem, Nortje personifies the sun as not only aggressive to humanity, but also as adamant and aloof, "unconcerned about revolutions it cannot afford, / uninformed of the passengers aboard; / an error of judgement, said Aristotle" (91-92). Nortje also uses the same kind of disinterested personification on other aspects of nature like the sea and wind. Does this betray a lack of love for nature? It is not so simple. Nortje's love for nature has led to the rich presence of nature in his corpus which is produced through the practice of observation. Appreciating nature cannot, therefore, be limited to a sentimental appreciation of beauty, but finding even the contradictions of nature worthy to be aestheticized.

Nortje's poetic representation of nature delivers an attempt to understand nature, finding it to be impenetrable or inaccessible, and finding that as long as language continues to alienate members of the ecosystem, engaging them will be complex. In other words, the story Saito claims nature tells, may never be known in the strict sense of the idea. Realism's claim to objectivity in terms of describing nature may sound superior over an effusive sentimental aestheticization of nature, but even that itself is mediated by the tool of mimesis – language, which is human and indicative of the writer's state of mind.

3.8 Water in Arthur Nortje's Poetry

One image that is almost ubiquitous in Norte's works is that of water in different forms: rain, rivers and seas. These, especially rain, are examples of the involvement of nature in man's everyday experiences. In our understanding of everyday nature, we could say that water is one phenomenon that people do not have to leave community to find. It is also one aspect of nature that has been written about much by poets across temporal-spatial borders. Nigerian poet Gabriel Okara wrote about his native River Nun, in which the river serves as a symbol of his cultural and spiritual roots.⁹ African-American poet Langston Hughes, in the heyday of the Harlem Renaissance of the mid-twentieth century, wrote "The Negro Speaks of Rivers",¹⁰ which uses rivers from different world geographies to signify the different stages of the collective Negro experience. Other poets were simply attracted to the character of water and wrote to describe their experience of such bodies of water. Wordsworth wrote such poems as "Upon the Westminster Bridge", "Yarrow Visited" and "Valedictory Sonnet to the River Dutton", in which water is represented as the continuity of life, the element that exceeds man's time on earth. In writing about the image of water in the works of Tanzanian poet Euphrase Kezilahabi, Katriina Ranne uncovers the constant presence of water as a symbol in many African works, mentioning the works of writers like Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Chinua Achebe and Tsitsi Dangarembga. According to her, "The commonness of the image is understandable, given the continual physiological necessity of water and the presence of it in everyone's life, and the scarcity of water in many areas of Africa" (1). John Gregory Brown gives an overview of the use of water in literature as follows:

That images of water should play such a prominent and recurrent role as a metaphor in literature is hardly surprising, given the essential place of water in life itself. Water is, of course, mutable and sublime, sustaining and destructive, and throughout literature water serves as a representation not only of birth but of death, not merely of placidity but of violence. Water transports the hero to his great adventures and carries him home. Water holds the promise both of freedom and of enslavement, its shimmering surface inviting, its depths mysterious and daunting. (par. 2)

The major focus of this section is Nortje's depiction of rain in his poems. Volk notices that "[f]luidic language runs throughout Nortje's work" (56). But, while Volk analyses images of spitting or body fluids in Nortje's poems, I am looking at external water, rain, to be precise.

⁹ Okara, Gabriel Imomotime. "The Call of the River Nun." *A Selection of African Poetry*. Ed. K.E. Senanu and T. Vincent. Essex: Longman, 1976. 103-104.

¹⁰ Hughes, Langston. "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." *Crisis* (Nov 1970): 366.

Close reading has shown that Nortje's repeated use of water images cannot be divorced from his society-psyche engagement already suggested in previous sections. As such, we still return to Guattari's linkage of "the environment, social relations and human subjectivity" (20) which he calls "the three ecological registers" (19). His ideas are based on the view that it is impossible to look at the environment, the *socius* and the psyche as three separate worlds. In other words, the external non-human environment should never be seen as a separate entity from society and human subjectivity. Hess's idea of 'everyday nature', a view of nature not only as "the place where we go both imaginatively and physically, to escape this modernity" (85), but acknowledging the presence of nature in everyday human experience and environment, especially in urban areas, will also be important for this discussion. For Hess, it is not enough to identify everyday nature and simply write about it. It needs to be divested of the transcendent quality that connects it only with the "autonomous individual self" (93) and be viewed in terms of its "social and economic relationships" (93).

"For Rada" is a love poem within whose artistic framework Nortje brings together the interplay between human subjectivity, nature and society, thereby creating a picture of both dissonance and harmony between the concrete and the abstract, between humanity and nature, and between various social groups. The poem is typically couched in very private referents which alienate the reader when it comes to specifics. Expressions like "since last summer" (4), for instance, work to open up a world to the reader and to shut them out at the same time.

The first stanza of the poem is centred on memory and desire. The concrete images of "cobwebs" (1), "ceiling" (1), and "tan parquet" (2) signify private memory shared between the poet and his lover, which "[s]ince last summer [...] revolves in [his] brain" (4). This memory revolves in his brain in the same fashion a fragment of music would keep replaying itself in a person's mind. This probably refers to an earlier encounter described in "A Love Song for Rada Naidoo", written in the same year and addressed to the same person: "We rot together in the cellar / centred in the spider's cobweb: /outside looms the end of summer" (15-16). Part of the poem "For Rada" reads as follows:

Not cerebral in this our intellectual
age and time. You choose to be. Now rain
inopportunately interrupts your conversation with a girl,
though in half-light a stoep should satisfy.

A car is only narrow enough for a kiss
and anyhow on rain-spoiled nights like these
few things are said, or simple futile ones:
love becomes the beginning and end of news. (5-12)

The desire expressed by the speaker is frustrated. Rain comes in as an uncaring interrupter in human affairs, showing up uninvited. Quite different from the Romantic view of nature as transcendent and spiritual, Nortje views rain, representative of non-human nature, as a mere unthinking element that does not take into account human affairs. There is also a sort of ambivalence expressed towards rain. While the “rain inopportunistly interrupts” (7-8) and becomes the hindrance to desire being fulfilled, on “rain-spoiled nights [...] / [...] love becomes the beginning and end of news” (10-12). So instead of a sentimental yearning to ‘return’ to nature, the return being yearned for here is a return to the lover, a human relationship, as shown in the next stanza: “Tomorrow, you return to save the scene” (13). The involvement of rain in human affairs amidst everyday objects like a stoep and a car brings up the idea of nature as an everyday phenomenon, something not separated from everyday human life. Nature is thus not something we retreat from society to find or just something we involve in our activities, but something that involves itself in our activities whether invited or not, and plays very important roles such as being able to provide “sweet weather” (15) for smooth human activity or the reverse. So in this piece Nortje gives us a poetic vision that blurs the nature-urban divide and shows a complex mutuality between non-human nature and man.

The name of this lover, whether real or fictional, suggests that the poem is not just about love inhibited by rain. It rather points to a larger social-historical reality. Rada Naidoo is an Indian name and the poet was a member of the coloured Afrikaans community. This usage brings to question the historical journey of South Africa into a significantly multiracial nation. We witness an engagement of identity as constructed difference and humanity’s basic need for community beyond racial colour and cultural differences. Here is a coloured subject reaching out to an Indian lover in a society where race is what largely defines human beings either liberating them or incarcerating them. The poet’s feeling of love signifies the nature of human individuals to want to relate with one another regardless of racial constructions. However, the poet’s desire fails to be fulfilled because the rain has spoiled his plans. This representation of rain can thus be read as symbolizing the political atmosphere of the day, an atmosphere that separates humanity in a rather artificial way and leaves humans unfulfilled in their relationship with one another.

In the poem “Cracked Asphalt” we witness another connection between rain and racial identity and topography in apartheid South Africa of the 1960s. The first two stanzas of the poem read as follows:

Cracked asphalt conveys to me neglect
as it here conveys me home at midday,
though “If I’m lucky” I’ll stick to my stones

along long stretches of loneliness
which damp earth, rotting leaves now make
while I encircle turquoise water. (1-6)

Using the universal road symbol, Nortje depicts a persona on a journey to a destination he calls “home” (2). But right from the opening, the idea of “cracked asphalt” (1) prevents us from expecting a romanticized landscape. Instead it conveys a negative notion, the idea of violence and scarred land. The road does two things, which seem contradictory: it conveys neglect to the poet and conveys the poet home, and is thus an object that embodies Nortje’s ambivalence around the public represented as site of social neglect and the intimate connotation of “home”. Although it is midday, the road is described as a series of “long stretches of loneliness” (4), “damp earth” (5) and as covered with “rotting leaves” (5). The idea of loneliness is a repeated motif in Nortje’s poetry, a psychological reality which also reflects the external world. Chapman notes that “Nortje often incorporates within a single poem both the personal and the social implications of his loneliness” (“Exile” 60). Through this mix of concrete images and abstract ideas, we are beginning to see that the journey is not a mere physical journey home on a familiar path, but also a psychological one hampered by unfavourable social conditions symbolized by the concrete images.

Rain in this poem serves the purpose of exposing the society in which this persona is located. If it were a dry day, we would not have seen these issues most probably, but because of the rain, the cracked asphalt is magnified as a symbol of “neglect” (1) by the authorities responsible. In a subtle way the poet shows he lives in a community that is neglected by those who could make amenities better. The road is so bad that he has to “stick to [...] stones” (3) and “encircle turquoise water” (6). This invokes the idea of apartheid geography and its legislation of residential areas based on race – the poor living conditions in the townships to which apartheid laws had subjected black people.

Describing the rainclouds as “morose dragon hordes / bellowing forward to my destination as if in defiance” (8) depicts nature in this poem as aggressive and wild and even antagonistic towards humans. It has caused a separation in human interaction by removing the “albino, slave or mongol” (12) where they have always been. But far from depicting nature as being in perfect unity and thus uniting against humanity, we see intra-natural violence as the rain acts on the “wet-black bluegums” (15) and the “fir trees” (16). Instead of the rain being

shown as beneficial to the rest of nature, it comes in as an enemy, and these other items of nature suffer from its actions. So, in this poem, rain is associated with neglect, loneliness and violence. While most environmentally-conscious writing, in a bid to avoid being labelled anthropocentric, focuses on the unfavourable activities of humans on the environment, this poem depicts the violence of non-human nature, void of any innocence, on humans such as in the line, “wires of hot rain assault my shirt” (18).

I shall end this section with a look at “All Hungers Pass Away”, one of the last poems written by Nortje before his death in Oxford. This poem is like an evaluation of the poet’s journey in search of existential fulfilment as an individual human being who seeks connection with his environment. In the poem the two places of his experience converge in his room and in his imagination. He has left South Africa in search of a better life away from political instability, away from the roots that reminded him of his sense of rootlessness as a marginalized citizen and as a fatherless young man. But towards the end of his young life, he has come to describe England as “a land where rhythm fails” (8), a place of uncertainty and elusive fulfilment. He has earlier described England as “haven under your eye” (“For Gerald Going to England” 10). But now “famous viands taste like ash” (14) and the “arms of a bland girl” (18) no longer interest him. His escape has turned out to be false, for while in exile “[w]hat consolation comes / drops away in bitterness” (21-22) because “Drakensberg lies swathed in gloom, / [and] starvation stalks the farms of the Transvaal” (19-20). This disillusionment comes with the realization that although he has left South Africa, which he describes as “a land of problems” (“Song for a Passport” 20), South Africa has not really left him.

Alongside this engagement is the rain falling outside the speaker’s room. Again, the rain occupies an active place in the poem instead of a passive background:

I lie and listen to the rain
hours before full dawn brings
forward a further day and winter sun
here in the land where rhythm fails. (5-8)

The brooding begins with “I lie and listen to the rain” (5) and ends with “[t]he rain abates” (25). In listening to the rain, the rain is assigned agency as a speaker, a carrier of a message or information. It reflects the internal troubles the speaker is thinking about as the word “abates” (25) implies a crisis or storm. That is the state of mind of the poet as he ponders “the wasted years” (24) and “Drakensberg [...] in gloom” (19). But at the same time, the idea of abatement resonates with the mention of “recover[y] from the wasted years” (24) in stanza

six and “full dawn” (6) in stanza two, which, in the midst of the chaos and confusion, point to hope and a new beginning in the poet’s life.

3.9 Animals in Arthur Nortje’s Poetry

Bunn’s emphasis on Nortje’s alienation from the pastoral terrain as a victim of apartheid’s imbalanced geography may also be applied to the kind of animals that Nortje wrote about. Nortje’s contemporaries, the likes of Livingstone, did write on animals as well, but rather differently from what he had done. Livingstone’s persona’s encounter with a wildcat, for instance, is placed in a familiar rural topography (game reserves and farms in the bushveld) to which the township poet hardly had access. With this in mind and building on our conception of everyday nature, in which we have established that nature is not absent from urbanity but has only evolved into a different form of recognition along with human technological developments, I shall analyse Nortje’s portrayals of animal figures in his poetry. Just as the poems depict the strong presence of flora in urbanity, Nortje’s poems also depict animals in nexus with urbanity quite recurrently. In his oeuvre, for instance, one could see that he wrote mostly about animals that are within the urban areas which include birds, insects and rodents. In this section, I am interested in discussing the allegorical depiction of animals, realist treatment of animals, animal-encounter poems and the concept of animality. I shall do this relying on the thought of urban and everyday nature as laid out by Hess and by Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the becoming-animal.

The portrayal and treatment of animals in human culture has been a matter of heated discussion. Philosophers have attempted to unravel the animal in relation to the human and these relations have come in diverse forms. Soper has divided the voices on this debate into two broad categories of dualists and monists, which she acknowledges as too narrow to contain the complexities of this relationship. She writes that

[f]or the dualist, our attributes, realized capacities and potentialities as human beings are so radically different from those possessed by other species that there is no proper analogue between human and other animals. For the monist, by contrast, all the ways in which we differ from other species are matters of degree, which can be all the better illuminated by seeing them as gradations within an essential sameness of being. (50)

Apart from uprightness and hairless skin, culture, language and rationality are at the centre of the discussions around the nature of the relationship between human beings and animals. Descartes has been famously noted for his adherence to dualism in the relationship between humans and animals, with consciousness and reason as the chief points of difference between

them. The human being is a conscious thinker while the animal is just a machine without the ability to think or even feel. These differences are, however, taken care of in works that disturb hierarchical thinking like that of Deleuze and Guatarri. In their thought about becoming-animal, they explore an interest in the spaces of overlap between different domains. What is important about their position is the fact that this relationship between human and animal is not conscious; not imitation (mimicry); not hybridity. It speaks rather to the idea of spaces of proximity, the shared likeness, the nuanced or blurred place where it is impossible to draw a neat demarcation. They clearly show that this is not about a sentimental relationship either. This transversal thinking disturbs the idea of strict opposites by appealing to multiplicity and metamorphosis rather than to a closed system. I shall return to these ideas in Chapter Four where I discuss Nortje's sympathetic imagination of animals. Here I want to look at Nortje's poems with these concepts in mind as his depiction of animality functions in ways that acknowledge heterogeneity without a centralizing device. His depictions of the animals are quite varied and represent the complexities in the relationship between humans and animals. These variations range from naturalism to tropological and humanized depictions of animal figures.

Given the equation of human culture and the city, the presence of animals in daily human affairs in the urban is a necessary focus, especially the use of animals allegorically in the life of the polis, the polity, the politics of urban life. I understand allegorically to stand for a shared ground between species. This shared ground could stand for a way of flattening and stereotyping animals in relation to the human, but I would like to read it as a creation of middle spaces to explore the sentience of animals and the animality of humanity. In some poems, Nortje produces a merging of animals with the socio-political. These images will not be read as mere metaphors but as juxtapositions of domains which allow a crossing as in Deleuzian thought. I look, therefore, at the ways in which animal figures are featured in representative ways to converse or intersect with social and political matters. I shall also rely on Huggan and Tiffin's explanations of how animal figures are used in regard to politics. Their interest is to understand the manner in which animals are represented by human beings in relation to the major thrusts of postcolonialism such as the questions of race, otherness, language and representation (135). They identify four ways in which animals have been constructed for the purpose of marginalization. First, dominant groups categorize dominated peoples as animals and use that to justify inhuman treatments of such peoples (135). Second, humans are deprived of space and resources in favour of animals. The third point is the "ways in which the treatment of animals that have special status in one human society is used to vilify, incriminate or

marginalize other human groups” (137). The fourth challenge is wrapped in the question, “why worry about animals when children are starving, or when other people are still being killed, raped and abused?” (137).

Nortje uses animal figures to construct the South Africa of his day, the racial and class disequilibrium that existed in his familiar space. In the poem “Midnight and After”, which speaks about the dystopic dimensions of the black townships of apartheid South Africa, Nortje imagines a world of deprivation and discomfort. The lines I am interested in speak of black “souls, condemned to their ancestral black, / on vermined beds which white hate would ignite” (9-10). In these lines, Nortje brings up matters from a history of racial marginalization which straddled space, the body and the mind. The connection to the body reveals the centrality of corporeality in the whole business of dislocating and relocating black members of the society. The word “hate” (10) speaks to the psychic and interior dimensions of the experience of racism. These explanations lead me to the phrase “vermined beds” (10). It conveys the manner in which certain animals are associated with certain ideas in human society. In this poem, it evokes an image of poverty as a home infested with insects such as bed-bugs and lice and rodents automatically invokes a lack of means to a proper living standard. This, however, is not merely a symbol, but a literal picture that speaks of the multiplicities that characterize society, the manner in which there is a crossing between different domains of signification.

In another poem, “Hangover”, rats are part of the speaker’s room, again revealing his poverty and belonging to a low class in the society. In close connection to these rodents, he describes himself as a “bastard” (18), showing not just an issue with paternity, but a deep sense of displacement and loss in his society. While in this poem, the speaker says, “No lice, luckily I’m a bastard” (18), in “Casualty”, remembering his past life while in exile, he says, “The brown lice are buried in old mattresses: / they smothered, feeding sweetly in my highways. / And the rats peeped from hiding when / the scissored bag had spilled me like a wombscrape” (18-21). In placing these animal figures side by side with the human, Nortje’s work here develops a vision in which he attempts, in the words of Beaulieu, “to create an assemblage and find a zone of indiscernibility between the human and the non-human” (76).

Returning to the poem “Thumbing a Lift”, we note that the speaker is embarrassed by the fact that the only vehicle that would give him a lift home is a cattle truck. The crisis here is that of the question of the status of the human versus the animal. While it is a help for the speaker to be given a drive home on this truck, he *feels* degraded to the status of an animal. He feels a threat to his humanity and the dignity that is supposed to be inherent in his human status as shown in the ironic lines, “I’m afterwards only O.K. when, chosen, / A cattle truck careers

me towards the horizon” (27-28). Already he is struggling with how he is perceived racially as expressed in the line, “Cars pass by the thin thing of my *brown thumb*” (18, emphasis mine), which shows his struggle with the body as a mark of racial inferiority. This idea opens up the complexity of the animal-human dialectic in such a way that the society has already placed him racially below the level of a ‘proper’ human being. This is also a matter of space; for just as space defines race, it also defines species – humans travel in cars and animals or the dehumanized are driven in trucks (to the slaughterhouse). The speaker’s grumbling is not just a personal misreading, but a revelation of what has been socially and culturally constructed beyond him, a signification that every member of his society would understand. In the poem, “Leftovers”, Nortje describes “the countries south” (2) as “we who have been tarzanned” (4). The verb “tarzanned” is drawn from Edgar Rice Burroughs’ fictional character, Tarzan, who was raised by animals in a jungle, thus cut off from the rest of human civilization. By this allusion, Nortje is speaking about the bestialization of non-white races and third world nations by the West, as Fanon articulates:

At times this Manicheism goes to its logical conclusion and dehumanizes the native, or to speak plainly, it turns him into an animal. In fact, the terms the settler uses when he mentions the native are zoological terms. He speaks of the yellow man's reptilian motions, of the stink of the native quarter, of breeding swarms, of foulness, of spawn, of gesticulations. When the settler seeks to describe the native fully in exact terms he constantly refers to the bestiary. (42)

The animal figure also serves direct political purposes in Nortje’s poetry. The poet, expressing his anger against the oppressive regime of his day, describes the group in power as “those blond beasts we have known as foes” (“Now” 6). The bestial image is thus not only used as degrading towards the marginalized, but is also used as language of resistance by the oppressed. The oppressive apartheid regime is also described as “dragon” (“The Dragon’s Head” 2) and as having “saracen-fangs” (“The Dragon’s Head” 8). To speak of one’s enemy’s despicable behaviour, one has to oust them out of the realm of humanity to that of the uncivil other – the beast. The human is assumed to be above the nonhuman due to its gift of language, culture and rationality, so that a fall below expectation is always a fall into bestiality.

Animals can also be an example for humanity to learn from. In a country where freedom was constrained, Nortje wrote “Hatched things, flocks of new birds fashioned / freedom’s country, hope’s emergence, / blood’s fresh chance to change and mingle” (“Cold Spell” 10-12), and elsewhere, “Mixture of death here and death going by, / seen by the birds who fly away / to Europe or America” (“Quintet: Wednesday Blessing” 9-11) to speak of migration.

Exile is implied here as a result of witnessing violence and the bird image again speaks of freedom sought by South Africans elsewhere outside their country.

Nortje has also used the image of animals to convey patriarchal and even misogynistic attitudes. He has used the word 'bitch' to describe women he is not favourably disposed towards. In "Oxford Walk", for instance, there is a tension between love and disappointment on the side of the speaker, whose sense of being betrayed or neglected has led him to construct the woman as less than human in the derogatory image of the 'bitch'. In "Two Women", the woman who has stubbornly decided to stand on her dignity is described as a "tigress on the phone" (12) to suggest both spite and admiration for the woman. Nortje has also, however, used animal images in endearing ways to describe his lovers. This suggests the variety of attitudes expressed towards animals by humans, which cannot be homogenized. In "Gnomic", the woman is addressed as follows: "sweet bird, slim spirit, / you shall inherit / phoenix feathers / weather all weathers" (8-11). The bird is viewed as an object of beauty beyond human beauty in this context, and using the specific image of the phoenix points to ideas of regeneration.

It is thus clear that the political use of the image of animals in Nortje's poetry confronts us with multiple attitudes that exist in the human society towards the otherness of animals. The use of animal images to describe human persons, attitudes, behaviour and culture conveys multivalent, even contradictory, attitudes towards the animal world. Huggan and Tiffin, for instance, note that "dominant European discourses have expressed...dominance by constructing others – both people and animals – as animal, both philosophically and representationally" (135). While animals are used as symbols of difference, of otherness, of whatever stands outside the scope of humanity, that is, to identify even the behaviour of humans that are viewed as falling outside the human circle, they are also used as symbols of elevation. That shows that an allegorical use of the image of animals is not necessarily a negative one. It also, in fact, works as a means of exploring the common grounds shared by different species and the animality of humans.

Poems that capture an encounter between a human subject and an animal have formed a sort of sub-genre in the Western poetic traditions. These poems are not usually interested in portraying a general animality, the idea of an animal; rather they capture moments of confrontation, moments of encounter between humans and animals, which often result in questions about the troubled interspecies relationship. Elizabeth Costello, in Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals*, draws a distinction between poetry of allegorical depictions of animals and one-on-one encounter poems, showing the latter as superior in showing the relationship between humans and animals. While this sub-canon focuses on an intense prolonged encounter

conveyed in a poetic meditation by the poets, for the purpose of this study I shall broaden the scope of encounter poems or use the term rather more loosely. This means I shall include poems that capture these encounters even in a subtextual way. The following poem, “Plover”, captures succinctly such an encounter:

The tan stripes of the plover spurt
along the sand mounds, and the white
fur sits like winter at its throat.

Bird stands in Junelight, eyeing me
as if I should find sympathy
for trees from which the dead leaves float. (1-6)

The poem describes an encounter with a single bird, a plover. The first stanza of three lines describes the bird in naturalistic terms: the appearance of the bird - “tan stripes” (1), “white fur” (2-3) - and action - “spurt along the sand mounds” (2). The second stanza describes a face-to-face encounter with this bird: “eyeing me / as if I should find sympathy / for trees from which the dead leaves float” (4-6). Communication is hinted here as being initiated by the bird, appealing to the persona to develop a right attitude towards his environment, to show some concern for the existence of the bird and its habitat. So in a sense we can say this poem crosses from the naturalistic depiction to a compassionate one, in which the poet recognizes a call to be a responsible member of the nature community – bird, tree and human. The animal gaze, the eyeing, is also a form of call to the human to identify with the natural community.

Another dimension to the treatment of animals in Nortje’s poetry worth looking at is that of the human fear of animals. Animal fear is a common phenomenon among human beings which does not only come from the idea of animal danger, but from their uncanny difference. “Spiders” is a poem of mockery written in Canada about the speaker’s fear of spiders.

The spiders in my room run for their lives.
When I feel alien web-threads
pass through my jugular
snare my cage of bones
convulsions of the blood beat through my temples,
sweats break upon my brow. (1-6)

This stanza conveys the speaker’s fear of spiders and his mock aggression towards them. The keyword that suggests the reason for the speaker’s fear is “alien” (2) used to describe cobwebs. Describing the spiders and their activities as alien points to the speaker’s sense of this difference as uncanny. There is a separation in the speaker’s mind that rules out the possibility of shared features between the species. The description of his fear is conveyed in

very physical terms, using words like “jugular” (3), “cage of bones” (4), “blood” (5), “temples” (5) and “sweats break upon my brow” (6) to capture the extent of his discomfort, irritation or disgust at the thought of contact with a spider or its web.

In the subsequent stanza, it turns into a space issue. The spiders are depicted as intruders in the speaker’s private space. The speaker recalls when he once “sacrificed / the pleasure of / [...] [his] room” (7-9) due to spider presence. The presence of the insect in the room threatens his sense of security in that space and renders the room ‘uninhabitable’. He regrets that there was a time he “could come / home to a book” (11-12). In this, we see a kind of reversal. In the pastoral ideal, the appearance of a locomotive, for instance, is a disruption of the serenity enjoyed outside of society. That dissonance is played out here in this poem, albeit reversed: The room has become the norm, the peaceful serene space without the presence of intruding insects. The presence of the insect now becomes the counterforce, an infringement on what is the normal and quiet. The room is pastoralized, so to say, so that a visit from the animal world becomes an unwanted intrusion. So, read on three levels, we see in this poem: (i) othering of nature (ii) conflict between man and nature (iii) the pastoralization of the urban space. However, under the mock-anger and the speaker’s noted fear of spiders, there lies the uncanniness that characterizes the tricky recognition of difference and kinship played out simultaneously. The space that the speaker claims for himself (and humanity) fails to succeed in binarizing not only the division between private and public, but even between spaces that animals and humans can occupy. It is a demonstration of the impossibility of total separation, and the deterritorialization present in the interrelationships between humans and animals and between them and space.

Another category of representation of animals in Nortje’s work is a placement of animals along with humanity, urbanity and technology without a unifying element. “Power Trip, Soul City” is a poem that captures the diversities of a modern city as suggested by the refrain “There are a thousand” at the beginning of most stanzas. In this resistance of the city to be homogenized, besides the complex racial diversities of “a thousand wogs” (24) that inhabit the city, the random multiplicities include “a thousand birds” (27). In the picture, “both larks and blackbirds sing: / I am lifted out of stagnation / by this *come-together city*” (342, emphasis mine). By depicting the city as “come-together” and listing the diversities found there, the poet projects a sort of egalitarianism among cultures and lifestyles (“a thousand ways”), individuals (“a thousand souls”), things (“the poppy, and juice”; “a thousand bogs”), animals (“a thousand birds”), and shows how the city is a Deleuzian rhizome with multiple domains running in and out of one another. This rather anarchic view of the city has done a few things for the animal

figures in the poem. It has equalized them, for instance, with humans and things and even intraspecies difference. In another poem, “Blue Air” we read the lines “That bird sings, eloquent and seemly / in daybursts, calling / calling with a sweet clarity, contrapuntally against the roar of / traffic, the trucksound” (7-10). This is a fine example of where Nortje’s post-romanticism is demonstrated as something that blends Keats and Eliot – the nightingale and the wasteland – together. In the rhizomatic scheme of things, the birdsong and the sound of technology, which are of different strata, now interconnect in order to disconnect or take a line of flight.

3.10 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to uncover the ways in which Nortje has sought to ‘disorientate’ the ideas of nature as separate and as closed. I have established that Nortje’s postcolonial and post-romantic aesthetics have worked out a vision of the world in which nature and culture, nature and history, nature and society are all webbed together in complex harmonies and dissonances. As environmental criticism continues to evolve along with social practices and restless advancements in science and technology, it becomes necessary to review and re-evaluate perceptions of nature and the natural in the modern world that we inhabit. It goes without saying that return is an impossibility. Return to a past world or a past time is a hope that no longer offers much impact on the environmental project. Nostalgic and primitivist treatments of nature are, therefore, becoming increasingly anachronistic in times when our lives are inseparably enmeshed in urbanity, technology and futurism. According to Guattari, “[i]t would of course be absurd to formulate [...] [ideas about the environment] in terms of a desire to retrieve past forms of human existence. In the wake of the data-processing and robotics revolutions, the rise of genetic engineering, and the globalization of markets, neither human work nor the natural habitat can return, even to their state of being of a few decades” (134). This forward thinking in respect of the environment, according to Guattari, is not only an acknowledgement of the current situation of our historical moment, but seeks to reorient it, to engage in “a redefinition in terms of contemporary conditions of the objectives and methods of each and every form of movement of the social” (135) in the light of the fact of irreversibility.

Two important ideas, therefore, emerge in this study of nature in Nortje’s poetry: the need to locate a ‘middle space’ and the need for a form of ecological agnosis. The ‘middle ground’ is the space of shared interconnections that permits sympathy and heterogeneity to exist as diverse legitimate domains of difference without an unnecessary verticalization. It

implies respect for nature in both wilderness and urban centres, giving the same value to nature out there and nature assumed to have been tampered with by human activity. While the interpenetrations may be asignifying, without any real unifying force, they still provide a space where change, processuality and commonality can be explored with a sense of respectful agnosis as to what nature is about. This agnosis does not imply insouciance (as we shall see in the next chapter); rather, it encourages humility in the human subject who uses language, culture and technology to engage with nature. The renunciation of a claim to a mastering knowledge of nature and claiming agnosis does not mean abandoning such constructed 'facts', but leads to a cautious use of language when addressing nature and a more sympathetic understanding of natural entities as fellow members of an ecosystem.

Chapter Four

Speaking *as* the Environment in Arthur Nortje's Poetry

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the ways in which Nortje's poetry is engaged in 'speaking *as*' rather than 'speaking *for*' the environment. In the previous chapters, I have established the poet's deep interest in the environment – place and nature, to be precise. In the chapter that deals with the idea of place and placeness, I have established the poet's consciousness of the physical location of subjectivity, the placement of consciousness in both space and time. The reading of place as an aspect of the environment points to the human-environment relationship and draws attention away from a nature-only ecology. The chapter on nature discusses nature as portrayed in a horizontal rather than a hierarchical manner, a portrayal where nature is coexistent with, rather than antithetical to culture. I explore the idea of a speaking nature in which Nortje comes up with complex treatments of that motif, showing nature as indeed speaking in a certain sense, but not necessarily accessible. This chapter takes the argument a step further, addressing the question of representation not in the sense of artistic portrayal as in the previous chapter, but in a somewhat more political sense. The chapter attempts to climax the foregoing discussions on place and nature with the poet's environmentalist consciousness. This is quite interesting when we consider the historical moment when Nortje's body of poetic works was created. The 1960s are always viewed as a uniquely turbulent passage for South Africa, a period in which black poets were thought to be more concerned about race politics than the environment. Nortje's poetry proves otherwise. He, I argue, did not only anticipate an environmental turn, he visualized the environment in a radically transversal manner that will continue to be relevant for postcolonial environmental criticism.

The chapter is divided into five major conceptual movements. First, I shall develop an idea of the postcolonial environmental text as a form of speaking *as* rather than *for* the environment to prepare the grounds for analyses of the poetry. My analyses centre on the images and motifs of waste, decay and pollution in connection to the consumerist-capitalist culture of the urban spaces represented in Nortje's Canada poems. Following this, I discuss apartheid geography and environmental injustice as shown in the poet's exile imagination. Here, I look at the poems that explore the ideas of division in terms of race, space and resources and the disequilibrium of the social-ecological landscape of apartheid South Africa. I then analyse Nortje's interest in the relationship between war and the environment as expressed in the poems that touch on nuclear culture, the world wars and Vietnam. The idea is to understand

the connections between war and ecocide and ecocatastrophes. After grappling with the poet's concern for animals, I pursue an argument that sees the human body as a part of the environment and consequently a site of environmental crisis as well.

4.2 The Postcolonial Environmental Text and Speaking as the Environment

In *The Environmental Imagination*, Buell outlines four important criteria of the environmental text rather loosely, calling it “a rough checklist of some of the ingredients that might be said to comprise an environmentally oriented work” (7). The criteria include the representation of the nonhuman environment not as mere backdrop for human action, but one in which “human history is implicated in natural history” (7). The second criterion is for a text to work in a way that “human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest” (7). The third points at “human accountability to the environment...[as] part of the text's ethical orientation” (7). The final point is when in a literary work “[s]ome sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text” (7). Surrounding these criteria are Buell's deliberate deviation from orthodox environmentalism. He emphasises that in his “version of the history of the western hemisphere, the ecological colonization of the Americas by disease and invasive plant forms is as crucial as the subjugation of their indigenous peoples by political and military means” (6). This sort of restructured ecological model seeks a detour from the traditional pattern that sought a totally biocentric approach without much regard for the intricate intersections of nature and culture. Buell, in an effort to resist opposite exclusionary reductionisms in regard to matters of representation of the environment and of priority given to nature, remarks that all environmental texts are concerned with the actuality of the environment and how humanity conceives and represents nature (13). Already, his openness, although in an American-centred study, about nature's complex interaction with culture, and his willingness to move away from thought systems that categorize those areas in strict terms, opens the way for a postcolonial integration. He raises questions about the power relations involved in environmental issues, pointing out the interrelatedness of diverse domains of existence including nature. He reasons that while nature is “doubly otherized in modern thought” (21), and “subserve[s] human interests”, one of which has been “to make it serve as a symbolic reinforcement of the subservience of disempowered groups: nonwhites, women, and children” (21), it has to be raised to the status of equal attention but not above other agendas. The four criteria of the environmental text, therefore, capture in a broad way the possibility of engaging environmental issues across a history of colonial disempowerment and

serve as a foundation for formulating a model that views the environmental text as necessarily speaking from within the environment rather than outside it.

Environmental art and criticism are conventionally viewed as speaking *for* nature, as earlier noted, rather than speaking *as* nature. Bate, for instance, comments on the difficulty of literary ecology as speaking for the other. He writes that,

[t]he ecocritical project always involves speaking for its subject rather than speaking as its subject: a critic may speak as a woman or as a person of colour, but cannot speak as a tree. Readers of colour find it easy to project themselves into Caliban, women readers into Sycorax or Miranda. But it is not easy for any of us to project ourselves into a character who is specifically non-human and is only gendered in a shadowy way. Perhaps that is why postmodern criticism has been almost silent about Ariel. (72)

Most cultural theories are built out of the idea of providing a channel of expression for a marginalized group that would ordinarily not be able to speak for itself. This inability to speak does not imply an intrinsic lack of an ability to communicate. Rather, it points to the disadvantaged position in which such groups are located in the matrix of power relations and dynamics. Buell has rightly noted that these “emergent discourses on behalf of silenced or disempowered social groups” (*Future 7*) in areas such as feminism, race and sexuality studies clearly play a representative role for the marginalized (*Future 7*). Bate observes that “[m]uch of the work in feminist and post-colonial theory has been done by people who are beneficiaries of the cultural revolutions of which that work is a part: women and people of colour” (72). In this way, both Buell and Bate are implicitly pointing to the way it is sometimes viewed as ‘illegitimate’ for a writer, critical or creative, to attempt representing experiences other than their own direct experiences. Ownership or belonging seems to be an important criterion to consider before one could attempt such a venture.

The major point Buell and Bate are making is how ecocriticism is perceived to be different from other critical stances, given the difficulty and slipperiness of environmental discourse as speaking *for* the environment. According to Buell, in comparison to cultural theories, “[o]ne can speak as an environmentalist, one can ‘speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness,’ as Thoreau did, but evidently no human can speak *as* the environment, *as* nature, *as* non-human animal” (*Future 7*). There is a problem of not belonging, in which the speaker is representing a non-linguistic entity whose ordeal they are not confident they understand. This raises further questions that have to do with the ontologies involved. What is nature? What is the nature of the divide between humanity and nature? Are human

beings not a part of the ecosystem? Are human beings not nature as well? The complexity of this matter points to the diverse ideas that are held in regard to the human relationship to nature.

So far, ecological movements have been involved in the project of finding the right space for humanity in the ecological scheme of things. Deep ecologists who have relied on nineteenth century American nature writings have moved not only towards an egalitarian vision of the world, but have almost excised humans from the picture. In other words, humanity is not only decentred but removed. The so-called social turn of ecology, on the other hand, has sought to reintroduce the human and cultural into the sphere of what constitutes the environment (Bennett and Teague 170). The 'pristine' wilderness, the country and the 'natural', for instance, must not be valorized over the urban, the industrial and the cultural or human. The environment must be viewed as eclectic rather than exclusive. Moreover, while ecocriticism is quite right to move onto biocentrism in which all members of the network are respected, we must not fail to acknowledge that the whole ecological consciousness and its discourse are a human project carried out in language; ecological discourse comprises humans speaking to other humans about the world. Other parts of the environment are neither engaged in producing environmental knowledge, nor are they a part of the audience.

Now, in order to answer the question of this section about postcolonial environmentalism, I have to turn to the centrality of language. I agree with Bate on the place of language and imagination in approaching the environmental dilemma (Bate 37). This is important as he proposes that since it is through language that we identify the problems encountered by the environment, it is by changing how we use language that we may be able to confront these problems (37). This is an aspect of his central idea of ecopoetry. According to him, poetry uses a language that is different from practical language: "Ecopoetry is not a description of dwelling with the earth, not a disengaged thinking about it, but an experiencing of it" (42). Bate's point is to distinguish between ecopoetry and ecopolitics, how the former relies on the power of language to present an experience rather than serve an instrumental purpose as politics does. He reasons that "[t]he choice of those who make a commitment to writing and reading must be the latter. The question of consciousness comes first; the political consequences which may flow from a different kind of consciousness should not be anticipated too readily" (23). As far as he is concerned, "[t]he business of literature is to work upon consciousness. The practical consequences of that work – social, environment, political in the broadest sense – cannot be controlled or predicted. They will be surprising, haphazard, indirect, long-term" (23). Vital too, when he calls for an African/postcolonial environmental approach, has language at the centre. According to him, "[w]hat is needed [...] is an interpretive strategy

that does [...] rest on the assumption that all understanding of the world (what we call “nature,” “history,” etc.) is always delivered through language” (90). The return to the centrality of language is critical and quite tricky as it constitutes a seeming automatic promotion of humanity over the rest the environment. But creating art about the world and engaging in critical discourse in reference to the world is entirely a human venture. Again, this is not to use the rational-language argument for human superiority, rather it is to see how language as the tool of environmentalism does not necessarily cut humans out of the rest of the environment.

In forging an approach that asserts a turn to *speaking as*, I depend on the Guattarian concept of transversality, which resists the verticalization of ideas in favour of a more contingent and free interaction of various ideas (Guattari 135). This affords us the view that the speaking subject does not claim sameness or connection to other domains and regimes, but evinces awareness of multiple intersections of different domains within the shared space. It is a matter of belonging to a multiplicitous universe. Transversality, asserting the impossibility of isolating and interpreting an ‘ecology’ only in terms of itself, thereby disregarding other universes of reference (Guattari 135), confronts us with the humility of subjecting language to the purpose of representing the environment with the speaking subject considered not as an outsider but as a part of a heterogeneous universe. *Speaking as* does not, of course, mean arrogating to oneself total knowledge of the world, but involves a view that humanity itself has become a victim of its activities, and nature in both the exterior and interior of the human subject is threatened (to speak in terms of environmental degradation). Guattari rightly notes that, “[w]e live in a time when it is not only animal species that are disappearing; so too are the words, expressions, and gestures of human solidarity” (135). So *speaking as* would be more inclusive than the condescending *speaking for*. Although it has been viewed unfavourably when an outsider offers a sympathetic representation of a group, it is rather simplistic to give a wholesale dismissal without looking at the space where shared humanity interacts with particularity. The problem with such views is, if a man cannot speak for a woman simply because of difference, then where is the common human experience of injustice? If the western woman cannot speak for the African woman, where is the common ground of feeling dominated? Look further. If only the African woman can speak for other African women, would the speaker who possibly belongs to a middle class not be arrogant trying to represent the uneducated poor woman? Even when the poor wants to represent the other poor, are their experiences of poverty the same? If we follow this line of thought, it would mean that no one can ever represent another since experiences are unique and inaccessible. Yet there are common grounds in between. These in-between spaces allow us to speak not only *for*, but even

as, where the speaker or representative does not only represent, but speaks from an experience of similar emotion or feeling of being oppressed or deprived regardless of the object of deprivation. Again, this means that a rigid dialecticism would not work here. Instead, we speak of the in-between spaces where it is impossible to isolate one domain from another. That is the space from where *speaking as* happens.

Postcolonial environmental texts, most of which are not primarily environmental, can be seen to be speaking-as texts. They perform the role of Caliban speaking for both himself and his island. According to Bates, “[p]ost-colonialism has restored a voice to Caliban. Ecopoetics asks us to *imagine* that Ariel can be set free” (Bate 93, emphasis mine). He assumes Caliban only represents a political voice, but the text shows how central to Caliban’s dissatisfaction is the land, the physical world. There is no way to separate the domination of Caliban from the domination of his physical space. So when he protests to Prospero, he does so both as himself and as the land inseparably. Similarly, in *Things Fall Apart*, for instance, Achebe demonstrates this connection between people and land. Gillian Gane feels that in the novel “it is taken for granted that the natural world exists to be exploited by human beings, though parts of the natural world are at the same time a source of fear and danger” (40). Gane is, however, imposing on this text a conventional ecocritical reading ignoring the nature of the relationship between the community and the land. There is no separation. Chengyi Coral Wu, on the other hand, has been able to unravel the way in which *Things Fall Apart* stands as a demonstration of speaking as the environment by carefully explaining the role of the Evil Forest as the community’s connection to the earth through the goddess of the earth, Ani. Gane ignores the role of this goddess and the people’s reverence for the earth. I would say this novel and other African works that may not project a conscious campaign against destruction of the physical world may be loose examples of Rousseau’s idea of naïve poems, which, according to Bate, work in “the positive sense that they don’t think of their relationship with the environment: they are part of nature” (73).

Basing this position of speaking as the environment on the role of language and imagination would mean interrogating the use of the words *nature* and *environment*. The words are used interchangeably, although the senses each convey are rather different. While nature is that which is generally seen to be opposed to humanity and its culture, environment does not necessarily always convey the idea of oneness with humanity; rather it suggests being environed or surrounded, an exteriority. In the previous chapter, I argued for a transversal view of nature in which nature cannot be simply placed as antithetic to culture. I choose to use the term *environment* over *nature* in the current context because it conveys a more inclusive sense

of the world, covering both natural and built aspects, which are both important components of environmentalism, as Buell articulates it (*Future* 140). Buell notes that some think the term *environment* “to imply an anthropocentric center” (*Future* 140). I understand its problematic use also lies in the idea of its pointing to an outward “enviroming” entity, an exteriority opposed to human internality. But we have already addressed these dualist flaws. Transversality provides us with the platform from which to view humanity as part and parcel of environment, rather than the other side of a binary. By being a body that is situated in the world, the human being is one with the environment (the world). Thus speaking for a tree can be viewed as speaking *as* a tree not in the sense of unity, being united to the tree, but in the broad sense of speaking for the world that we all make up. This does not deny the multiplicities that make up the world, but acknowledges the interconnectedness and intersections that exist within it as well as the obvious differences that characterize it.

Speaking as the environment also depends on the logic that a genuine ecological perspective must be built on what Shumway articulates as the “assumption that human activities are no less natural than are those of other species” (256). He appeals to human animality as the shared ground with the rest of nature so that activity and structure that come out of human practices does not necessarily remove it from the scope of the natural. In this logic, human inventions, as complex and sophisticated as they may be, are no less natural than the products of other animals; spider webs and bird nests or the music of birds, for instance, are no more natural than Mozart’s genius music or the Burj Khalifa in Dubai. The degree of sophistication does not really make a difference. Shumway thus reasons that culture is only a “web of socially transmitted behaviours [...] not restricted to human beings” (256). If humans partake in animality and are natural beings, then their constructions are as natural as those of other animals; and then culture must be seen as including the activities of other members of the natural community. This then means a collapse of the demarcation of the urban and the wild or the bucolic. Cities and “other ‘unnatural’ spaces that humans have constructed” must then be seen as “environments humans *naturally* construct” (Shumway 256, emphasis mine). On the other hand, spaces conventionally identified as nature spaces such as those marked for preservation must just be seen as “nature museums” (256) as even preservation itself is as cultural an act as the act of archiving or preserving cultural items in museums. Shumway also reasons that if we must follow the thought that nature is that which has not been touched by human activity, then that kind of nature does not exist. In addition, according to William Cronon, the idea of wilderness is only a cultural construction to signify an untouched nature which in turn only signifies human desire to return to a mythical past. He writes that the

wilderness “is not a pristine sanctuary [...] Instead it is a product of civilization, and could hardly be contaminated by the very stuff of which it is made” (102). Cronon criticizes the foundation of preservationism as involving erasures of history and a desire to take flight out of time (109), thus placing humanity “entirely outside the natural” (110). Of course, the logic behind these thoughts is not to do away with the value of preservation and preventing degradation, but to also take into account the impossibility of the separation of nature and culture.

Nortje’s unique place in the landscape of South African poetry of the 1960s once again shows up here. He has been dismissed by critics as being too inward and weak in an environment that was politically turbulent and needed a voice to speak out against the injustice and violence and discrimination of which he himself was a victim (Berthoud 2), making him unable to fit into the categories either of white poets with the heritage of European poetry tradition or black poets who had to put their art to a direct political use. On the other hand, Nortje’s poetry might also be viewed as too dense and fragmentary. But here I wish to connect this with the idea of *poesis* being discussed above. Nortje’s fragmentations might have resulted from a reluctance to impose order on a world of chaos. Therefore, I do not only view such fragmentations in terms of rhizomatic interconnections, but as a view of poetry as ‘making’ or as a ‘happening’ rather than making things happen (Bate 42, Corby 118). Nortje might have had an understanding of poetry not as a finished reflection of the world, but as an experience in itself. The images and motifs of separation and loss in the poems only speak of the doubt of an ordering force in a world that is otherwise impossible to simplify. While the poems defy the expectations of overt politics, as might be expected of a poet belonging to an oppressed group, they demonstrate in the poet and the work the experience of belonging to such a historical moment. That way, the poems engage in *speaking as* rather than *for*. Nortje embodies the history of colonialism and the environmental crisis enmeshed in each other along with personal psychic turbulences.

The importance of this collapse for postcolonial ecology is not just in forging a middle space of articulation, but also in treating the environment beyond the position of the other object and identifying with it because of the cycles of impact involved. For postcolonial environmentalists, speaking as the environment empowers them with the legitimacy to speak of the physical world as deeply involved with and inseparable from history. In this chapter, I shall explore Nortje’s different ways of identifying with the physical world and speaking as the environment from a local place, from a global perspective, from an interspecies angle, and from the body located in a world.

4.3 The Urban Environment in Nortje's Canada Poems

Nortje's Canada poems define an important stage in his artistic trajectory. Solomons writes about the sort of political awakening Nortje experienced in Canada as he came in contact with the consumerist culture and political issues that produced a sense of disillusionment in him:

[t]he Canadian political and social milieu influenced the thematic development in the poetry. The aggressive consumer culture encouraged the poet to assess the presentation of political themes which he had introduced in the earlier poems, linking political insights about Northern America with political and economic exploitation in South Africa. (10)

Solomons remarks also that it was in Canada that Nortje grew into a poet of "mature observations of specific political realities" (10). Important to the discussion in this section on Nortje's environmental interest, Solomons commented on Nortje's representations of "a society haunted by the threat of nuclear annihilation" (12). But that is how far Solomon can go in commenting on Nortje's environmental concerns. McLuckie and Tyner have noted that while Nortje's life in Canada had earlier been written off by scholars as his most unproductive, in truth he was able to produce up to sixty-five poems while there (122). Since their observation is contained in an article about Nortje's life in Canada rather than one that provides an analysis of the poetry written in Canada, the article only mentions the peculiar natural environment of Hope and the consumerist culture encountered by Nortje while there. Nortje's Canada poems project a shift in his perception and construction of the environment. While the South Africa poems are deeply involved with the physical world – the landscape, seascape and the township urban world – the Canada ones reveal a *concern* for the environment, conveying a disturbing awareness of the degradations and decay taking place in Canada's urban spaces. In this section, I shall explore the recurrent images of urban collapse as they cross paths with the poet's exile condition.

Urban or social ecocriticism, according to Michael Bennett, rejects mainstream ecocriticism's emphasis on "nature writing and pastoral insisting on the incapacity of these genres to represent the complex interactions between political choices, socio-economic structures, and the densely-populated ecosystems that shape urban environments" ("Open Wide Spaces" 31-32). Bennett notes that deep ecology's marginalization of urban environments is based on the idea that nature is absent from the urban space. This binary that forms the foundational thought of deep ecology or conventional ecocriticism has failed to see not only the interaction between nature and urbanity, but even the human factor in the so-called

wilderness and country. Above all, it has failed to see the constructedness of the idea of nature or wilderness as articulated by Cronon (102). Social ecocriticism is based on the fact that everything, including our experience of nature, is constructed. The epistemological shift remains an important aspect of the emergence of social ecology, a move from a view of an objective nature out there and dualisms based on Cartesian thought. Social ecology does not try to do away with the foundations of traditional ecocriticism, however; it only seeks to dismantle the underlying (mis)understanding that is responsible for such a view. Instead of valorizing 'nature' as symbolized by the pastoral rural and the 'pristine' wild, social ecology, based on constructivism, seeks to redefine what nature is by disrupting the traditional divide between what is conceived to be natural set against industrialism and urbanity. It thus becomes difficult to view nature apart from human society, even more difficult to ignore the fact of mediation in the experience of nature.

In the poem "Hope Hotel", the poet's typical interactions of the personal and private with the outer world happens again. Set in a hotel room, the poem shows an alienated figure standing between an interior world and an external one. There is a development from the loneliness of the room space, the experimentation with "a book of nudes" (9), to images of the environment that lies outside the room. The world outside is of "lush woods" (21), "rich valleys" (22), "river and the snow runnels" (19). According to McLuckie and Tyner, "[t]he town of Hope is bordered by the Fraser River on the North and West, the Coquihalla River on the East, and the Trans-Canada Highway to the south. It is a small town, nestled between the densely treed, towering hills of the Cascade Mountains" (106). This setting provides the poet with the view of a landscape that bears crossings of nature, pastoralism and industrialism. Having observed the 'natural' setting of this small town, the poet's environmental concern comes through in the following lines: "hang those gardens / through which meanders the river bringing / pesticides from upland farms, the effluence of our lifeblood. / The rain-forest now breathes though / the chimneys of the pulp mills belch sulphur" (12-16). While the chimneys of our modernity choke the rain-forest with their sulphur (although the rain-forest is shown to be resistant to these toxicities), it is the rivers that transport "pesticides from upland farms" (14). Even 'natural' entities like the river and valorized activities like farming become implicated in the degradation of the environment. In these lines, the poem is not only concerned about pesticides and sulphur and their impact on natural environments, but also about the impact of such via 'nature' on "our lifeblood" (14). Written in 1968, the poem converses with the rise of urban ecology and with the entrance of commentators like Rachel Carson, whose *Silent Spring*, published in 1962, advocates pest control instead of pest extermination. It is

obvious that Nortje's thoughts about pesticides are influenced by a view that "chemicals sprayed on croplands or forests or gardens lie long in soil, entering into living organisms, passing from one to another in a chain of poisoning and death" (Carson 5). Carson herself states that she is only concerned that pest control methods must not be such that "destroy us along with the insects" (8).

Nortje has also explored the industrialized urban Canadian space as dystopic in close connection to motifs of decay and pollution. "Poem in Toronto", for instance, reveals Nortje's environmental consciousness in clear terms of urban decay. The narrator is situated in a room, or at least, a "loft / with lilac walls" (357) from where he imaginatively interacts with the physical world around him. Toronto was a different world from Hope for Nortje. It was, according to McLuckie and Tyner, the "second largest Canadian city at that time" (116). In this poem, Nortje continues to explore the ideas of degradation in the urbanity of Canada:

Eternal curtains drape this loft
with lilac walls around me.
A view towards the beech-tree landscape
swirls with blossoms and the throbbing sun
in middle May, the lakeshore waters rich
with the poison tide of phosphates feeding algae,
feeding the killing weeds
from the bilge of a million
miraculous machines. (1-9)

From the enclosure of this room, the speaker looks outside on the landscape. Again, he does not fail to acknowledge the beauty of such scenery which "swirls with blossom and the throbbing sun / in middle May" (4-5). The lakeshore, however, he describes as rich, but "with the poison tide of phosphates" (7) showing the blossom as only a cover for an environment facing decay. While onlookers continue to look at the beauty of the place, they may be unaware of the effect of the chemicals on the area. Nortje also shows the "million / miraculous machines" (8-9) as the source of this kind of contamination. There is, therefore, a hint of something aesthetic and even awesome in the view of decay resulting from the interaction between machines and the natural world. In subsequent portions of the poem, the speaker says,

Lying prone with the dormant seed of syphilis
lodged in my skull
and a whisky feeling coming through the sky
I hear the world at work
busy doing this that and the other,
and make of sleep a saviour. (10-15)

The speaker's view now turns inward to what is happening in his mind and his body. The contamination happening outside is also happening to him psychically, and possibly physiologically too, as signalled by the "dormant seed of syphilis / lodged in [...] [his] skull" (10-11). These images point to an inner landscape facing its own form of decay in conversation with external decay. In this, Nortje creates the platform from which to speak as the environment having situated the speaker's internal decay in intersection with environmental decay. He writes about his "words [that] spew through the sewers / in the company of beer cans, [and] bob among / plastic flotsam, long-lived soapsuds, garbage of / the good city" (20-23) to signal the wastage and the culture of consumption that has come to indicate urban settings around the world. It is important to note that the general mood of the poem is that of loneliness, presenting ideas of alienation throughout. Klopper has noted that most of Nortje's Canada poems actually convey a haunting sense of alienation ("A Life Story" 20). Situating Nortje's environmental concern in intersection with his expression of personal loneliness and sense of existential precarity delivers a suspicion of modernity as a paradoxical situation in which humanity has advanced as a species at the expense of individual sense of fulfilment in social relations. For Nortje, in this poem, his words are also a waste along with the waste produced by this culture. That is why they will end up in the sewer instead of in other humans' ears and hearts. Aestheticizing the "garbage of / the good city" (22-23), for Nortje, therefore, means an inability to only speak an outside world without bringing out the crisis that is also taking place psychically. As articulated by Guattari, the decay is without as well as within with a global capitalist culture impacting on the *socius* and psychic dimensions of our being (139).

In the poem, "Toronto North by North-West", Nortje may not have spoken directly to environmental decay or degradation, but he explores the urban landscape as space in which a sort of endangerment and extinction happen. The first stanza opens with images of consumerism placed along with the poet's condition of exile:

Dairy Queen and Brazier Burger mate
 on the corner of O'Keefe and Lawrence:
 dissolved in acid rock of rum and iced coke
 exile makes no sense
 and whatever past there was is amputated. (1-5)

The speaker locates himself in a familiar part of the city mentioning particular spots. Within this space he is 'soaked' in alcohol, pondering his exile condition as no longer meaningful. The past in South Africa, the dreams of fleeing a troubled country, that has led up to his sojourn in Canada, is described as "amputated" (5). At this moment, he imagines that he has lost

connection with the past and the home country. In the third stanza, the urban space here is spoken of in terms of competition in the evolutionary fashion when he refers to the “fat brokers on Ray Street / and the swingers in the Yonge taverns” (19-20). In subsequent lines, in anxiety, the poet describes parts of the city using the word “hell” (22). This calls to mind the practice of speaking of urbanity in infernal terms, the idea of the dualist view of the country and city polarized as heaven and hell respectively. This form of what Buell calls Gothicism, “the Virgilian mode” (referencing the character Virgil in Dante’s *Inferno*), “advocates social regeneration by reinscribing the polarization of saved versus damned” (“Toxic Discourse”, 655). Echoing Dante’s idea of levels in hell, Nortje writes of a portion of the city of Toronto, “I am curious, yellow: / the ninth level of hell on 401 / zooms by me on a summer’s day with fumes / belched and spinning wheels revolting / the soul’s soft harrowed centre” (21-25). The infernality of the city is based on its failure to recognize the individual soul as compassion seems lost in the game of the survival of the fittest. It is, however, based much more on the idea of urban decay and an overwhelming sense of loss in the city’s enormity rather than on morality. In this picture, the speaker finds the presence of technology and its emission of fumes, harmful gases, disturbing. The following lines express both awe and despair: “The monstrous landscape of apartment towers / parking lots and pizza drive-ins / Dominion-drugstore-plazas, super highways / makes this life of informality / a little difficult, perhaps absurd” (31-36).

While the city is described as wild (37), the speaker still tries to retain the everydayness of the city: “A poet of tedium / resolves that the impossibly expressible / should be inevitably celebrated: / a dog’s pee glances off his cocked leg / against the chromium rail / and dribbles through the eye of yorick” (38-43). This develops into an image of industrial waste journeying underneath the city described in connection to “Buchenwald or Belsen” (46), Nazi concentration camps during the Second World War. By connecting the names to the “river of Styx” (48), Nortje furthers the infernal image of the city, this time in close connection to “garbage”, injustice and industrialism. The urban as hell is the obverse of the pastoral ideal in which the countryside is the utopia. Although this is simply a case of binarizing the city and the country in that sense, when the poem is compared with other poems, it becomes difficult to trace the dichotomy in which the poet exhibits a desire for the utopian over the dystopic city as the countryside is already shown as also interrupted by industrial garbage and pollution. The following lines in “Looking” do just that: “Toronto yields me / sprawling suburbia, flat / distances / from high-rise turrets / garish and humid. / Beyond this, beyond / gaze / on *broken countryside* / surveying the slums / faces among the rubble” (51-60, emphasis mine). Nortje’s words come very close to Andrew Ross’s words when he enumerates the concerns of urban

ecology as “sanitation, rat and pest control, noise pollution, hunger, malnutrition, poor health, premature death, not to mention the conditions that underpin these hazards, like the slashing of public services and the savage inequities of public housing policy” (Bennett and Teague 15).

On the whole, while Nortje has always been a poet of urbanity as already seen in his treatment of the South African townships and his *flânerie* in British urban spaces, the environmental consciousness becomes more pronounced in the poems written in Canada. Canada seems to have provided him the platform and material on which to raise somewhat direct questions on urban environmental failure. In these poems, as seen, it is easy for him to capture images of pollution, of decay and toxicity. While it can be argued that he does not speak out directly against the environmental issues, it is quite clear from the poems that he was concerned about what happens to the environment. This is also quite significant as the poems were written at a time when the environmental justice movement was still at its very tender stages within the United States. He is rather exploring the idea of the city as wasteland in the context of the technological advancements combined with the forces of capitalism to explore the paradox of regression in what is generally accepted as progress. There is also the image of the city’s decay intersecting with personal psychic decay as shown in the images of the estrangement that abound in the poems. The narrating voice is always both a part of the world and outside of it as he is a part of the degradation that takes place in the world while he is cut off from a truly fulfilling relationship with the environment and with others. It is through these imaginations of the entwinement of domains that the poet can be said to be speaking as the environment rather than just representing an object outside him.

4.4 Apartheid Geography and the Environment: Thoughts from Exile

Nortje’s interest in the environment as shown in his pre-exile poems was mainly influenced by a certain level of Romantic interest in the natural world and a political consciousness of the geography in which he lived. However, in the exile poems, there is a shift in the depiction of the South African environment from a Romantic (post-romantic) urban aesthetics to one that conveys an environmentalist consciousness in the exile poems. The way in which Nortje depicts the exterior world of South Africa while in exile becomes more imbued with a concern not just for the people, but for the land as well, rather than dealing with personal alienations from such physical worlds. In these poems, the land becomes a subject of exploitation, and representation moves from local familiar sights as in the South Africa poems to a more nationalist depiction and symbolic use of specific monumental sites. To explore these ideas, I

shall like to lay a foundation with the concept of apartheid geography in conversation with Fanon's idea of the colonial world.

Apartheid geography is a term that usually refers to the racialization of space or the spatialization of race, however we wish to view it, under the legislation of the Group Areas Act of 1950 and other related acts. The ideology behind these legislations is the belief in maintaining the myth of 'natural' difference among people. The idea of separate development based on ethnicity and race would then seem like a logical and just idea as each race can develop within their space without other cultures being imposed upon them. But that is far from the truth and implementation of the legislation. The fact that there was a regime that oversaw the 'separate' groups, a regime that was made up of one group and which legally denied the others their political rights to participate in the running of the state, betrays the prejudice on which the law was created. Because the sharing of space was not done democratically, the term apartheid cannot suggest justice. Land was shared unfairly as the minority in power took the largest most productive portions and expelled the rest to 'homelands' (self-governing territories in apartheid South Africa created by the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act in 1959) and 'native' townships. Behind this was the European settler myth of the frontier and wilderness, much like the American case. The European settlers took over the country and the wild, banishing blacks to impoverished rural areas and deplorable social conditions in urban areas. The logic in the creation of black townships in South Africa is based on Manicheanism, as suggested by Fanon when he expounds on the idea of the colonial world: "[c]olonialism, as we have seen, is in fact the organization of a Manichean world, a world divided up into compartments" (*Wretched* 84). He describes the binarism of Manicheanism as follows: "Good-Evil, Beauty-Ugliness, White-Black: such are the characteristic pairings of the phenomenon that [...] we shall call 'manicheism delirium'" (*Masks* 141).

Michael Bennett, in his article "Manufacturing the Ghetto", analyses the nature of the 'spatialization of race' in America, equating the American inner city to inner colonies which work in much the same way the colonizer-colonized dynamics worked: "Colonies, internal and external, can have vital cultures, but the opportunities therein are still circumscribed by the colonizer" (171). The ghetto is, therefore, not a natural development, but a creation by the powerful for economic dependence, in much the same way as empire worked in the day of European imperialism and colonialism. Bennett also reasons that, "The element of enforcement, or policing, of ghetto borders is in accord with the concept of the ghetto as an 'internal colony' – a concept that makes a fundamental connection between the processes of international capital and domestic economic planning and public policy" (170). This

compartmentalization is not only with regard to people, however, but also to the places where they live. Apartheid geography is, therefore, not limited to the racial-based division of land; it extends to even the exploitation the land was subjected to during this critical phase of South Africa's history. Beyond the categorization of land and people lay the control of the economy, which was rooted in the land. According to Nixon,

In terms of a national progress narrative, the mutually constitutive discourses of racial and natural purity were mapped onto both game reserves and native reserves. Game reserves were represented as positively archaic – unimproved places where whites could venture for spiritual renewal – whereas native reserves were negatively archaic, places set aside for the uncivilized. (171)

In addition to the game reserves were also farms and mining sites on which were inscribed the inequalities of apartheid South Africa. In the poems here, Nortje refers to mining activities and exploitation of labour which deserve to be given attention.

The poem “Questions and Answers” was written as an exile's memory of the home country in which is invoked history as a story not only of people but also of the land. By asking the question, “Which Dutch Reformed Churchman has the sheer gall / not to compensate the looted Kaffir?” (5-6), Nortje opens the poem with an idea of a takeover. The “looted Kaffir” (6) connotes the domination of both land and peoples connected. This stanza bears the speaker's burden of historical knowledge, sense of environmental and psychic deprivation, and a struggle to articulate this burden to be heard: “no-one answered me, not one” (8). The second stanza describes the ugliness of marginalization in which the marginalized subjects have been rendered nothing less than “effigies”, “camera pabulum” and “ineffectual scarecrows” (11-12). The lines speak of victims of war and poverty as reduced to a status below the dignity of humanity, only good for the western colonial gaze as signified by the camera: “We are caught / in colourful postures at shanty entrances / with corrugated faces trapped in Kodacolor” (16-17). The gaze of domination here carefully carves out the dominated group into a lower division which reinterprets difference as inferior and seeks to perpetuate this difference through the demeaning focus of the camera.

The poet also points out the namelessness and facelessness of the blacks “sweeping Parliament floors after the great / incomprehensible debates of the Potchefstroom Doctors” (20-21). In referring to “the Bloemfontein farmers [who] have more to say / about where I must live and work” (22-23), Nortje points to the colonial exercise of power not only over people, but over land as well. The farm referred to in the lines may be taking us back to what the poet speaks of in the first stanza when talking about the “looted Kaffir”. The colonized is stripped

of his sense of freedom through spatial restrictions which is reminiscent of JM Coetzee's explanation of animals finding freedom in movement and open spaces rather than being caged or restricted by men (128). The poem extends the idea of spatial restriction to how the environment or nature is used to restrict and silence the 'minority'. It describes how it is 'natural' or environmental entities like the "stone cage" (26) and the "Hellespont" (27) that are used by the powerful to restrict the disempowered, to divide people along class-racial lines. This makes it rather impossible to exonerate nature from history and human politics. The third stanza painfully celebrates exile as escape from a politically troubled geography: "I have broken free of those excellent unctions / administered in the name of my country's honour. / I have rejected the domains of gold / because I was living with the burning devil" (28-31). The reference to "domains of gold" (30) speaks of the exploitations of the land and its people so that there is really no real space of difference between the power and authority exercised over nature or the environment and people. This is ironic in the sense that the colonial powers worked at separating the "looted Kaffir" from the land but force the same hands to work the land, to be close to the earth from which they have been displaced.

Finding a language for the South African urban landscape in "Rimbaud's nightmares" returns to the Virgilian mode, which describes the place victimized such as the slum or an ecologically threatened urban space as hellish: "evil flowers / ...sprout in the festering alleys of Johannesburg" (36-37). The lines speak of the demarcations, estrangements and marginality whose depression and frustration can best be described as a sort of hell created by "the burning devil" (31). "Evil flowers", echoing Baudelaire's 'flowers of evil', ambiguously speak of a decaying urban environment and the rise of resistance. The poet speaks as the land by mentioning names like Charles Englehard, a known name in connection to mining across the world. The "blackmass" spoken of is the speaker's angry rant in resistance and rebellion towards the colonial powers. Describing the poor of South Africa as "eroded paupers" (45) here, he speaks of the colonized people in terms of their connection to the earth, showing that it is difficult to handle nature's sufferings without a connection to the people who relate with it. Speaking of people as eroded also speaks of degradation in culture, politics, economy and individual sense of self-worth. In response, the speaker's idea of subversion, "the blackmass", is to ignore a physical resistance, but challenge the system in another, perhaps more subtle, way. The idea of the "blackmass" can relate to Bhabha's concept of mimicry, a travesty, an undermining of the authorities through mockery and other subversive use of words, to either figuratively or literally "perpetrate atrocities / on the daughters of the boss" (52-53). In the

same way, he will not “slip across the border / patrolled by men with leashed Alsatians / snarling along the barbed wire fences” (46-48) since he is not a “guerrilla” (50).

The juxtaposition of Cecil John Rhodes and Anton Rupert is equally telling. Rhodes is representative of the “gold-mine fathers” (57), while Rupert, also a wealthy businessman, was an environmental conservationist and an apartheid critic. The two represent the political tension in the country and its connection to the land. Representing the South African black, the speaker says “I have dug enough diamonds for them, “the gold-mine fathers” / in the blue pipes of Kimberley” (59-60). Without speaking of the toxic impact of mining on the environment and public health, Nortje speaks of the impact more in terms of unethical exploitation of the land and the people resulting in the physical destruction of the land and in the perpetuation of poverty among the working class, the political minority. The reference to the Kruger National Park, in which “the lion lies lazily now... / or only stalks the zoo / the hyena laughs / (but for how long?)” (77-80), is also significant in painting the complex nature of the South African landscape and the imbalance in the relationship between people, animals and land. The lines are underpinned by a form of scepticism also enforced by the references already made to the same colonial powers who have destroyed the land and “looted the Kaffir”.

The poem “Immigrant” communicates the speaker’s feelings dangling between the place of exile and his home country. The imagination of the country in terms of landscape and history continues here as the speaker travels by air over Canada. This time, however, he makes a comparison between the home country and the mountainous landscape of Canada, what he calls “My prairie beloved” (55). There seems to be a preference for the foreign landscape over the home one, but purely for political reasons. From comparing how “snow mantles the ground peaks over Greenland” (36) to “the known white kingdom / first encountered at Giant’s Castle” (38-39), the poet quickly moves on to speak about the “granite glare / on the slopes of the Table Mountain” (42-43) and the “gold dumps of the vast Witwatersrand” (44) in South Africa. While the poet seems here to be reverting to the nature-culture dichotomy as a way to engage the environmental abuse in his country taking place via mining and other forms of exploitation of the land, he also brings in the political: the story that the granite quarries and gold dumps tell beyond exploitation of non-human nature. They speak of the exploitation of people: “Where are the mineworkers, the compound Africans, / your Zulu ancestors, where are / the root-eating, bead-charmed Bushmen, the Hottentot sufferers?” (46-48). The actors in this stanza also include “the governors and sailors of the / Dutch East India Company” (49-50) on the one hand, and “the women who laboured in the castle” (50) on the other.

“Poem: South African” speaks about an estrangement between the speaker and his South African past, distant homeland and relationships; it speaks of the speaker’s struggle to reconnect with people through the technology of the telephone. This medium, however, breaks his words, mediates the communication, but manages to “get us all together as a vision” (32). It is within this context that the poet mixes a sense of nostalgia with a certain unpleasant vision of the South African landscape as victimized, as wounded and as raped by oppressive mining and capitalism. The description of the South African landscape is chiefly a recollection from both spatial and temporal distance. The poet could be battling to justify his exile while feeling, perhaps, not only nostalgic but guilty as well. The lines that lead to these ones about land, speak of “shattered faces” (7), a phrase which sounds ambiguous as to whether it speaks about people who have been robbed of their humanity by being subjected to labour under harsh conditions or the land itself. The phrase “dark with terror” (7), which suggests the racial oppression of blacks, works as a metaphor of traumatized psychology; “drugged” also speaks of the subjection of not just corporeality to harsh conditions, but the mind as well. The region of colonial control does not stop at external geography; it finds space to control in the body and the interior as well. Saying “having looked” (6), the speaker stands as a witness who has to testify to his trauma and that of those he speaks about in rather symbolic terms. The ambiguity of the lines can also be read to mean the land spoken of in animate terms – this is possible when the succeeding lines are also considered:

scarred landscapes
 earth of rape
 Goldrich once the world was
 far away
 for me in my home rain
 which grew rainbows (10-15)

The image of the humanized, even feminized, earth potently conveys a sympathetic attitude towards the earth viewed as scarred and raped. At the centre of this wounding and rape is capitalism – colonialist-capitalists carved in the image of offenders, not just of people, but even the earth itself. The poem here finds it impossible to disconnect eco-destruction from history and society as nature becomes not just a victim of history but a witness and a bearer of such atrocities. It is this kind of discourse that would render Saito’s listening to nature’s story on its own terms impracticable as the pristine does not really exist (151). It only works if the story told by nature considers its intertwined temporalities with human time, the long relationship between nature and human.

The poet's sense of separation is not mere sentimentalism, but a separation that involves politics. He becomes a part of the "passengers [who] / crowd the ports / bound out / by sea and air / and land" (19-23) – mass migrations happening as a result of the powerful impact of the mobility of capital and its inseparable relationship to colonialism. Nortje's return or reconnection is considered through an unlikely means, technology, rather than a communion of the Romantic sort, which reconnects him to the land and community he has left behind. In these exile recollections, the poet also recalls the land along with its communities and presents them in terms of injustice. Although not speaking of localized spaces as occurs in American eco-justice movement, the poem speaks of a national condition as though it was a local setting. The earth, the external world, is personified in order to show it that it also needs justice and fair treatment by humans in power.

In "Autopsy", Nortje focuses on the teachers/mentors who to him were the true exiles, he being only "nominal an exile" (2). While these teachers are pictured as victims of the apartheid regime, and its admirable resistance warriors as well, the land is not separated from the victimization. Both the land and the people entwine under this oppressive regime referred to as "the blond / colossus" (4-5) and "the laager masters" (52). The land is spoken of in terms of racial injustice, the first two stanzas showing marginalization of race via apartheid injustice in relation to "drug-blurred townships" (13). The image of the apartheid township as dystopic against the unmentioned antithesis of the white suburbs also comes to mind. The last three lines of the second stanza describe a border policing which is characteristic of what Bennett describes in "Manufacturing the Ghetto" (169). Read the ironic tone in "drug-blurred township / breathing hygienic blasts of justice" (13-14). The authorities have pushed the marginalized to the wall of deviant behaviour, an act of injustice perpetrated legitimately against the human natural desire and tendency to explore the world beyond familiar spaces. It is paradoxical that the same authorities police the slums in the name of justice. The postcolonial subject is thus unable to identify land/environment as different from the "arid atmosphere where jackboots scrape / like crackling electric, and tape recorders / ingest forced words" (16-17). The atmosphere cannot be separated from the experience of violence. Again, contrary to voices like Saito's, the postcolonial cannot simply see a story in nature outside of his experience of trauma, outside what the environment had been subjected to. There is no story nature would tell without its relationship with humanity. Saito has separated nature from culture and such aesthetics is no longer possible in a modern world where such boundaries are already being crushed.

The line "To their earth unreturnable" (27-28) echoes Biblical connection of human and the ground. It imagines the exiles being discussed to have been created from the South

African earth from which they have now been exiled and to which return is unthinkable. While the land is the marginalized's object of love/desire, it is also a cause of horror, made so by political-racial constructions and practices. The kind of separation from nature that Nortje speaks about here differs much from the Romantic sense of alienation. The Romantics complained against the industrialization of Europe as the perpetrator of separation. But they still wrote in a society where they were free to explore to the wild, which later gave birth to Western environmentalism. This is not the postcolonial case. The separation experienced here is different in that it is caused by politics, colonialism and a logic of superiority. These people have been forced to 'return' to the earth as forced or overused labourers – this does not return them to “their earth” (28) but takes them further away from it. One is reminded of Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Weep Not Child* in the way Ngotho works *his* land for the white master – losing his land and feeling hurtfully separated from it. In Nortje's case, it works in the way “the laager / masters recline in a gold inertia / behind the arsenal of *Sten guns*” (31-32, emphasis mine).

The second part of the poem focuses on one exiled teacher, arguably Dennis Brutus. In this, the image of “knife-slashed landscapes” (35) resurfaces. The landscape becomes a site of struggle, of resistance – the red sandfields, the puffs of dust, “the geography of dongas” (38), and escarpments. The image of the poet-teacher being forced off land/earth shows his inability to settle as power symbolized by technology's *Sten guns* and banshee sirens make it impossible. The speaker then finds in that rift issues for his art and connects the troubled landscape with the “stretches of [...] virgin minds” (44). Crucial to the second stanza of the second part, the poet's teacher surveys “a sea of galvanised roofs” (48) considering the “fatal loveliness of the land [...]” (51). We have here an ambivalence of love and bitterness and a fusion of the urban and raw earth. A sea of roofs echoes, albeit faintly, the urban as natural, a merging of nature and urbanity. In the third stanza (second part), nature is shown to be corrupted by human violence; “a guano rock in a sea of blue diamond” (58), suggested here to be pristine and picturesque, has been polluted by inhumanity in the line “a warder kicked the stitches [of a prisoner] open” (57). Showing the exiled teacher ending up “in a London suburb” (59) contrasts sharply with his origins in a poor South African township where he taught. While the suburb in South African apartheid geography symbolizes white privilege, the tone hardly suggests the new setting in London in terms of victory and happiness for the exile. Rather, further alienation is suggested by words like “grave and patient” (60).

In conclusion, in these exile poems we see how Nortje reimagines the landscape of South Africa quite differently from his earlier works. The environmental consciousness seeps through the images of the land no longer as beautiful, but as ravished by those in power. The

idea of speaking as the environment manifests in the poet's recurrent intertwining of land and people, of the physical world and human society. The process here is dependent on the poet's willingness to engage in imagining the landscape where he was not actually present at the time of writing. The artistic imagination, therefore, serves as a means by which to engage in *speaking as*, but more than that, it finds more legitimacy to do this by appealing to the fact that both the land and the people suffered the same ordeals under the same regimes, thus creating the shared ground from which to speak authoritatively.

4.5 The Sympathetic Imagination, the Zone of Proximity and Nortje's Animals

In this section, beyond just an artistic representation of the animal, I am digging into Nortje's environmental consciousness and concern with regard to the human treatment of animals. Admittedly, the poems do not convey direct activism for the rights of animals, but they do express misgivings towards human treatment of animals through recurrent images of the animal as oppressed or marginalized, and identification with such suffering. In other words, they do, in the style of Bate's idea of ecopoesis, create a consciousness while not necessarily engaging directly in a political fight (Bate 42). Mainly, I shall depend on the idea of the sympathetic imagination expounded by J.M. Coetzee through his fictional character, Elizabeth Costello, supported by Dan Wylie's understanding of compassion in literary depictions of animals, and Deleuze and Guattari's idea zone of proximity within their larger concept of becoming to develop a framework of speaking as the environment in relation to the animal.

Engaging the dignity and rights of animals is an intense area of debate as dramatized in Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals*. The argument of how animals are treated always leads back to philosophies that have shaped how we view ourselves as humans in relation to the world and how we view non-humans. In other words, the ethics always returns us to ontological questions about essence and being. What makes up the human being? What makes up the animal? Are we different? Are we the same or even similar? Is it a question of total difference or a matter of degrees? DeLoughrey and Handley have outlined the different approaches that have been used to reason out the foundational thought for animal rights. Some have posited that animals are as intentional towards freedom and welfare as human beings are (222). Others reason that the question should not be about similarity or difference, but about whether animals feel pain or not. "Can they suffer?" is, therefore, the important question to ask (222). I am building on all these elements, particularly "the principle of equality based on difference, rather than normative homogeneity or similarity" (222). This point on heterogeneity leads me to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of animality articulated as the becoming-animal. In this I find I can deal

in a more complex way with the tension between humans and animals to redefine Costello's idea of the sympathetic imagination in such a way that sentimentality may not even be a factor.

Coetzee's Costello captures the plight of animals in a very disturbing manner. Everyone is implicated in what she views as a conspiracy of silence towards animal oppression. She does this by falling back on the silence of Germans in the 1940s when thousands of death camps snuffed out millions of lives in their midst. She calls this not only silence, but a claimed ignorance (Coetzee 117). She feels that the same kind of ignorance is assumed as the animal meat industries continue to increase around us. In fact, this is not a modern phenomenon. She refers to ages of struggle between humans and animals as a result of which "[t]oday these creatures have no more power. Animals have only their silence left with which to confront us. Generation after generation, heroically, our captives refuse to speak to us" (123). Costello's emphasis is on Western discourse's dualization of the human and nonhuman by privileging reason. Western philosophers, especially Descartes, have created this chasm, claiming that humanity's ability to think is what separates her from other animals. According to Costello, such thinking, ranging from St. Thomas, Plato to Descartes, reasons that "animals, lacking reason, cannot understand the universe, but have simply to follow its rules blindly [...] unlike man, they are part of it but not part of its being: [...] man is godlike, animals thinglike" (121). Costello's position is one that seeks to dethrone reason as the ultimate: "reason looks to me suspiciously like the being of human thought; worse than that, like the being of a certain spectrum of human thinking" (121). Costello's argument counters arguments like those of Thomas Nagel that emphasizes difference and impenetrability between the human and nonhuman. She questions Nagel's conclusion by steering the focus from the assertion that "we need to be able to experience bat-life through the sense-modalities of a bat" (129) to the question of being. So instead of emphasizing the difference between human-being and animal-being, the interest should be in shared "fullness, embodiedness, the sensation of being [...], of being a body with limbs that have extension in space, of being alive to the world" (131). But even the question of shared characteristics should not arise when it comes to treating animals' rights. The questions should not then be, "Can I share the being of a bat?" (133), but about applying the faculty of *sympathy* to the situation of another. Even in the cases of genocides, intervention fails to come when such sympathetic thinking is not applied. Costello insists that "there is no limit to the extent to which we can think ourselves into the being of another. There are no bounds to the sympathetic imagination" (133). Reinforcing this idea from the position of a creative writer, she reasons that "If [as a writer] I can think my way into the existence of a

being who has never existed, then I can think my way into the existence of a bat or a chimpanzee or an oyster, any being with whom I share the substrate of life” (133).

Becoming, in Deleuze and Guattari’s vocabulary, refers, Beaulieu puts it, to ideas that “open up common zones not only between various realms of the living (animal, mineral, human, vegetal, etc), but also between living beings and haecceities or singularities (“five o’clock in the evening,” a wound, a sunset, etc.)” (73). It is within this concept that they express the idea of the zone of proximity. Becoming does not function as imitation, history or imagination. According to Deleuze, “To become is not to attain a form (identification, imitation, Mimesis) but to find the zone of proximity, indiscernibility, or indifferenciation where one can no longer be distinguished from a woman, an animal, or a molecule” (1). It is, therefore, clear that Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of becoming differs from Coetzee’s idea of the sympathetic imagination in that it emphasizes impersonal and molecular commonness rather than sentiment. Fusing these two ideas together here implies a wider way to view Nortje’s poetry in the different ways that he employs to serve his purpose in speaking as the environment. Whether sentiment is involved or it is entirely impersonal, the idea is to find a middle ground, a shared space, where difference becomes hard to determine.

In “Visceral Nightmare”, Nortje explores the exploitation of the nonhuman animal for consumption and commercial purposes, how it is normal for humans to subject other animals to such treatments solely for their own benefits. The poem, however, raises questions rather than taking a definite belligerent stand. The central question seems to be laid on the shared grounds of the human and nonhuman animals – the fact of both being flesh. The only difference between victim and seller or buyer is evisceration; the fish is unfortunate to be subjected to being opened up this way, while the perpetrator is “uneviscerated” (4):

Laid out on marble slabs the prosperous fish
Dribbling watery veins of red
Lie with disconsable bulbous eyes.
Uneviscerated, you
 Yet plead and pay
At the meat counter
For a piece of rump
Or a pound of liver
Or a beef heart whole! (1-9)

Meat-eating remains a controversial matter among human beings and a significant matter of discussion both philosophically and ecologically. This relates to the discussion of Costello after

her lecture at Appleton College. While she has, in her lecture, drawn attention to the suffering animals are subjected to in order to provide meat to man, she has not been able to declare a clear stand against meat-eating; rather, in addition to her practice of vegetarianism, she says, “If principles are what you want to take away from this talk, I would have to respond, open your heart and listen to what your heart says” (135). This is intended to divert humanity from limiting itself to rationality in order to benefit from the emotional dimensions of existence. Costello might be partly confronted with the complexity of the matter so that she cannot bring herself to the point of offering principles. For instance, during the conversation after the lecture, she says “I’m wearing leather shoes...I’m carrying a leather purse. I wouldn’t have overmuch respect [for me] if I were you” (142). Her elusiveness in the responses only points to the complexity of the matter of meat-eating.

Nortje’s short poem presents us with a different sort of encounter in which the speaker uncannily recognises himself in the animal he carnivorously devours. The movement from “the prosperous fish / dribbling to watery veins” (1-2) to the last line, “a beef heart whole” (9), serves a sort of mirror purpose to reflect to humanity the fact of its own animality. Describing the human as merely “uneviscerated” (4) also questions human arrogance and prods readers to think about the often ignored corporeality of humanity. In that way, the poet critiques the transcendence claimed by humanity over other animals as the words “meat” (6), “piece of rump” (7) and others like them also reflect human biology.

This poem illustrates the poet’s exploration of the shared middle ground between animality and humanity and questions the right of humanity to maltreat animals on the basis of species-superiority. There is a similarity to how Deleuze and Guattari view Francis Bacon’s relation of animal experiences to those of humans. According to Beaulieu, “In Francis Bacon’s paintings, Deleuze saw the expression of the human being’s becomings-animal at play. It is well-known that Bacon visited slaughterhouses and found inspiration in flesh by undoing faces to better express human shouts, postures, and actions at the edge of his own humanity” (78). He adds that, “Deleuze says that in doing so Bacon does not say, ‘Pity the beasts,’ but rather that every man who suffers is a piece of meat. Meat is the common zone of man and the beast, their zone of indiscernibility” (78).

Nuttall has noted how most discourse on the postcolonial body ignores the materiality of the human body. She writes that such discourse “has left aside the body as flesh and bones, as soft and hard, as surface and volume; the body as densely packed interior – liver, kidneys, heart, cavities, vessels, fluid – and as breath, odour-like, beyond the material, the anatomical” (37). In her work, she finds that Nortje addresses this aspect of the human body, the anatomy,

quite extensively. She has, in fact, noted the idea of eating and connection to the animal body, meat as the common ground between humans and animals. She comments that “[e]ating the heart is an especially fearsome and symbolic image. Eating an animal’s heart has a slightly cannibalistic edge to it; it conjures up the spectre of eating a human heart. There is a sense in this poem [‘Visceral Nightmare’] that Nortje is seeing his own body through the lens of animal parts” (44).

“Horses: Sanitation Department” depicts a scene of maltreatment of animals by human beings.

I mite am watching at the street-end
Horses drag to a huge standstill.
Hoof’s iron slipped on damp cement
Is hard-luck to the animal;
Curse which thunders to the cocked ears,
Raping whip of rubbish chief,
Hoots and jeers of armoured monsters:
These are wisdom’s steel and proof.

One pony only screamed the anguish,
Bladed open all the old scars,
In flared nostrils bristles tinder,
He whistled wishes to the ashen stars,
Spunk among the brutes. Lash
Fried him crisp in the hungering air. (1-14)

The poem is a good example of representing animals in what is known as the compassionate mode, or the sympathetic imagination as Coetzee puts it. Coetzee, via Costello, argues that compassionate view of animals does not at all have to depend on whether humans can change into animals or have first-hand experience of being those animals before they can appreciate the suffering of such animals. The imagination, viewed as elastic and able to contain extra-human experiences and feelings, is central to his view of compassion (133). The speaker in this poem does not only watch the horses subjected to the unpleasant conditions indicated by the “huge standstills” (2) and “hoof’s iron” (3), but identifies with their suffering through language and imagination. Wylie supports this view saying, “there seems to me a profoundly important set of connections between compassion, communication, and the exercise of the imagination” (10). Apart from physical maltreatment (6), curse words are also spoken to the animals rather constantly (5, 7). In empathetic and compassionate terms, Nortje describes a pony that “screamed the anguish” (9) and wished it could be free, but instead, “Lash / fried him crisp in the hungering air” (13-14).

In this poem, the watching persona, a member of the human race, creates a world of connections and conflict among members of ecosystems. Wylie's idea is that compassion "means finding direction together with the other, and within some encompassing envelope, an ecosystem, if you like. Compassion says to the other, whether human or elephant: Hey, we're on this journey together" (9). In appealing to this encompassing nature of compassion, Nortje imagines a power problem in which the poor animals are degraded by the "rubbish chief" and his "armoured monsters" (6-7). Nortje's concern is not merely about the use of animals for transportation, but about the attitude of humanity towards animals. Important to this discourse also is the view of animals as able to feel. The concern of the poet again shows an othering and silencing of the animal world, in which they are denied any form of respectful treatment as members of a community. The observing persona, therefore, stands in the middle position which identifies him as both human and animal. He sees his own kind maltreat another member of the community with whom he sympathizes. Noting that there is a wish whistled by the pony shows the subalternizing of the animal world and the denial of their voice. The screaming and whistling by the pony are a form of language that tells the story of the marginalized animals, but which the human master views only as *screaming* and silences the animals by reapplying the very treatment that provoked the screaming in the first place.

In these poems, Nortje depicts the different ways that humanity handles animals without showing that there is a simple way out of the situation. However, his explorations of the middle spaces shared by both animals and humans seems to be a call to the need for humanity to recognize their kinship with the animal world and rethink their attitudes towards animals. This, for the poet, is also the way that he can employ the imagination, tap into what Wylie calls "the largess of literature" in a compassionate way for the purpose of initiating a conversation about not just the rights, but also the feelings and consciousness of animals. In this way, by exploring the common grounds between humans and animals, the poetry has opened up the way for humanity to identify with and speak *as* the environment. The common grounds explored by the poet include the shared corporeal material, and for him as a postcolonial subject, the common ground of being subjected to marginalization and oppression by those in power.

4.6 War and Ecocide

Nortje, writing in the 1960s, wrote some of his 'outward' poems on global politics. Here, I narrow it down to the environmental concern expressed in this global vision in connection to war and how it impacts the world. The 1960s was when the Cold War produced a number of proxy wars such as the Vietnam War and the Korean War. In imagining these wars, Nortje

shows his concern about the impact of such aggression on both people and the physical world, especially as nuclear and chemical warfare were becoming common possibilities. His commentary on wars globally is underpinned by questions concerning the success of modernity, industrialism and human progress. In this section, I shall discuss a number of his poems that express the themes of war and its impact on the environment.

War has always been a part of human existence at least since the earliest civilizations, as most civilizations took to war both to expand and to sustain their territorial control. However, with the advancements in science and technology, warfare becomes a more sophisticated engagement. War is most often thought of in terms of power clashes and domination of communities and nations. Hardly do we think of the act of war as not only an assault on human lives, but also as an attack on the environment, the physical nonhuman world. Looking at the histories of large-scale wars in which the environment and human communities are subjected to immeasurable destruction, wars may be viewed as the most heinous force of environmental destruction executed by humanity on this planet. According to Buell, “In the Cold War era, ecocide was always a more serious threat than nuclear destruction” (*Imagination* 7). In the same context of the Cold War, Bate mentions how ecocide, which refers to the “systematic destruction of dwelling places in the name of progress” (71), was an invention of the West. David Zierler wrote extensively about the impact of war on the environment, with focus on America’s use of chemicals (Agent Orange) in the Vietnam War and the destructive impact of this on the environment. He writes that,

[t]he denuded landscapes formed in the days and weeks after a Ranch Hand spray mission created a bizarre spectacle of destruction unlike anything that occurred in the course of peacetime activity. War, as recent studies have demonstrated, is always damaging to natural environments, yet few contemporary observers made reference to the ‘moonscape battlefields’ of World War I or other potential analogs. (26)

Although the term ‘ecocide’ has come to mean different destructive acts perpetrated against the environment, it was originally a war-related concept born from the deliberate large-scale destruction of the environment as a weapon of war (21). Carson, in her *Silent Spring*, has commented on the enormous dimension of damage war can perform on the environment: “Along with the possibility of the extinction of mankind by nuclear war, the central problem of our age has therefore become the contamination of man’s total environment with such substances of incredible potential for harm” (7). Richard Falk explains that the selection of the environment as object of military assault in Indo-China by the United States in the 1960s was

carried out in the “demonic logic of counterinsurgency warfare [...] to deny [the insurgent] the cover, the food, and the life-support of the countryside” (1). The result of this approach included loss of forests, human displacements and much more (1). In a nutshell, “[j]ust as counterinsurgency warfare tends toward genocide with respect to the people, so it tends toward ecocide with respect to the environment” (2). Behind this logic of warfare, ecocide is the silent acknowledgement of the inseparability of people and their land, the complex relationship that exists between a community and the environment so that an attack on the land equals attack on the human enemy. I discuss these ideas in relation to Nortje’s treatment of America’s nuclear assaults on Japan, the Middle East crisis and the Cold War proxy wars in Vietnam, Korea and Cambodia respectively.

The poem “Hiroshima 21 and the Lucky Dragon”, presents us with the motifs of ecological disaster and war or impact of the nuclear culture on the environment. The background to the poem is the World War II and the development of nuclear and atomic weapons for more mass destruction in wars. This poem was written about twenty years after the bombing of Hiroshima and the Lucky Dragon incident. These are events that foreshadow others like Chernobyl and Fukushima, which have come to represent large-scale ecocatastrophe in modern times. The Lucky Dragon incident happened in 1954 when twenty-three crew members on the Japanese fishing boat named the Lucky Dragon were exposed to nuclear fallout from a United States nuclear testing at Bikini Atoll. In this poem, Nortje is concerned about the memory of the incidents as treated only a generation later when America suddenly becomes an image of glory among the younger generation in the age of globalization. Recalled years later, the nuclear incidents remind us of human resilience in the context of time and the transformations of histories. By interrogating the treatment of memories of such incidents, Nortje seems to be weighing the seriousness with which we have taken the treatment of this planet, sweeping the gravity of such man-made disasters under the carpet of politics and even tourism, forgetting that such were supposed to be lessons for the future. The occurrence of Chernobyl and Fukushima seems to have validated this view.

In the poem, Nortje reimagines the impact of war on the physical environment in two important ways. The first is the toxification of the atmosphere as shown in the lines, “The steel birds [...] shitted / mightily through the brilliant air” (11-12), describing the bombing of Hiroshima. The Lucky Dragon nuclear incident is also shown as malignant on the nonhuman world: “After its wandering on the clouded sea / the timbers probably rot / in some derelict dockyard of Japan. / No fish are wriggling in the glistening nets” (18-21). It does not stop there, however. The impact of the incidents on human health is also considered by the poet: “The saki

did nothing for their appetite. / Pus in their eyes, their scalps brittle, / the fishermen vomited blood wearily into the green spume” (23-25). This is important because by imagining the impact of war’s destruction on both flora-fauna and the human, we again see that it is difficult to continue a reasonable environmentalism by sticking to views of nature-culture dichotomies in which environmentalism is speaking *for* an ‘other’. In the poem, Nortje does not divorce political and cultural spheres from the environment. For instance, the second stanza shows the way in which globalized culture is itself in correspondence with nuclear disaster. The young people in Japan have already forgotten about history and buy into American popular culture. The speaker’s pain is that, “[r]emoved, forgetful, we soon forgive / the gory orgy, [and] whitewash the accident” (31-32). Memory should be allowed to play an important role in environmentalism so as to enable the prevention of reoccurrence of ecocidal activities. This memory, which is reshaped by capitalist and globalizing forces, however, seems to later trivialize or “whitewash” the incidents, and it becomes difficult to understand that “we can never be / safe enough” (39-40). The poem thus ends on a rather sceptical note in which “[w]e shall survive [only] to succumb in the megaton waves” (38).

Another poem that shows the impact of military violence or war on the environment is “Nasser Is Dead”. The background of the poem is the long struggle between the Palestinian and Israeli communities, and the Egyptian involvement in this struggle. It was written in the same month, September 1970, when Gamal Nasser, Prime Minister of Egypt, died. His name brings to mind the Six-Day War (May 1967) with Israel which led to his defeat and brief resignation, and the War of Attrition (1968-70), which he started for the purpose of retrieving areas of Egypt captured by Israel around the Suez Canal. While this crisis involves ethnic difference, tied to this difference is the centrality of the physical world – territory and land. It is a crisis centred on belonging and ownership of land and the struggle for power around opposing historical claims.

In the poem, images of damage to the people are entwined with those of damage to the environment, as in the lines, “Hulks of ships clog Suez, / sandbagged bunkers on either side. / The Red Sea ports are closed. Jordan cannot be crossed, / the Syrians are punished for their impunity” (15-19). In punishing opponents, the land is also subjected to brutal treatment. The phrase “the Sahara is timeless” (34) shows that although nature’s temporality is its own domain, it cannot be separated from human history, as it serves as a witness to human history in this context either by being at the centre of the crisis or even as the victim of clashes between human communities. “So much water has drained from the heartland lakes / and yet they never dry up” (35-36) does not mean that all is well with such bodies of water in the midst of crisis. It

only points to resilience despite the threat it faces. Speaking of Africa in the context of the Middle East crisis, the poet writes, “All over Africa marched the ravagers, / Alexandria burnt and flames ate the pages of books” (38-39). Relating the Middle East issues to Africa, Nortje creates a vision of ‘ravage’ that combines people and culture together as all are victimized by a long history and varied types of “ravagers”. Other places that have been subjected to destruction are Aswan and Abu Simbel: “Aswan, that great work, / was almost broken by the raiders. / Abu Simbel was first saved piece by piece: I understand / it cost the Americans millions” (40-44). In these lines the poet speaks of the danger faced by historical monuments such as Aswan, a town and a dam, and Abu Simbel, the temples, amidst political strife. It is interesting how these are not natural tourist sites, but examples of cultural sites that have come to be valued almost as much as nature tourists would value ‘pristine’ sites of nature. This shows the poet’s vision of the environment as all-inclusive in terms of nature-culture difference and an expansion of what consists in environmental violation. Another section in the same line of thinking reads, “One wonders who / plundered the Pyramids, found the tunnels. / No worse than a bank / robbery, stealing the mummies” (45-48).

In the late 1960s Vietnam, Korea and Cambodia were in the middle of wars all considered to be part of the Cold War between America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Nortje’s poem “Seen One, Take One” was written in conversation with all three wars. It is narrated by a witnessing photojournalist who travels around the world, especially in dangerous warzones to cover stories and take pictures. The speaker’s observations present war scenes that marry the actions of people with their physical environment:

The professional guns are out in the jungle fatigues,
picking their way round dung-tipped bamboo spikes,
sensing movement in the world of leaves.
I read their trigger fingers, minds efflorescing
to poisonous intent. The sergeant almost
bursts at the joints with tension as he tightens
his true-blue shoulders in a recoilless moment:
but Charlie-baby is wily with patience,
fed on a diet of rice and General Giap’s
‘One cannot love the enemy unless
he is near to touch’. (1-11)

In the stanza above, we are presented with images of war set in a jungle in which the speaker is carefully trying to take pictures of what is happening. Being at the scene of war, he comes very close to the actors on different sides of the war. The two contending images in the stanza are those of the “professional guns” (1) and “jungle” (1), supported by “bamboo spikes” (2),

“world of leaves” (3), “trigger fingers” (4) and “poisonous intent” (5). These words show the role of the environment in wars, providing hiding space for both the aggressor and the attacked, and also for the neutral witness. The “poisonous intent” (4) of the hand on the trigger speaks volumes. It points to the danger to which both human lives and the environment will also be subjected. The reference to poison invokes the language in which the environment is spoken of when faced with the dangers of toxicity. The polluting and contaminating effect of war on various levels is thus conjured up here.

The rest of the poem speaks about human death, which leads me again to the view of the inseparability of the human from the world. Just like Falk has asserted that genocide is to people as ecocide is to the environment (2), an attack on the environment is also an attack on the people, thereby making it difficult to categorize ecocide as only an attack on the non-human environment since humans are also a part of the environment. I shall expand on the human body and the environment in the next section of this chapter. Meanwhile, we are presented with images like “‘Bland as an icicle he hangs in a heaven of flamethrowers’” (27), “a marvellous shot / of a V.C. skinned by Koreans, strung from a tree, / or a multi-exposure of a human wave / at dawn” (33-36).

In conclusion, these poems have brought to our attention Nortje’s concern for the environment under war circumstances and the need for human communities to consider the long term effects of war on flora and fauna and the continuity of life on the planet. War does not only harm human communities; it hurts whole ecosystems. The poems are, largely, thus, a critique of how power and territorial control have become more important to humanity than peace and harmonious existence in both social and ecological senses.

4.7 The Body-Mind in Crisis

Taking into consideration the intricate interweaving of body and mind, and body and world, I shall explore Nortje’s treatment of the body-world relationship as it intersects with ecological questions. Through his poetry, he has demonstrated the inseparability of the mind, body and world in whose complex intersections we can understand the world and the environmental crises better. This leads us to see the impossibility of speaking of pollution without thinking of the human body and mind as susceptible to these poisons. In the poems, we come across images of the body as corrupted and the mind as polluted as a result of substance abuse and as a result of exclusionary social practices. In this case, the human mind-body is really no different from a body of water subjected to toxicity or a piece of geography facing desert encroachment or deforestation.

Thinking of the body in this way brings up Merleau-Ponty's idea of the body as lived. His phenomenology of the body is summarized as follows:

my body is made of the same flesh of the world (it is perceived), and moreover that this flesh is shared by the world, the world reflects it, encroaches upon it and it encroaches upon the world [...] they are in a relation of transgression or of overlapping this also means: my body is not only one perceived among others, it is the measurement of all, of all the dimensions of the world. (qtd in Nuttall 48).

I am also interested in the way Merleau-Ponty thinks of the intersection of the body and mind. He writes that "the life of the body, or the flesh, and the life of the psyche are involved in a relationship of reciprocal expression, or [...] the bodily event always has a psychic meaning" (160). Based on this idea, I shall refer to the body and mind as hyphenated to convey the sense of both domains as linked in their involvement with the outside world.

The view that the body is lived, inseparable from the environment is important for reading the body in colonized spaces. The body is also colonized and subject to the environmental abuse that the external world is subjected to. In other words, it stands as a medium between the political and ecological, a space where these two meet. A few scholars have written about Nortje in relation to the body situated in political contexts, but I find Nuttall's work more helpful for the discussion at hand. She notes that most studies of the body in the context of colonialism and postcolonialism often focus more on "the body of the self in relation to the body of the Other, the body of exile, and the body as a site of multiple political and social inscriptions" (37). Her focus, therefore, is to look more deeply into the way Nortje writes about the fleshness of the human body, the fact of its biology. Taking her view into account, I would like to build on how the corporeal-psyche is impacted by the physical environment without ignoring the social and political situatedness of the postcolonial body and mind. In a paper titled "Crisis and Human Biology", Prashant Bharadwaj and Tom Vogl enumerate different crises that affect the human body as "recessions, famines, epidemics, natural and environmental disasters, and wars" (2). My work, however, also pays attention to the abuse of drugs and alcohol as one of the ways the ecology of the human body-mind is affected.

In the poem "Hangover", Nortje draws up an image of apartheid geography situating the body-mind as not removed from the exteriority of the politics:

In the case of foul play, imprisonment, death
by drinking (identity is
268430L KLEURLING,

Pretoria register, male 1960)
inform Mrs Hartford, Krombroom Road, Crawford,
house without garden, no reward. (40-45)

The address referred to in the poem, as noted by Bunn, recalls the unpleasant history of dislocation that surrounds that area. Connecting it to “foul play, imprisonment, death / by drinking” (40-41) does not miss the link to the racial tension that characterized the South Africa of the 1960s as the speaker’s racial identity, “KLEURLING” (42), which means ‘coloured’ in Afrikaans, is spelled out in capital letters. The alcoholism which would lead to death functions as symptomatic, in the words of Klopper (“Self and Community”), as it opens up a world of interconnections among environmental, political and internal domains of existence.

If the body-mind is an ecology or an ecosystem or a part of an ecosystem, then by a political system that ignores the impact of oppression on the environment, the body-mind of the marginalized subject is also led either directly or indirectly towards an experience of its own ecocatastrophe. While writers like Chapman would like to think that Nortje’s expressions of depressions and loneliness is only a matter of temperament and inability to handle relationships, the poem does not lead us in that direction. The poem conveys an idea of inebriation that connects intricately with the political condition, the physical restrictions imposed on ‘minority’ groups and the psychological impact of such demeaning experiences. It opens with an idea of dissatisfaction, loneliness and silence but leads into a public matter about “Bill” and “Tom” referring to the white powers and to the “Special boys”, an obvious reference to the apartheid police. It continues as follows:

After the pub, after the blur in the vague room
wine carries me to sleep.
Groaning awake I ask for time and water.
Snores answer me and rats
clawing wallpapers with tiger paws.
No lice, luckily I’m a bastard. (13-18)

In this description of drunkenness, Nortje does not only lead us to the fact of the symptomaticity of the habit, but to the injustice that the environment carries and extends to the body-mind. Although the mention of rats and lice obviously speaks of poverty, as discussed in the section “Animals in Arthur Nortje’s Poetry”, it also speaks of the low sense of self-worth that results from constantly being reminded of one’s inability to transcend the claustrophobic restrictions of the apartheid world. The speaker’s reference to his identity as a “bastard” (18)

is ambiguous in that it speaks about his confusion of identity in terms of who his father is, but more about a country in which he feels rootless and unaccepted.

The human body as environment resurges in the poem “Quiet Desperation”, which is one of the Canada poems that treat the matters of industrial pollution and urban decay. In the poem, Nortje situates the body amidst the ecological corruption signified by words like “sulphur miasma” (21), “motor din and gasoline clang” (20). While the poem shows the decay in the physical world around him, the speaker is also subject to the impact of such: “motor din and gasoline clang that knot my nerves” (20). The pollution expressed in these lines are thus not only an environmental matter, but even a personal matter, showing that human beings are a part of the environment suffering the effect of all the larger environment suffers. In another stanza, the speaker casually makes his way around people and buildings, and describes himself as “[b]lind with fumes” (23). Urban ecology always make reference to the impact of industrial emissions on the environment as well as on human health. Carson, for instance, shows that pesticides do not only harm trees and animals but also human beings (5). In Nortje’s environmentalist vision, the urban space becomes a victim of industrialism and capitalism and the body-mind of the human inhabitant becomes trapped in there. “My mind hurts with consistent / intakes of chemicals” (29-30) stands between emissions beyond the poet’s control and personal drug and eating habits. This, however, also shows that he is trapped in a culture that is somewhat beyond his control. The lines “Slim-mint Sabbaths, long walks in the dog park, / librium for angst Mondays, / diet foods for I have drunk / much beer, flung suds / down my gullet” (31-35) show the speaker in a struggle to live a healthy life and an entrapment by unhealthy habits of ingesting harmful substances subjecting the mind and body to a sort of decay. In the end it is not easy to find any fissure between subjectivity and city: “this city whose / rotten bonanza I earn” (29-30).

This is also treated in “Poem in Toronto” (previously discussed in the section “The Urban Environment in Nortje’s Canada Poems”): “Lying prone with the dormant seed of syphilis / lodged in my skull / and a whisky feeling coming through the sky / I hear the world at work” (10-13). These lines are situated between two other stanzas that complain about the poisoning of waters, “the lakeshore waters rich / with the poison tide of phosphates feeding algae” (5-6), the environmental menace “from the bilge of a million / miraculous machines” (8-9) and the stanza that speaks of urban waste, “sewers / in the company of beer cans, [...] / plastic flotsam, long-lived soapsuds, [and] garbage of / the good city” (20-23). While the speaker’s body-mind location in this setting of natural and urban decay does not place the body-mind as direct victim of such external decay, its placement there implies such

interconnectedness. The direct perpetrator here, however, is “the dormant seed of syphilis / lodged in my skull” (10-11) and “a whisky feeling” (12), which refer to the speaker’s personal self-destructive habits. In their correspondence, these different destructions communicate the self-destructive lifestyle of humanity on a large-scale as not very different from the abuse of one’s body and mind through negative habits.

The poem “Supremely Individual” is centred on the speaker’s existential struggles. The mind is “attacked” (3), a word that suggests warlike aggression, “by love’s dementia, and predicaments and loud / laughter at the skyjackings, world troubles and world strife” (3-4). While he is talking about the modern man’s lostness in the midst of urban crowdedness and busyness, he uses the language of ecological maltreatment to talk about his mind and body so that we encounter a person entrapped in a continuously incomprehensible existence. He is a part of the world and at the same time estranged from it: a busy, impenetrably, crowded, cosmopolitan metropolis and a universe that continues to remain frustratingly mysterious. “The poisoned spring has bubbled through my veins” (9) speaks of the body as it would of the exterior world. Whether he is deliberately echoing Carson’s *Silent Spring* or not, the poem raises the same concerns as hers, only that here the issues are expanded to contain the interconnections of the mind, body and world helplessly intermingled. The spring outside the human body is continually being poisoned; so is the internal spring of being.

In “Stop-”, the same theme continues. It does so, however, in the context of war, the Vietnam War, to be precise:

[stop]-ping bombards an area vacant:
visceral forests grr! to the wind that withers.
Buttery viands are self-denied. There is want

racking the hollows, maling the roots.
The walls of my crater groan, sag dead
With verdigris, bomb ash, conglomerates.

Tortured and fractured in Vietnam.
Life is a fugacious black pyjamas,
no joy, no rich cargo of pabulum. (1-9)

In these lines, the human body is subject to destruction as a part of the environment being attacked. Outward acts of bombarding the area in question affect the interior “visceral forests” (2). The body is spoken of in terms of the outward environment: “forests” (2), “roots” (4), “crater” (5). The reference to forests signals the environmental problems of deforestation that many parts of the world face and a visceral forest would speak of both internal anxiety and the

physical pressure that the body is subjected to in wartimes. Crater refers to a bomb crater, and when used to refer to the body as it is done here, it speaks of the body as positioned in dangerous and deadly situations. The line “Tortured and fractured in Vietnam” is sufficiently self-explanatory about the suffering the body is exposed to in times of war. The poem further moves on to specific members of the viscera to show them as decaying and toxified:

On January the First I think
Of soot that cakes around the alveoli,
Yellow fingers, the death of pink.

Kidneys are cesspools, the liver slithers
In poison chemicals. But isn't the dead-
lock of the heart the flashpoint to consider? (21-27)

The alveoli are intruded and recoloured by carbon, and the fingers turn yellow, an obvious reference to the effect of nicotine on the fingers. Speaking of the body as “death of pink” (24) again shows the body as degenerating due to external effect. The kidney is only a cesspool, a storage of filth, while the liver is dying in poison chemicals. In similar fashion, in another poem, the speaker describes himself as possessing “[...] nicotine fingers [...] [and] nitrous laughter” (“View from the Village” 47) to convey the idea of the human body as facing crisis not different from what the external environment faces. While this could be narrowed down to the speaker’s lifestyle, there is already a context provided, that of a world in political-environmental crisis in which the speaker is situated.

In this section, I have discussed poems that convey the idea of the human body in crisis as part of the crises experienced by the environment. The ecological crisis is not, and should not be, limited to the outer world. As earlier stated, the use of the word *environment* can be the culprit in this as the word suggests an outwardness rather than an inclusion of the human body and the internal world. Arguing from an overarching theoretical position of transversality, which opens up possibilities of seeing the interconnectedness, multiplicities and heterogeneities of domains as a way to think of the world, and a phenomenology of the body as inseparable from the world in which it is located, this becomes inevitable. Thinking this way makes it difficult to cut out the human body and subjectivity from the environment as is often done in environmental discourses. The implication of this awareness is phrased by David Rosen as follows: “Only when people of the 1st world recognize their own physical self-destruction as part as [sic] the larger ecological crisis will we be able to halt the plunder of living nature” (par. 23). Enmeshing the human body-mind in the environment thus becomes another way that poets and ecocritics speak *as* the environment.

4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed Arthur Nortje's environmental consciousness as depicted in his poetry. My purpose in the chapter has been to explore the ways in which the poet identifies with the external environment in order to speak for it, or more appropriately, *as* it. This by no means disproves the poet's well-known and acknowledged sense of alienation from the physical and social worlds around him; it rather explores the complex ways in which both identification and alienation are intermingled. It is important to note that Nortje's exile, his life outside South Africa, plays a significant role in the development of his environmental consciousness. Most of the poems treated here are, therefore, ones that he produced while in exile, especially in Canada. They show a trajectory in his development as a poet who has shown interest in his environment in South Africa in somewhat Romantic (post-romantic) ways to a poet who feels responsible to speak on behalf of the nonhuman world. I began by analysing poems that speak of the poet's return to the imaginations of his motherland and how in exile he becomes more conscious of the exploitation suffered by the land through activities such as mining and of human labour exploitation. This was followed by the exploration of the images of urban decay that reoccur in Nortje's Canada poems in which industrialism and capitalist cultures are questioned as they impact the environment negatively. The discussion on animal treatment in the chapter builds on what I already did in the previous chapter in the section on animals. It moves on from the artistic imagination of animals to speaking for them on the matters of their rights and suffering. I also look at the depiction of wars and their impact on the physical environment as Nortje's interest spreads to international politics and history. In this he has written about the Second World War, the Vietnam War, the Korean War and the Cold War, commenting on nuclear and chemical warfare and the general defacement of the environment through acts of war. The last section takes a look at the body-mind as a part of the environment and the different ways in which it is threatened in connection to surrounding ecological threats and personal lifestyles. The broad implication of this chapter is to contribute to the already growing discussion on the artistic exploration of the environment by postcolonial writers who have been previously viewed as more concerned with direct political matters than the environment. The poems here show that that view is not only erroneous, but it is based on ideas that have for long separated the physical world from the world of human politics and subjectivity.

Chapter Five

Conclusion: A Final Look at Place, Displacement and Postcolonial Ecology

Nortje's location within the South African literary canons – the white literary (landscape) tradition and the black protest movement – has been an uncomfortable one. This unfixed position that he occupies demonstrates the myth of a homogeneous tradition, especially in a society as diverse as South Africa. It also shows the need for difference and plurality to be considered in the pursuit of a more effective means of engaging the environmental dimensions of the postcolonial imaginary, as both white and black lineages point to different experiences and views of the environment, often referred to as the land. The white tradition was built on a forward-looking view of the land as a place to be conquered and modified, while the protest tradition looked to history and ideas of autochthony as a means to recover the land. This schism, however, only mirrors the geopolitical turbulence of the country, in which the politically disempowered had to deal with various forms of unsettlement in respect of the land and country. It is the impact of this platial unsettlement that I seek to address in this concluding part of the thesis. Even though the thesis is divided into three central chapters dealing with place, nature and environmental consciousness in Nortje's poetry respectively, it is obvious that throughout the discussions, platiality and platial unsettlement keep resurfacing as deeply tied to the poet's treatment of nature and his speaking *as* the environment.

Place is a concept in environmental criticism that has faced counter-responses to its traditional view that it is a static location to which its inhabitants are supposed to demonstrate love and commitment as a means to developing and expressing ecological consciousness. This study of Nortje's poetry has demonstrated that while place commitment is a laudable idea, it is parochial in the way it does not consider the position of people whose relationship to the land or place is conflicted. In Nortje's poetry this relationship to place is treated in different scales, such as the room space, public spaces and foreign spaces. His representation of the room leads to questions around ecology's concern with interconnectedness and the hope for a form of balance in the environment. For instance, in the room poems, we are faced with a poet who psychologically struggles to connect with the world outside the room and, on the other hand, finds the room intruded by public matters and unable to offer him true privacy and repose. His sense of alienation does not merely spring from social separations, but even from a sense of rupture from the non-human world around him. This interweave of the social, political and subjective vis-à-vis the non-human world presents us with the challenge of widening the way we think about place, to include both marginalized subjects and the micro-spaces they inhabit.

The impact of apartheid's divided and violent landscape, in which most of the room poems are set, for instance, comes to bear on the small room space, thus revealing a need for thinking about place and ecology with the awareness of all forms of ruptures, psychic, social and political, to be considered. The experience of being marginalized and finding the room as troubled space demonstrates the difficulty for such a subject to form the kind of stability and attachment to space that is required in traditional place ideas. The examination of such compact and private spaces in environmental criticism, therefore, might point to the experiences in such close environments as of value to the wider understanding of the environmental crisis.

When the domestic space becomes uncanny, violated and a site of precarity, the questions of the validity of place as important to ecological thought and practice become problematic. How can the unhomeliness of the postcolonial subject be engaged with the concept of place in ecocriticism? In other words, how can ideas that separately posit displacement and stasis be brought together? If we are to follow Jameson's idea of national allegory, we can view the room as pointing to a wider national truth, the room merely as a miniature of the nation built on alienation and division. This, however, would simplify the matter and overlook the reality of the micro-space as a fact rather than a symbol, which would mean a forfeiture of the richness in the overlap of diversities of domains. That is, the room space as a domain and the country as yet another domain, which, instead of one allegorizing the other, become heterogeneous components relating with each other. This also leads to the question of home, what becomes home to the postcolonial subject and how it intersects with questions of the environment. Recently, works like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* have explored the postcolonial home space, which can be read as a national allegory. This kind of domestic unsettlement that characterizes the postcolonial imaginary seems like a promising area from which to revisit the role of place in ecological thought especially when it concerns the postcolonial multi-layered space. But the reality and autonomy of the domestic experience is watered down when viewed merely as an allegory. The room must be viewed as a literal space for it to make sense as a part of ecological thought. In fact, the place of home in ecological discourse must not be viewed as anything near irrelevant as the root of the word 'ecology' is the Greek *oikos*, which means 'home'. The home space as habitation, therefore, points to the rest of the world as habitation, but which does not only accommodate physicality, especially natural, but social and personal worlds, being a space of constant and complex interactions and overlapping with different domains.

Outside the room space, place is also treated in Nortje's poetry as a site for nature. Although not treated directly as such in the third chapter of this thesis, the imbrications are

evident. In the chapter, the idea of place functions in the form of urbanity and how it is not only a site for the political and technological, but for nature as well. Through that approach, I have attempted to explore the ways in which Nortje's poetry seeks to destabilize ideas that sever nature from human culture. Through his postcolonial and postromantic aesthetics, he has imagined a world in which nature and culture and history are all complexly woven together without ignoring the geographical and the way it had been politicized or racialized. It no longer makes sense to hold tenaciously to traditional views of nature as our daily realities continue to be transformed and redefined by technology and urbanization. In studying these ideas in Nortje's poetry, I witnessed the emergence of two significant ideas worth pursuing. The first is the need to find a middle space between nature and culture. The second is the need to adopt a level of ecological agnosis. Here, the same respect and value are given to nature in both the wilderness and in urban centres. The middle space, therefore, is the idea that respects interconnections and allows a horizontal interaction of different domains. This also allows the sometimes 'purposeless' interpenetrations of domains such as that of urbanity and nature. What I mean by ecological agnosis is a possession of respect for nature without claiming to have mastered what nature signifies. This does not at all mean nonchalance towards the environment, but humility in our use of language, culture and technology to engage with nature leading to a more sympathetic attitude towards the environment.

Exile, on the other hand, represents all forms of displacement, and presents another medium through which to engage with the idea of place and its role in postcolonial ecological thought. Works such as Nortje's draw us into considering the impact of this current age of unprecedented diaspora and transnationalism on the environment and on environmental criticism. What is the impact of postcolonial migration on the environment and on environmental criticism? It is worth noting that most postcolonial concerns about migration, diaspora and transnationalism always involve colonized subjects moving towards the west, the 'centre'. The history that produced this dichotomy would, therefore, play a role in the way the postcolonial subject would think of the space he is leaving and the one he is moving into. The ambivalence involved in the view of the west as utopia and the resentment produced by years of colonialism or encounters with xenophobia would have to be considered in what the environment would mean to the typical postcolonial diasporic subject who is subject to multiple levels of displacement. It is, however, wise to refrain from asserting that postcolonial subjects living as immigrants in the western world have the same level of sense of displacement, since colonialism itself must be viewed as complex and its experience by its subjects also as varied.

Exile as a motif in postcolonial literature usually demonstrates a complex relationship between place and subjectivity, thereby presenting us with newer ways to view the environment. Exile was common among South African protest writers and activists as most were banned or banished from the country for their anti-government activities and ideas. While the room or domestic space demonstrates estrangement caused by political intrusion, exile is a physical manifestation, a performance of such separation from country and land. Exile has always been present in literature, even of the west, but in the postcolonial context it is usually connected with the struggle against colonialism or post-independence conflicts. Poetry such as Nortje's which foregrounds exile along with a deep environmental consciousness suggests to us the need to redefine ideas of place and placeness.

In *Things Fall Apart*, for example, Achebe creates a character with a strong sense of place in Okonkwo, who is assured by his sense of belonging to Umuafia as a place inherited through generations and as a space also inhabited and protected by gods and spirits. Okonkwo experiences, however, a sense of displacement when driven into exile for seven years in Mbanta. Although Mbanta is his maternal village in which he is welcome and experiences prosperity, his spirit is restless and yearns for a return to his fatherland. The ultimate separation, however, comes with the advent of colonialism. In this case, Okonkwo is not ousted from the land; rather he is in the land, but the land is falling into foreign control, which results in a deep sense of being exiled from the land in a psychical sense and in the physical sense demonstrated by his suicide. It is instructive here too that Nortje's life ended with what some have assumed to be a suicide, an ultimate demonstration of his personal struggle with a sense of rootlessness that was caused by both his experience of political and geographical alienation by apartheid and other personal experiences of estrangement. Reference to Achebe would, therefore, mean a need to question even the underlying cosmologies that inform modern environmentalism. Achebe shows a certain sense of security existing in the precolonial psyche, which is shattered by a political crisis which involves the takeover of power and land.

If a sense of place means being rooted to a place, then the power relations contained in such space must be considered. As Nortje's poetry shows, exile exposes the shortcomings of the kind of environmentalism that separates the environment from the politics and history of the land and ignores how people's troubled experiences within a place provide a window onto the relationship between politics, self and the environment. As postcolonial environmental criticism seeks to continually engage issues of the environment with the issues of disequilibrium in power relations, exile becomes a way to engage Nixon's schisms with regard to the disparity of place commitment in ecocriticism and displacement in postcolonialism.

Which is why a novel like Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* cannot be limited to a political novel that cannot be read environmentally as the place of the environment is glaringly foregrounded along with other matters raised in the novel.

Nortje's exile did not only offer him the opportunity to reconstruct the local place or national space that he had left, but to reconstruct himself in connection with the world outside South Africa. While the idea of a global sense of place, which is based on the reality of place change and the need to embrace that, would have been ideal for approaching the environmental crisis as a global phenomenon, a more effective conceptualization is to open up to the fact that attaining such an attitude would not be easy for refugees and exiles or for the postcolonial subject who might still bear resentment towards the western world where he or she lives as a migrant. For a poet like Nortje, already faced with different levels of displacement in his home country, and having to contend with another form of alienation and sense of loss in Europe and Canada, it becomes obvious that a fruitful approach to global environmental efforts would have to factor in the trauma of the history of colonialism and the current imbalance in power geometry.

As much as the role of place may begin to look unnecessary in environmental discussions when faced with situations that do not fit into traditional ideas of place, situatedness will continue to be an issue in this field as the environment will always be a physical location rather than an abstract idea. I find myself thinking about Niyi Osundare's collection of poetry called *City without People*, which is centred on his experience of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in the United States. The poems speak of personal experience of place as an immigrant in the United States, which has become a second home to the poet. He has, therefore, been able to articulate concern for this 'foreign' space without necessarily feeling as an outsider, while at the same time weaving the thoughts with layers from ideas of water from his homeland. The point here is that Osundare's poetry does not point to an unsettled immigrant, but to an immigrant who has embraced the homeness of his foreign space, thereby showing to us that postcolonial ecology needs to open up to diversities of experiences and avoid framing rigid critical structures that would not allow for molecular differences and unique heterogeneities. Just as Doreen Massey's idea of progressive sense of place treated in her book *Space, Place and Gender* may not be able to cater to all populations' experience of place, so also it must not be cast away as it describes even the experience of some postcolonial subjects.

This reflects somewhat in the fourth chapter of the thesis, which was naturally a consummation of what had gone ahead in chapters two and three. The chapter shows the impact of place and movement, exile, in this case, on environmental thought. For instance, the poet's

exile experience ironically seems to have increased his maturity in environmental consciousness as shown in the poems produced while in exile, especially in Canada. Through this he is evidenced to be a poet who has grown from a more descriptive depiction of the environment to one who feels responsible towards the wellbeing of the physical world. It is instructive the way in which Nortje, despite his sense of social alienation in Canada, has been able to speak *as* the environment in the poems written in Canada with a sense of responsibility like Osundare in New Orleans. In addition, even the nostalgic poems written in exile about the homeland have begun to take a different turn; in them, he becomes more conscious of not just the beauty and a desire to forge connections with the land and the inscription of apartheid's divisions on the landscape, but rediscovers the land in terms of human exploitation via economic activities such as mining, whose other side of exploiting human labour is also factored in. Nortje's environmentalist consciousness was perhaps sparked by the kind of industrialist and capitalist culture he faced in Canada. Beyond local urban decay, the poet has also shown deep interest in major global conflicts and how they impact on the environment. He draws from the Second World War, the Cold War and its proxy wars directly or indirectly pointing to the ecocide launched on the environment via chemical warfare and other destructive acts of war. As I worked to show that the poet's identification with the physical world in both social and physical ways have pointed to a way of seeing environmentalism as not the condescending speaking for, but an act of *speaking as*, this idea is nowhere more evident in the poetry than in the poems' reconstruction of animals and animality. These have served to provide for this study the demonstration of the middle between human being and animal being as pointing to the middle grounds that exist in diverse ways between humanity and the whole physical world. The physicality of the human is further explored to buttress the human legitimacy of claiming to speak as the environment. The poems depict the human body as both an ecosystem with its crises and as a part of its surrounding ecosystems also subject to the diverse ways in which the environment is subjected to pollution and decay. To do this, body-mind dichotomies had to be addressed in order to factor in the impact of pollution as not only on the human body but on the human psyche as well.

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