

Self, Family and Society in Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter*, Rachel Zadok's *Gem Squash Tokoloshe*, and Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing*

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Lauren Leigh O'Brien

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Supervisor: Professor Dirk Kloppe

Abstract

This dissertation examines Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter*, Rachel Zadok's *Gem Squash Tokoloshe*, and Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing*. It focuses on the development of each of the protagonists' identities in three realms: the individual, the familial and the societal. Additionally, it is concerned with the specific socio-political contexts in which the novels are set. It employs psychoanalytic and historical materialist frameworks in order to engage with the disparate areas of identity with which it is concerned.

The introduction establishes the analytical perspective of the dissertation and explores the network of theoretical frames on which the dissertation relies. Additionally, it contextualises each of the novels, within their historical contexts, as well as in relation to the theory. The first chapter examines Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter*. It focuses on the protagonist's assertion of an identity independent of her father's role as a political activist, and her eventual acceptance of the universal difficulty in negotiating a life which is both private and political. The second chapter, on Rachel Zadok's *Gem Squash Tokoloshe*, examines the relationship between the protagonist's traumatic experiences as a child and her inability to assert an identity as an adult. The similarities between the protagonist's attempts to address her traumas and thereby create herself anew and South Africa's employment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as a means to acknowledge and engage with its traumatic history is of import. The third chapter which deals with Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* traces the life of its protagonist, whose identifications remain childish as a result of having witnessed her parents' difficult relationship. Her understanding of the world is informed by a rigid, binary understanding, which is ultimately disrupted by her relationship with a black employee. She is incapable of readjusting her frame of reference, however, and ultimately goes mad.

I conclude that, while my focus has been on personal, familial and social identifications, the standard terms in which identity is examined, namely, race, class, and gender, are present in each of the three tiers of identity with which I have been concerned.

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Introduction

Novels and their Reception

This dissertation examines three South African novels, namely Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter*, Rachel Zadok's *Gem Squash Tokoloshe*, and Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing*, and attempts to locate each of the novels' female protagonists in terms of their personal, familial and social identities, while exploring the socio-historical contexts in which the protagonists are positioned.

Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter* is set in the 1970s, though it recalls the protagonist's father's life from his birth in 1905. It was published in 1979 and describes contemporary historical events such as the 1976 Soweto uprising. The protagonist's father is based on Bram Fischer and historic political events are dealt with directly, and the novel explores the family's personal concerns as explicitly linked to national political occurrences. The contemporary national politics – apartheid suppression of anti-apartheid groups like the African National Congress and movements such as the Black Consciousness Movement – is mentioned, although the novel is more concerned with social and personal politics. Protagonist Rosa Burger struggles to forge an identity for herself which is not defined by her father's position as an anti-apartheid activist. Initially, his political concerns occlude her personal motivations, but after his death she finds herself detached from politics and she seeks a non-political life. The novel explores the dynamics of personal and political obligations, and Rosa's attempts to negotiate these in her own life.

Gem Squash Tokoloshe by Rachel Zadok was published in 2005 and commences in 1985 when the protagonist is seven years old. The political changes taking place in the country are obliquely mentioned, and are evident when the narrative depicts the 21-year-old protagonist in 2000, six years after South Africa's first democratic election and the dismantling of apartheid. The novel's thematic concern with the protagonist's return to repressed traumas resonates with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and its attempt to address national and personal traumas which had been concealed by apartheid. After her father leaves the protagonist, Faith, and her mother, Bella, Faith's life changes dramatically. Bella's sanity deteriorates and a woman, Nomsa, is brought to the farm to care for Faith. Faith accidentally kills Nomsa in an attempt to protect her from Bella's suitor, whom Faith finds raping Nomsa.

This memory is repressed, and Faith believes Bella is responsible for the murder, until she returns to the farm on which she lived as a child and reencounters the man who raped Nomsa.

Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* was published in 1950, after the commencement of apartheid and a decade before South Africa was to become a Republic. The novel is set in the 1930s in Rhodesia, in which the economic climate was affected by the global recession which "crystallized" the developing class structure (Arrighi 36). Although it is set well before the start of apartheid, the novel depicts the broad-based, socially accepted racism which forms the foundations for the possibility of legal racism. Mary's life is determined by her desire to avoid replicating her mother's life, and the apparently inevitable replication thereof. Her mother turned her against her father as a child, and, as a result, Mary views men with disdain. She marries out of a desire to conform to social convention, and comes to hate her husband, just as her mother hated her father. The only man for whom she ever feels genuine affection is Moses, the "houseboy" (*The Grass is Singing* 9), whose blackness makes their relationship illegal¹, as well as threatening to the social order. Their relationship results in the inevitability of both of their deaths.

The novels have received diverse critical attention. *Burger's Daughter* is most often regarded as a novel about women and feminism, and related ideas of private (as opposed to public) spaces as women's spaces. Studies of race and parental relation are also frequent. Academic focus on *The Grass is Singing* tends to be from feminist, Marxist or Freudian perspectives, and most often views Mary as an individual who has repressed her childhood traumas. Race is also a common theme, as is class. *Gem Squash Tokoloshe*, having only recently been published, has received merely four pieces of critical analysis, all of which focus on trauma, race, and identity.

Literature and Society

Since even before the foundation of formal colonies in what is now South Africa, understandings of identities have been formed around racialised divisions. As a result of South African identities being constructed in such stark oppositions, identity, society, and the interplay between these have been a common concern of the country's literature. Literature is

¹ The 1903 Immorality Suppression Ordinance made it illegal for a black man and a white woman to engage in sexual relations, although relations between a white man and a black women were legal.

a useful way of exploring the relationship between the apparently unrelated frameworks of the political or societal, and that of identities, which are personal. This relationship is made visible through the construction of a multi-layered narrative which navigates personal and political concerns simultaneously. The political framework is manifest in personal interactions, such as social conventions and markers which are informed by a political-symbolic that in turn determines the parameters of possible interactions between the individuals living in a given context. That is, the parameters of possible interactions between any people are already established by the social context in the interaction occurs.

The complicated relationship between the realms of the personal and the political is best described by Raymond Williams as a “structure of feeling.” He defines this term by explaining as follows:

It is not only that we must go beyond formally held and systematic beliefs, though of course we have always to include them. It is that we are concerned with meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt, and the relations between these and formal or systematic beliefs and acted and justified experiences. [...] We are talking about characteristic elements of impulse, restraint and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity. We are then defining these elements as a ‘structure’: as a set, with specific internal relations, at once interlocking and in tension. Yet we are also defining a social experience which is still *in process*, often indeed not yet recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating, connecting, and dominant characteristics, indeed its specific hierarchies. (quoted in Lazarus, *Postcolonial Unconscious*, 234 fn. 150)

The relationships between the personal and the political which comprise these structures of feeling are rendered visible in literature. This study understands the mediation between these disparate elements as located in the family, as this formation is the locus of the socialisation of the individual into social conventions. The study explores identity formation in three different historical periods showing how existing mores inform the lives of the individuals within various social groupings.

Each of the three novels under discussion features a female protagonist whose relation to either one or both of her parents may be seen to inform her social identity. These female characters all struggle with unresolved childhood issues which they must address in adulthood and, for various reasons, all find themselves outsiders to the conventions of their respective societies. The interplay between the protagonists’ personal identifications, family relationships, societal concerns and historical location in each of the novels provides a meaningful basis for analysis. All three protagonists’ identities are informed in a fundamental way by their relationships with their respective fathers, in particular. The historically distinct

periods in which the novels are set – namely, pre-apartheid, apartheid, and post-apartheid South Africa– allow for dynamic comparison, but these historical boundaries are also transcended by the shared concerns in the novels.

Analytical Perspective

Considering South Africa's history, it is understandable that a large portion of the country's literature focuses on racial identities rather than other identities, although other identifications are of course explored. As Spencer points out, however, when examinations of other identities do occur, they tend to originate from “emerging female writers [who] focus on representing conflicting, contradictory and ambiguous identities and revealing the complexities of the female experience in both public and private spaces” (67). This study is interested in the contiguities and fluidity of identities, their dependence on context, and their negotiation of various influences.

The context of identity formation is the social-symbolic framework into which subjects are inducted as children. That is, the children are brought up in a system of ideas and norms which manifest both in social (interpersonal) and symbolic (structural) ways. This introduction is facilitated by the subject's parents who are themselves products of socialisation processes. Families – and the individuals that comprise them – therefore have a complex interaction with the society of which they form a part, as they are both the recipients of socially inscribed attitudes and the proliferators thereof. As John Scanzoni and Greer Litton Fox observe, gender roles are inscribed by “social agents,” who are, in this case, parents (747).

On the one hand, this study seeks to show how, in each of the novels under consideration, the identity of the protagonist is presented in the contexts of prevailing social formations and the familial relations which mediate them. On the other hand, the study seeks to locate the representation of family relations and social relations in each novel within its historical context, showing how the nexus of self, family and society has shifted from the late 1930s to the early 2000s, during the pre-apartheid, apartheid and post-apartheid periods. The different historical periods in which the novels are set, with their different social norms and social formations comprise the conditions of possibility for identity construction for each of the

protagonists. These periods are crucially different because of socio-political changes in the country over the years in question, but also because of global changes² that have seen the emergence of new conceptions and experiences of self and society.

Like Johan Geertsema, I take literature “to be a mediation of the social and thus as an imaginative engagement with society that helps shape it” (7). This study seeks to provide a conceptual understanding of the relationship between literature and history that will guide the way in which it locates and examines the texts under consideration. Literature will be viewed as a socially symbolic artefact located in a specific time period. It is seen as a record of the “political unconscious” (Jameson 20) rather than as an “artifact [that] “reflects” its social background, which is a notion that Jameson deems “utterly unacceptable” (81). Jameson’s ‘political unconscious’ incorporates the “concentric frameworks” of the political, the social, and the historical (75). In as much as the political unconscious is an invisible cause which informs the values and aspirations of society, and works through psychic processes, it conceptualises social structures through a psychoanalytic frame.

This dissertation employs an analytical perspective derived loosely from Fredric Jameson’s concentric frameworks but these frameworks are transformed here into those of the individual, the family, and the society. While these frameworks are obviously constructed conceptual realms, their differentiation serves as a lens through which the concerns of the texts may be meaningfully examined. These frameworks function as a means to locate the identifications evoked within the various narrative contexts, and are interrelated and permeable. I examine the protagonists’ lives as the locus of the negotiation of the personal, the familial and the social. This analytical perspective allows for the invocation of various theories which together enable analyses of the complex interrelationships between these otherwise disparate categories.

I view literature as imbued with social values and norms and seek to locate the lives of the protagonists in individual, familial, and social frameworks in order to provide the basis for comparison of the three novels in question. The dissertation will utilise Graham Pechey’s understanding that Bakhtinian theory describes literature as discourse:

² Examples of these changes include the Second World War, the gradual decolonisation of Africa by colonisers, and the increasing threat of communism during the Cold War. Although none of these issues is directly addressed, they are part of what constitutes the contemporary political unconscious.

the novel is the self-consciousness and (at least partial) thematisation of dialogism; it is the form of writing in which what is signified is discourse itself. The novel foregrounds [...] the social materiality of discourse. (49)

Literature foregrounds the ‘social materiality of discourse’ by emphasising the relationship between socio-historic conditions and the personal experiences of the characters. The fictional characters are projected into a real context. The materiality consists in the characters’ necessary location in language, in which “signs [are] interiorized by [...] individual subjects and subsequently reuttered based on the relation of the subjects’ position to one another” (Bernard-Donals 3). These relative subject positions are informed by the social symbolic order in that this order predetermines the conditions of possibility for the dynamics of the relationship. Factors which are ascribed meaning by the social order – such as race or gender – affect the way in which an interpersonal dynamic manifests, so that an identity is determined relationally.

This study will use the notion of the linguistic subject to locate the protagonists of the novels under examination in a necessarily social environment which delimits the possibilities for identification. That is, because all subjects are linguistic subjects, subjectivity is formed through language and therefore exists within the boundaries of linguistic confines. This is of course especially true for literary characters because they are themselves within texts. That all the protagonists in the novels being examined are female and explore their gendered identities gives rise to the useful exploration of the intersection of gendered identities with other identifications. Judith Butler’s notion of gender performativity is utilised in this dissertation as a means of approaching the depiction of gender in the novels, and their conformity to or subversion of gendered norms. This theory will similarly be used to view other identities and associated performative norms and the performance of identity.

Importantly, identity is not finite: the individual must figure and refigure herself continuously. Marilynn B. Brewer notes that the self can be viewed as “multifaceted, composed by a set of discrete identities” as well as “an organized system that structures the relationships among different identities and determines which identity is invoked at a particular time as a function of the relative salience and centrality of identities within and across social situations” (121). A subject must therefore be adaptable to being both the agent (the actor) and the object (the acted-upon): indeed, as Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall argue, “the subject is the agent, the subject OF social process; [...] [as well as] the patient, subject TO social processes” (493—494). It is for this reason that they prefer the term ‘intersubjectivity’ to ‘identity’ as it

emphasises that “identification is inherently relational, not a property of isolated individuals” (494).

Although I will use the term ‘identity’ I would like to emphasise the intersubjective nature thereof. I propose that all identity is like gender identity, which, according to Mary Bernstein’s explanation of Judith Butler’s theory of performativity, is realised “through the performative acts that constitute gender but do not actually reflect an inner core” (Bernstein 56). Like gender, other elements which make up an identity are performed: they are intentional depictions of one’s self, as they are considered presentations and representations of the place in which one places oneself in relation to others. Gender-identities, I would argue, are like race- and class-identities in that they are performative.³ They are the insertion of oneself into society as they reflect the position in which the self has been posited in relation to the other. This resonates with Lacan’s mirror stage of identity formation in that the self is concerned with its projection of itself; that is, how it is perceived by others. This conception allows for nuanced understandings of identities to emerge, as in Mary Turner’s performance of herself in front of Moses and in front of Tony Marston respectively (*The Grass is Singing*), Faith’s identification of herself with her mother’s paintings of fairies (*Gem Squash Tokoloshe*), and Rosa’s awareness of herself as an object of observation (*Burger’s Daughter*).

As implied earlier in reference to the notion of a ‘structure of feeling’, literature can be understood to perform a mediation of the political and the private. A more psychoanalytic way of putting this would be to say that literature incorporates the symbolic and the semiotic realms, as conceived by Julia Kristéva, who establishes the ‘semiotic’ in contrast to the ‘symbolic’ as posited by Jacques Lacan. As Leslie W. Rabine explains:

[i]f the symbolic function comprises all communicative activity, then the semiotic designates those unconscious, instinctual, bodily impulses which precede syntactic language. The semiotic also includes the effects of pre-symbolic impulses which come into language, as ‘rhythms, intonations,’ which cannot be captured as sign, signifier, signified. (45)

The symbolic is the rational social structure which includes “science, logic, the law” (Becker-Leckrone 162), and which determines the conditions for the possible identities of those who

³ There are, of course, intrinsic differences between these identities: class may be ambiguous or disguised while race and gender can be “read from the surface of body” (Salamon 97). These identities however are enacted (though not in a universal manner). That is, a subject enacts the identities it assumes in the manner in which it interprets those identities. Therefore, although there is no universal manner in which whiteness or maleness is enacted, each individual performs these identities in his own way. An individual asserts and makes known the identities to which she has chosen to affiliate.

live in that society; while the somatic is the personal, corporeal and emotional experience, a modality which encompasses the “unknowable, artistically productive” (*ibidem*). The symbolic and the semiotic interact and manifest in various ways in the novels, through their material specificities. For example, in *Burger’s Daughter*, the somatic designates the family and the intimacy which accompanies it, while in *The Grass is Singing*, the claustrophobic family is a space informed by symbolic structures projected through psychic fantasy. Literature negotiates a space between the symbolic and the somatic by drawing attention to the ways in which the political affects the personal and the personal impacts the political. A particularly explicit example of this occurs in *Burger’s Daughter* where Rosa claims that the “public events so often are decisive ones in [her] life” (194). This study focuses on this relationship and explores its structures of feeling. It seeks to achieve this by employing psychoanalytic and historical materialist theories which recognise the interplay between the personal and the political, and by locating the intersection between these disparate dimensions in the family.

This constellation of concerns draws together the semiotic (corporeal, affective) experiences of the characters in the novels under examination and the symbolic resonances of these experiences with the contemporary socio-political concerns. The ‘semiotic’ and ‘symbolic’ are not fixed systems but rather formations that are strategically invoked in order to allow for my chosen form of analysis. This network includes the complex relations between the structures of the personal, familial and social, as well as structures such as the political and the domestic, and the public and private. This theoretical lens allows the interaction of these ideas to be explored in a meaningful way.

Theoretical Development

The theoretical trajectory employed in this dissertation is cumulatively employed. That is, the theory utilised in the first chapter has another dimension added to it for the second chapter, and yet another for the third. The first chapter, concerned with Nadine Gordimer’s *Burger’s Daughter*, employs a Lacanian psychoanalytic conception of identity formation. The second, addressing the concerns of Rachel Zadok’s *Gem Squash Tokoloshe*, necessitates the inclusion of Melanie Klein’s models of splitting, doubling and projections. Doris Lessing’s *The Grass*

is Singing, is featured in the third chapter, and is seen through the additional lens of Julia Kristéva's theory of abjectivity.

Jacques Lacan, following Freud's conception of the unconscious, identifies two stages of identity formation, the imaginary and the symbolic. According to Lacan's theory regarding imaginary identity formation, a child observes itself in a mirror and realises that the person it is seeing is in fact itself. This results in the formation of a split subjectivity from its inception: the infant becomes aware that it occupies both the position of subject (or viewer) and object (or viewed). This split position is visible in the narrative of *Burger's Daughter*, in which Rosa addresses her narrative and herself to various others, and in *The Grass is Singing*, when Mary becomes aware of the disparity between her conception of herself and her friends' interpretation of her. The symbolic figure of the father interrupts the child's relationship with the mother and suppresses the child's belief that it can satisfy its mother's desires. He represents the social conventions to which the child must conform, and prevents the child from behaving inappropriately. The fact that the "name of the father" is alternately named the "law of the father" indicates that the father occupies an inhibiting role. He denies the possibility of an oedipal relationship between the child and its mother, which is representative of society's inhibiting function: social convention dictates what is acceptable behaviour. This is representative of the symbolic systems into which the child has been inserted.

Lacan's theoretical framework provides an explanation of the manner in which the family plays a role in inserting the child into the social symbolic, which has in turn determined the family's dynamics and relationships. The social symbolic is representative of the culture into which a child is inducted by its family, through language (Leader & Groves 73). Because the child enters into language through the 'name of the father,' and that language is shaped by society, and the child learns language through family members, the child's identity is fundamentally dependent on society and the family. It is through her interaction with her father, at least archetypically, that the child realises the manner in which personal relationships are defined by external social forces. The child, therefore, enters into the social symbolic as a result of the presence of the father, or a paternal figure. The social symbolic is the nexus of history, society, family and the individual into which the child must imagine herself. It is important that this is true not only during childhood, as well as in determining the manner in which a person is initiated into the social, so that it informs the way in which identity is conceived throughout a subject's life.

Klein's theory of splitting speaks to early childhood development. The child is uncomfortable with her own negative feelings – towards external objects, such as the mother, and herself – and accordingly splits the offending object – an external object or the self – into two parts: good and evil (Segal 34). Splitting serves to protect the child from the perceived threat of the evil aspect. C. Fred Alford emphasises the importance of this in allowing for the formation of a relationship with the 'good' object, although he notes that if the division is "[c]arried on too long, it can seriously weaken the ego, preventing its eventual integration" (*Klein and Critical Social Theory*, 86). The split protects the individual against apparently threatening objects or people, and also functions as an attack "on the perception of reality" which makes the division "itself a danger to long term security" (Segal 42). This position occurs as a natural defence (Likierman 167) and is employed "throughout life [...] when under any kind of stress" (Segal 33). Trauma constitutes the kind of stress indicated by Segal, and splitting off of traumatic memories, as a means of "avoiding (rather than working through) internal conflict and guilt" (Segal 42).

Trauma cannot be entirely severed, however. It will continue to affect the unconscious of the subject, and may "inhibit emotional learning" (Alford, *Klein and Critical Social Theory*, 71). Eventually, through the Freudian "return of the repressed" (Friedman 141), the trauma will re-present itself psychosomatically. *Gem Squash Tokoloshe*'s Faith struggles with the repressed memory of having accidentally killed Nomsa, and becomes increasingly ill, apparently as a result of the return of the trauma after her mother's death. Projection forms part of successful repression via splitting: it includes the splitting of an internal object, which has been identified as 'bad,' from the self, and its projection onto an external object. The negativity associated with the internal object is now attached to the external object (Alford, *Klein and Critical Social Theory*, 31). The purpose is to remove the 'bad' element of the self so that the self remains untainted by it. Additionally, an object can be similarly split into 'good' and 'bad' parts that are comprehended as distinct, rather than comprising a single object. There are various instances of such projective splittings in *Gem Squash Tokoloshe*, such as Faith's belief that her mother is completely 'bad' which is maintained by Faith's belief that it was Bella, her mother, who killed Nomsa.

Kristéva's conception of the abjection is difficult to define because it encompasses anything that is perceived as a threat to subjectivity. Megan Becker-Leckrone explains that "[a]bjection looms and threatens, jettisons the subject to a borderland of horror, and at once beseeches and repulses the subject, radically defying categorization" (151). Stacey K. Keltner takes care to explain that while Kristéva states that the abject threatens "identity, system, order ... borders, positions, rules" (Kristéva, quoted in Keltner 44—45), "it is also the permanent 'outside' that preserves personal and social boundaries" (Keltner 45). That is, it functions both as a negative – which threatens the subject – and a positive – which reaffirms the subject's constitution. Becker-Leckrone explains that:

abjection refers at once (1) to an infantile, originary moment in the subject's individual history, (2) to something the subject might experience throughout its existence at moments of extreme crisis, and (3) to a collective condition of our humanity. It manifests itself in the most exceptional instances of human horror, both personal and collective, but also in the deepest structures of cultural taboo, and even in what we hold to be our highest cultural achievements. (151—152)

Abjection thus functions on multiple levels. It can result from an interaction with anything that threatens subjectivity: a corpse, excrement, or a social transgression. This is important because, for Mary in *The Grass is Singing*, blackness is abject. For her, it is an indicator of inferiority and savagery, so that the humanity of a black person is negated by his blackness. Unbeknownst to Mary, as a social outcast, she occupies a similarly abject position, and eventually comes to represent a comparable threat to the society in her liaison with Moses.

This analytic frame structures the dissertation, so that its theoretical trajectory develops alongside a deepening analysis of the novels. The composition of historical materialist and psychoanalytic frameworks allows for an investigation into the three spheres of identity with which this dissertation is concerned: personal, familial and social.

Identity formation and assertion in *Burger's Daughter* by Nadine Gordimer

History and Psychoanalysis

Nadine Gordimer's 1979 novel *Burger's Daughter* (hereafter, *Burger*) is directly concerned with identity. This concern is indicated by the title, which makes it clear that Rosa – the unnamed daughter – is dependent on her father for her identity. The novel addresses identity formation as a necessarily dialectic configuration which shifts with context. This shifting formation of identity is reflected firstly in the novel's structure, which is in three parts, addressed by the narrator-protagonist to her lover, her father's ex-wife, and her father respectively. It is also reflected in the manner in which the protagonist's perspective shifts, so that she is sometimes the Rosa before visiting Katya, her father's ex-wife in France, and sometimes the Rosa who knows of her inevitable return to South Africa, even though chronologically the experiencing-Rosa is as yet unaware of what will occur (Head 122). The story is set in a South Africa ruled by the white minority, which is implementing increasingly discriminatory policies in order to retain its position as hegemon. The black majority is becoming more structured in its action against apartheid under the banner of Steve Biko's Black Consciousness Movement and other banned organisations like the African National Congress and the Pan-Africanist Congress, leaving Rosa and her family – white, anti-apartheid activists – increasingly isolated both from the white minority and the black majority with whom the Burgers have struggled for democracy.

Some previous readings of *Burger's Daughter* have been psychoanalytic, notably Dominic Head's *Nadine Gordimer* which includes a chapter entitled "The construction of identity in *Burger's Daughter* and *July's People*" and Susan Barrett's "'What I say will not be understood': Intertextuality as a subversive force in Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter*." Other, less explicitly psychoanalytic readings, such as Karen Halil's "Travelling the 'World Round as Your Navel': Subjectivity in Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter*" and Thomas Knipp's "Going All The Way: Eros and polis in the Novels of Nadine Gordimer" include references to psychoanalytic and Lacanian interpretations of the novel. While this reading will similarly adopt a broadly psychoanalytical approach by focusing on family relations in the novel, it differs from its predecessors as it will simultaneously attempt to locate the novel in its historical context. It will employ Frederic Jameson's notion of the "political

unconscious” (Jameson 20) in an attempt to locate the novel in relation to real, socio-political events. The relationship between a society of people and its “political unconscious” is, of course, psychoanalytic in nature. Jameson observes that “history is *not* a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but [...] an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and [...] our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious” (35). That is to say, for Jameson the manner in which we access history – which is like the Lacanian Real in that it is inaccessible to us “except through its effects on the symbolic” (Homer 50) – is through narrative. This approach and its historical materialist framework allow for the exploration of the minutiae of the characters’ lives in relation to the broader socio-political context. Since the publication of Friedrich Schiller’s *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* in 1794, the notion of the aesthetic, in this case literature, as an integration of private (sensuous) and political (formal) dimensions of experience has been prominent. In the case of *Burger’s Daughter*, these dimensions are the political-symbolic and the human-personal aspects, explored through a fictionalised account of history. As Wilkinson and Willoughby note in their introduction to Schiller’s letters, it is imperative that the aesthetic must “make connexion with the chaos it claimed to conquer, not remain aloof from it” (Schiller xxv). That is, literature must embed itself in the context in which it is set, containing and refracting contemporary ideology. This negative dialectic between literature and history is one of several which the novel explores, and examines the complex interplay between opposing forces without the possibility of synthesis.

The interplay between the apparently vastly separate spheres of the political and the personal is pursued in this chapter through an examination of the intersection between the symbolic and the somatic, that is, an examination of what Lazarus, referencing Williams, refers to as a “structure of feeling” (*Postcolonial Unconscious*, 233). The South African social-political system of the novel’s milieu comprises apartheid structures and organisations, and it is against these that the Burgers and their associates are fighting. The contrasting, anti-racist political ideologies with which they are aligned are informed by the intimate human relationships between people, regardless of race. This means that while their actions are political, and their goals are social, their motivation for these actions and goals is personal and intimate. Part of Rosa’s difficulty in adulthood is learning to live in the social-political order without the nuanced human relationships within which she has been raised. While most children are introduced to the symbolic order during the oedipal phase, Rosa’s experience of

a somatic, interconnected humanness extends into her teens. She remains in a state of stasis in conception of herself, a state which continues to be formed oppositionally, as in the mirror phase, in which her subjectivity remains external to her. She thus preserves a working version of the Lacanian imaginary, partially isolated from the symbolic order. It is only after the death of her father that she begins to realise the uniqueness of her insulated experience under apartheid, which sought precisely to prevent human relationships being formed across racial boundaries. As a result, Rosa struggles to live in South Africa, and it is only by removing herself from a fraught political alignment that she can begin to determine her personal alignments. Rosa has inherited her parents' political ideologies, which she experiences as external forces, unrelated to her intimate experiences. Because she has not come to the social-political stance as they have (that is, through a social, human experience, which drives them to fight for equality), but through socialisation, she does not have the same passionate relationship with the ideology they espouse. In Conrad's words:

being brought up in a house like [her] father's is growing up in a devout family. Perhaps nobody preached Marx or Lenin ... They just lay around the house, leather-bound with gold tooling, in everybody's mind – the family bible. It was all taken in with your breakfast cornflakes. (50)

Rosa has assimilated her parents' ideals into her own, without the motivation that drove them. In order to develop a personal relationship with the ideology she is so familiar with, she must leave. Eventually, she comes back, having independently returned to some of her parents' ideologies, but this time with her own reasons and understanding.

The identity of Burger's daughter, Rosa, is variously constructed in relation to other characters (most obviously, Conrad, Katya and her father, Lionel, though this is by no means exclusive). Her performance of identities in relation to other characters is representative of the social nature of identity, and this chapter explores the nexus between Rosa's independent identity, her family connections, and the country in which she does not "know how to live" (210). Rosa comes to feel alienated from South Africa, because – after attempting to distance herself from her parents' ideology – she can find no comfortable place in the society. She has rejected her parents' social-political approach, but along with it has lost her connection with the human-intimate community in which she has lived. She cannot find an alternative social grouping. Rosa's identity is also shaped by the historical context in which she lives, as well as her interaction with members of her society. As the epigraph – a quote from Claude Lévi-Strauss – suggests, Rosa is "the place in which something has occurred." That Rosa is a 'place' is interesting because it shows her as passive: she has been the recipient of her

parents' socialisation into their political stance. While this is standard for parental relationships, Rosa has foregone the normative rebellion against her parents' beliefs. Nevertheless, she remains submissive in relation to her own life until after her father's death, when she begins to behave self-reflexively.

The chapter will address the novel's socio-historical context, and discuss the manners in which the values of the characters in the novel differ from those of the National Party government that they oppose, and then examine Rosa's relationship with her family, both immediate and extended, and her parents' political associates. It will progress to discussing Rosa's reasons for rejecting the struggle⁴ in which she feels she has been used, her resentment at her parents for depriving her of a 'normal' childhood, and her difficulty in finding alternative means of living in a racially polarised and divided society. The structure of the novel and the manner in which the narrative mimics the dialectic nature of identity is of import. Its tripartite structure – thesis-antithesis-synthesis – replicates the journey Rosa undergoes during the course of the novel. She attempts to find an alternative way of living while cohabiting with Conrad, whose individualism embodies the opposite of the Burgers' communism, after which she makes a more successful attempt to "defect" from her parents' discourse by visiting her father's ex-wife Katya in Nice, and she eventually returns to the identities she sought to evade. On returning to South Africa Rosa resumes the role left to her by her parents, albeit with a sense of herself as an individual, rather than one who exists only in relation to another. The chapter will explore the relationship between Rosa, her family and contemporary society, examine these and related dialectics, and then explore Rosa's development of an identity in relation to various characters.

Oppression and Liberation

The National Party (NP) commenced its rule in 1948, at which point it began implementing apartheid policies, such as the 1949 "Prohibition of Mixed Marriages" Act.⁵ Institutionalised racism was therefore entrenched by the time the novel starts in around 1962, although the NP rule merely enforced a long history of racial inequality that predates even the formation of

⁴While the term 'the struggle' is commonly used to refer to the attempt to overthrow the racist regime of the apartheid government, here it also refers to Rosa's father's dedication to combating the capitalist system.

⁵This act made marriage between people from different racial groups illegal and was followed by the 1957 Immorality Act which prohibited sexual activity between a white person and any person from another racial group.

South Africa. Members of the African National Congress (ANC) had been performing symbolic acts of non-violence in order to express their dissatisfaction with the apartheid government. In 1955, the ANC, the South African Indian Congress, the South African Congress of Democrats and the Coloured Peoples' Congress met in Kliptown for the Congress of the People, at which the Freedom Charter was adopted. The Charter declared the unification of the groups in attendance in opposition to apartheid. It was declared a treasonable document, and 156 Congress Alliance members were tried between 1956 and 1961, although no one was sentenced due to a lack of proof that treason was their intention (Monteith 61). In 1956, several members of the ANC formed a splinter organisation because of their disapproval of the ANC's alignment with organisations which were not African (62). This Pan African Congress retained a policy of non-violence and organised a peaceful protest in 1960, which resulted in the Sharpeville massacre, after which the ANC and PAC, among other organisations, were banned (66).

The ANC then went underground and its militant armed wing, umKhonto weSizwe (MK) continued to implement various acts of sabotage between 1961 and 1963, when the ANC headquarters were raided and the members were arrested (67). They were tried in the Rivonia Treason Trial in which the leaders, including Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and Denis Goldberg, were found guilty. After this, the liberation movements went into exile. The memory of the 1960 Sharpeville massacre was no doubt in the forefront of the United Nation's mind when in its 1962 General Assembly it adopted Resolution 1761, condemning the country's racist policies and calling on UN members to introduce trade sanctions. The ANC's protests continued to employ violent action, and both the ANC and the PAC persisted in exerting pressure on apartheid systems. This was exacerbated by the suppression of members of the organisations, and forced removals around the country, which were increasingly common in the late 1960s. By the mid-1970s, when *Burger's Daughter* is set, the Black Consciousness Movement⁶ had gained momentum, and it had become clear that the

⁶The Black Consciousness Movement formed the ideological structure which provided a trajectory for black action in South Africa. It was influenced by people like Stokely Carmichael, Eldridge Cleaver, Malcolm X, Leopold Sedar Senghor, Frantz Fanon, Julius Nyerere, Kenneth Kaunda, and Kwame Nkrumah (Hirschmann 3). According to its originator, Steve Biko, "Black Consciousness is in essence the realisation by the black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their operation – the blackness of their skin – and to operate as a group in order to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude. It seeks to demonstrate the lie that black is an aberration from the 'normal' which is white. It is a manifestation of a new realisation that by seeking to run away from themselves and to emulate the white man, blacks are insulting the intelligence of whoever created them black. Black Consciousness, therefore, takes cognisance of the deliberateness of God's plan in creating black people black. It seeks to infuse the black community with a new-

black majority was prepared to take increasingly radical steps to combat the historical oppression.

Burger's Daughter, Gordimer's seventh novel, and the one she holds in highest regard (Green 558), was published in 1979. The novel marks Gordimer's "attempt to 'enter' the world of black experience in South Africa while remaining, as she must, a member of a dominant white minority" (545), which indicates a shift from her initial focus in *The Lying Days*, her first novel, in which she has her protagonist witness blackness from the outside. *Burger's Daughter* is "narratively more complex" (558) than her previous works. This is because there are several different narrators who "address themselves to various matching listeners" (559). These narrators include Rosa's different perspectives, which form a kind of dialogue, but are joined by narrators such as Brandt Vermeulen (*Burger* 180) and an implied representative from BOSS, the Bureau of State Security (191).

The Political Family

The novel commences with the protagonist recalling her wait outside prison to give her mother a blanket and hot waterbottle when she was fourteen, which makes the year approximately 1962. The story closes in 1977, and incorporates various socio-political events, such as the Soweto riots of 1976 and the series of arrests on 17 October 1977.

Burger's Daughter is the most overtly political of Gordimer's novels. It incorporates cultural artefacts such as a speech given by Lionel Burger that includes quotations from Nelson Mandela⁷ and also Bram Fischer, upon whom Lionel's character is based (Clingman 192), as well as a replication of the pamphlet distributed by the Soweto Students' Representative Council, which includes spelling errors and grammatical mistakes as in the original. Gordimer chose to include it in its original form because, as she stated, "it expressed more eloquently and honestly than any pamphlet I could have invented, the spirit of the young people who wrote it" (Gordimer in Dugard, quoted in Barrett 116). This assists in the creation of the historically embedded, nuanced world in which Rosa lives.

found pride in themselves, their efforts, their value systems, their culture, their religion and their outlook on life" (Biko 49).

⁷The quotation from Mandela is included in Lionel Burger's speech at his sentencing. He attributes it to "a great African leader who was not a Communist" (25). The quote itself is: "The white man's moral standards in his country can only be judged to the extent to which he has condemned the majority of its population to serfdom and inferiority."

The choice to use Bram Fischer as the basis for Lionel's character is an interesting one. Abram Louis Fischer, widely known as Bram Fischer, was an anti-apartheid activist, advocate, and leader of the South African Communist Party. Additionally, Fischer was an Afrikaner, who gave up his Afrikaans privilege which, in Nelson Mandela's words, showed "a level of courage and sacrifice that was in a class by itself" (341). Fischer led the defence for Mandela and the other accused during the Rivonia Trials. Gordimer's alteration of Bram's legal profession to Lionel's medical one is noteworthy because of the alignment the careers indicate. Fischer's profession is part of the symbolic order, while Burger's is somatic, involving a physical relationship with human bodies. This shift is important because of Lionel's association with somatic, intimate relationships throughout the novel.

Lionel Burger was born in 1905. The narration commences after his death in 1974, although Rosa repeatedly recalls her relationship and interaction with him, and addresses him directly in the last of the three sections into which the novel is divided. He and his wife are loyal Communists and Rosa's interactions are primarily with her "parents' 'family' of associates" (84). Rosa is careful to emphasise the physical intimacy of the relationship between the 'comrades.' She states that "some new term ought to come into being for what I understood, coming back into their presence. It goes beyond friendship, beyond association; beyond family relationship – of course" (113). Their shared ideology lies in their ability to "see the necessity of many" (112) and this unites them more closely than genetic relation could, meaning that her socialisation, while intimate and interpersonal, is also explicitly political. The people who influence her as closely as her family are those who have come together for a political purpose and this informs Rosa's understanding of herself in the world. Nevertheless, although they have united for a political – and therefore symbolic – purpose, their interaction remains rooted in the corporeal life, the somatic experience they share in defiance of apartheid's exclusions.

The Burgers' blood relatives are seen far less frequently than the "associates." Staying at her Uncle Coen and Aunt Velma's house while her parents are detained, Rosa comes to understand why her parents disallowed her "black brother Baasie"⁸ (122) from accompanying her, and she is offered an alternative set of values and identities, those of white South Africans who maintained rather than challenged the *status quo*. She is presented with another

⁸This problematic appellation will be discussed later.

perspective into which she could be socialised. Her aunt and uncle maintain the attitude espoused by Rosa's grandmother, Marie Burger, who was "secure in the sanctions of family, church law – and all these contained in the ultimate sanction of colour, that was maintained without question on the domain, dorp and farm where she lay" (72—3). This is the first time Rosa encounters racial inequality. Unlike at the home to which she is accustomed:

Those who owed love and care to each other could be identified by a simple rule of family resemblance, from the elders enfeebled by vast flesh or wasting to the infant lying creased in the newly-married couple's pram. I saw it every Saturday, this human family defined by white skin. (71)

Here, she "forgot Baasie. It was easy. No one had a friend, brother, bed-mate, sharer of mother and father like him" (*ibid.*). Baasie had, until now, been raised with Rosa and her brother Tony. He and Rosa

had often shared a bed when they were as little as Tony, they scuttled wildly from that particular breed of dog and fought for the anchorage of wet hair on Lionel Burger's warm breast in the cold swimming-pool. Baasie was sent to a grandmother; he did not seem to have another mother (he had Rosa's mother, anyway) and his father, an African National Congress organizer from the Transkei, moved about too much to be able to take care of him. (55)

While staying with her relatives, she meets "old black men or women [who] greeted her as if she were a grown-up" for the first time (58). She is faced with the normative, white, nationalist perception of race endorsed by the governing party, which she does not consider a viable alternative even when she comes to reject her parents' stance. This interruption of Rosa's understanding of the world is akin to an oedipal disruption of the semiotic order. It is as though Rosa has, until now, maintained a pre-oedipal, somatic relationship with the world as a result of her parents' rejection, rather than an enforcement, of the symbolic order. Instead of the symbolic father interrupting the semiotic relationship with the mother, Lionel has maintained the intimate relationship usually associated with the maternal, and it is the Nels who assume the role of introducing Rosa to the normative position of white South Africans at the time. This does not result – as an archetypal interruption of the imaginary order does – in incorporation into the symbolic order, however. She continues to conceive of herself in relation only to her family, who present ideal versions of themselves to the world, thus maintaining, I would suggest, a disposition similar to the mirror phase.

The apartheid government determined identity oppositionally, essentialising the identity of an individual to a single tag, race. The Party with which Rosa's parents are aligned functions in opposition to this dualistic mode of thinking, in terms of their dedication to a non-racial, non-classist society, but simultaneously falls prey to such binary identities. The performed selves they present to the world are their presentation of themselves as apartheid-opposers. This is a

necessary response to the conditions under which they must function, ensuring that no weakness can be perceived and exploited by the apartheid government. The ‘family’ is permanently at risk of being infiltrated by a spy, which is something so common-place as to be recognisable as a ‘type’ of newcomer to the gatherings at Lionel’s home (17). This threat is augmented by the common instance of having an individual who initially wanted to “do something effective – something less self-defeating than charity, for what (euphemism being their natural means of expression) they call ‘race relations’” (84) turn state witness (85). This is visible in their response to Katya, whom they expel from the party for having “innocently let slip the servant girl had blancoed [her shoes] for [her]” (247), as well as when Rosa describes the family’s associates “behaving as Lionel Burger would expect, as he would do himself in their situation” (33) on Lionel’s first night in prison. This performance of a public self is something with which Rosa begins to struggle as an adult, because she lacks the drive that comes from direct dedication to the struggle, and decides instead to pursue a personal life. That is, where devoted individuals like her parents have the motivation to maintain these ideal public selves, Rosa longs to live independently of the social responsibilities with which she has been raised, so that she can “live a personal, private life” (Gordimer, “What the Book is About,” 149). Her relationship with Conrad begins this process, which is furthered by the time she spends under Katya’s influence. Ultimately, though, Rosa must determine her own location in relation to others and her social context.

The Burgers live in opposition to the national political unconscious which enforces race and class divisions.⁹ They subvert these divisions as on the occasion of her mother’s release, and Tony and Rosa’s return to their home:

there was a party, then, more joyous than any wedding, cathartic than any wake, triumphant than any *stryddag*¹⁰ held by the farmers of the Nel’s district in celebration of the white man’s power, the heritage of his people that Lionel Burger betrayed. (61)

This is a refutation of the view of Rosa’s lover Conrad, who sees “that house” as a place of “*intention*” (50, italics in original) and a place where people “came together to make a revolution” (*ibid.*). It is not, as Conrad believes, a place of politics exclusively, but is also a place of celebrations and joys. Indeed, the two are inseparable. Rosa states that, “[f]or us – coming from that house – that was the real definition of loneliness: to live without social

⁹ However, if the political unconscious is taken to represent the social-political order of all people living in South Africa, rather than those to whom the government ascribes rights, it would then be indicative of the political turmoil of which the Burgers are part.

¹⁰ ‘conflict day’

responsibility” (77). She suggests that Conrad was drawn to “Lionel Burger’s empty house” on the night of Lionel’s “first night without the privileges of an awaiting-trial prisoner” because he “had a sense of wonder” about the “bravado and sentiment in the confidence of the room full of people” (33). But Conrad is present only as an observer. He does not align himself with the commitments of those about whom he is curious and often critical: the inhabitants and associates of the Burger home which he refers to as “that house.” He observes in a conversation with Rosa:

the people who came to your house weren’t there for tea-parties with your mother or bridge evenings with cigars. They weren’t your father’s golf-playing fellow-doctors or ladies your mother went shopping with, ay? – They came together to make a revolution. That was ordinary to you. That – *intention*. It was ordinary. (50)

His remarks cause Rosa to consider her position in the society and the fact that she does not occupy a normative role. His approach is intellectual, cerebral, and does not allow for the nuanced, somatic experience of the ‘associates.’ He understands the world through a social-political framework, and locates himself as an individual, rather than part of a community. His influence causes Rosa to begin to examine her symbolic place in the world. While among her ‘family’ of associates, her actions are considered the norm, in the rest of the country, their activities are unusual. Rosa becomes increasingly self-reflexive under Conrad’s influence.

Rosa differentiates her immediate family’s opinions about race from those of the Nels, and other “racialists.” Despite the physical sense of solidarity, the Burgers are wary of seeing blackness as “a sensual redemption, as romantics do, or of perceiving fears, as racialists do. In my father’s house, the one was seen as the obverse of the other, two sides of false consciousness” (135). Rosa admits, though, that indeed “in that house blackness was a sensuous-redemptive means of perception. Through blackness is revealed the way to the future” (*ibid.*). But they are saved from romanticising this by their appreciation of the thinking of the Black Consciousness Movement. They are entirely comfortable with the idea that the

descendants of Chaka, Dingane, Hintsa, Sandile, Moshesh, Cetewayo, Msilekazi and Sekukini are the only ones who can get us there [to the future]; the spirit of Makana is on Robben Island as an intercessor to Lenin. (*ibid.*)

That the Burgers’ relationship with black people is not one of theoretical composition only is evident in the following observation:

people in that house had a connection with blacks that was completely personal. In this way, their Communism was the antithesis of anti-individualism. The connection was something no other whites ever had in quite the same way. A connection without reservations on the part of blacks or whites. The political activities and attitudes of that house came from the inside outwards, and blacks in that house where there was no God felt this embrace before the Cross. At last there was nothing between this skin

and that. At last nothing between the white man's word and his deed; spluttering the same water together in the swimming-pool, going to prison after the same indictment: it was a human conspiracy, above all other kinds. (172)

The Burgers' attitude to race is, in short, the antithesis of the apartheid ideology. People – regardless of their race – are recognised as individuals who come together for the common cause of a revolution to bring about racial and class equality.¹¹ It is for this reason that Gordimer's novel was initially published only in England, in expectation of a forthcoming ban as it “contains various anti-white sentiments” (J.C.W Van Rooyen, quoted in Coetzee 12). An example of such a sentiment is Rosa's statement that it is

[w]hites, not blacks, [who] are ultimately responsible for everything blacks suffer and hate, even at the hands of their own people; a white must accept this if he concedes any responsibility at all. If he feels guilty, he is a liberal; in that house where I grew up there was no guilt because it was believed it was as a ruling class and not a colour that whites assumed responsibility. It wasn't something bleached into the flesh. (161)

By virtue of her family's position, Rosa's position within society is that of an outsider, an other. She represents a threat to society at large, as did the novel itself at the time of its publication. She is a threat because of her socialisation but also because of her choices. It is important that even when Rosa challenges elements of her parents' ideologies, she is not tempted by Brandt Vermeulen's individualist justifications of his scientific racism. He is working towards “ethnic advancement, separate freedoms, multilateral development, plural democracy” (194) which Rosa dismisses in favour of “Peace. Land. Bread. But Brandt knows only the long words” (*ibid.*). Rosa remains opposed to the racist ideologies which Vermeulen espouses and continues to assert Marxist ideologies as at Fats' place, where she asks Dhladhla if he “ignore[s] the capitalist system by which [he is] oppressed racially?” (163). However, she is determined to assert an identity independently of her parents, their associates, and their ideologies.

In spite of Rosa's assertion that the relationship between comrades “goes beyond friendship, beyond association; beyond family relationship” (113), it is to her immediate family that she feels bound. When her father, her last living relative, dies, she considers herself “free” (40). She is not part of the family of activist camaraderie because she is unlike the others who “had the connection because they believed it possible” (172). Rosa differs from her father and the rest of her political ‘family’ because she is disillusioned by the failures that the Communist

¹¹At least, this simple division appears at first to be true. Later in the novel, when Rosa reenounters Zwelinzima (Baasie), he challenges her perceptions. He asserts that the Burgers used him to serve a political purpose rather than taking him in for any altruistic purpose.

Party and its devotees have faced thus far, and lacks the motivation which drives them. She does not share her father's eternal optimism about "[t]he future he was living for until the day he died" (126, italics in original). Rosa has not chosen a communist identity for herself and therefore cannot devote herself to it in the same way her parents and their comrades have done. As a result of her upbringing in a "completely personal" environment (172) – that is, an intimate-human environment – she has not experienced the necessity for the comrades' action against the apartheid social-political order. For Rosa, their action is ideologically motivated. She has not experienced the normative, social mode and, as a result, cannot know the need for such action.

"That House"

Rosa Burger has a very complicated relationship with her parents. Her main – often her only – identity tag "Burger's daughter" is dependent on her father's identity, which is, admittedly, rather overwhelming. Lionel Burger is a medical doctor, a Marxist, and an anti-apartheid activist, at a time when this was a dangerous thing to be, even as a privileged white. Her identity is also intrinsically bound to South African politics. She was born in May 1948, the month in which the National Party came to power. Rosa states that she knows Conrad "dislike[s her] habit of naming private events with public date, but public events so often are decisive ones in [her] life" (194), an example of which is Rosa's much later detention on 19 October 1977, a day on which "[a] great many people were detained, arrested or banned [...] many organisations and the only national black newspaper were banned" (353). This intersection of the personal and the political is significant, as the important moments in the political unconscious resonate with the personal ones in Rosa's life. Her difficulty mediating between the intimate-human and social-political realms is occasionally overcome by her apparent alignment with the nation itself. Rosa's name is an amalgamation of the political and family: she is named after Rosa Luxemburg¹² and her grandmother, Marie Burger. She is, accordingly, at the intersection of the Burgers' family history, and the political history of Communism. The family's surname is also of import. As Rosa tells Baasie, her surname means "solid citizen" (318). It is Lionel Burger rather than Rosa to whom this title is initially relevant, but Rosa comes to adopt the position as a stalwart participant in the struggle, a 'solid citizen' who strives for equality.

¹² Rosa Luxemburg was a Marxist theorist who was murdered as a result of her involvement with Marxism in Germany in 1919.

The Burgers are indefatigable in their devotion to the struggle as well as to assisting others where they can. They remain unperturbed by adverse circumstances. Rosa attempts to replicate this almost stoic response and appears to succeed until she later rejects her parents' ideology after their deaths. The turning point comes when she witnesses the death of a tramp. She states that "[t]here had been deaths in my father's house but the death of a tramp in the park was in a sense the first for me" (77). Even the death of her brother, who drowned as a child after Rosa had warned him "not to show off and dive" (63), is recounted less emotionally than the death of this stranger. It appears that she has imitated her parents' rational functional responses to traumas, but now, after her father's death, is free to experience an emotional response to mortality. This is important because it indicates that Rosa has become more concerned with her sensitivity even before her exposure to what Karen Halil calls the "pre-Oedipal realm" of Katya's influence (7). That she is able to reject her socialisation in favour of her intrinsic emotional response shows that her identity has not been entirely determined by her socialisation. The binary of Conrad's liberal individualism and her family's historical determinism is overcome by her reflexivity. She is not constrained to act in accordance with either liberal individualism or historical determining but instead asserts her agency as a subject who *decides*.

Rosa has, understandably, found it difficult to form an independent identity, particularly as both of her parents – heavily involved in the anti-apartheid struggle – have expediently used her, and various other people, to further their goals of attaining politically enfranchised equality. An example of Rosa being used by her parents is her forced pseudo-engagement to Noel de Witt, whereby she is allowed visiting rights to him in prison. In this way, she is used to convey communication between her parents, Lionel and Cathy, and the prisoner. Her identity is negated by the role she has to play. She becomes a tool through which Noel and her parents are connected rather than having any subjective role in her interactions with de Witt. Her resentment at being used is exacerbated by her genuine, unexpressed affection for De Witt. She states that she "didn't know, ever, whether [she] had succeeded in writing with the effect of a pretence (for him to read as such) what [she] really felt about Noel so tenderly and passionately" (66). Her anger is directed also at her mother who, "[i]f she saw, realized – and at least she might have considered the possibility – she didn't choose to see" Rosa's authentic feelings for De Witt (*ibid.*). She is angrier however at her father, "Lionel Burger,

knowing, as he did, without question, [she] would do what had to be done” (*ibid.*). As Rosa always has done, she did

what was expected. I was not a fake. Once a month I sat as they had sent me to take their messages and receive his, a female presented to him with the smiling mouth, the gazing yet evasive eyes, the breasts drooped a little as she hunched forward, a flower standing for what lies in her lap. (*Burger* 68)

Rosa, as young as she is, conflates the symbolic, political act with the sensibilities of an affective-corporeal experience. She cannot separate her usefulness from genuine attachment to De Witt. Her parents, who have raised her in the intimate space of their house, irrationally expect her to be able to separate her emotion from the intimacy of the pseudo-engagement. It is while living with Conrad that Rosa comes to be aware of these repressed feelings of resentment when he draws attention to what he calls “that house” and its happenings (53). He points out how Rosa and her family differ from the rest of South Africa. Rosa is unable to reject his appellation and is “brought up short by her own use of the definition ‘that house,’ distancing the private enclosures of her being” (54). Conrad’s analytic approach has affected her in spite of her claim that she “could not be reached by someone like him” (46). He has exposed her to the symbolic order outside of the emotional and political drive of ‘that house,’ and shaken her out of the imaginary order she has hereto occupied. He functions as a symbolic father, in that he causes her to locate herself in a symbolic and historical context and to construct herself as an individual subject, instead of as an extension and part of her parents’ goals.

She comes to resent having been used as a tool in a struggle she does not consider her own: she has learnt the ideology

on the same level at which [...] children learn to eat with a knife and fork, go to church if their parents do, use the forms of address by which their parents’ attitudes – respect, disapproval, envy, whatever – towards people are expressed. (50)

It is typically these attitudes against which children rebel during adolescence. Rosa has, however, not rebelled during puberty as she has been employed in the struggle by her parents. Her personal development has been delayed as a result of her parents’ politicised lives. The political ideologies which drive her parents have been reduced to the level of the “natural and personal by the time they reached [her]” (*ibid.*). She does not know the extent of the power of the political unconscious which drives her parents and their associates. She lacks the motivation because the political struggle is the norm for her. Rosa maintains – until her father’s death – a pre-pubescent attitude. She has not rebelled or asserted an independent identity but has always done what is expected of her, as her parents, dedicated struggle-

participants, had taught her. Rosa realises that she and her family “belonged to other people. [She] must have accepted that, too, very young, in that house. [...] And other people belonged to [them]” (84). A poignant example of this is Rosa’s delivery of “a green eiderdown quilt and [...] a red hot-water bottle” (9) to her mother in prison, while her father

had put others’ plight before his own, and had been tirelessly busy ever since his own wife had been taken in the early hours of the morning, going from police station to police station, trying to establish for helpless African families where their people were being held. But he knew that his schoolgirl daughter could be counted on in this family totally united in and dedicated to the struggle. (12, italics in original)

This is all the more poignant by the inclusion of the information that Rosa is experiencing “the peculiar fierce concentration of the body’s forces in the menstruation of early puberty” (15). Although she is only fourteen, she is expected to assume the function of an adult. She, an immature child-woman, waits outside the prison as an adult, alongside adults, but she is tautly aware of her body. She states that she is “within that monthly crisis of destruction, the purging, tearing, draining of [her] own structure. [She is her] womb, and a year ago [she] wasn’t aware – physically – that [she] had one” (16). Her adolescent corporeal experience is one shared with young girls her age, yet she is expected to be ready to assume the responsibility of an adult. She longs to be like “[o]ther people” who “break away” from their parents to “live completely different lives” (127).

It is thus with embarrassed relief that she finds herself responding to the news of her father’s death: “[n]ow [she is] free” (40) to explore her own identity in order to discover who she truly is without the overpowering political influence of her parents. It is for this reason that she refuses to help Clare Terblanche, the daughter of her parents’ comrades and Rosa’s contemporary, to photocopy documents to further the political cause at her place of work. Rosa can see no point in continuing what she considers her parents’ futile struggle against the capitalist patriarchy. She has exhausted her motivation for a campaign in which

There is nothing but failure, until the day the Future is achieved. It is the only success. Others – in campaigns with specific objectives, against the pass laws, against forced dispossession of land – would lead to piecemeal reforms. These actions fail one after another, they have failed since before we were born; failures were the events of our childhood, failures are the normal circumstances in our adulthood – her parents under house arrest, my father dead in jail, my courting done in the prison visiting room. In this experience of being crushed on individual issues the masses come, as they can in no other way, to understand that there is no other way: state power must be overthrown. Failure is the accumulated heritage of resistance without which there is no revolution. (125)

She claims that she does not “know how to live in Lionel’s country” (210), in which it is impossible to remain apolitical, and begins going about finding a route out of it. She has applied for a passport previously but was rejected because she is her “father’s daughter” (62)

and is therefore identified, “named,” and thus watched, as a Communist, which has, in turn, restricted her from making the “associations and movements she would most desire” (173). Her opportunities to be herself have thus been limited by her parents’ political actions in which she has been involved. She is assumed to share her parents’ views and thus has had her freedoms removed. The most obvious example of these is the state’s refusal to grant her a passport. On this occasion, she must use the skill of persuasion she inherited from her mother, who used it amongst other things to accumulate the services of useful, unnamed people as couriers, to persuade Brandt Vermeulen, in an episode resembling a perverse seduction, to assist her in acquiring a passport.

Vermeulen is an Afrikaner nationalist whose politics are the antithesis of those of the Burgers’. His ideals are separatist – seeking to maintain the apartheid mantra of “separate but equal” (Eastman 10). This means that Rosa is, quite literally, consorting with her inherited enemy. He agrees to help Rosa on condition

that she would contact no one who counted, abroad; she would not even go to Holland or Scandinavia, where anti-apartheid and Freedom Fighter support groups were most active, and her Communist background effectively debarred her from the United States, where black American lobbies would have sought support for economic boycotts. (95)

After a few meetings, the passport is hers and she is free to leave the country. She is, however, uncertain that she wants to do so. South Africa is the only place she has ever known, and she includes herself in the rejection of the institutionalised racism in her statement that “[o]ur kind repudiates ethnic partitioning of the country” (112). She retains the socialisation she received from her parents and so, although she has rejected their ideologies, and has “lost connection” (172), she does not reject their desire for political involvement. A desire to change the *status quo*, which includes inequality, is part of her identity.

The Liberal Dilemma

Before Rosa decides to leave, she gives participation in South African society a last chance. She is persuaded by Flora Donaldson, a family friend and ‘associate,’ to attend an illegal women’s meeting, attended by both black and white women. Rosa is disheartened by a white woman’s protestation that “[w]e don’t need to bring politics [meaning race] into the fellowship of women” (231). The narration implies a perception of the misunderstanding on the woman’s part, as she believes that it is possible to discuss women’s issues without engaging with the topic of race. In other words, the woman is willing to acknowledge that

women are oppressed, but cannot recognise the intersection of oppressions, by which I mean to say that she cannot see the similarity between the oppression she perceives all women to be subject to – in the form of sexism – and the further oppression perpetuated against black women – that is, racism. The black women, on the other hand,

were complaining, opportuning for the crèches, orphans, blind, crippled or aged of their 'place'. -They had asked for 'old' cots, 'old' school primers, 'old' toys and furniture, 'old' braille typewriters, 'old' building material. They had come through the front door but the logic was still of the back door. They didn't believe they'd get anything but what was cast-off; they didn't, any of them, believe there was anything else to be had from white women, it was all they were good for. (203)

Their appeals, born of the poverty apartheid has engineered, are directed at the white women's sense of compassion, at their humanity, rather than at their sense of political justice. The women fail to recognise the fundamental differences in the possible identities they can adopt because of their race, and to acknowledge the impact of apartheid on both black and white women's identities. No one at the meeting can offer Rosa the possibility of tangible change she requires as an alternative to her parents' communism and their rejection of South African forms of capitalist governance.

Dorothy Driver states that while Gordimer is aware of "the metaphorical relation between sexism and racism [...] [she] makes the apparent common ground *dependency* rather than oppression, and thus is somewhat less sympathetic towards white women" (Driver 46, italics added), and this is apparently a characteristic which Rosa shares. The primary focus is therefore on the effects of racial oppression. Rosa seeks an alternative route to 'the future' via the women's movement but is disappointed by the forward-thinking gender movement functioning entirely *within* the racial structure. The white women choose to falsely separate 'politics' from 'the fellowship of women;' the black women, on the other hand, are unable to escape the "back door" logic, which, without political conscientisation, such as the Black Consciousness Movement, confines them to the role of second-class citizens. The narrator states that they "had come through the front door but their logic was still of the back door" (203), indicating the extent to which they have internalised the state's racist ideologies. The 'fellowship of women' is prevented from being actualised by racial inequality even if the women themselves do not see it: the 'fellowship' can offer only token sympathies and cast-off goods rather than empowerment for any of the women. Their failure to recognise the extent of the patriarchal oppression – racially and sexually – prevents their attempts to create even a symbolic space of equality from being successful. The women want to work within the contemporary political system, which Rosa, as someone accustomed to a more nuanced,

human understanding of politics, cannot accept.

Rosa therefore decides that a women's movement cannot offer her the kind of satisfaction that she wants, but she does not give up hope of finding the possibility of a 'future' in South Africa until she witnesses violence against a donkey. She wants to prevent the black owner from beating it and would, quite simply – as a white person in South Africa – wield the authority to do so. However, she refuses to assume the racial archetype, and eventually moves off without intervening. She is motivated by her compassion for the animal, but acknowledges the power she wields, so her actions then are political even when her motivations are not. The incident, as Louise Yelin notes, highlights the fact “that apartheid affects women and men differently” because “[a]lthough we first see the group of ‘donkey, cart, driver, and people behind him’ as ‘a single object,’ we soon recognise that black women and children [who are initially invisible] are doubly victims of apartheid” (229). However, Gordimer “eschews an essentialist conception of sex and gender: in this episode, she deconstructs the identification of Woman as victim with inert or subjugated nature” (*ibid.*). Here, Rosa's capacity to act is not determined or constrained by her gender. This ability to act is however necessarily a part of her whiteness, which is the reason for the apparently unbreachable division between the white and black women at the meeting.

That said, Gordimer's inclination to emphasise racial rather than gendered inequality is clear. She has gone so far as to state in an interview that “[t]he feminist battle must come [after the racial struggle]” (Gardner 33). While the racial imbalance in power is addressed directly, gender inequality is more subtly acknowledged. Rosa mentions that her mother “thought too many people in our country who cared for animals had no care for people – she herself had none over, for beasts” (196). Rosa – always “Burger's daughter” – is like Lionel who “loved animals almost sentimentally” (*ibid.*). The violence against the donkey and the violence perpetrated against the man by apartheid are not unrelated, of course – it is systemic and Rosa decides that her isolated intervention will do no good. To Rosa, the donkey's owner is himself a victim of an inherently violent system of governance. Rosa feels that she cannot interfere because she knows that, although the man is personally responsible for his cruelty, he abuses because he is abused by the apartheid system, and she feels compassion for him as well as for the animal. Rosa states that she does not “know at what point to intercede makes sense, for [her]” (209). She struggles with her (in)action:

I couldn't bear to see myself – her – Rosa Burger – as one of those whites who can care more for animals than people. Since I've been free [of her obligation, after her father's death], I'm free to become one. [...]
Nothing and nobody stopped me from using that passport. After the donkey I couldn't stop myself. I don't know how to live in Lionel's country. (210)

She is inhibited from acting because she knows that, although she is right in wanting to stop the man, if she does so, he will be punished by a system that will not take into account the challenging circumstances by which he came to that situation. She notes that she “didn't do anything” (209): unsure of how she ought to act, she chooses *not* to act. Rosa refuses to conform to the stereotype of the ‘white liberal’ and thereby asserts an identity in opposition to that which she has rejected. This is evident again when, in Paris, Rosa catches the hand of a thief in her bag in a crowd. She is determined to note that it was the “ordinary matter of pickpocket and victim, that's all, nothing but a stupid tourist with a bag, deserving to be discovered” (233). She acknowledges that “[i]f he hadn't been black he might have succeeded in looking like everybody else [...]. But the face could not deny in anonymous confusion with like faces. He was what he was. I was what I was, and we had found each other” (*ibid.*). In her determination to deny the possibility of a racialised understanding of the situation, and in her mind, align herself with a racist conception, she refuses to assume the role of the white person accusing a black person of theft. Instead, she “let go. [She] let him go. He couldn't run” (234).

This incident is important also because Rosa states that “he had felt for leather, and come up with the address book in which, anyway, I have been trained to record nothing more valuable than the whereabouts of hotels and American Express offices” (*ibid.*). To Rosa, ‘trained’ as she has been, this incident suggests that someone is watching her and that this man's intentions are more sinister than the “ordinary matter of pickpocket and victim” (233), in spite of her evident attempt to convince herself otherwise. She chooses to ignore this incident, and to react as someone to whom the only possible explanation of this encounter is attempted theft (rather than acknowledge the possibility that it signifies something more sinister), although she appears uncertain about this choice. This is evident when she “told a man she had never met before and probably would never meet again her version of an incident in Paris when a man tried to steal money from her bag” (265). As he does not understand the rigorous training she has been subjected to by her parents, he comes to a conclusion which, for him, is the only possibility. His repetitions – “[a] pickpocket. Poor devil. [...] A black man” (*ibid.*) – are his attempts to provide her with the understanding she desires in spite of her having told

him that she “thought someone else might be keeping an eye on what [she] was doing” (*ibid.*).

She attempts to explain her concerns to her lover Bernard Chabaliar:

If you are followed by policemen you get used to it, so do they. You know whether they fall asleep waiting for you and whether they slip away at regular times for a beer. I’ve known them since I was a child. But in a foreign town, it wouldn’t have been so easy to recognize one. I don’t know the sort of person who’d do the work, here – the kind of clothes, the haircut. (268)

She is constrained by her parents’ training to react as a political subversive must, even once she has discarded her direct associations to the political because she is aware that she may still be considered suspicious, still be ‘named,’ and that she therefore must avoid subversion or risk being found out (173). Rosa is, in spite of her desire to escape the appellation, still ‘Burger’s daughter’ to the South African government and is thus subject to the same observation that her father was. Her identity, as conceived by the government at least, has not shifted, despite her efforts to stop being “Burger’s daughter.” Her identity as intersubjective because, regardless of Rosa’s desires and actions, she continues to represent a threat to the state and is accordingly treated as such. This level of symbolic intersubjectivity is nevertheless rendered in a corporeal way, through bodily recognition of appearance and behaviour.

The Dialectic of Identity

The structure of the novel – in three parts, each of which is directed to someone in Rosa’s life, namely Conrad, Katya and Lionel – is of importance. The narrative addresses each of these characters directly. On discovering that Conrad is dead, Rosa states: “I may have been talking to a dead man: only to myself” (210). In its structure, the novel imitates the way in which identity is constructed relationally and as an address: identity is necessarily intersubjective as it relies on selective inclusion and exclusion. The subject, then, is formed *in relation to* an other. Rosa’s addresses follow this pattern in that her identity is ultimately asserted through her engagement with each of the addressed. But an identity is also asserted in a context in which the conditions of possibility are predetermined. That is, the dialogue in which an identity is formed occurs in a space in which the dynamics of that relationship are limited. Identity is provisional and shifts in relation to these dynamics and dialogues, determined by the social symbolic. Rosa initially struggles to conceptualise the symbolic restraints on her relationships because her lived experience has been isolated in the ideal

space that Lionel and the 'family' have created. With Conrad, she realises her isolation, and is exposed to his rigid understanding of the symbolic order and the place of individuals within it. In Nice, Katya demonstrates a lifestyle which is entirely personal, and in many ways similar to the atmosphere in 'that house' in terms of the human connectedness between Katya and her friends. The difference is the motivation: while political motivation inspires the 'associates,' Katya lives a selfish life. Rosa eventually rediscovers a politicised understanding of herself, and goes back to South Africa, where she assumes a complex and nuanced position, having reached a compromise or integration of her personal and political aspirations.

As Dominic Head succinctly notes, it has been suggested that the novel's structure divides it into a "tripartite organisation of thesis-antithesis-synthesis" (122) wherein Rosa acknowledges her political stance, which is challenged, and then accepted once Rosa chooses to adopt the position her parents have left her. As Gordimer has stated, "[t]he theme of [the] [...] novel is human conflict between the desire to live a personal, private life, and the rival claim of social responsibility to one's fellow men" (Gordimer, "What the Book is About," 149). Although the "notion of a 'synthesis' in the working out of Rosa's commitment is helpful in one sense, because it locates the novel's focus and the nature of its central debate" (Head 113), the novel is more complex than this formulation allows. As Head explains,

Rosa's career is not as programmatic as the thesis-antithesis-synthesis model might suggest: the dialectic involves vacillation and uncertainty, and Rosa's synthesis' establishes an unfixed and potentially changeable response, one deemed appropriate to a particular historical situation. The search for the terms of the new commitment does involve the fundamental elements which [Richard] Peck suggests are opposed in the dialectic: private/public, and future/present, for example. But there is no real binary opposition in the way these elements are considered since the dialectical interaction is complex. (113—4)

These apparent dialectics are without a final synthesis, which makes them negative dialectics. The impossibility is important, because it denies the feasibility of resolution for Rosa. As in the world, the possibility of synthesis in the novel is precluded. This interrelationship is therefore more important than any supposed resolution in the structure of the novel.

Other important negative dialectics include the relationship between the social-political and intimate-human realms, which Rosa has trouble negotiating. Additionally, the novel addresses complex, divergent ideas, including those Head mentions above, with which Rosa struggles. As a work of literature, the novel occupies an interesting position in relation to the formal ideas it presents and the lived experience of the characters. That is, a novel has a unique

capacity to engage with the interrelationship between the elements of ‘structures of feeling.’ Gordimer’s use of real documents and people (or derivations thereof) further convolutes the complexity of this dialectic, because the relationship between history and fiction is blurred. This complicated relationship is rendered visible in the nuances of the text. The novel assumes the contemporary society’s political unconscious in that it replicates the conditions of possibility for the characters. This is discernible in the kinds of language used, as well as the incidents which occur, which are determined by the social context.

As all elements of identity are constituted of a variety of factors, so is Rosa’s identity refracted and restructured by her interactions with others, and in relation to the historical context in which she exists. As Elli P. Schacter and Jonathan J. Ventura note, “development can only be understood by incorporating in its subject of study a context that is broader than the development. [Bronfenbrenner, the forerunner of a developmental understanding] described development as always occurring within multiple concentric levels of context that are continuously in interaction with the individual and among themselves” (450). In this study, similar concentric circles are used to locate the characters in relation to their families, the societies in which the families occur, and the historical context which informs those societies, as well as the interplay between these circles. Rosa’s identity is determined by her family’s allegiances, which are in turn constructed in opposition to the normative social and political discourse, which follows from a settler-colonial history that constructed a hierarchical conception of race.

Head further states that the several ways in which Rosa’s identity is constructed throughout the novel

is demonstrated both by the problematic narrative perspective, and by (what now seems the deliberate) obfuscation of the overall dialectical structure [in that the narrator-Rosa’s perspective shifts during the text]. The essential point is that personal identity must be appropriately constructed in a given context and in relation to given discursive practices. (122)

Rosa’s exploration of her relationship with her ‘given context’ is important in terms of the historical context, but also because she seems distanced from the political discourse by her family’s involvement in it, and, in attempting to disengage from her family, initially distances herself from political action as well. Her understanding of herself develops in relation to the trajectory of the novel, mostly in terms of Conrad, Katya and Lionel’s sections, but also in terms of other more nuanced shifts which also occur relative to other characters, such as Brandt Vermeulen or Clare Terblanche. The discursive nature of identity is made visible by

the ways in which Rosa changes as a result of these dialogical interactions. An example of this is that Rosa's eventual decision to return to physiotherapy is brought about by her volunteering to help Katya's friend Georges with a muscular pain in his leg.

As Head explains, *Burger's Daughter* sets up what appears to be a Hegelian dialectic in its tripartite structure, and then subverts the form by preventing the required synthesis from occurring by disrupting the chronological order of the narrative perspective (122), thus creating a negative dialectic. The possibility of a complete synthesis is undermined by the continued existence of the apartheid government, which Rosa continues to act against, as well as the possibility of so perfect a synthesis, which is prevented by her existence in a necessarily complicated and nuanced world. Rosa has realised the relationship between her identity and her subjectivity. She has rejected the possibility proffered by Conrad of a liberal individualist subjectivity. He states that his "fantasies and obsessions [...] [are] the form in which the question of [his] own existence is being put to him" (47). Rosa is unable to dismiss the embodied, interactive, community-directed, Communist perspective with which she has been raised, and calls Conrad's theoretical response to trauma, which is to "pull the world down round [his] ears," "pretty useless" (54). He states that "[w]hen [he] feel[s], there's no 'we', only 'I'" (52). Conrad allows the existential human experience, which is necessarily in isolation, to overwhelm him, while Rosa's communal upbringing has led her to believe that this is selfish and unengaged. This shows naivety on her part, in terms of a belief in the possibility of a completely synthesised human community without accounting for the necessary solitariness of human life, as experienced by a discrete being. The dialectic of 'I' and 'we' is not resolvable, however. While Conrad is correct in asserting a subject's necessary independence, Rosa's sense of collective responsibility is required for a functioning intersubjectivity and therefore society. Rosa initially rejects Conrad's stance outright, but comes to act in her own interests when she goes to France. She eventually returns to South Africa with a more nuanced sense of herself, and a renewed dedication to the struggle.

Rosa's initial intersubjective conception of herself is reflected in the manner in which Rosa's identity is refracted through and shaped by the people around her, as well as enacted in the directed nature of the narrative. Rosa's subjectivity is relational because it is dependent on its address *to* an other. As Bakhtin observes, "we can never see ourselves as a whole; the *other* is necessary to accomplish [...] a perception of the self that the individual can achieve only partially with respect to himself" (Todorov 95). Rosa affirms this position in her statement

that “[o]ne is never talking to oneself, always one is addressed to someone. Suddenly, without knowing the reason, at different stages in one’s life, one is addressing this person or that all the time, even dreams are performed before an audience” (16). Rosa performs her identity for an observer: this is true firstly in the directed narration, and secondly in the textual aspect of the novel. That is to say, all narrative is performative, and Rosa acknowledges this when she articulates the contrasts between her “version and theirs [the government’s]. And if this were being written down, both would seem equally concocted when read over” (17). Rosa is aware of the way in which she is perceived, and knows that her understanding of herself differs vastly from perceptions of her. This is especially so in respect of the government’s perspective but is true even in respect of those closest to her, like Conrad and her ‘family’ of associates.

Burger’s Daughter explores Rosa’s refusal of both the Marxist determinism into which she has been socialised and the liberal individualism that is presented to her as an alternative by Conrad and also by Katya, who asserts *her* identity so intentionally that, under Rosa’s eyes, the person who had been Madame Bagnelli “became Katya” (267). By the third section of the novel, Rosa has come to accept that “[n]o one can defect” (332). She knows that she will never escape the identity tag of “Burger’s daughter” and has come to accept that. Although she is “living like anyone else,” by which she means like one not involved in the political struggle, she is simultaneously attempting to be like her parents and “the faithful [who] never limited [them]selves to being like anyone else” (*ibid.*). Rosa’s identity is necessarily intersubjective and is therefore not in her control – this position is unchanged from when Conrad observes that she has “grown up entirely through other people” (46), but she has accepted that she is part of her father’s legacy, which is clear in her prison letter to Madame Bagnelli. It includes “a reference to a watermark of light that came into the cell at sundown every evening, reflected from some west-facing surface outside; something Lionel Burger once mentioned” (361). Rosa comes to inhabit not only a prison cell, like her father, but also his attitude and perceptions.

Rather than allowing her story to be composed of binaries, Rosa takes note of oppositions (such as her identity being constructed by either Marxist determinism or liberal individualism) and subverts them: both her parents’ ideologies and the assertions of Conrad, as well as others who attempt to offer her alternatives, are assimilated in constructing an identity Rosa is willing to assert. By the time Rosa is imprisoned, she is content to be

Burger's daughter, with all that it entails. She has, however, become a person in her own right: she is no longer dependent on her parents and no longer feels the need to direct her attention to her socialisation. Her identity has been moulded by her parents, but through her self-reflexivity she is able to escape feeling psychologically determined by them. In Kristévan terms, she has created a frame in which she can unify the embodied, semiotic and political, symbolic spheres of herself. This is clear in her elision of the mention of a realignment with the Communist Party, although her name and genetics are enough evidence for her to be retained along with Clare Terblanche and Marisa Kgosana.

A Lovers' Discourse

The first part of Rosa's narration is directed at Conrad, a deceased former lover with whom Rosa had lived. His ideas about identity and its formation are academic and oriented to the conceptual and symbolic, but Rosa calls him out on his "navel-fluff-picking hunt for 'individual destiny'" (62). His identity is formed as though following psychoanalytic theories of identity, down to the oedipal longing for his mother during early puberty (*ibid.*), and he acknowledges as much in his question "[w]hat does Oedipus do about two rivals?" (44). He believes that he is in control of his own life, as evidenced by his philosophy that "[y]ou commit the great blasphemy against all doctrine and you begin to live" (47), but asserts (correctly) that Rosa will end up in prison in spite of her determination to avoid her inherited destiny. His academic, onanistic, ruggedly individualist philosophy offers Rosa an alternative to her father's Marxism, but in Conrad's eyes, she "could not be visualised as leaving, living any other life than the one necessity – political necessity? – had made from [her] so far" (62). Conrad is fascinated by the physically close, humanist experiences of the Burgers and their associates, but remains entrenched in the symbolic of individualism. He does not physically challenge the normative apartheid position, preferring to distance himself from it verbally.

It is Conrad's philosophy against which Rosa rages, as he sees her as simply an extension of her father's will. He states that to "the Lionel Burgers of this world – personal horrors and political ones are the same to you. You lived through them all. On the same level" (42). He essentialises Rosa's existence by assimilating it into her father's and is unable to see why the Rosa he assumes she is can be capable of "[s]inging under [her] breath. Picking flowers" (*ibid.*). She is unable to offer a better explanation of her behaviour than, "[n]othing more than animal survival, perhaps" (*ibid.*). Her appreciation of the nuanced affective, metonymic

aspects of her life are inexplicable to him, concerned as he is with the symbolic, the metaphoric. He finds her bemusing because their conceptions of the world are entirely incongruent.

Rosa is “at once resistant and yet alert to the point of strain” to his suggestion that she has “grown up entirely through other people” (46). She cannot agree with Conrad’s assertion that her attempts to assert an identity after her father’s death have been “just words; life isn’t there. The tension that makes it possible to live is created somewhere else, some other way” (*ibid.*). Despite his continued attempts to persuade her, she claims that she “could not be reached by someone like him” (*ibid.*). There is, however, truth in Conrad’s observation. When Rosa recalls her wait outside the prison which held her mother, she wonders “[w]hen they saw me outside the prison, what did they see?” (13, italics in original). She is concerned, as is evident from the start of the novel, with how she is perceived. Vermeulen notes¹³ that

There was no indication of what impression she wanted to make, this girl; [...] she was either so vulnerably open that her presence in the world made an impossible claim, or so inviolable that her openness was an arrogant assumption – which amounted to the same thing. (180)

She is overtly aware of how she is perceived and accordingly attempts to present nothing that can be construed as her own identity; she censors herself. She notes that she does not

know how I look when I’m being used, an object of inquiry, regarded respectfully, notebook in hand, or stripped by you [Conrad] [...] to assess my strength like a female up for auction in a slave market.[...] I produce a privacy so insulting that those well-disposed towards me don’t feel themselves considered worthy of rebuff... (159)

This awareness of being observed, and of responding by presenting an impenetrable surface of the self, recalls the mirror image invoked by Lacan. She is permanently aware of what she displays herself to feel, and necessarily so – Lionel and all of his associates are alert to and have “studied the pattern of police surveillance as surveillance studied them” (95). The fact that Rosa is watched is emphasised by the inclusion of excerpts from notes about her movements, from an unknown source, presumably the records of BOSS (Bureau of State Security) or a similar organisation. The reader is made aware that Rosa is being monitored closely – the notes contain dates and addresses of suspicious activity, such as her visits to Brandt Vermeulen (173) and others’ accounts of her experiences (12). When she boards the plane to Paris, “[s]urveillance watched her go in” (191).

¹³This is a moment at which the narration switches from Rosa’s perspective. Various pieces of information are included to which Rosa does not have access: even the ‘narrating Rosa’ cannot know what Vermeulen thought at this point, or that he thinks of her dress’s colour as “coolie-pink” (189). Moments like this highlight the intersubjectivity of identity, the multiplicity of voices in the text that reflect the dialectic nature of identity.

Rosa's actions, then, are always intended to be perceived because she knows that she is being watched. She is able to control her reactions as a result of a lifetime of socialisation from her stoic parents. As a result of her restraint, she is accused of being a "cold fish" (159). Conrad, commenting on her lack of emotional response to her father's sentencing, charges her with being restrained by "conditioning, brain-washing: [being] more like a trained seal, maybe" (52). Rosa is concerned, always, with what she *seems* to be doing – she looks upon herself as an other, which results in her struggle to assert herself in a subject position: she is acted upon and acts in return, but does not initiate actions, which is a necessary condition for subjectivity.

Rosa is deeply affected by her relationship with Conrad and her direction of the largest portion of the narrative to him is an indication of this. He assumes a role similar to that of the symbolic father, offering her an alternative set of values to those espoused by her biological father. She dwells on his ideas and assertions long after they have parted ways, determined to prove that she can become someone other than "Burger's Daughter." Conrad is certain, "[m]atter-of-factly, eventually, inevitably" (62), that Rosa will be imprisoned as her father was. This is one of many of her father's characteristics that Conrad believes are inescapable, necessary characteristics Rosa has assimilated from Lionel. In his opinion, she has been assimilated into

A prescribed way to deal with the frail and the wayward flesh that gets sick and wasted and drowns. [...] Among [the faithful], the cause is what can't die. Your mother didn't live to carry it on, others did. The little boy, your brother didn't grow up to carry it on, others will. It's immortality. If you can accept it. Christian resignation's only one example. A cause more important than an individual is another. The same cone, the future in place of the present. Lives you can't live, instead of your own. (52)

It is with Conrad's assistance that Rosa begins to be able to see that, despite the proximity and closeness, the shared intimacy of danger, "in *that house* [the inhabitants] didn't know each other" and she is moved, later, to state that he "proved it to [her] in what [she has] found since in places [he has not] been" (171). His presence has continued to affect her after she has lost contact with him, and even after his death.

In spite (or perhaps because) of Conrad's inability to conceive of a future for her other than the one he foresees, Rosa does, in fact, leave. She absconds, without informing anyone, to the south of France, where she meets with her father's ex-wife. She longs to "defect" from her father, and the identity she feels has been foisted upon her, and believes that Lionel's ex-wife

Katya may be able to show her how she is “able to write to [Rosa] that he was a great man, and yet decide ‘there’s a whole world’ outside what he lived for, what life with him would have been” (264). Rosa wants to be independent of her father’s influence, or at least learn how she might achieve such independence.

Until now, her relationships have been focused on and determined by her father. It was Conrad’s fascination with her father that led him to her at his trial, and her other relationships with her parents’ comrades, such as Marisa and the Terblanches, have confined her to her role. In one of their first conversations, Conrad says, “[y]ou’re always so polite, aren’t you. Just like your father” (23). Paradoxically, however, it is Conrad’s influence that allows her to begin to consider the possibility of constructing an identity separate from the one prescribed for her by her position as her father’s daughter.

Another Place

The second part of the novel is directed to Lionel’s first wife, who is known variously as Collette, Madame Bagnelli, and Katya, which is what she asks Rosa to call her. It is to her that Rosa has turned for an alternative identity: Rosa knows that Katya was able to sever herself from the struggle and from Lionel, and Rosa longs to do the same. She states openly that she hopes Katya will be able to show her how to “defect” from Lionel (264). Katya was banished from the Communist Party because of “bourgeois tendencies” after having “innocently let slip the servant girl had blancoed [her shoes] for [her]” (247). Like Rosa, she was happy to be “free of *them*. [...] Those bastards” (*ibid.*, emphasis in original). Katya has adopted what she sees as the European perspective. She tells Rosa that

If you live in Europe... things change [...] but continuity never seems to break. You don’t have to throw the past away. If I’d stayed... at home, how will they fit in, white people? Their continuity stems from the colonial experience, the white one. When they lose their power it’ll be cut. Just like that! They’ve got nothing but their horrible power. Africans will take up their own kind of past the whites never belonged to. Even the Terblanches and Alettas – our rebellion against the whites was also part of *being white*... it was, it was. But here you never really have to start from scratch... Ah no, it’s too much to take on. That’s what I love – nobody expects you to be more than you are, you know. That kind of tolerance, I didn’t even know it existed – I mean, there: if you’re not equal to facing *everything*, there... you’re a traitor. To the human cause – justice, humanity, the lot – there’s nothing else. (249—250)

Katya has defected from the Party mentality more successfully than Rosa is able, in spite of her more heavily entrenched involvement with it, because she seems to agree with the sentiment of Didier, a lover of one of her friends, that “Africa is no good for white people any more” (243). If they are to stay, their “colonial experience” will be severed and white people

will “really have to start from scratch” (*ibid.*). Before she leaves South Africa, Rosa argues against a similar statement, made by Duma Dhladhla at Fats’ place:

Whites, whatever you are, it doesn’t matter. It’s no difference. You can tell them – Afrikaners, liberals, Communists. We don’t accept anything from anybody. We take. D’you understand? We take for ourselves. [...] It’s finished. (157)

Katya’s, Didier’s and Dhladhla’s statements indicate that, for very different reasons, they have all drawn the same conclusion about South Africa, that it is “no good for white people.” Katya does not desire having to create anew a ‘white identity;’ Didier does not believe that white people have any place in Africa after the collapse of colonies, saying “[w]e have to forget about them. It’s not our affair. I’m not my father, êh?” (243); Dhladhla represents the Black Consciousness Movement which has gained momentum since its formation in the 1960s, and asserts that “black people don’t need anyone else. [...] We’re one kind. Black” (157). Rosa, however, remains attached to her contested identity as a white South African, and complains that in France, “nobody could see [her], for what [she is] back where [she] come[s] from” (231).

Having been displaced from her home, Rosa has found herself surprisingly attached to her national identity and heritage and is very aware that if she had “been black that would at least have given the information [she] was from Africa” (*ibid.*). In Europe, however, she is assumed to be European based on her skin colour. Leonie Huddy, among other theorists, has examined the relationship between an asserted identity and the number of people present who share the identity (138). The more salient an identity tag, the more likely it is that it will be actively adopted. The fewer people present who share an identity tag in a situation, the more likely it is that that identity tag is one that will be asserted. Rosa is surrounded by Europeans and African ex-patriots who no longer maintain any attachment to their country of origin, and therefore realises the strength of her attachment to her home country.

Rosa meets a man called Michel Pistachi, who insists on asking “Madame’s permission to take [her] dancing” (252). Even though he is “a brick-layer,” and therefore a member of the working class, he rejects her assertion that if the Communist Party came to power in France, “the workers will be strong. Not the *patrons*” because he “want[s] what is [his], êh? The Communists won’t allow that. [He] would be robbed of [his] own father’s property” (253). At Rosa’s request, he takes her to see the “house [he is] going to inherit” (*ibid.*). Rosa is charmed

by the pastoral pastiche she finds there, and she tells him she “like[s his] inheritance” (254).

As she stated at the women’s meeting while in South Africa, she has, in contrast, inherited

a gag on [her] mouth [...] in the family tradition, since only my name – Lionel Burger’s daughter, last of that line – can be reported, not my ‘utterances’. That’s how they perceive her, people who read the name. I am a presence. In this country, among them. I do not speak. (200)

She longs for the simplicity and the normative relationship that is possible for Pistachi and his parents which is impossible for her, even though she has escaped her parents’ direct control. She is still influenced by their ‘training’ and therefore remains Burger’s daughter, as evidenced by her argument in favour of the Communist Party against one of the workers the party seeks to represent.

Before leaving South Africa, Rosa had left her job as a physiotherapist in favour of “the faceless kind of job 90 per cent of people do” (103), a secretarial job where she “came to be anonymous, to be like other people” (77). She had studied something “politically innocuous” instead of the law degree she had wanted. She chose something “in the field of medicine; [her] father’s daughter” (63). While living with Katya, however, she is encouraged to resume her role as a physiotherapist when one of Katya’s friends, Georges, suffers with a pain in his leg. He encourages her to start working in the village to treat people’s “pains and aches” without the official permit (260). This is a reassertion of an identity Rosa has sought to shed, and, in reclaiming it, she severs her connection to the version of herself who wanted to remove herself entirely from anything that connected her to her previous lifestyle, as orchestrated and organised by her parents. She has reassumed an identity tag previously associated with her lack of agency, and in doing so has asserted her role as a subject (even though the roles – as a physiotherapist – are the same, her attitude to them is what has shifted).

In what Halil calls the “pre-Oedipal realm” (7), which she experiences while living with Katya, Rosa is able to determine herself independently of the symbolic social order. She has been able to ensconce herself in an entirely semiotic, sensory, intimate realm, removed from the symbolic politics with which she has struggled to live. In this comfortable space she is safe to determine where her own allegiances lie. Katya’s rejection of the ideologies she once held is important. She has gone from challenging the normative, symbolic order, as a Communist, to living in a space where the political unconscious is not as dogmatic. In South

Africa, Katya felt obliged to act, while in France, she feels free to behave like the Europeans who “don’t know what conflict is” (*Burger* 250).

Although the second section is directed at Katya, it is in fact Bernard Chabalier who proffers a philosophy which Rosa considers adopting. She sheds the tag of “Burger’s daughter” and assumes instead “Chabalier’s mistress” (304). This version of Rosa is “certainly not accountable to the Future, she can go off and do good works in Cameroun or contemplate the unicorn in the tapestry forest” (*ibid.*). Chabalier offers Rosa an opportunity to remain in Europe indefinitely. He suggests that the “anti-apartheid committee [could] get [her] temporary residence and even a work permit” (288). After “[f]our days and three nights together in Corsica had given Rosa Burger and Bernard Chabalier a taste of being alone,” he “put his mind to discovering some sound reason why he should need to go to London” (305), and she “telephoned Flora Donaldson in Johannesburg and explained that after spending the summer in France she now wanted to visit London” (309), and Flora provides her with the necessary information to go about gaining access to her apartment.

Her willingness to adopt the appellation “Chabalier’s mistress” in place of “Burger’s daughter” indicates Rosa’s unwillingness – in spite of herself – to assert an independent identity. Her identity has shifted away from her father but she maintains her dependence on another patriarchal figure for her referential term. Instead of escaping her father’s authority to assert an identity of her own, she has merely chosen to defer the power to another man. This seems to be a common pattern for Rosa, who stated that while her father was alive, her obligation to him was her priority: “[her] studies, [her] work, [her] love affairs must fit in with the twice-monthly visits to the prison, for life, as long as he lives [...]. My professors, my employers, my men must accept this overruling” (62). This is also a repetition of her behaviour with Conrad, whose identity she often mimicked rather than asserting an independent one. She seems tied to some kind of masculine symbolic, but paradoxically seeking a figure that maintains her imaginary identification rather than liberating her from it.

It is interesting to note in this second section directed at Katya that Rosa retains her identity as defined in relation to Chabalier until she reencounters Baasie, her childhood “black brother” (122) at a political gathering in London, where

‘A few words’ were spontaneously said – and developed into an elegy with the eloquence of one (of the faithful) who had drunk just enough to gauge his moment – about the great men who had not lived to see oppression in South Africa breached – Xuma, Luthuli, Mondlane, Fischer, and of course Lionel

Burger, who was particularly in the thoughts of many people tonight because ‘someone closest to him’ and his wife Cathy Jansen, another fine comrade – was present among them. Lionel Burger’s role in the struggle; the callousness and cowardliness of the Vorster government, keeping an ageing, dying man in jail, in contrast with the courage of that man undefeated to his last breath who refused to allow any appeals for compensation concessions on his behalf, who asked nothing of Vorster less than justice for the people. The white racist government had stolen his body but his spirit was everywhere – in Mozambique; in this room, tonight. (312—313)

She is among Africans and has found herself “daydream[ing] about looking up the people it had been easy for her to undertake to avoid, because she could not have imagined herself wanting to do otherwise. Now she saw herself talking to them, accompanied by Bernard Chabali” (311—312). Chabali’s influence has directed her back to political involvement in “Lionel’s country” (210). She does not immediately recognise Baasie and he hesitates in answering her when she addresses him with his childhood nickname. After a brief conversation, they exchange contact details. He wakes her with a midnight telephone call and states that he “didn’t like the way [she] went around and how [she] spoke” (319). He is angry that she calls him “Baasie” (which is translated as “little master”) (71) and that she does not know his real name or what it means. He interrupts her to state “Zwel-in-zima. That’s my name. ‘Suffering land’. The name my father gave me” (318). His assertion of his father’s surname and the name his father gave him in place of the name Lionel had given him is symbolic of the rejection of the *status quo*. He has potentially been influenced by the Black Consciousness Movement,¹⁴ and makes clear his resentment of the Burger family. He sarcastically states that they appear to be of the opinion that they

didn’t mind black skin so we’re different for ever from anyone? You’re different so I must be different too. You aren’t white and I’m not black. [...] I’m not your Baasie, just don’t go thinking about that little kid who lived with you, don’t think of that black ‘brother’, that’s all. (321)

Like Rosa, he has rejected the identity Cathy and Lionel constructed for him, though for different reasons. He resents the Burgers’ use of him as a political tool – as a representation of their willingness to disregard race as something which signifies. He makes lucid his discomfort with the way in which her father is portrayed:

Everyone in the world must be told what a hero he was and how much he suffered for the blacks. Everyone must cry over him and show his life on television and write in the papers. Listen, there are dozens of our fathers sick and dying like dogs, kicked out of the locations when they can’t work any more. Getting old and dying in prison. Killed in prison. It’s nothing. I know plenty blacks like Burger. It’s nothing, it’s us, we must be used to it, it’s not going to show on English television. (320)

¹⁴ Zwelinzima’s anger seems rooted in what he perceives as the appropriation of the struggle by the Burgers, and other white people like them, as a class struggle rather than a racial one. In “Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity,” Biko states that “They [liberal whites] tell us that the situation is a class struggle rather than a racial one. Let them go to Van Tonder in the Free State and tell him this. We believe we know what the problem is, and we will stick by our findings” (90).

Rosa defends herself, but is left with accusations and questions she cannot answer. She reacts emotionally, “sobbing and clenching her jaw, ugly, soiled, stuffing her fist into her mouth” (324). It appears that Zwelinzima feels that the Burgers reinforced the symbolic order, as whites who assume power in what he sees as an exclusively black struggle. While they mean well, the fact of their whiteness means that they continue to occupy a normative role. Rosa attempts to explain what happened to Chabalier, and he attempts to comfort her, but his Eurocentric understanding of an essentially South African experience cannot be explained. He tells her that she “really should have put down the phone. To hell with the stupid cunt, then. I don’t care who he is! ... Maybe a bit crazy? You know, an exile, black, it’s hard. *Je hais, donc je suis*”¹⁵ (330—331). He stated previously that he did not think it was possible for one to

enter someone else’s cause or salvation. [...] The same with your father and the blacks – their freedom. You’ll excuse me for saying... the same with you and the blacks. It’s not open to you. [...] Not even you. (297)

He has made clear his disbelief in the kind of political change Lionel sought to bring, although he is unable to convince Rosa that the encounter was insignificant. His perspective is similar to Katya’s, Didier’s and Dhladhla’s. He cannot see how white people can be involved in what he sees as an essentially black transition. He is only able to offer platitudes and Rosa later regrets that she had not been able to address him in person: “[i]f I could have seen his face, the gestures – I might have found, at that point, how to explain what was happening to me, I might have found he was moving to come between it and me” (331). He is in France, however, and Rosa is reconstituted by her encounter with the last living member of her childhood family. She comes to acknowledge that she is Burger’s daughter, regardless of her desire not to be, and she returns to what she now views as *her* struggle in *her* country. Her motivation to return to the struggle indicates her new, nuanced understanding of the country. She comprehends that she is compelled to fully enter the symbolic order and that the only way to attempt to change this order is to live within it and work against it wherever possible.

A Homecoming

The third and final part of the novel is addressed to Rosa’s father. She returns to South Africa and assumes a role unaligned to any political organisation. She works as a physiotherapist at Baragwanath Hospital, treating disabled children, as well as children hurt in the 16 June 1976

¹⁵ “I hate, therefore I am” (my translation)

Soweto riots and subsequent instances of violence, “teaching them to walk again” (332). She has reassumed entirely the role she occupied while her father was alive, but no longer feels the need to complain that she is “sick of this job” as she did while living with Conrad (69). Rosa acknowledges that “these white people [herself among them] could not imagine what it was like to be living as their patients did” (343). She admits that she does not “know what [she] would do” in their position: “[s]he was white, she had never had a child [...] No child but those who passed under her hands, whom it was her work to put together again if that were possible, at the hospital” (345).

Rosa is reminded of the “catchphrase of every reactionary politician and every revolutionary come to power as a politician” (328), the appeal to “[o]ur children and our children’s children” (348). It is the children, however, who have come to reject their parents’ compromises: “[t]here are new nightclubs in Johannesburg where fashionable getups provide customers’ equality [...]. But these are not the kind of pleasures on which the children are set” (*ibid.*). Their ideals are politically orientated. Rosa knows that her father’s goals and the children’s are aligned. They want

Their country, not ghettos allotted within it, or tribal ‘homelands’ parcelled out. The wealth created with their fathers’ and mothers’ labour and transformed into the white man’s dividends. Power over their own lives instead of a destiny invented, decreed and enforced by white governments. (349)

Rosa wonders if Lionel who “used [her] as a prison visitor, courier, whatever [she] was good for” would have “seen [himself] watching Tony and [her], hand-in-hand, approaching guns” (*ibid.*). She acknowledges for the first time that he “must have been afraid sometimes” but sees that he was “a bit like the black children – [he] had the elation” (*ibid.*). The children – like Lionel – refuse the role society has prescribed them and in doing so, reject the inequality, and enact the beginning of the movement to ‘the future.’

Rosa imagines explaining her reactions to and her interactions with Baasie to her father and states that he “would laugh” (*ibid.*), even though the “squabble between [his] children” involved their “manoeuvring [themselves] into the position their history books would have had ready for [them] – him bitter; [her] guilty” (330). Rosa has seen herself in the role of the white oppressor, inserted normatively into the symbolic order and she has realised how easily she could assume that identity; instead, she rejects this in favour of returning to Lionel’s country to continue his struggle and to continue his mode of physical involvement with the facticity of others, their suffering bodies. She has acknowledged that

No one can defect.
It's about suffering.
How to end suffering.
And it ends in suffering. (332)

Rosa has realised that she does not need an ideology like Conrad's intellectualism, Chabalier's Eurocentrism, or Lionel's Marxism in order to act against the apartheid government. She can reassume the struggle in which she was involved without the theories that problematise the apartheid state. Her experience in France has demonstrated her inability to live inactively in the symbolic political order and that is enough to motivate her. She has witnessed the students' and children's opposition to apartheid structures, and recognises that she must act. The struggle is hers too because she is a South African, and her father's daughter. Rosa comes to this point by taking her "statements," the accusations she directed at Zwelinzima during their conversation, and "carr[ying] them round with [her] and [seeing] them by daylight, turned over in [her] hand while [she] was sitting at [her] class, or talking softly on the telephone to Paris" (329). She continues to do this until she appears to have a revelation and begins planning to return to South Africa. This suggests that she has chosen to act rather than to continue to analyse and overanalyse in the manner of Conrad, Vermeulen and Chabalier. She accepts the appellation of 'Burger's Daughter' when she chooses, like her father, to act. Rosa returns to 'Lionel's country,' where she is able to use her skill as a physiotherapist to begin to heal children.

Rosa is detained without charges on 19 October 1977 (353), no doubt as a result of being her father's daughter, and is held with Clare Terblanche, and near to Marisa Kgosana, whose "penetrating wobbly contralto announced her presence not far off" (354—5). The last few pages of the novel contain an episode that replicates the commencement of the novel, when Flora Donaldson delivers "some things for detainees" to the prison (358). This time, though, it is not with Rosa that she waits to give things for Cathy Burger, but holds "[p]lums, mangoes, oranges and some boiled sweets" for Rosa and Marisa. Rosa has assumed the place in prison that Conrad assumed she would, the place that was occupied by both of her parents and their comrades, the place she denied she would ever be.

Rosa has shifted from unquestioningly adopting the ideals of her parents, to rejecting them outright and leaving their country, to gradually reassuming their ideals on her own terms, and returning to the country she now sees as her own in order to reject the system of apartheid. Rosa has assumed her own motivation for her political actions and is now capable of

engaging not only as her father's daughter who is used, but as a subject in her own right, who is able to accept and reject ideologies for herself. She does not need to rely on her father or an ideology in order to possess the capacity and drive to act. She assumes a position, and in doing so assumes a place in the symbolic order that is not only ideological but intersubjective, involving the embodied and the reasoning self.

The Family Scene

In the course of Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter*, Rosa undergoes a transition in the manner in which she views her own identity. She shifts from unquestioningly accepting her parents' ideologies, to beginning to question their validity in her own life, and considering alternatives, such as Conrad's rugged individualism. Her next move is to leave the country of her birth, where she is able to assert identities for herself without the constraints of the society to which she is accustomed, and – in spite of the temptations of the position in the form of the role offered to her as Chabalier's mistress – she comes to realise that her primary chosen identifications are those from whom she had sought to be free. She returns to physiotherapy, to South Africa, and to an involvement in the struggle, although she does not accept the communism to which her parents were devoted. Rosa has realised that she need not be constrained by the "position [...] history books [...] have ready" (330) but that she can, like her father, act as an individual in spite of the constraints of the identity tag that precedes her and which attempts to confine her. She is Burger's daughter, but she refuses to be *only* Burger's daughter, as is written in the BOSS files. Importantly, Rosa has formed a connection to her personal motivations, and no longer feels constrained by her parents' political endeavours. The narrative remains elusive about Rosa's final political and personal affiliations, leaving the dialectic unresolved, but she appears to have achieved some satisfaction with this balance, choosing to sacrifice her personal relationship with Chabalier for the struggle which is now not an inherited burden but a cause to which she is personally dedicated.

Rachel Zadok's *Gem Squash Tokoloshe* and the negotiation of an identity within a family structure

Between Psychology and the Supernatural

Rachel Zadok's *Gem Squash Tokoloshe* is a novel about the protagonist's early childhood in apartheid South Africa and her early adulthood in post-apartheid South Africa. The first part of the novel traces protagonist Faith's experiences on the family farm, and the various traumas she suffers as a result of her mother's mental illness after her father's decision to leave the family. The child undergoes multiple forms of traumatic loss – including the death of her dog, her father's absence, her mother's increasing madness, and the death of Nomsa who had assumed the role of her mother. Her inability to understand these occurrences, specifically the death of Nomsa, leads to their repression. The second part of the novel – when Faith is 21 – examines her recovery of these traumatic memories after the death of her mother, upon returning to the farm on which she spent the first seven years of her life. By acknowledging the parts of herself she has striven to repress, she is able to form a complete picture of herself, as well as of her mother, and is thereby able to commence healing. Faith's individual traumas are closely linked to her family's traumas, and echo the national trauma of South Africa in the 1980s, a period of intense political struggle. Each psychic fracture, at the personal, familial and societal levels, resonates with each of the others.

The novel has not received a large amount of critical analysis. In her paper "Memory, Madness and Whiteness in Julia Blackburn's *The Book of Colour* and Rachel Zadok's *Gem Squash Tokoloshe*," Miki Flockemann explores Faith's trauma by employing Cathy Caruth's claim, which is "that textualizing traumatic memory exposes not only one's own, but also an effaced other's story of trauma, prepares the way for identifying reciprocities in the dissonance between 'seeing' and 'knowing' exposed here" (Flockemann 4). Faith's narrative forms a textualised version of her trauma and its nuances. Similarly, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission relies on the notion that the narrativisation of traumatic experiences can form a healing function. Flockemann also examines the complexity of Faith's – and indeed all South Africans' – identities and the negotiation between "Western rationalism" and "African cosmology" (10).

In his master's dissertation entitled "Trauma and Narrative in the Contemporary South African Novel," Andreas Trimbacher "focuses on Zadok's depiction and presentation of traumatic experience" (78), and understands "the fairy world [a world in which Faith's mother is subsumed as a characteristic of her madness] as the channel to incorporate the traumatic experience into the narrative" (90). He reads the character of the most evil fairy, Dead Rex, not as a psychic embodiment of trauma but as a personification which "does not only impersonate Faith's traumatic memory, [but also] [...] metaphorically mirror[s] the situation of the whole nation" (92).

Katrin Harvey's chapter in her master's dissertation, "Rape in Contemporary South African Novels" is concerned primarily with Nomsa's rape and the power dynamics involved. She also posits that the "underlying message of the novel is that Africans can deal with the fairy world of South Africa, while Bella [Faith's mother], the white woman, cannot" (82). This is problematic because the fairy world originates in Bella's traumatised imagination. It seems Harvey has conflated the imaginary fairy world and the supernatural elements of South African belief systems, such as the *tokoloshe*.

Dirk Klopper's argument as outlined in "Spirit and phantasy in Rachel Zadok's *Gem Squash Tokoloshe*" posits that the novel is composed of a "narrative of trauma" and a "narrative of return" in the first and second parts of the novel respectively (4). He also examines the "splitting and doubling" (6) that occur thematically and the entangled nature of South African culture (8).

This chapter explores the complexity of the trauma and its resonances with familial and national traumas, while also attempting to locate the experience of trauma in a western psychological frame and an African supernatural context. It employs Melanie Klein's understanding of splitting as a psychic response to trauma. In the case of personal trauma, splitting involves projective identification, in which the split off part of the ego is "located elsewhere outside the ego altogether, and perceived as part of the identity of someone else" (Hinshelwood 510). The fragmented psyche will continue to be affected by the split-off part, even if it remains unaddressed and unremembered. Eventually, this results in what Freud calls the return of the repressed. Freud understands repression as a process which attempts to remove traumatic events from memory, and appears to succeed, but achieves only the denial of the existence of the memories, which remain (Hornstein 260). Similarly resonant splittings

occur in familial and societal spaces, where trauma causes fractures among the subjects who make up these social groupings. A lucid example of this in the novel is Faith's parents' divorce: it is a physical split that causes psychic trauma to Bella, and, consequently, Faith.

Social and political traumas, like racism, which denies the humanity of a large number of the citizens which make up South African society, result in splittings in the political unconscious, affecting all South Africans. Neil J. Smelser, a sociologist specialising in collective behaviour, states that "a cultural trauma is a threat to some part of [individuals'] personal identities" (40). Not only did apartheid function as a threat to individual identities, it denied them the right to any independent identity at all, as a racial identity was prioritised over any other identification, and this was beyond the subject's control. Faith's childhood naivety mostly occludes the tense political landscape in the first section. As an adult in the second section, however, she must confront her history. This replicates South Africa's relationship with its past: the nation must also address the past, in the form of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

The first part of the novel describes Faith's childhood on the farm where she spent her first seven years, and the trauma she experiences in her last year there. The second part of the novel is concerned with her ultimate return to the farm as an adult and the events which lead up to this return. The division in the narrative replicates the psychic split between Faith prior to Nomsa's death and Faith as an adult still in stasis after the trauma it has caused. The adult Faith claims that "[t]here is no point to [her] life, it lacks meaning, direction" (*Gem Squash Tokoloshe*, hereafter, *Gem Squash* 242). This stagnation is indicated by the use of the present tense throughout the second section. Faith, along with the reader, experiences life moment by moment, in contrast to the first section, which Faith narrates retrospectively. The narrative split mirrors the split in Faith's identity caused by the trauma of Nomsa's death, and the repressed memory that it was she, not her mother, who killed Nomsa in an attempt to save her from Oom Piet, who was raping her.

Faith has repressed the memories of "that night," as it is ambiguously named (302), so that until her encounter with Oom Piet, she believes that her mother is responsible for Nomsa's death. Yet the event remains active in her unconscious. As Caruth puts it: "[t]he experience of trauma, the fact of latency [...] consist[s], not in the forgetting of a reality that can hence never be fully known; but in an inherent latency within the experience itself" (187). That is,

without Piet's intervention, Faith would forever have remained ignorant of, but possessed by, the truth: that she, not her mother, killed Nomsa. Faith projects her feelings surrounding that night onto her mother and her severance from her mother, who reminds her of the events. In order to continue successfully repressing the memories, she must dissociate from her mother, as she is representative of the parts of herself Faith has split off.

Faith's psychic split replicates the split in her family. From the start of the novel, it is evident that Faith's family is divided, even though the child-narrator does not know it in a fully conscious sense. Bella is making a concerted effort to impress her husband, Marius, upon his return from his work as a travelling salesman, and Bella asks if Faith thinks she is "worth another look" (17), which indicates that she is uncertain whether he will be coming. This is enforced by Bella's hope that the Sunday dinner "feast of chicken, roast potatoes and boiled gem squash would remind Papa that home was the best place to eat" (19), suggesting that she is worried that he is considering alternatives. The split in the family widens when Marius leaves without saying goodbye to Faith (26). His absence causes Bella's mental condition to worsen, and leaves Faith without any familial structure. Nomsa, a woman hired to take care of Faith and the house while Bella is ill, takes on the role of Faith's mother figure until her death, and later, Bella's friend Mia assumes a maternal role in Faith's life, but she does not consider Mia or her daughter Molly to be her family until after she has psychically returned and recovered the memory of killing Nomsa which she had split off (326).

Faith's psychic split also resonates with the national policy of segregation. South African society suffers a psychic split in its political unconscious. This national trauma results in fractured identities for South African citizens. Conscription for all white men meant that the contemporary border wars simultaneously constituted a national trauma, a personal trauma for those involved, and a familial trauma for their relatives. This is compounded by the patriarchal conception of a rigid masculinity which denies the possibility of an emotional response to this trauma. Additionally, this patriarchy endows men with more power than women.

The novel sets up two modes of understanding trauma: the western psychic framework and the African supernatural. While western structures, like the Kleinian theories employed in this chapter, serve as a means to understand the novel in terms of psychoanalysis, there are elements of the novel which elide this classification: the supernatural. While there are

traditional supernatural elements in the novel such as the tokoloshe and Modjadji, who brings the rain (74), Bella believes in a fairy world, which seems composed of western and African archetypes. A western reading would interpret this belief in magical entities as the result of trauma, while an African stance views these magical entities as a facet of the real world. This split between interpretative frameworks resonates with other splits in the narrative on societal, familial and personal levels.

Racial Entanglements

Gem Squash Tokoloshe was published in London in 2005. It is interesting that although the novel is concerned with return – psychological as well as physical – it was written and published *outside* of South Africa. The novel is Zadok’s imaginary return to the country, although no physical return has occurred. Her insight and clarity of memory is perhaps sharpened as a result of the distance in both space and time between the action in the novel and the time of writing. Zadok’s narrative evokes a nuanced, vivid picture of South Africa, presenting to the reader an intimate sense of Faith’s experience. This is achieved by the inclusion of sensory invocations and the use of language that transports the reader to the specific locations. Aside from its evocation of a South African milieu, the novel is embedded in an obviously South African context by its employment of non-English words such as “Ouma” – which is Afrikaans for ‘granny’ – and “suka wena” (7) – which is a colloquial dismissal in Zulu.

The narrative invokes the minutiae of southern African life, exhibiting specific products used, such as Brylcreem (29), and the source of Nomsa’s specific smell, “Sunlight soap, Vaseline-oiled skin” (203). It is concerned with the human dynamics of relationships which are informed by contemporary social structures. Nevertheless, these forces are invisible and not explicitly mentioned in the text. Although the political underpinnings of apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa are only presented obliquely, these structural features of the political unconscious are manifest in the way in which characters interact, in their forms of address, as well as in their ways of positioning the political and racial other. The lucidity of these recreations and recollections of life in South Africa is perhaps facilitated by the author’s distance from her subject matter. It is perhaps *because* she is writing about the country from Europe that her observations are so astute. She sees South Africa from the point of view of an outsider with intimate knowledge of a native inhabitant’s lived experience.

The novel commences in 1985, at a time when South Africa's system of legislated racial oppression was growing unstable. Historically, resistance to apartheid-style oppression is older than apartheid itself: "[e]ven before [...] 1948 [when the National Party came to power, and apartheid commenced], the African National Congress (ANC) struggled with various government administrations in the country [...] for a change of their policy towards blacks" (Motlhabi 2). Several attempts in this vein were made after the National Party commenced its rule, although non-violence began to appear a less plausible strategy. These included boycotts and a policy of non-co-operation (5), campaigns against passes, stay-aways and sabotage (8), and were implemented until the early 1970s. By then, resistance against racist governance had been formalised, intellectualised and radicalised. This was realised in the Black Consciousness Movement, led by Steve Biko, which spearheaded the message that Black people refused to tolerate the continuing oppression.

At this time, black and white South Africans were divided along racial lines even as they existed together quite intimately, in the home and in the place of work. Sarah Nuttall uses the term 'entanglement' to describe the post-apartheid South Africa that has emerged since:

a condition of being twisted together, or entwined, involved with; it [entanglement] speaks of an intimacy gained, even if it was resisted, or ignored or uninvited. It is a term which may gesture towards a relationship or set of social relationships that is complicated, ensnaring, in a tangle, but which also implies a human foldedness. It works with difference and sameness but also with their limits, their predicaments, their moments of complication. (1)

This is a more fruitful idea than the commonly used notion of 'hybridity' which also involves the coming-together of two or more ways of being, but suggests a somewhat universal identity that is paradoxically the same everywhere. Instead of insisting on a kind of flattened identity for all subjects, entanglement allows each subject to retain his singularity while acknowledging the proximity of others. This idea also resists the ethereality of a "rainbow nation" (Mwabo 94) in which South Africans live harmoniously in their multi-toned differences. Entanglement acknowledges the nuanced, interactive relationship between individuals across cultures. It is important that the entangled identities can, in Nuttall's conception, be "resisted, or ignored or uninvited." This is a useful way of seeing Faith's resistance to entanglement with others and her behaviour, which indicates she is acting as though she were disentangled.

The first part of the novel, set in 1985, encapsulates the politics of white South African life. The characters are sympathetic towards the apartheid government. Tannie Marie, an acquaintance of Faith's, empathises with the president [P.W. Botha] who "was on the news again, as if he doesn't have enough to do without having to make statements for the television. Running a country can't be easy" (33). The banter is so familiar that Faith thinks that she "might ask Papa if he knew the President" (35). Their white camaraderie forms the basis for the appearance of a colloquial relationship between the government and their voters, even over vast distances. Their solidarity and unity in their identity is informed by the perceived threat of black people.

The town in which the family is located is in rural Northern Transvaal, and its inhabitants are isolated from political activity such as the protests in more metropolitan centres. The residents are misinformed about the nation's affairs, if they engage with the political situation at all. The nuances of politics are absent in the minds of the townspeople who see the social upheaval as, literally, black and white. The town is largely unaffected by the riots which lead to the implementation of the state of emergency in 1985, but the national anxiety about the infiltration of black people into spaces perceived as belonging to white people is certainly present. It is evident in a reaction to Nomsa's presence at the farmers' market, where the market manager insists that she ought to behave "like the rest of her kind" (93). This is an example of the way in which Nomsa's presence agitates the usually settled town. Unlike in the town – where it is of importance – race is not mentioned by anyone in Faith's immediate family, and her surprise on learning the significance Nomsa's race has, to others, seems to indicate that she has not been exposed to the social symbolic of racism.

While the racist social symbolic informs a facet of the oppression Nomsa suffers, her womanhood under patriarchy results in sexist subjugation as well. Bella's partially-comparable sexist oppression is visible in the implication that Oom Piet attempted to rape Bella first. However, the fact that she successfully repels him, as evidenced by the "ugly brown dress [she had been wearing the night before which] [...] was torn at the neck [...] [as well as] her lipstick [which] had rubbed away" (166—167), indicates that she is not entirely deprived of power. The fact that Bella was able to deter him in spite of her lack of physical strength indicates that he was deterred by her capacity for recourse. As a white woman, she has access to enough power to employ legal action against him, but Nomsa, whose blackness deprives her of this power, is doubly vulnerable to Oom Piet's advances. Her womanhood

makes her a target for sexual predation, and her blackness leaves her without recourse, and she is victimised by Oom Piet, who knows this. He is more powerful than her, both in his whiteness and as a man, but also physically, as is clear in Dead Rex's description in the prologue: "[w]oman bent over bed, dark demon shadows lick her like black dogs. Fat-fingered butcher hand push down her head, fat-fingered butcher hand squeeze her delicate woman wrists, bend her arms back behind her, like broken sticks they look" (3).¹⁶ His physical strength over her replicates his social hegemony.

The second part of the novel begins with a countdown to the New Year, 2000, marking the commencement of a new millennium. The theme of beginning anew is important for Faith's story. In the interim between the abrupt ending to the first section (with Nomsa's death) and the second part, South Africa has undergone radical change. In 1994, the country held its first democratic elections and Nelson Mandela was elected to the presidency. As an attempt to address the national traumas of the violent inequalities of the past, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission commenced in 1996. While Faith has reacted by closing herself off from her painful past, the country has begun to address its history and acknowledge the formative role of racism. Faith must, like all South Africans, look to the past in order to be able to adequately face the future. Her discomfort with returning to a painful past while simultaneously attempting to determine an independent future for herself replicates the position of many South Africans, who believe that it is possible to move beyond the history of apartheid without addressing historical injustice and inequalities. The use of a Truth Commission in order to address these inequalities is directly relevant. As Fiona Ross notes, "[m]ost [TRCs] have been predicated on the assumption that knowing the truth of violations committed in the past is important, not least to the establishment and legitimization of new political dispensations in the present" (235).

The latter part of the novel explores the continued racial discomfort in post-apartheid South Africa. While Faith clearly disapproves of Tannie Marie's racism when she "mouths the word 'blacks' like it's some dirty word" (281), she acknowledges while living in Yeoville that "[i]t's a risky business drawing cash here on a Saturday afternoon, especially if you're alone, on foot, a woman, white" (207). She is practical about the racial inequalities that persist six years into South Africa's democracy, which the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC),

¹⁶ Dead Rex's narration is indicated by a specific font. It is signified here as italics.

in an attempt to heal the national trauma of years of racial oppression, has brought into the public consciousness. Faith says very little about race directly and seems to have embraced the ethos of non-racialism. Nevertheless, this ethos rests on a naïve ignorance. For example, Faith is insensitive about the meaning of Maswabing's¹⁷ name. Faith is making conversation with the caretaker's wife and is "determined to make this woman warm to [her]" (272), but the conversational patterns she knows to follow end up further distancing her from the other woman. When Maswabing explains, having been asked the meaning of her name, that "[i]t means sadness," Faith insists that the name is "still lovely," causing offence to Maswabing who snaps:

My mother had five daughters before me. My father wanted me to be a boy, and when I wasn't, he took another wife. My mother had to leave us on the farm with my grandmother who was too old for children and go and find work in Johannesburg. My name is not lovely because life is lovely, life is not lovely, life is hard. Ay. (*ibid.*)

Faith has caused "great offence" (*ibid.*) merely by conforming to social conventions to which she is accustomed. She has attempted to insert Maswabing into an aesthetic framework in which a name is judged by its tonal qualities rather than as a comment on the circumstances of the birth of its bearer. This simply further alienates the woman she wished to befriend. This cultural *faux pas* may be viewed as evidence of Faith's childlike oblivion, similar to the incident when as a child she asked Nomsa about her parents' farm, assuming that Nomsa's parents were the owners of the land rather than workers on it (71). Nomsa's reaction is amusement to a child's misunderstanding, but Maswabing expects more sensitivity from an adult. While this may simply be a case of cross-cultural ignorance, it is nevertheless evident that her development has stagnated so that she is "always slightly surprised when [she] catch[es] a glimpse of [herself] in the mirror; the person that looks out at her isn't the person [she] expect[s]. [She] feel[s] smaller than her, feel[s] like what [she is] should take up less space than [her] framed reflection" (242). Her body has grown into adulthood but her psyche, it would seem, remains diminutive, like a child's.

In addition to the trauma of racism, the political unconscious is additionally fractured by the national trauma of the border wars, which occurred between 1966 and 1989. The wars were fought in Angola and South-West Africa (now Namibia) between South Africa, the Angolan government, and the South-West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO). It was caused by South Africa's unauthorised administration of South-West Africa, which, after 1971, when the International Court of Justice supported the United Nations, was determined to be illegal.

¹⁷Maswabing is the wife of the caretaker on the farm Faith encounters when she returns.

Compulsory conscription for young white men ran between 1968 and 1993 (Edlmann 256), so the experience of the “border wars,” as they are euphemistically named, is common. However, the secretive nature of the activities on the border meant that the public discussion thereof was prohibited. Every conscript signed allegiance to the “Official Secrets Act” so that the sharing of information garnered by them was classified (264). This led to the repression of the memories of the traumas experienced by the soldiers. This repression was compounded by the heavily patriarchal society of contemporary South Africa, which perceived the expression of emotion as weakness, and meant that men who survived the border wars were discouraged from sharing their traumatic experiences. The silence about various experiences of the men at the border in the novel is representative of the silence that all men who went to the border maintained, as well as the absence of acknowledgement of the war and its associated traumas in public.

The traumatic experience affects the political unconscious and informs social interactions even while it is unacknowledged. The only times Faith’s father’s conscription is mentioned are in conjunction with the secret cabinet, which stores Marius’s rifle, uniform, camera, and binoculars. Faith recalls that “[s]ometimes he’d come back a different person, quiet and moody, other times he would be the same, just not laugh as much as usual. Always, he was glad to be home” (*Gem Squash* 156—157). It seems that for Marius, his only outlet was his family. Bella has assumed Marius’s “demons” as a result of sharing the psychological space, in their marriage and their home. Their very intimacy has resulted in the psychic transmissions of the traumas.

Bella, too, is haunted by the ghosts which he has brought back with him. Mia, Faith’s mother’s friend who takes care of her after Bella is institutionalised, suspects that “all the demons he’d brought back with him from Angola attached themselves to her. Started whispering” (233). Interestingly, it is the very gun that symbolises her father’s conscription (and consequent traumatisation) that she uses in her accidental killing of Nomsa. The traumatic experiences Marius suffers at the border are inextricably entwined with the rifle, and it is relevant that it plays a causal role in the trauma that irrevocably changes Faith’s life.

Familial Fractures

At the start of the novel, Faith's family comprises her mother, Bella, her father, Marius, and a dog, Boesman. The only extended family mentioned are Faith's grandparents: Bella's deceased mother, Grandma English (148), and Marius's mother, Ouma, who helps Faith pack and move to Johannesburg (244). The farm on which they live is no longer operational, as the orange plantation has been crippled by drought (8). As a result, Marius works as a travelling salesman who returns home each weekend. Their isolation on the farm means that Faith's only frequent companions are her mother and Boesman – she has no friends her own age. Faith's relationship with her father, who she affectionately calls 'Papa' is amicable: he brings her a comic book and a toffee apple when he returns from his weekly travels (18). Her relationship with her mother, however, is more tense. Bella is always "Mother" (20),¹⁸ and from the beginning of the novel, the reader is informed that "[s]ome days a strangeness would take hold of [Bella], and she would disappear into the orchard for hours" (8). Rather than provide a maternal, semiotic refuge from the constitutive violence of the symbolic order, Bella's 'strangeness' has denied Faith access to this safe space. Marius originally fulfilled the feminine, semiotic position, in terms of the comfort he provided to her, even though as a father, he archetypically would fulfil the role of disrupting this comfortable intimacy and introducing the child to the symbolic order. Importantly, the semiotic is present "not as a mythically coherent, fixed sexuality specific to women but as a pre-conceptual psychic position – a chronological stage of experience preserved in the unconscious as a site of marginality to the Symbolic" (Jones 61).¹⁹

Marius is absent for the majority of the novel, firstly because of his occupation and later because he does not make contact with Faith after he and Bella separate in spite of being in the same town (*Gem Squash* 146). He maintains this silence even after he is informed that Bella has been sent to an institution and Faith is alone (223). As an adult, Faith finds herself defending her father, although he is in fact the one who abandoned her. She notes that her "Mother might have been too crazy to care about [her], but Papa didn't have that excuse. He didn't want [her] to find him, even after [Bella had been institutionalised]" (*ibid.*). Andreas

¹⁸The few exceptions to this, when Faith calls her mother 'Ma,' occur when Faith is either half-asleep (80) or paralysed by fear of the fairies, who she believes possess her mother.

¹⁹This is a similar situation to Rosa's in *Burger's Daughter* as discussed in the previous chapter. Both protagonists have non-archetypal relationships with the semiotic; both fathers maintain the semiotic order instead of interrupting it with the name of the father. In Marius's absence, however, Faith dissociates from the semiotic entirely, and thus precludes the possibility of engaging with subsequent maternal figures.

Trinbacher believes that it “is obvious that Marius is not the father of Faith” (106), because Faith’s blue eyes resemble Oom Piet’s rather than Marius’s brown ones, and because Bella states that “the day [she] conceived, the fairies came out and put [Faith] inside [her] [...] [her] father wasn’t even there” (128). I am not convinced by this argument because Faith resembles Tannie Hettie’s granddaughter, Lizelle, whose mother was the “fancy-woman” (42) with whom Marius had an affair. This resemblance is so vivid that Tannie Hettie calls her granddaughter by Faith’s name (289). This uncanny similitude would indicate that Lizelle and Faith share a father. As for Bella’s remark that Marius was not present for Faith’s conception, it is possible that she does not remember correctly. Her testimony is questionable as a result of her recurrent flights to the ‘fairy world,’ and her increasing mental instability. Regardless of Marius’s genetic relationship with Faith, he has nevertheless abandoned her. He does not come back even though he promised he would in a letter which Faith receives years later from her mother’s lawyer (240).

Bella’s madness, although having been hinted at in her absolute belief in the fairies, becomes unavoidably clear after Marius leaves. The effects of his absence are almost immediately apparent. Bella neglects her usually diligently completed household duties and she spends her time “staring into space” (30), a stark contrast to her usually talkative manner. Faith is isolated and confused by the consequent “lonely week” (*ibid.*) and its unusual activities which include going “to bed early, without stories, without fairies, and once, without dinner” (31). Bella’s withdrawal is intensified when she and Faith spend the next Saturday waiting for Marius’s arrival (*ibid.*). He does not return for over a month, until Bella abandons Faith in the roadhouse on her birthday (40). Marius takes Faith back to the farm, where they find the house in darkness because the generator is broken (48).

In the kitchen, they find “the devil” (47), a rabid Boesman, which Bella shoots and kills. Faith overhears the ensuing argument which includes personal accusations such as “[y]ou fucking left her,” and “[s]he’s your bloody child” (49). The altercation results in physical violence when Bella strikes Marius with “a large spanner” (50) and he retaliates by “punch[ing] her squarely in the face” (*ibid.*), after which he throws his wedding ring onto the ground and leaves. The rabid dog is a symbol for the collapsing family unit. Bella admits that she had “hoped it was Billary [sic]” and that she “should’ve know when he wouldn’t drink” (48). Her persistent hope in the face of contrary evidence indicates her attitude to her marriage: she knows there is a problem but hopes that if she does not address it, the problem

will disappear. It is significant that the night that Boesman is killed, and Bella can no longer maintain the hope that he does not have rabies, she must also face the fact that her marriage has degenerated to verbal and physical violence. The violence itself is also significant: it indicates the lack of verbal communication between the married couple: their inability to convey their feelings in words results in the use of violence. The fact that Faith witnesses her parents' communicative failure, and subsequent turn to violence, constitutes a trauma. The denial of the existence of the problem entirely is also possibly reflective, at another level, of white South Africa's failure to acknowledge the severity of the racial discrimination beyond calling the attempt at combating it "nonsense" (35). If this unaddressed trauma had continued unabated, it would have resulted in violence, as did Marius and Bella's relationship.

After Bella's death, Mia explains to Faith that Bella went "funny" (233) after she married Marius. Bella's first impression of Marius was that he was "too strange" and Mia affirms that "He was strange. There was an odd look in his eyes, obsessive. Lots of men had that look, the ones who'd been to the border" (*ibid.*). She describes how he "looked at Bella with those eyes, and it freaked her out" (*ibid.*). Mia suspects that "all the demons he'd brought back with him from Angola attached themselves to [Bella]. Started whispering" (*ibid.*). This indicates Mia's assumption that the "evil spirits" which "possessed" Marius before attaching themselves to Bella are what cause her mental instability, although this is something Bella herself dismisses when Nomsa suggests it (100).²⁰ This is an indication of one of the ways in which the novel presents evil: it can be interpreted as manifesting as psychological disturbance. In this way the political state of the nation is reflected in the psychology of its inhabitants. It is important that trauma is transferable or contagious: it is not contained to the person who experiences it.

Bella is apparently unable to address these traumas directly and has employed one of the responses to trauma as described by Robert Silverman, namely, fantasy. He explains that

The individual frustrated by reality may escape from that reality into a world of *fantasy*, where he is no longer disturbed by his frustration. Because he cannot cope with the conditions of reality, he resorts to fantasies, using them to reduce his anxieties and satisfy his needs. [...] Individuals [...] may withdraw completely into a fantasy world. When this happens, the individual becomes increasingly dependent upon his fantasy solutions and less able to deal with his frustrations. Ultimately, he may be unable to distinguish the real from the unreal, manifesting behaviour pathology. (454–455)

²⁰Her reluctance to accept the validity of Nomsa's suggestion may alternatively be motivated by her reluctance to accept anything about Nomsa: she does not want her in the house at all.

Bella's "fantasy world" is inhabited by fairies. She "believed in magic" (*Gem Squash* 7) and "was the only person who ever saw the fairies" who, she tells Faith, inhabit the farm on which the family lived (11). As Flockemann notes, "[t]hese paintings and stories [of the fairies] are so vividly described and graphically visualized by the mother that they literally inhabit the child's consciousness which in the first half of the book is contained within the boundaries of the farm" (8). For Bella, the fairies are a source of company on the farm, which is physically distant from the town and also socially isolated. She knows that the 'Tannies',²¹ in the town "didn't like [her] from the beginning. [She is] not from their precious little town. Worse, [she is] not even an Afrikaner" (34). As an adult, Faith realises the extent of her mother's loneliness when she returns to the farm and is similarly isolated (296). Consequently, as well as providing an outlet for the repressed traumas, the fairies also provide Bella with a source of comfort and escapism. It is them she paints, using Faith's face as the model, as Faith only realises when she returns to the farm (*ibid.*).

These paintings are indicative of the split that occurs within Faith as a result of her mother's traumas. While splitting is normally defined as a response to direct trauma (that is, trauma to the person who is split as a result), it is clear here that Faith has been deeply affected by her mother's depression as a child so early in her development. Even before Bella's psychological maladies descend into a world subsumed by fantasy, Faith suspects that if she stops looking at her mother, "she would turn into something bad, something that was not my mother" (15). This unsettling feeling of not being safe with her mother results in a psychological split in Faith which is mirrored in the paintings of the fairies. Rather than offering her solace, Bella has drawn Faith into her delusion, placing her at the centre of it, and objectifying this identification as visual representations.

Faith's desire to "belong somewhere" (275) is evidenced by the detailed descriptions of spaces which are provided. She longs for the intimacy of sensory experience. As a child, Faith no longer feels safe around her mother because of the distance instantiated by the fairies and Bella's "sickness" (127). An example of this is Faith's reaction to being interrupted by her mother while pretending to be 'Supergirl': her mother "looked as surprised to see [Faith] in [her] room as [Faith] was to see her out of hers" (126). The isolation Faith experiences is augmented by the numerous traumatic losses she perceives as abandonments: her father has

²¹Literally, 'aunts.' In this context, it denotes women.

left (26) and, in her words, “God took Boesman” (112). Faith goes in search of a safe space which can provide her with the security her parents have neglected to provide.

Faith turns to the physical comfort of sensory experiences rather than relying on people for emotional safety. It is interesting that it is on the first morning that Nomsa is on the farm that Faith feels comfortable enough to fall asleep on the kitchen step:

The *shup-shup* sound of straw on concrete floated out of the room [Nomsa was sweeping], mixing with a rhythmic singing Nomsa had struck up. The warmth of the sun and the hypnotic noises made [her] eyelids heavy. [She] felt blood buzzing in [her] veins, throbbing a sleepy rhythm as the world blurred into hazy shapes. [Her] mouth went slack, letting a spit-string escape, which [she] couldn't be bothered to wipe away. (66—67)

She is initially put out by Nomsa's response, which is to laugh at her, and she attempts to react haughtily, “the way Mother would when she disapproved of someone” (67), although her attempts to “keep her face together” only make Nomsa laugh harder, and Faith cannot withhold her own amusement. They spend the rest of their day together, “while [Nomsa] had cleaned the house, breathing in her smell of Sunlight soap, paraffin, and Zambuk” (*ibid.*) and Faith determines that “of all the woman [sic] I knew, Nomsa was the most beautiful” (67—68). The sensory experience Faith associates with Nomsa forms a sharp contrast to that she discovers in Bella's room:

The curtains were drawn, blocking out the light. It smelled of old ashtrays and her unwashed body. Mother stood with her back to the door. Her breathing was sharp and ragged, each breath expelled violently through flared nostrils. [...] The shoebox in which Mother kept all her [...] photographs was empty. Every picture had been systematically ripped to separate Papa. (79)

This fragmentation of the photographs represents the spitting of the family: it is symbolic not only of the separation between Bella and Marius but also of the destruction that this division causes. Bella is no longer “beautiful, worth a thousand looks” (17), and she has neglected her space with the result that it matches her. Accordingly, Faith chooses to spend her time with Nomsa, who encourages Faith to assist her around the farm (81), rather than with her mother, of whom Faith is scared (100).

During her childhood, Faith searches for and fears the fairies who “lived on the peripheries of [her] vision, well hidden from [her] curious eyes, but [she] knew they were there” (7). The trauma of Marius leaving results in Bella becoming more heavily entrenched in the fairy world. She begins referring to it as “the other world, the real one” (100), and is “excited” to see that the fairies are “waiting for [her]” (79). Faith comes to associate the fairies with the deterioration in her mother's condition. When her mother leaves her room, after Nomsa has

slipped medication into her food and she is well enough to realise that she has been “selfish,” Faith asks her if the “fairies [have left her] alone” (128). Bella is still sick, however, and misunderstands Faith’s meaning. Hoping to provide her with comfort, Bella tells her that the “fairies will never leave [her], don’t worry about that, not as long as [Faith is] here” (129). This indicates to Faith that she is “a child of the fairies,” which is confirmed by Bella’s confession that “the day [she] conceived, the fairies came and put [Faith] inside [her]. [She] used to wonder about that; [Faith’s] father wasn’t even there” (*ibid.*).

In spite of having acknowledged that she has been “selfish” and promising that “[t]hings will be better” (128), Bella does not notice the effects that her words have on her daughter. Faith feels that she “might vomit,” but her mother appears not to notice – instead she is “looking at someone behind [Faith]” (129). Faith has split her idea of her mother into parts: the good, which is the version of her mother before Marius left, and the bad, which Faith understands as being dominated by the fairies. In Klein’s terms, this is the artificial split between the “good breast” and the “bad breast” (Alford, “The Organization of Evil,” 10). Faith’s ensuing concerns about her biological tendency towards her mother’s madness will prove justified, when she begins to suffer symptoms of a madness of her own. As she explains to her friend Ketso after losing track of time, “I think I’m losing it” (211).

Bella’s friend, Tannie Hettie, organises that a doctor comes to see her. He asserts that “[i]t’s because Marius left. For some women, this is like death” (119). He explains that “[w]omen think to [sic] much, don’t get on with things” and accordingly do not sleep (120). Faith is suspicious of this diagnosis because she knows that “[n]ot sleeping [...] didn’t make you not you” (121). The doctor prescribes medication which Bella refuses to take and Faith is angry when Nomsa crushes the tablets into Bella’s food. While medicated, Bella’s condition improves, although she continues to rely on the fantasy of the fairies. Faith’s understanding of her mother’s ‘sickness’ as something supernatural, rather than physical, endows it with power beyond the help of medicine. She “didn’t believe Dr Fourie” (*ibid.*) about what is wrong with her mother, as she considers the fairies to be the cause, rather than a symptom, of Bella’s sickness.

Faith’s attitude towards the fairies changes once it becomes apparent to her that the presence of the fairies has a detrimental effect on her mother. She moves from “hoping [her mother] would take [her] with her to meet the fairies” (9) to being “in the dark, alone, [and not]

want[ing] to see the fairies” (25). This is most clearly exemplified in the “fairy song” Bella used to sing to Faith which Faith recalls while she is exploring the grove – a place her mother has warned her is occupied by fairies (8) – in order to find her mother’s soul after becoming convinced that Dead Rex has stolen it. The fairy song at first ‘comforted’ her (84), but as she remembers more of it she realises that the fairies are “green, not golden” which indicates she is following “*a dangerous path*” (84, italics in original). The song which formerly made her feel “braver” (*ibid.*) mutates into the source of horror which leads her to turn and “[run], stumbling on jelly legs” (85).

Bella’s mental instability has resulted in the psychological instability of the household. She had previously maintained the house single-handedly, but is no longer able to hold it together. Her internal destabilisation has resulted in the visible deterioration of the house. Faith recognises this and understands that the fairies, which she has realised with the intervention of Nomsa, are present only for her mother. She fears her mother’s apparently increasing reliance on something she no longer shares a belief in, and she comes to fear the fairies she once longed to see.

The Places of the Mothers

Nomsa is brought to the farm by Tannie Hettie after she came to investigate the cause of Bella’s absence at the Sunday market where Bella usually sells her paintings and vegetables. Bella has “taken to spending afternoons in her room with the door shut” and abandons her carefully tended vegetable patch, which is “set upon by birds” (60). Faith attempts to maintain a sense of normalcy and is ashamed of the state of the house when Hettie arrives. After witnessing the extent of Bella’s degeneration, she brings Nomsa to “take care of” Faith (62). Nomsa greets Faith with “an African handshake” (65), which Faith associates with power, because she has seen her father greet men – his equals – that way.²² It is of import that while Faith notices Nomsa’s blackness – the first descriptor of her is “[a] young black woman” (64) – she does not assume that Nomsa is, like all of the other black people she has encountered, there to work. Faith has been told that Nomsa will be present to “take care of [her]” (63) and assumes that she will be filling a role similar to her Ouma’s, as she is the person who has cared for her in similar situations. It is for this reason that when Nomsa asks

²²That is, with a traditional, European handshake, rather than the one Nomsa teaches Faith which involves a “Shake, fist, shake” (65).

Faith to direct her to her room, Faith offers her own room, as she has been expected to do for her grandmother (65). Instead, Nomsa assumes the “servants[’]” (*ibid.*) room from where Moses, the former farmhand, had disappeared (66). Despite the highly racist ideologies of contemporary society, Faith has escaped being indoctrinated into the prejudiced mindset of the majority of white South Africans at the time. In this way, her isolation has proved to be advantageous: she has not been exposed to a symbolic order which asserts the superiority of whiteness. The relationship between racism and socialisation is pertinent: while a child may be able to escape the dogmas into which she is socialised, this requires significantly more effort on behalf of the individual than it does to maintain the beliefs with which she is brought up.

Nomsa, with Faith’s assistance, restores order to the farm and to Faith’s life. Faith initially resents Nomsa’s presence but comes to like her. She decides that “of all the woman [sic] I knew, Nomsa was the most beautiful” (68). This forms a sharp contrast to Bella, who Faith once considered “beautiful, worth a thousand looks” (17), but who is now described as having “sallow skin, [...] limp ropy hair, [...] [and] stick-like arms” (98). Faith is requested to help Nomsa “picking up tomatoes” instead of playing with her “bucket and spade” as she would have with her mother (81). Nomsa allows Faith to assume some agency: she is encouraged to be useful. Bella used to ask Faith to “help her make dinner” but Faith resented not being allowed to “do any of the fun stuff, stir the pots or chop the vegetables” (21). The power dynamics between Faith and the two maternal figures in her home are vastly different for various reasons. The first is the biological family relationship between Bella and Faith – Bella’s desire to protect her daughter from the dangers of knives and hot stoves is understandable. Secondly, Nomsa’s blackness alters the *status quo*. Although she is an adult, her power is diminished by the country’s racially discriminatory policies; she occupies a similar position to Faith who is – by virtue of her whiteness – more powerful, but is, as a child, not able to access her power. Bella, Nomsa, and Faith are all less powerful because they are females in a heavily patriarchal society.

The positive effects of Nomsa’s allowing Faith to take on responsibility form a contrast to the negative results of Bella’s abandonment of her own responsibilities, and Bella leaving Faith to assume them. Faith feels she needs to assume the position of caretaker to a mother whose agency has been significantly diminished as a result of her mother’s irresponsible behaviour. This is exemplified when Faith observes that her “feet didn’t reach the ground, Mother’s were

flat on the floor, but somehow [Faith] still felt that [she] was more on the ground than [her mother] was” (128). After being discovered by her mother playing a game by herself, Faith is confused by her mother’s apology. It is clear to the reader that her apology is for having neglected her daughter during her ‘sickness;’ Faith, however, is “confused” – she believes that the apology is for Bella having told her she looked “silly” and “felt embarrassed, [and] kept thinking it wasn’t a big deal, [because Bella had] called [her] silly lots of times before,” and she assumes that Bella’s tears and apology are part of “Mother’s sickness” (127). Faith, who is standing on her bed, as she was before her mother arrived, “realized that the floor must always be that far away for Mother” (128). She has assumed the position of her mother, figuratively and literally. Faith is thus forced into taking on the position of the parent in their relationship. She states that “[t]he look on her [mother’s] face brought out an overwhelming urge in [Faith] to protect her, but [she] was the child and [she] didn’t know how” (144). Bella has relinquished control of her own life, making herself into a child-like figure. Faith is too young to assume the responsibility that has been thrust upon her by her mother who has, in turn, become helpless like a child.

Bella is threatened by the relationship Nomsa forms with Faith, which is sharply in contrast with Faith’s relationship with her mother. Nomsa assumes Bella’s household responsibilities as well as the maternal role. This is most clear when the narrating Faith notes that “Dettol was a cure for every gash, cut and scrape [she] had ever sustained, and it was still [t]here even though [her] Mother wasn’t” (85). It is as a result of this and Faith’s increasing fear of her mother (99) and the latter’s worsening “strangeness” (8) that Faith comes to decide “that [she] would no longer love Mother” when her mother slaps her, after Faith bit her in anger (103). The strength of this conviction to “no longer love Mother” is displayed when Faith is only able to maintain her anger at Nomsa for a day, while she maintains her promise to forgo loving her mother, with apparent success, for far longer. Indeed, Faith still claims not to love her mother into her adulthood although this is exacerbated by Faith’s understanding that Bella killed Nomsa. Her anger at Nomsa arises when Nomsa crushes the medication that Bella has refused to take into Bella’s food (122) which results in Faith snapping at Nomsa:

‘Why won’t you just go away and leave us alone!’ The words flew out of my mouth before I could catch them. In the silence that followed I wished I could take them back. Without Nomsa I would be alone. I wanted her to hug me, not be cross with me. I wanted her to stay and save Mother from dying. (124)

Her discomfort and unhappiness over the following day indicate her sincere feelings towards Nomsa which are feelings that are not replicated for her mother. She comes to make

reparations by making a sacrifice of something she dearly loves (her favourite teddybear, King Elvis) which she leaves on Nomsa's doorstep (137). By contrast, Faith is prepared not to speak to her mother for lengthy periods, and feels uncomfortable when her mother initiates contact. She admits feeling "wary of this Mother-person and I didn't want her to touch me" (127). It is interesting that Faith has emulated her mother's difficulty apologising – her mother "has never been sorry for saying things to [her] before [she was medicated, unknowingly, by the conniving of the doctor, Tannie Hettie and Nomsa, and before her 'illness']" (*ibid.*). Similarly, Faith is not "brave enough [...] to face Nomsa's anger" which is why she leaves King Elvis at the door rather than knocking at the door (137). This is an instance in which Faith's behaviour is similar to her mother's which Faith so fears, and yet which Faith increasingly emulates as she grows older.

It is interesting that when Faith does spend time with her mother – at Nomsa's insistence – it is to the orchard that they walk (142). Faith associates the orchard with the fairies as a result of Bella's warning that if she goes there alone, "Tit Tit Tay [a forgetful fairy who kidnaps children] will steal [her] and turn [her] into a monkey child" (7). Now, however, the orchard represents an even greater danger: the orange trees

seemed alien, and now that alienness made them seem bad. Under all those leaves were skinny deformed people with lots of arms and lots of fingers. But all trees sort of looked like people, I told myself, all trees look like they have somebody trapped inside. So why did these ones bother me? I looked at them as we walked closer and closer, and I realized they all looked the same. Rows and rows of the same tree. It was as if someone had planted a lot of identical twins in the ground. (143)

This may indicate Faith's fear of that the similarities between herself and her mother will cause Faith to suffer the same "sickness" (127) as Bella. As previously discussed, these fears are indeed justified. Faith must eventually act in order not to end up like her parents who "couldn't let go [...] [of what eventually] destroyed them" (233). Faith's traumatic experiences and physical similarities to her mother exacerbate the standard emotional experience of "matrophobia" which Sukenick defines as "a woman's fear of becoming her own mother" (Tyler 83).²³

After hearing about the death of her mother, Faith is unable to continue to successfully repress her feelings towards her. While she and Mia attempt to choose a coffin for Bella, Faith finds that her "voice sounds hard, sarcastic, not at all like the soothing funeral director's voice [that she had] tried to imitate" (175). Her apparent anger, as expressed in her repeated

²³Matrophobia is also relevant in the next chapter in relation to the protagonist of *The Grass is Singing*.

statement about “[l]eaving her [mother] to rot” (184), is revealed to be repression of a sadness that she feels, which is expressed only in her apparently unanticipated tears at her mother’s funeral. Faith’s identity has been split by trauma and her repression thereof. It has also been shifted – as a result of the relational nature of identity – as Faith asserts her identity in relation to each of the three mother figures who feature in Faith’s life.

The first, Bella, has always had a “strangeness” (8) about her, which gradually grows and undermines the practical part of her she was able to maintain until Marius left. In relation to her, Faith initially fulfils the role of a child (to whom Bella is the protector); later, this role is partially reversed when Bella is incapable of caring for herself, and it is Faith who worries about the presentability of the house (61).

The second mother figure is Nomsa who simultaneously endows Faith with agency – by getting Faith to show her around the farm (71) and to assist her with household tasks (81) – and she assumes the responsibility for the household. She provides a safe space in which Faith can exist as a child: Faith notes that Nomsa “felt like the only solid thing in the world” (109). Faith is initially suspicious of Nomsa, but is eventually won over by Nomsa’s emotional availability and genuine compassion. Without the recollection of “that night” (302), Faith assumes that her mother has been rightfully detained at Sterkfontein hospital as she believes Bella murdered Nomsa, and Faith is therefore unable to forgive her biological mother for depriving her of the mother figure in Nomsa of whom Bella was jealous (177).

This pseudo-maternal relationship is cut short, and Faith prevents herself from accepting a third maternal figure, Mia. The possibility of an archetypal somatic relationship with a maternal figure has however been precluded by Bella’s ‘sickness.’ Faith’s emotional relation was primarily with her father, with whom she had a more intimate relationship. Nomsa cannot completely fill this position because of the power dynamic informed by the symbolic order which deprives Nomsa of power as a result of her race. In spite of her willingness, Mia cannot fully function as a mother figure for Faith as her previous mothers have failed her and Faith is jaded as a result. Faith shows disdain towards Mia. When she first lives with her, she seems determined not to form emotional connections with either Mia or her daughter Molly (182), and, as an adult, while she appreciates that Mia has provided her a “temporary refuge” (236), she expresses disapproval for Mia’s childish attitude (171, 172, 175). She resents Mia for this, but eventually comes to “wonder what ever possessed [her] to doubt them [Mia and

Molly], to flee the safety of their friendship. Of [her] family” (326). It is only after addressing her repressed traumas, however, that she is able to accept that they are her family. Until her return to the farm and “that night,” she feels merely as though she has “outgrown” her sisterhood with Molly (236).

She unintentionally (unconsciously, compulsively) continues to fragment her family so that she can return to the farm and address the traumas that necessitated the formation of her alternative family. It is only once she understands that it is because *she* killed Nomsa – albeit as an attempt to save her from the sexual violence of Oom Piet – that her mother was detained, that she can begin to accept that the present family unit, comprising Molly and Mia, is her own. This acceptance of family restores to her possibility of the place of the mother and to her corporeal-sensuous being, her reintegrated embodied being in a world that also includes her immediate neighbours, including Petrus, Maswabing and the rest of their family. Faith comes to occupy an embedded position, signified by the reawakening of her sensory world and the recovery of a liveable structure of feeling.

Faith’s Fragmentation

In spite of her dedication to it, Faith’s repression of her memories involving her mother is not entirely successful. Her fear of becoming her mother continues to inform her identity. Part of this is exhibited in her maintenance of a child-like demeanour although she is 21 years old at the start of the second part of the novel. While she has been allowed access to standard maturation through her closeness to Molly, she has not developed an adult identity for herself. Faith acknowledges that she has lived “a borrowed life, a childhood that Molly allowed [her] to share in” (*ibid.*). She has relied on Molly’s progress to indicate cues for ‘normal’ maturation, but – while Molly has been in Grahamstown at university – Faith’s progress has been suspended. She works and lives in the same place and has retained the same attitudes. As Flockemann explains, Cathy Caruth shows “how the repetition of remembered traumatic events shape a sense of self, but also become the story ‘of the way in which one’s own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another’” (8). For Faith, repressing the memories of the trauma is not something she can comprehend as a whole. She is fragmented and the possibility of a unified selfhood is undercut by her incomplete understanding of herself. Caruth explains:

The repetitions of the traumatic event – which remain unavailable to consciousness but intrude repeatedly [...] – thus suggest a larger relation to the event that extends beyond what can be simply seen or what can be known. (quoted in Flockemann 5)

This is an example of Kleinian splitting. Faith is so totally split from her memory of killing Nomsa that it is only after Oom Piet asks her specific questions about the night Nomsa died that “it dawns on [her] that this line of questioning is weird. No normal person would bring this up. No one, not even those closest to [her], would dare dig into that night” (304). It is only as a result of this catalyst that she is able to fully recall the trauma. If not for Oom Piet’s prompting, she would continue to experience not only trauma in “the forgetting of a reality that can hence never be fully known; but [also] in an inherent latency within the experience itself” (Caruth 187). Faith’s trauma has caused her to maintain a stasis in terms of her self-conception as well as her development. Caruth furthers her point when she states that the “truth, in its delayed appearance and belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language” (quoted in Hesford 196). As a result of Oom Piet’s intervention, Faith is allowed access to a repressed memory which would otherwise have remained unknown and inaccessible.

Faith’s stasis is visible in her inability or unwillingness to engage in self-analysis. She is able to critically analyse others and their behaviour. She understands for example that Ketso – her boss and occasional lover – “couldn’t love anyone. [She] wondered for a moment how he’d become that way, and then [...] realized [that she] didn’t want to know” (*Gem Squash* 215). She has taught herself to disengage. Faith actively chooses *not* to ask difficult questions because she fears the answers she will receive. She acknowledges that she is

a spectator. Since the day [she] stepped on the train bound for Johannesburg, [she has] done nothing to alter the course of [her] life. [Her] entire childhood was spent playing a game of follow-my-leader, acting out a part in a life that wasn’t [her] own. [She has] drifted out of reach, sodden and heavy with water, soon [her] own weight will drag [her] under. (242)

Faith has maintained the pattern of having been split from herself as a result of the trauma. This pattern is echoed in her desire to pretend she is someone else on arriving in Johannesburg (182), and also imitates the splitting between Faith and the paintings her mother does of her as well as the resemblance between Faith and her mother. Several people assume that she is in fact her mother (252, 272, 278). This connection to her mother that she cannot sever serves to exacerbate her trauma. Andreas Trinbacher states that “[t]he repetitive references to Faith’s unease [...] when looking into mirrors are a structural means to stress her shattered identity. There is a climax in Faith’s behaviour and the interpretation of her reflection” (100). Although the confusions between Faith and her mother might serve to return Faith to the initial trauma, Faith has split herself from “that other person that bad

things happened to” (*Gem Squash* 182), and is thereby able to continue to repress these reminders.

Repression, via splitting, has become her default state and it is only as a result of a large amount of pressure that she begins to adjust this pattern. Faith resists returning to the farm, and does so only when she has no alternative. She clings to the repression of the memories of “that night” even when her life is at stake. Only at the intervention of the sangoma does she begin to address the traumas (320). Her inability to engage self-reflexively is contrasted with and exacerbated by her capacity to notice the nuances of behaviour even of people she does not know well. For example, she is aware that Michael Hurwitz – her mother’s lawyer – behaves unusually when mentioning that he has “waived his usual administrative fee” (238). She understands that “the lurid pink spots that coloured his cheeks like the blush on an apple” indicates Bella had “never lost her ability to charm men” (239). Until Faith returns to the farm, however, she does not begin to use her ability for astute observation self-reflexively.

Faith’s repression of her memories of, and connection with, her mother is not entirely successful. Several similarities between them cause Faith to fear that she is biologically determined to become like her mother. Just as Bella assumes Marius’s trauma, so Faith is scared that she has inherited the madness she witnessed in her mother. The physical resemblance is so close that even Faith herself accepts that “[a]t times [she] look[s] in the mirror and feel[s] like [she] is seeing her [mother]. [Faith has] her thick hair, though the colour is closer to Papa’s, her thin, even lips, her straight nose. [Her] hands have her [mother’s] long fingers, her square nails” (175–176). In order to symbolically distance herself from her mother, she says apparently careless things like “[w]hat about the crazy bitch?” while she “smile[s] and shrug[s] like [she is] some cartoon character and [she has] just said aw shucks” (174). She actively performs the attitude she wishes to convey. She appears to have kept the promise she made to herself as a seven year old, that she would no longer love her mother (103). For the most part, Faith has managed to “bury [her]self and [her] feelings” (182) as she chose to do when she came to live with Molly and Mia. She indicates that she wants to

pretend that [her reflection] wasn’t [her], that everything that had happened had happened to somebody else. As long as [she] didn’t see [her]self or hear [her] voice, [she] could hold on to the belief that [she] was someone else. [She] even kept King Elvis [her beloved teddybear] locked away in [her] suitcase because he belonged to that other person that bad things happened to. (182)

This is a clear indication of Faith splitting herself into parts, and dissociating from the part she associates with fairies, her mother, and her life until this point. As Flockemann succinctly states:

Faith's resemblance to her mother is signified by her starkly dead-white hair and blue eyes. It is suggested that just as the child is afraid of becoming like the mother, so do the parents appear to reject this reflection of themselves mirrored in the child. This mirroring of the self across generations is represented in frequent references to reflections in literal mirrors, which result in a 'mis-recognition' as the protagonists do not appear at first to recognize themselves in their own reflections, another indication of the fragmented selfhoods trapped in another's past that are described here. (10)

Even while she pretends that she had severed herself from her mother, Faith's way of living in the world is determined by her parents. She follows the example they provided her in failing to address issues which present themselves, and splitting them off instead. This is worsened for the child by the fact that her mother's appearance so closely resembles her own. She is incapable of effacing the traumatic memory of her mother because even her own face reminds her of her mother. Faith's repression of the trauma relies on distancing herself from her mother emotionally – as she has tried to do since even before Nomsa's death – and she now finds she needs to attempt to deny her identity in order to separate herself from “that other person that bad things happened to” (182).

Supernatural/Psychic

The supernatural in the novel has heretofore been discussed as a symptom or manifestation of the repressed or split traumas the characters have suffered. This is an entirely Western perception, however, and assumes a psychic world view. The complex, entangled political unconscious cannot be encompassed by the Western perspective. It requires the complementary – and sometimes contradictory – South African understanding of bewitchment, as explored by Gavin Ivey and Tertia Myers' informative two-part paper entitled “The psychology of bewitchment.” They attempt to consolidate Western psychological understandings of responses to trauma and African experiences of bewitchment into a “more adequate psychological understanding of bewitchment” (Part I, 71) by performing phenomenological and psychoanalytic studies on interviewed participants' experiences with witchcraft.

They determine that victims of bewitchment display four symptoms, all of which relate to Bella's ‘sickness’ and Faith's splitting of her memories. In the first place, “victims of bewitchment display a suspicious orientation, evident in their conviction that others wish

them harm” (Part II, 80). In her paranoid state, Bella is convinced that various people intend to do her harm: she “didn’t trust” the pills prescribed by Dr Fourie (121) and suspects that the other people in the town have “been talking” (89). As an adult, Faith is quick to fear the unknown. Her reaction to Mrs Mabutu, a women offering traditional prayers and healing, is evidence of this – she is instantaneously and inexplicably frightened of her (189).

Secondly, “bewitchment is typically experienced in interpersonal contexts marked by envy, jealousy, and hostility” (Ivey & Myers, Part II, 80). Bella behaves in a hostile manner towards Nomsa, in particular, although she also reacts angrily to Tannie Hettie’s interventions. Upon finding out that Hettie had brought Nomsa, Bella’s face “twisted into a feverish hatred” (78): she is infuriated by the implication that she cannot care for the house independently. Her anger may be inflamed by her misdirected fury at Hettie who “could have warned” Bella about Marius’s affair with Hettie’s daughter (89). Faith’s hostility is mostly directed at Molly’s cats (243) although she exchanges “harsh words” with Mia (250), alienating the people who love her most, before she leaves for the farm.

In the third place, “victims of bewitchment commonly display moralistic attitudes involving the polarisation of good and bad, and a conscious identification with the good pole” (Ivey & Myers, Part II, 80). Bella has, in Kleinian terms, split off from the bad: in her mind, the fairy world is “the real one. It’s perfect there, no one will bother us. Make up lies about me. I belong there” (100). She has created an idyllic world in which she and Marius are united (100—101). For Faith, the bad is associated with her mother. A large part of her identity is formed is retaliation against the similarities she shares with her mother and she strives to prove that she is not like her in spite of these.

Finally, “bewitchment is characterised by a preoccupation with destructive events occurring inside one’s body, typically following the perceived ingestion or absorption of evil *muti*” (Ivey & Myers, Part II, 80). Although neither Bella nor Faith believes in witchcraft as it is outlined here, Faith discovers a physical object inside her that must be removed by a sangoma (320). Once it is gone, Faith is able to heal. Of course, it is also possible that, because Faith is the narrator, Bella’s experience of internal destructive events are elided, or indeed, that the ingestion of *muti* was accompanied by trauma, and the memory of it has thus been repressed, causing it to be absent from the narrative.

If the supernatural is to be taken seriously, it would appear that the origin of this witchery seems to be Mary who introduced Faith to the concept of tokoloshi (20). Ivey and Myers explain that the tokoloshe is considered to be a witch's familiar (Part I, 58). Mary tells Faith that "a witchdoctor had sent a Tokoloshe to live with [them]" and it would stay "unless [they] moved and gave the land back" (20). A witchdoctor would not have sent the tokoloshe without motivation. This causal motivation would either be in the form of a personal relationship between the sangoma and the family, or the witchdoctor, who was paid by someone else to send the tokoloshe. As there is no other mention of a witchdoctor – aside from the sangoma who helps Faith – it appears that it is more likely the latter, and, as Mary knows about the tokoloshe and how it got there, it is likely that it was she who acquired the witchdoctor's assistance.

Ivey and Myers are aware that there is a risk that their approach "pathologises African belief systems" (Part II, 91), but claim that this criticism is "based on the assumption that interpreting the unconscious significance of specific supernatural ideologies is tantamount to pathologising these belief systems" (92). Instead, their concern is with "how specific aspects of supernatural belief systems [...] are unconsciously employed by individuals in the service of the defensive processes implicated in various forms of psychopathology" (*ibid.*). This fulfils the purposes of their project, as they have "illustrate[d] both the relationship between bewitchment beliefs and psychopathology, and [...] explore[d] how such beliefs can be worked with in the context of individual psychoanalytically oriented psychotherapy" (*ibid.*).

Gem Squash Tokoloshe, however, utilises an entangled approach which does not prioritise one hermeneutic mode over another. Instead, it is left open-ended: Bella's condition improves after she receives (Western) medication, and Faith is cured after her encounter with a sangoma.

Faith fears the supernatural as a result of her mother's madness which she assumes is caused by malicious fairies, even though she tells herself to "[g]row up [...] the days of the evil fairies are over" (198). Her instantaneous fear of Mrs Mabutu is augmented by the fact that the blind woman "appeared to be looking [her] over" (189). Faith insists that she does not "need any prayers" but Mrs Mabutu insists that she does: "there is a bad inside [of Faith] ... bad things have happened and need to come out. You don't let them come" (191).

Faith's repression of the traumas she underwent – the loss of Boesman, her father's abandonment, her mother's depression, the loss of Nomsa, and the mistaken belief that her mother killed Nomsa – can no longer be maintained. She sees in Mrs Mabutu's eyes "a look [...] that reminds [her] of [her] Mother, a madness [she has] forgotten, or chosen not to remember" (*ibid.*). Her mother's death has brought her feelings about the period described in the first part of the novel to the fore and she must now deal with her past. While her mother was alive, Faith could continue to split off her memories of killing Nomsa and attach them to her mother. Now that she is dead, it seems these memories have returned to Faith. Mrs Mabutu instructs her to "[g]o home" (*ibid.*), and it appears that she begins to mentally return to the night that Nomsa died even on the day that she encounters Mrs Mabutu, even though she does not take Mrs Mabutu's opinion seriously.

In "a halfway world" (201) between sleep and wakefulness, Faith hears the voice of Dead Rex who, the reader learns in the prologue and epilogue, encouraged Faith to "*hurt [Oom Piet] back*" after guiding her to the room where he was raping Nomsa (3). The voice encourages her to "*[l]ook, look, mosetsana, look what you have done*" (201). This is a call for Faith to remember and acknowledge her own responsibility for the death she blames her mother for. Although she dismisses this as part of a dream, she then hears Nomsa's voice calling "Koko," her nickname for Faith, when Mrs Mabutu's granddaughter knocks on the door (204). In addition to Nomsa's voice, Faith also experiences the "conjuring up [of] her smell, Sunlight soap, Vaseline-oiled skin, iron-hot cotton sheets" and "a floodgate of memories" (203). The intimacies of sensory experience draw Faith back to the time before she split off part of herself. Faith confesses that she "think[s that she is] losing it" (211).

Mrs Mabutu symbolises the traditional African approach to the supernatural. She is able to access the world of the spirits and ancestors, and mediates for people like Faith messages therefrom (230). This contrasts with Bella's more Western conception of the supernatural. For her, it is comprised of fairies in the European tradition, though they are of her own invention. It is interesting that Dead Rex exists beyond Bella's lifespan because the "*mad woman painting [...] has trapped him in this place too long*" (327). For Faith and Molly, with whom she shares the stories her mother told (194), the fairies are not wholly of the Western tradition. They retain the form with which Bella endowed them, but are made even more monstrous by the combined imaginings of the two girls (195), and are akin to tokoloshi. The girls' fear is intensified by the confirmation that "[t]here is such a thing as a Tokoloshe [...].

In fact [...] there are many such Tokoloshi” from a woman called Beauty who is babysitting them (196).

While Bella “thought religion was nonsense” (176), she seems wholly invested in a fairy world of her own imagining. She does not subscribe to the archetypal Western belief, Christianity: Faith knows that her mother “didn’t believe in Jesus. Mother didn’t believe in things she couldn’t see” (119). She does see the fairies, however, and wholeheartedly believes in them. She is, however, aware that other people do not know about them: she orders Faith not to tell Nomsa about the fairies because “[t]hey’ll hear [her] and they’ll leave” (76).

The fact that Faith’s trauma is linked to the supernatural necessitates that she utilise supernatural means to dispel her repressed – and physically embodied – trauma. After she confronts Oom Piet and remembers the night Nomsa died and her responsibility for her death, Faith slips into a dream-world in which she is consumed by “a thick and soupy vortex, pressing against [her] feverish retina in the light, the silvery eyes like darting fish, their magenta voices whispering, ‘Killer’” (319). She is not fully a part of the human realm: the soup she is brought contains “nourishment [which is] of no use to [Faith]” (*ibid.*). She overhears conversations about the possibility of contacting a doctor, though Faith is said to be “already in the spirit world” (320), but instead, it is a “new presence” who is brought to the room instead (321). He is able to sense the supernatural realm of which Faith has become a part: the fairies “don’t like him” (*ibid.*), despite the fact that the narrator observes that he “is old and gnarled and brown and he is able to discern that and stooped and looks like a tree spirit but he doesn’t feel like one of them” (*ibid.*).

The sangoma is able to determine that

There is a thing inside her, a thing that has been there for many years, maybe since she was a small girl. It grows. She will not let it go; for some reason she wants to hold it inside her, even though it will destroy her. If we are to help her, we need to get it out. (321—322)

It might be that Faith is reluctant to forgive herself for the crime for which she blamed her mother. The extent of her anger when it was directed at her mother is indicated by a bitter statement she makes after her mother’s funeral: “God forgive her. I can’t” (177). However, with this unnamed man’s assistance, Faith is able to undergo three nights of spiritual redress.

Faith states that “[t]he first night is black;” “a cold black tar” which is spread on her stomach penetrates her, “coating the swelling thing” which is the physical manifestation of Faith’s traumas, and she is numbed (322). She describes “[t]he second night [which] is red” – “the spasms begin and, like a pupating worm, [she] begin[s] to change” (323). She is “left, small and pink and raw, squirming on the bed like a new baby grub” after having shed her “outer shell” (*ibid.*). The man is able to remove “the swelling thing [...] hard and dead” and although she initially ‘wants it back,’ Faith allows him to take it (*ibid.*). Faith experiences “[t]he third day [which] is white” as “a blank canvas” (*ibid.*). She is “an empty shell, hollow and vacant, yet somehow [she] feel[s] free” (*ibid.*). She is liberated from her traumas and rejoices in the fact that “the only one who can scar [her] surface with paint is [her]” (*ibid.*).

As Trinbacher correctly observes, it is somewhat problematic that Faith is able to overcome approximately fifteen years of trauma in a few days, although he suggests that it is not “that far-fetched” because of the novel’s supernatural elements (93). The resonance of traumas on multiple levels suggests that Faith’s personal trauma is emblematic of or comparable to South Africa’s social trauma, and her encounter with the sangoma would then represent the workings of the TRC. The suggestion that it is possible for such rapid healing to occur figures the TRC as a resolution of the national trauma rather than simply as the commencement of an attempt at national healing.

Trinbacher suggests that

The supernatural realm is a decisive dramatic means to forebode and anticipate the narrative action. [...] The characters’ narratives, as well as their invented supernatural imaginary figures, merge up to a point that scratch the surface of schizophrenia, prompting the characters to commit deeds they cannot remember. (89)

I disagree that the supernatural aspects of the text are merely manifestations of psychological traumas. The existence of Dead Rex outside of Faith’s story – in the epilogue – indicates that his desire “*to find fear-hate to eat*” (328) extends beyond Faith and Bella. This is evidenced by the statement that “*[h]e smell the stink of goat-dead and it please him. The sad one give him appeasement, the sad one know how to protect her own*” (327). The goat mentioned is clearly the one Faith found in the orchard: “[i]ts leg lies at an awkward angle, trapped by the snarled roots of the tree. It must have lost its footing in the roots and broken its leg, though that seems strange for a goat” (294).

It seems that Maswabing, whose name means sadness (272), is “the sad one” who has offered the goat as a sacrifice to Dead Rex to leave their family alone. This indicates that the trauma Faith and her family experience is not isolated. Indeed, as it is emblematic of the repression induced by living in apartheid South Africa, all are affected by the national trauma. The repressed traumas of Faith and her family are a microcosm of the sustained trauma at a national level. Like the traumas Faith has needed to address, so must South Africa as a country address the collective traumas of its inhabitants under apartheid. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is the formalised means by which the nation attempted to unveil the hidden traumas of the past in order to allow collective healing. The difference between the Western conception and the African conception resonates with the difference between an abstract, generalised understanding and an embodied, specific understanding that this study denotes as the symbolic and the semiotic. Where the symbolic follows the logic of metaphor, substituting the particular with its ghostly schematic representation, the semiotic follows the logic of metonymy, relating proximate concrete objects through contiguity.

Return

Faith’s reticence to “[g]o home,” as she is instructed to do by Mrs Mabutu (230), indicates her unwillingness to address the traumas she has faced. It is only after a heated argument with Molly and Mia that Faith relents and leaves. She admits that

For years, all I longed for was to return to the farm, breathe in the hot smell of citrus, or even taste the dust-grit of the drought years on my teeth. I can’t remember when I gave up hoping, when I buried myself so deep that I ceased to be. There is something inside that is beating to get out, some violence that is buried, an anger that, if I remain here and ignore it, will end up harming more than Bratcat [Molly’s cat]. There is something inside of me and it’s out of control. A thing that has been suffocated for too long and now claws its way up, gasping for air. It’s the voice that whispers spite in my dreams, a darkness that attached itself to me long ago, before I was aware of dark things that grasp. I feel it beating against my ribcage, like a giant irregular pulse. If I don’t do something soon, it will be all of me, and I will be like Mother, a nothing locked inside my body, waiting for death. (242—243)

In short, it is out of fear that she returns to the farm: fear that she will become her mother if she does not address her repressed traumas. Faith’s longing to return to her childhood home is indicative of her desire for wholeness – in contrast to her current split state – and a desire to assert an identity. As Trimbacher notes, “place and home are a decisive supportive means to re-gain one’s identity” (100). It is important “that the place itself, and the local inhabitants, appear to reject the protagonist’s right to belong” (Flockemann 9). The first instance of the family’s right to inhabit the home being questioned is very early in the narrative when Mary, an employee of the family,

said a witchdoctor had sent a Tokoloshe to live with [them], to steal [their] souls while [they] slept. She said that the land [they] lived on didn't belong to [them], and unless [they] moved away and gave the land back, the Tokoloshe would stay. (20)

In Trinbacher's understanding, the basis for the family's non-belonging is purely their whiteness, and therefore, Nomsa – as a black person – does belong, purely by virtue of her blackness (11). I would suggest that this is an oversimplification of the matter. Land-ownership in South Africa is a complicated issue, and although the farm – as a piece of land in South Africa – is necessarily historically 'black land,' the history of the farm and how it got its name is explained (72). Mary's statement is apt for all white-owned land, however, and the tokoloshe, an embodiment of psychic power, like other supernatural figures in the novel, is the agent who acts out the psychological violence suffered by black people at the hand of white people. Maswabing echoes a similar sentiment when she rages against Faith after her arrival on the farm:

You come here and expect us to clean for you, to fix your house, and then you want to take our transport. And tomorrow, maybe you come tomorrow and say we must leave your land, land where we have lived for more than ten years. Eleven, twelve, thirteen [...]. And if we don't go, will you shoot us? (272)²⁴

Faith's ownership of the land and the farm is questioned because she has not lived there and because of her sudden arrival and claim of it after so many years of absence. Faith notes that "[i]t's strange, all the time spent in Johannesburg [she] felt out of place, the simple country cousin. Here, where [she] thought [she] belonged, [she's] city folk" (267). The possibility of belonging is not entirely negated, however. Faith still believes that there is a chance that she will be able to find in her exploration of the space – and herself – "a soul [she] can claim as [her] own" and a possibility that she "might belong somewhere" (275).

When she arrives on the farm, Faith finds a home in which "[n]othing seems to have changed" (261):

All the furniture, with a few exceptions, seems to be the same. It's just [Faith's] family and [their] personal belongings that are missing. It almost seems as if the house has been waiting for [them] to come back, frozen in time, patient. (265)

Although "the town itself has changed," the house appears as though it is "untouched by the passage of time and politics" (277). The town has been affected by the shifts in the political unconscious while the house, like Faith herself, has been possessed by a stasis. Mrs Mabutu tells Faith that her "mother collected these spirits around her, they brought sickness to [their]

²⁴ This emphasises Maswabing's alignment with the supernatural and psychic powers, as discussed in the previous section.

house” (230), with which Maswabing corroborates, telling Faith that the house “is full of spirits” (273).

The exception to this stasis is the presence of Petrus, the farm manager and his family who live on the farm. Maswabing’s attitude towards and Mpho’s resentment of Faith are indicative of the political changes in the country. In contrast to Mary’s veiled criticism of the white family living on ‘black land,’ Maswabing openly expresses her feeling about Faith’s sudden arrival and assertion of her power. Unlike Nomsa, who was an easy target for Oom Piet as a result of her womanhood and her blackness, Maswabing refuses to be similarly victimised and confronts Faith, who she believes to be her mother, who allegedly murdered Nomsa, a black woman.

The novel is open-ended, in that the extent of Faith’s healing is unclear. It appears as if she has overcome her individual trauma and is able to integrate herself into the community on the farm, and her family with Molly and Mia, but these are inferences made from brief descriptions. Even if she is accepted into these home-spaces, it remains to be seen whether this extends to the town, and to Johannesburg. Faith is still a white woman occupying ‘black land,’ and although Faith’s personal relationship with Maswabing has shifted, the social issues that caused Maswabing’s anger remain. While Faith has addressed her repressed issues and is now free to inhabit the so-called New South Africa, it is evident that many of the issues of the old South Africa remain pertinent, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s address of these has been largely symbolic. The large-scale address of social problems has failed, but the novel demonstrates that interpersonal relationships are the means by which these persistent divisions can be overcome.

The cure, for Faith, is not simply the removal of the evil inside her. It consists also in a return to an earlier, physical way of being in the world, an embodied location in a place, with people who share it. A return, then, to the somatic, but one that is already prefigured by the symbolic differentiation and conflicts that characterise human consciousness and social organisation.

Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* and the negotiation of an identity in a politically prohibitive environment

The Colonial Unconscious

Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* traces the life of the white female protagonist from her troubled childhood through her adulthood, until she is murdered by a black employee with whom she shared an intimate relationship. The novel explores the determinant relationship between Mary's childhood and the remainder of her shortened life. The dynamics of power she observes between her parents establish the pattern which she replicates in various ways and in assorted relationships. As a child, Mary finds herself allied with her mother, both as a result of their corresponding genders and her mother's use of her as a confidante, informing Mary of her marital difficulties. Deprived of an innocent childhood, Mary paradoxically continues to present a child-like temperament until after she is thirty years old. The naivety that accompanies this is interrupted, however, by a conversation she overhears between her friends in which it was stated that Mary "just isn't like" (*The Grass is Singing*, hereafter *Grass* 48) a normative woman of her age, and Mary consequently forces herself to perform the identity of an adult.

Mary maintains her understanding of the world as informed by her parents' gender-determined relationship as well as their colonially-informed racism. Her conception of gender dynamics cause her to struggle in her relationship with her husband. He is not controlling or dogmatic, which she finds unattractive, because she expects him to behave as her father did. She finds his companionable association with the black farm-workers repulsive. She maintains an "arid feminism" which she "inherited from her mother" (41), but this feminism does not extend to women who are not white. Moses, the "houseboy" (9), challenges Mary's rigid frameworks, which are formed around oppositions between masculinity and femininity, and blackness and whiteness, by being simultaneously commanding and compassionate, as well as black, insightful and informed. The dynamics of the relationship between Mary and Moses remain indeterminate, but their intimacy is evident enough to two local white men, who set up a plan to remove Mary and her husband from the farm. In the presence of one of these men, Mary shuns Moses for the sake of social convention, and then presciently knows that he will kill her for the rejection.

The novel was first published in 1950, two years after the commencement of the National Party's rule, and five years after the Second World War. It is set before the war, in the 1930s. The political climate is tense – a rigidly conceived idea about what it means to be a white, English-speaking South African is formed in opposition to white Afrikaans-speaking inhabitants and black people. This idealised identification is formed in allegiance with England. The narrator notes that “[f]or Mary, the word ‘Home’ spoken nostalgically, meant England, although both her parents were South Africans and had never been to England” (37). This identification is problematised by Tony Marston, who has only recently arrived from Britain, and who prescribes to “the conventionally ‘progressive’ ideas about the colour bar, the superficial progressiveness of the idealist that seldom survives a conflict with self-interest” (226). This disparity, between the nostalgic England for which English-speaking South Africans long and the lived reality of Tony, who has resided in England until recently, exemplifies the fractured identities of English-speaking South Africans.

Marston represents an imperial sensibility, different from the colonial stance espoused by the South Africans. While the colonial position depends on racial oppression for the maintenance of privileged whiteness, Marston – and therefore the imperial view – presents a position of “‘progressiveness’” (231), although it is clear that this apparent liberalism is hypocritical when he suggests that a relationship across “the colour bar” (230) “would be rather like having a relation with an animal” (231). While both ideologies are based on racist views, the imperial stance takes a paternal attitude towards black people, whereas the colonial position assumes a more obviously dominating relationship, a master/slave dynamic.

This difference is the manifestation of the fracture which is symptomatic of the repressed national traumas of colonialism and an unwillingness to engage with anything that threatens the precarious position of the power white people are unwilling to share. The “first law of white South Africa [...]: ‘Thou shalt not let your fellow whites sink lower than a certain point; because if you do, the nigger will see he is as good as you are’” (221) is the rule around which the events of the novel occur. The parameters of possibility are laid out in advance, so that Moses is perceived as a potential threat even before the actions which cause him to be condemned.

Early local criticism of the novel praised “the writing while excoriating the politics and the stereotyping of the colonial characters: ‘morbid,’ ‘bitter’ and ‘pessimistic’ were the dominant

adjectives” (Visel 159). Internationally, the novel was perceived as addressing “the important elements of the period: racism; the threat to white ascendancy posed by both socialism and African nationalism, and the personal dilemma of whites as they attempt to align their European values” (Bertelsen, quoted in Visel 159). Locally, however, the explicit critique the novel presents was unacceptable to contemporary norms. The unveiled criticism of racism in South Africa was heretical when the novel was published – two years into the rule of the National Party, whose oppressive apartheid regime lasted until 1994.

Later criticism is concerned with racial and gendered identities in the novel. Gender issues are explored in work such as Gül Büyü’s dissertation in terms of Freudian psychoanalytic concepts. He determines that Mary suffers “repetition compulsion” (29) and cites this as the reason Mary replicates her mother’s stances, such as staying in an unfulfilling marriage, the desire for children, and her attitude towards men. Mary’s unresolved oedipal complex is noted (38), and Büyü suggests that “Mary’s neurosis can be related to her experiences about sexuality with her father” (39). Problematically, he reduces the racial political unconscious to a “surface layer [which] indicates a simple conflict between black and white” (44), thereby failing to acknowledge the fractured national psyche which creates a person such as Mary. Sima Aghazadeh performs a comparable reading in her “Sexual-Political Colonialism and Failure of Individuation,” and additionally examines the relationships between gendered, racial and class oppressions. Other papers, such as Caroline Rooney’s “Narratives of South African farms” and Sheila Roberts’s “Sites of Paranoia and Taboo: Lessing’s *The Grass is Singing* and Gordimer’s *July’s People*” are concerned with land-relationships, and gothic elements respectively, although they weave in elements of race, class and gender.

The Politics of Race and Gender

Although Doris Lessing was an inhabitant of what was Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), the novel is set in South Africa, which Lessing explains by stating that she does not think “there was very much difference between the Rhodesian experience and the South African experience. *The Grass is Singing* [...] could have happened in South Africa” (Lessing, quoted in Gray 331). The countries have a similar history in terms of British occupation, and were, as of 1923, “subject to the same political rules” (Bertocchi & Canova 1855). As a result, the neighbouring countries share part of their colonial unconscious, especially before the implementation of apartheid, when the novel is set. That is, they share a social sensibility,

although in South Africa this is complicated by the presence of Afrikaners, against whom English South Africans were additionally, if more covertly, united. The theoretical framing of the novel in terms of psychoanalysis and anti-colonialism emerges in the ironic perspective located in the narrative voice and narrative structure. Lessing's employment of Freud's theoretical frameworks, which were by the time of the novels' publication widely known and accepted (Rock & Fonagy 535), are visible in the various pieces of knowledge the characters repress, to which the third person narrator has access, such as the notion that repressed memories will return, and Mary's relationship with her father framed as an unresolved oedipal complex (Roberts 77).

While the novel is set before the implementation of legal apartheid, the racism depicted in the novel is a result of centuries of oppression and the belief on the part of the various colonisers of Africa of their inherent superiority. As Motlhabi notes, the struggle against racist oppression in South Africa predates the formal commencement of legal discrimination in 1948 (2). Mary Turner unquestioningly accepts the colonial association of blackness with savagery and the bush, and, later, sexuality. The period is also informed by strict patriarchal conceptions: Mary's lack of marital prospects is a concern to the friends she overhears discussing her situation. They consider the fact that she is "well over thirty" and express their suspicion that she "will never marry" because she "just isn't like that, isn't like that at all" (Grass 48). Mary's mother's position, as a woman who depends on her despised husband to bring "home the money, and not enough of that" (39), demonstrates the lack of power available to women. Until this interruption of her understanding of herself as a result of her friends' conversation, however, Mary had lived independently and happily, supporting herself. It is for this position that she later longs, and she eventually runs away from the farm in order to return to her old job and the "girls' club" (43) where she used to live.

The novel is set "before the era of the tobacco barons" (Grass 11), although there is already a great financial disparity between Mary's husband, Dick Turner, and the other farmers of the area, who farm tobacco. Dick has terrible luck and is accordingly called "Jonah" by his contemporaries (101). Part of this is as a result of his desire to create an Edenic farm of "little crops" (98), although when he reluctantly agrees to plant tobacco (151), from which Charlie Slatter has made his fortunes, the rains come late, the season is a dry one, and "most of the tobacco was ruined: there would be a little" (160).

The novel is set in a period in which it is legally reprehensible for a white woman and a black man to engage in a sexual relationship, as Tony Marston suspects Moses and Mary to have done. As Sima Aghazadeh recalls:

Michael Thorpe remarks that: ‘since 1903 in Rhodesia, it has been a criminal offence for a black man and a white woman to have sexual intercourse but no such law applies where a white man and a black woman are involved.’[...] The natural relationship between a dominant man and a subordinate woman in a patriarchal system becomes problematic just because the man is black and the woman, white. This disturbs *spirit de corps* [sic], causing a tension in colonial culture by blurring the line between ‘us’ and ‘them.’ (116)

There is no question that Moses is “as good as hanged already” (*Grass* 18) as a consequence of his actions. They are completely disjunctive with the subservient position he is expected to occupy, and the readers of the newspaper article with which the novel commences “felt a little spurt of anger mingled with what was almost satisfaction [...] as if something had happened which could only have been expected” (9). Moses has fulfilled the expectation of the racist stereotype of ‘natives’ as people who will “steal, murder, or rape” (*ibid.*).

Mary and Moses’ relationship is a personal transgression of the political dictate that black men and white women should not engage in intimate relationships. The political-symbolic norms determine the conditions of possibility in which Moses and Mary *ought* to act, and yet their relationship transcends these. Their relationship is defined by their proximity, as well as by the socially constructed differences they have both been socialised into respecting. This is especially so for Mary, who is only able to explore her feelings for Moses as a result of her physical and emotional distance from people outside of the farm. Their racial and gendered differences continue to determine their relationship, however, because – although their respective access to different power (hers, whiteness; his, masculinity) places them on a more equal plane – it is *because of* these respective privileges and deprivations that their relationship can occur. Moses’ determined assertion of a human identity undercuts Mary’s attempts to treat him as she has other ‘houseboys.’ This results in Mary having to reassess the frameworks through which she understands the world: blackness can no longer be exclusively associated with savagery and baseness. Instead, she must begin to explore a more nuanced understand of her personal interactions, which has ramifications for her understandings of familial and social interactions, which have been informed by the same rigid binary frameworks.

Family and Childhood

Mary remembers her childhood as an unpleasant one. She looks “back on it [the period after the death of her siblings as a result of dysentery] as the happiest time of her childhood” (40). If the most joyful time is during a time of mourning, this indicates the extent of her difficult childhood. Her enjoyment of this period is because of her relief at “living in a house where there were suddenly no quarrels, with a mother who wept, but who had lost that terrible hard indifference” (*ibid.*). Her parents “fought over these bills [owing to the owner of the bar where Mary’s father drank away their money] twelve times a year” (39). She sums up her childhood lived in indistinguishable towns as being composed of “[d]ust and chickens; dust and children and wandering natives; dust and the store – always the store” (40), and resents her father for their presence in such places. The narrator notes that “[i]t had never occurred to her that her father, too, might have suffered” (41). Mary has aligned herself with her mother against her father, so that the “arid feminism” she has “inherited from her mother” is an overarching and unquestioned principle in her life (*ibid.*). These occurrences form a pattern in Mary’s understanding, which relies on binaries such as masculine/feminine, black/white without any conceptualisation of the breaching or transcendence of them.

Mary’s childhood naivety is marred by her parents’ financial difficulties, for which she, like her mother, blames her father. The maternal support Mary expects from her mother is reversed: her mother “made a confidante of her early. She used to cry over her sewing while Mary comforted her miserably, longing to get away, but feeling important too, and hating her father” (39). As an adult, she relies on “a small core of contempt” for men (49) which keeps her insulated from romantic relationships. Interestingly, once this contempt has been undermined by the criticisms Mary overhears, she comes to occupy a position in which “[i]n order to feel loved, the woman must see herself as ‘feminine’ or passive and the male as ‘masculine’ or dominant” (Markow 89). She must attempt to surrender her contempt in favour of submission in order to truly be assimilated into patriarchal society.

Mary continues to dress as though she is a child until after she is thirty: she “felt truly herself in pinafore frocks and childish skirts” (49). Her maintenance of a childish demeanour as well as “profound distaste for sex” (46) are part of her attempt to access a childhood innocence of

which she was deprived by having to provide emotional support for her embittered mother. She has “taken good care to forget” memories of her parents’ intimacy: “there had been little privacy in her home and there were things she did not care to remember” (*ibid.*). Aghazadeh suggests that the story is comprised of an “oedipal narrative in Mary’s sexual identity” (114). That is, Mary’s relationship with her father as a child continues to determine her relationships with men, in that she found her father sexually intimidating but simultaneously attractive, and she repeats this pattern. The oedipal complex may have remained unresolved because of Mary’s awareness of her parents’ sexual relationship as a result of a memory she recalls in a dream. In this dream, she is playing hide-and-seek with her family. While she is waiting, eyes closed, for her mother to hide,

Her father caught her head in his lap with his hairy hands, to cover up her eyes, laughing and joking loudly about her mother hiding. She smelt the sickly odour of beer, and through it she smelt too- her head down in the thick stuff of his trousers – the unwashed masculine smell she always associated with him. She struggled to get her head free, for she was half-suffocating, and her father held it down, laughing at her panic. (201)

Her discomfort is heightened by her understanding of the ‘masculine smell’ as associated with the sexual act, and her alliance with her mother (39). Mary has intentionally repressed these memories, although they continue to inform her unconscious desires and repulsions.

Mary’s consequent disgust for sex and female physicality is projected onto black women, a group she can safely other. Aghazadeh notes that “Mary’s obsession to gain control over the natives as ‘Other’ human beings is a kind of compensation for her sense of being a feminine and weak ‘other’ for the masculine ‘self’ of the white man and the empire, which make her unable to wield power over her own destiny” (112—113). Black women are, in the words of Jacklyn Cock, “situated at the convergence of three lines along which social inequality is generated – class, race and sex” (5). Like Nomsa in *Gem Squash Tokoloshe*, black women suffer as a result of their “ultra-exploitability” as a result of the combined oppression of their blackness and womanhood (Cock 6). Mary

hated the exposed fleshiness of them, their soft brown bodies and soft bashful faces that were also insolent and inquisitive, and their chattering voices that held a brazen fleshy undertone. [...] Above all, she hated the way they suckled their babies, with their breasts hanging down for everyone to see; there was something in their calm satisfied maternity that made her blood boil. ‘Their babies hanging on to them like leeches,’ she said to herself shuddering, for she thought with horror of suckling a child. The idea of a child’s lips on her breasts made her feel quite sick; at the thought of it she would involuntarily clasp her hands over her breasts, as if protecting them from a violation. And since so many white women are like her, turning with relief to the bottle, she was in good company, and did not think of herself, but rather these black women, as strange; they were alien and primitive creatures with ugly desires she could not bear to think about. (116—117)

The sensuous excess of this description indicates a troubled relation to the somatic, corporeal experience of the semiotic, the materiality and affect of the body. Mary's world is determined by the dictates of a symbolic law that has developed into an obsessive attachment to human categorisation and order. The structure of feeling exemplified here is pathological.

Mary's unbridled disgust is an indicator of her conception of herself "as pure and good and [indicates that she] considers her racial 'others' as impure and disgusting" (Aghazadeh 114). This can be understood through Kristéva's theory of abjection which "is rooted in the oedipal narrative in Mary's sexual identity" (*ibid.*). Her repulsion originates in discomfort with anything sexual because it disrupts her repression of her own sexuality. As Aghazadeh goes on to argue, this perceived strangeness of the biological and physical closeness between mother and child is part of the

mechanisms that the colonialist vision of imperialism has provided for its people. [That is, Mary's] self-misrecognition has implications beyond the personal sphere; it is formed by her culture which projects its own fears and prejudices on the colonized 'other' under the white mask of civilization and dominance. (*ibid.*)

Mary's repugnance indicates the refusal to acknowledge her own innate capacity for breast-feeding and her projection of her conception of it as something heinous onto the othered, black body is indicative of her denial of the natural method of feeding as something 'alien and primitive.' In short, abjection is important in the subject's understanding of herself as it constitutes a mode of exclusion of rejected identities. Joy Wang observes:

Mary as a subject (white working-class female) becomes constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection (from white society), and subsequently experiences an abject outsider (a black servant) who becomes the founding mark of her own internal repudiation (through white postcolonial guilt). (43)

Mary cannot access this information however. She is an "'other' in a male-dominant order of things, [which] parallels what blacks experience in a white-dominant one, but she is not able to recognise this 'other' in order to understand or define her 'self' because her culture limits her path to self-knowledge" (Aghazadeh 114). That is, she is initially unable to accept the possibility of commonality between her experience and Moses' because of her socialisation into seeing race as an overarching, divisive category.

Her vehement dislike of the women is partly explained by her racism, but the fact that she "disliked native men [but] [...] loathed the women" (115) indicates her sexism. The fact that she maintains sexism parallel to "arid feminism" (41) indicates that her kind of feminism is based on an inherited dislike for men as oppressors, rather than a commonality of experience

with women. Her behaviour, however, indicates that she dismisses characteristics perceived as feminine. Examples of this include Dick's sensitivity and lack of business sense which she perceives as an indication that he is "weak and goal-less, and pitiful" (156), characteristics she interprets as feminine. While Mary rejects feminine attributes in her husband, it is interesting that she fails at fulfilling her roles of feminine domestic duty. She rejects Charlie Slatter's wife's attempts at camaraderie (91), and refuses social invitations (98), effectively shunning the community. Additionally, when "her servant, once again, gave notice" (173), Mary does not assume the role of a housekeeper. Instead, "[f]loors were left unswept, and they ate tinned food" (*ibid.*). She acknowledges as much while watching Moses take out of the oven "a tray of the crisp, light scones, that were so much better than she could make herself" (189).

Mary has rejected traditional notions of the feminine but has been unable to replace this identity with a more functional conception of herself. She is defined again in terms of her failure to successfully perform her femininity. It is as though, after hearing her friends speaking about the unlikelihood of a marriage for her and her childish dress, her "idea of herself was destroyed and she was not fitted to recreate herself" (52). It seems that this remains true even after her marriage to Dick which she had hoped would have "saved her from herself" (248). But, as Alice Bradley Markow observes, "[r]omantic love is seen here, as elsewhere in Lessing's world, to result in a loss of self and a paralysis of the will for the woman" (91). Far from developing an identity to replace the one displaced by the overheard conversation, Mary loses her understanding of herself even more in her marriage to Dick.

Whereas before, she had lost only her conception of herself in relation to people's perspective, in the marriage, she finds herself beginning to replicate the patterns of her parents' lives by taking the place of the embittered wife and casting Dick as the dogmatic husband. However, Mary is denied the possibility of identifying as a long-suffering woman under the hand of an unsympathetic husband by Dick's sensitivity and openness. Mary, using her parents as her only point of reference, does not know how to behave in this unanticipated situation and goes about first trying to keep herself busy, then trying to run away, and later attempting to recreate the parental archetype with which she is familiar through her desire for a female child in whom she can confide. Mary's undetermined identity and lack of embodied groundedness leaves her open to her eventual relationship with Moses, as he is identified with

her father, but – because of his blackness – unable to completely dominate her as Mary's father did to her mother.

While Mary allies herself with her mother, she is simultaneously determined not to live the same life as her. As Lisa Tyler notes, Lynn Sukenick coined the term 'matrophobia,' "defined as a woman's fear of becoming her own mother" (83), inspired by Lessing's fiction. In spite of her efforts to the contrary, Mary becomes more and more like her mother, although Dick refuses to occupy the position of the cruel patriarch. This causes Mary's conception of herself – as a woman in opposition to man – to be fractured. Combined with the additional fracture of her understanding of the world in racialised terms, by way of recognising Moses' humanity, this results in a "[c]omplete nervous breakdown" (228). This 'breakdown' can be viewed as a result of personal impulses, familial socialisation, and societal dictates which contradict one another. Tony Marston observes that Mary behaves "as if she lives in a world of her own, where other people's standards don't count. She has forgotten what her own people are like" (232). He is correct in his observation that Mary has physically and psychically isolated herself from social mores, and in her seclusion, she has turned to Moses for companionship. Mary does not know how to function within familial and social dynamics because the rigid frameworks with which she makes meaning cannot contain the human relationships that transgress the boundaries around which she has structured her life. The symbolic and the somatic are discordant. As a result, Mary turns inward, isolating herself from the complexities of relationships.

Paradoxically, it is Tony's interference in the "world of her own" that results in her inability to maintain the separation between her own world and the world of "her own people" – white people. It is by witnessing the intimacy between Mary and Moses that he awakens Mary's repressed knowledge of the socially unacceptable nature of her relationship with Moses. She has, in her isolation, been able to forget, or suppress, her horror at her actions. Shortly after moving to the farm, she "could not understand any white person feeling anything personal about a native; it made Dick seem really horrible to her" (78); and Tony's knowledge of the nature of her relationship with Moses renders her incapable of continuing the repression of her knowledge of the overarching principles of racism that determine the possibilities in which life occurs in the country. Tony realises that "[f]or her, there was only the farm; not even that – there was only this house, and what was in it" (232). His external perspective allows him to see the complexity of the situation as a whole, even if he misses its nuances.

His insight is, however, dismissed by the investigating officer and Charlie Slatter after the murder. Tony insists that “[i]f you must blame somebody, then blame Mrs. Turner. You can’t have it both ways. Either the white people are responsible for their behaviour, or they are not. It takes two to make a murder – a murder of this kind. Though, one can’t really blame her either. She can’t help being what she is” (31—32).

In Tony’s imperial perspective, the relationship of the power dynamic between black and white people is paternal: if white people occupy the hegemonic position, they must be responsible for the power they wield. The colonial stance – as exemplified by Slatter – relies on this racial domination for the maintenance of their power, and any acknowledgement of shared humanity would function as a threat to the precarious social order. If the colonials admit the paternal relationship of power, they are obliged to care for the people they subjugate. Instead, the South Africans who expect ‘savagery’ from a black person see Marston as a ‘newcomer’ (20) who does not understand the issues. Charlie Slatter explains patronisingly that “[w]hen [Tony] has been in the country long enough, [he] will understand that we don’t like niggers murdering white women” (25).

A Sensitive Man

While there are some similarities between Mary and Dick’s marriage and her parents’, there are many differences between the circumstances: where Mary’s father “squandered his salary in drink” (38), Dick “had given up cigarettes, drink, all but the necessities” (55). Mary appears not to notice these dissimilarities, however, and when she does, she considers Dick’s differences from her father to be signs that he is “weak and goal-less, and pitiful, [and] she hated him, and the hate turned in on herself. She needed a man stronger than herself and she was trying to create one out of Dick” (156). What she sees as her “destiny” (Zak 486), which is to become her mother, cannot be fulfilled if her husband does not actively oppress or control her. Mary eventually succeeds in playing out the role of a wife she saw her mother perform: she blames Dick from circumstances she sees as “monstrous” having “been imposed upon her” (119) and likes “that heavy tormented look [that came] to his face” that caused him to take “her hand endearingly, and [kiss] it submissively” (79).

Her “profound distaste for sex” (46) results in her reluctance to be intimate with Dick. Their first night as a married couple concludes with her thinking “[i]t was not so bad, [...] not as

bad as *that*. It meant nothing to her, nothing at all. Expecting outrage and imposition, she was relieved to find she felt nothing” (66). In a characteristically ironic way, the narrator comments that

Women have an extraordinary ability to withdraw from the sexual relationship, to immunize themselves against it, in such a way that men can be left feeling let down and insulted without having anything tangible to complain of. (*ibid.*)

This dynamic is interesting because it demonstrates the power Mary does have as a woman. Even while she submits to Dick sexually, it is evident to him that she is withdrawn. While it is constrained by the patriarchal dynamic, and may have been ignored by a less sensitive man than Dick, this expression of her distaste demonstrates that she is not as powerless as she thinks she is. Her revulsion at sexual contact is indicative of the underlying presence of the traumas of her childhood she has attempted to repress. These memories return to her when she occupies a position so clearly similar to her mother’s. Mary retains her isolation from her husband until

she began to understand how her mother had clung to her, using her as a safety-valve. She identified herself with her mother, clinging to her most passionately and pityingly after all these years, understanding now something of what she had really felt and suffered. She saw herself, that barelegged, bareheaded, silent child, wandering in and out of the chicken-coop house – close to her mother, wrung simultaneously by love and pity for her, and by hatred for her father; and she imagined her own child, a small daughter, comforting her as she had comforted her mother. She did not think of this child as a baby; that was a stage she would have to get through as quickly as possible. No, she wanted a little girl as a companion; and refused to consider that the child, after all, might be a boy. (166)

Mary longs to replicate her mother’s choices in order to lessen what she believes are similar difficulties to the ones her mother faced. She believes that her own child will provide her with an ally against Dick, someone with whom she can make an enemy out of him. Dick, whose “dream was to get married and have children” (55), is at first thrilled with Mary’s sudden change of attitude, but comes to see “that she was desiring a child for her own sake, and that he still meant nothing to her, not in any real way” (165). He insists that Mary does not “know how poor [they] are” and that they cannot afford children (*ibid.*). Mary rages against him even while she knows that her desire is born of a longing for “something to do” (166). Mary’s attempts to recreate her mother’s life for herself are indicative of her lack of independent motivation or capacity to create an identity for herself.

In the opinion of Pedram Lalbakhsh and Wan Roselezam Wan Yahya, Dick is an “incompetent husband” (32). They assert that while Mary is a “sociable, athletic, realistic young girl in favor of city [sic],” “Dick is a claustrophobic, city-hating, daydreamer who

cares for his land more than anything else in the world” (*ibid.*). Although Dick is admittedly “properly old-fashioned” in his notions of what a woman ought to be (*Grass* 57), he is not dictatorial until Mary attempts to get rid of Moses, whose work has been faultless. At that point, Dick “spoke brusquely, almost with brutality” (174). To read Dick as someone “who[,] based on the unwritten law in patriarchy[,] knows himself [to be] superior and a master to Mary” (Lalbahsh & Wan Yahya 32) is to fail to acknowledge the compassion he shows towards his wife. When he realises that physical intimacy is something she would rather avoid, “he treated her like a brother, for he was a sensitive man” (*Grass* 74). Paradoxically, it is this sensitivity that Mary reads as a lack of will, and she hates him for it. The narrator makes clear that “[i]f he had genuinely, simply, because of the greater strength of his purpose, taken the ascendancy over her, she would have loved him, and no longer hated herself for becoming tied to a failure” (156). In spite of this, Mary only shows her husband tenderness when he indicates his submissiveness: “[h]is craving for forgiveness, and his abasement before her was the greatest satisfaction she knew, although she despised him for it” (80).

Interestingly, even while she is part of a relationship that cannot be classified by the binaries which group femininity and submission together against masculinity and domination, she continues to conceptualise their relationship in terms of these strict divisions. Her experience of these contradictory complexities results in a paranoid-schizoid psychic position, because the distance between what she had considered binaries is too great to integrate into a unified impression. Even after her relationship with Moses, and her consequent recognition of his humanity, she remains divided in her impression of him.

Dicks’ sensitivity is not, however, an indicator that his masculinity is untroubled by Mary’s agency and independence. He remains captive to the symbolic power of patriarchy in his relationship with his wife. Her enthusiasm and quick progress at improving their quality of living after she moves in “undermined his own self-assurance even further, seeing her like this, for he knew, deep down, that this quality was one he lacked” (75). His acknowledgement of her possession of a quality in which he is deficient does not detract from the oppressiveness of the patriarchy under which the Turners exist. Dick remains in control of the finances of the farm even after Mary has proven, during Dick’s illness, that she understands its management better than he does. Even when Dick attempts to “draw her into his work by asking advice,” Mary “refused as she had always done” (156). She declines in order to prevent his “defensiveness” at her “superior ability” and to avoid becoming “resigned to [the

farm's] little routine" (*ibid.*). Her other, unacknowledged, reason is that "[s]he needed to think of Dick, the man to whom she was married, as a person on his own account, a success in his efforts" (*ibid.*) It is Mary who maintains the *status quo* of the patriarchal arrangement in this instance because she is subconsciously seeking to replicate her mother's relationship with her father. Dick, a sensitive man, is an anomaly in the colonial society, and Mary sees this as a weakness.

Dick, although sensitive, cannot fully empathise with his wife. As Aghazadeh notes, "Mary uses Dick to prove herself not 'a ridiculous creature whom no one wanted' and Dick uses her as a way to escape from his loneliness" (110). Their relationship is based not on love but on each of their selfish motivations. Dick too has had a problematic childhood. Mary "knew so little about him," but has learned that

His parents were dead; he was an only child. He had been brought up somewhere in the suburbs of Johannesburg, and she guessed, though he had not said so, that his childhood had been less squalid than hers, though pinched and narrow. He had said angrily that his mother had had a hard time of it; and the remark made her feel kin to him, for he loved his mother and had resented his father. And when he grew up he had tried a number of jobs. (169)

Mary understands that his relationship with his parents aligns him with her, but seems not to understand that his primary relationships may have defined him in the same way hers have defined her. He is not a farmer by birth but loves his chosen career: he "worked as only a man possessed by a vision can work, from six in the morning until seven at night, taking his meals on the land, his whole being concentrated on the farm" (55). His relationship with his farm is unlike that of Charlie Slatter, who "farmed as if he were turning the handle of a machine which would produce pound notes at the other end" (15). Dick's holistic approach results in less financial success, because he participates in a relationship with the land. He gives back to it, planting trees in order to replace the nutrients he has taken from it (105). Part of Dick's sensitivity which Mary finds infuriating is his allegiance with an ecological, rather than patriarchal and exploitative, relationship with his land. Mary, whose parents' relationship was defined entirely in terms of opposition, does not appreciate the nuanced reciprocity between Dick and his land, or indeed his investment in his relationship with her.

While Mary's disapproval of Dick seems rooted in his blundering sensitivity, her distaste is also made evident in her perception of her husband as aligned with 'natives:' she is disgusted to find that he

seemed to be growing into a native himself [...]. He would blow his nose on his fingers into a bush, the way they did; even his colour was not so different, for he was burned a rich brown, and he seemed to

hold himself the same way. And when he laughed with them, cracking some joke to keep them good-humoured, he seemed to have gone beyond her reach into a crude horse-humour that shocked her. (172)

Mary finds these shared human experiences and physical similarities distasteful, because in witnessing them she must concede that there is a common humanity between her husband, a white man, and the ‘natives.’ In order to retain the racialised hierarchy on which contemporary society relies, she interprets this not as a sign of cohesion between black and white people, or of Dick’s sensitivity in recognising this, but as an indication of his inferiority. The racialisation of her disdain for her husband indicates that she sees him as inferior. She cannot respect Dick because he has ‘lowered himself’ by sharing jokes and mannerisms with black people, who are regarded as socially inferior, and ‘other.’ This is explicit in her earlier astonishment that “Dick was really sorry to see the end of this nigger [a ‘houseboy’ Mary has nagged until he leaves]! She could not understand any white person feeling anything personal about a native; it made Dick seem really horrible to her” (78).

It is interesting, then, that it is Moses – who is a ‘native’ and socially inferior – who is able to gain her acceptance as a male figure positioned in a way that is structurally similar to the position occupied by her father (203—204). Dick is associated in Mary’s mind with blackness, inferiority, and savagery, and she employs this connection as an attempt to subjugate Dick. But his patriarchal power means Mary never has any real power over him, in spite of her disdain for his sensitivity. Moses, who is black, but also defies the stereotype of blackness, is someone over whom Mary has some power – as a result of her whiteness – while she simultaneously feels subjugated by his masculinity.

An Intersubjective Relation

Before marrying Dick, Mary had “had nothing to do with them [‘natives’] really. They were outside her orbit” (42). Dick shares Charlie Slatter’s belief that “[n]o woman knows how to handle niggers” (216) but is still appalled at the contrast in her behaviour towards them. He notes that “[w]ith him she seemed at ease, quiet, almost maternal. With the natives she was a virago” (83). This drastic contrast between her behaviour with him and with the ‘natives’ is interesting. It indicates the shifting nature of her identity. Her identities, like Rosa’s in *Burger’s Daughter*, are constrained by interpersonal dynamics as well as contemporary colonial social structures. However, Mary’s refusal to recognise the interpersonal relationship between her and the ‘natives,’ because of the perceived threat to society, results in a

fragmented identity that does not recognise parts of herself because they are associated with blackness. Dick, however, can, to a certain extent, accept the nuanced dynamics of these relations. If a somewhat binaric psychoanalytic conception were to be employed, one might say that is as a result of his identification with his mother, rather than his father as a child, and his consequent acceptance of the fluidity of identity.

The narrator notes that Mary was “afraid of them [black people], of course. Every woman in South Africa is brought up to be. In her childhood she had been forbidden to walk alone [because] they were nasty and might do horrible things to her” (70). Her fear translates to a determination to exert rigid control over the man who Dick has employed as a ‘houseboy’ (9), Samson, who, having been used to Dick’s leniency is shaken “out of his comparatively comfortable existence,” and gives notice (77). Additionally, this fear results in her respect for Moses’ masculinity, which Mary associates with her mother’s relationship with her father.

In spite of Dick’s suggestion that she “will have to let go [her] standards a little [and] [...] go easy” on the “boys” (81), Mary maintains a rigidly firm hand with the employees and is eventually unable to keep anyone in her employ. She is left in charge of the house, but neglects her duties. Eventually, Dick is “unable to stand the dirt and bad food any longer” (174) and sends up “one of the best boys [he has] ever had” (*ibid.*). This man is Moses, who Mary, two years before when Dick was bed-ridden with malaria, had “struck with the whip over the face” (*ibid.*) when she felt he was being impudent by seeking water and ignoring her instruction to “get back to work” (145). Her anger is compounded by his attempt to explain his thirst to her “in his own dialect” which Mary dismisses as “gibberish” (146), and then his use of English which Mary believes is “cheek” (*ibid.*). He attempts to mime his desire to drink, which causes the other labourers to laugh. Mary is infuriated by his refusal to acquiesce to her instruction and by his rational appeal to her, and is humiliated by the laughter she believes is directed at her, and “lifted her whip and brought it down across his face in a vicious swinging blow” (*ibid.*). This vividly exemplifies Mary’s lack of empathy towards black people. She is threatened by his appeal to her humanity and rationality, and takes his self-assurance as an affront.

Moses, on the other hand, seems incomprehensibly compassionate. He appears to have forgotten the incident (175) in spite of the “scar on his cheek, a thin, darker weal across his black skin” (174). Although Mary’s constant fault-finding and criticism make for

uncomfortable working conditions, when she begs him to stay, he obliges (*Grass* 185—186). Her tears while pleading with him signify the shift in their relationship. She has displayed weakness, which she has kept hidden even from Dick, by crying, and to calm her, Moses insists that she drink a glass of water “as if he were speaking to one of his own women; and she drank” (186). She allows him to “gently propel” her to the bed, even while she is horrified at “the touch of this black man’s hand on her shoulder [which] filled her with nausea” (*ibid.*). Even this is a transgression of strict racial boundaries – before he acts, Moses “put his hand out reluctantly, loath to touch her, the sacrosanct white woman” (*ibid.*). Mary’s submission is important; she is prone to violent fits of anger, especially towards ‘natives,’ but her acquiescence indicates that his outspokenness is indicative of his ‘masculinity’ for Mary who associates domination with men.

His persistent empathy and appeals to her sympathy – as well as his addressing her as an equal – result in an irrevocable change in Mary’s life. She is forced to recognise Moses as a fellow human being rather than relying on the old dynamics. He reminds her “Madame asked me to stay. I stay to help Madame. If Madame cross, I go” (188). Mary feels “helpless” to act out vengeance, even while she is aware of “the resentful heat of his voice that said that he considered she was unjust” (*ibid.*). She knows that she is dependent on him and indebted to him for staying on, as she simultaneously experiences “a strong and irrational fear, a deep uneasiness, and even – though she did not know, would have died rather than acknowledge – of some dark attraction” (190). This attraction – and according resentment as a result of its repression – is evident even before she begs him to stay, when Mary comes across Moses bathing and is

annoyed when he stopped and stood upright, waiting for her to go, his body expressing his resentment of her presence there. She was furious that perhaps he believed she was there on purpose; this thought, of course, was not conscious; it would be too much presumption, such unspeakable cheek for him to imagine such a thing, that she would not allow it to enter her mind; but the attitude of his still body as he watched her across the bushes between them, the expression on his face, filled her with anger. She felt the same impulse that had once made her bring down the lash across his face. (176—177)

His assertion of a private existence is infuriating to her because she feels that, as a black person, he is inferior to her, and she believes that “[a] white person may look at a native, who is no better than a dog” (176). Her fascination with his body indicates a sexual attraction, however. Her anger may also be brought about as a result of her own desire for the privacy he demands, and his ability to demand it, something to which she has no claim. Even as Mary knows that her behaviour is contrary to the norm, she maintains a position that is equal to

Moses, in which the power vacillates, while he maintains his polite, “mission boy”²⁵ demeanour (191), calling Mary ‘Madame,’ he uses English, rather than the socially acceptable “kitchen kaffir” (72), to address her.

The fact that Moses’ use of the language which once resulted in her whipping him across the face no longer inspires such rage is telling. The narrator notes that “[h]e spoke in English, which as a rule she would have flamed into temper over; she thought it impertinence. But she answered in English” (189). This is at a moment when he enquires “why Madame always cross” when she admits that she is satisfied with his work (*ibid.*). He speaks “easily, almost familiarly, good-humouredly as if he were humouring a child” (*ibid.*). Their relationship has transmuted beyond the boundaries set for a relationship between a master and servant (Spencer & Krauze 60—61). Mary feels “the usual anger rise,” but is also “fascinated, and out of her depth: she did not know what to do with this personal reflection” (189), and ends up saying nothing. Mary’s conception of Moses is divided into distinct ‘good’ (compassionate, masculine, attractive) and ‘bad’ (black, taboo) parts. These parts are irreconcilable even while they are united in Moses.

The omniscient narrator knowingly summarises the change by stating that

What had happened was that the formal pattern of black-and-white, mistress-and-servant, had been broken by the personal relation; and when a white man in Africa by accident looks into the eyes of a native and sees a human being (which it is his chief preoccupation to avoid), his sense of guilt, which he denies, fumes up in resentment and he brings down the whip. (177—178)

Mary is forced to acknowledge Moses’ humanity which results in the denial of the possibility of the binaries around which she has based her life. By recognising that the one binary (black versus white) is false, that blackness is not an indicator of savagery, Mary has been rendered unable to maintain the other rigid binaries that have defined her life. This results in her further isolation: she cannot share her new, subtle and troubling understanding of the world in which she lives, firstly, because she has no one to share it with (her resentment of Dick means she cannot confide in him) and, secondly, because it is heresy in the society in which she lives.

²⁵ Interestingly, this aligns him with an imperial, rather than a colonial, position. This may be what differentiates him from the other ‘houseboys’ Mary has employed, and provides a reason for the possibility of his addressing Mary as an equal.

Moses' superior ability to engage critically is of importance. He is capable of understanding the nuances of their particular relationship, whereas Mary has, until now, been able to divide her ideas about the world into binaries, partly as a result of the fixed relationship between her parents while she was a child and partly as a result of the colonial context. Until she is influenced by Moses, she constructs meaning in terms of oppositions, understanding the world in binaries such as black/white, masculine/feminine, town/farm. She appears to start to accept a more nuanced worldview, although only independently of the racial symbolic order. As a result of her isolation, and lack of social contextualisation, Mary performs her identity in unusual ways. She has come to accept her female sexuality, but her performance of it is described as a "horrible pastiche of coquetry" (217), which leads to her relationship with Moses being discovered. She appears to be incapable of successfully integrating her new understandings of herself (as a sexual feminine woman), and consequently performs a perversion of sexuality, unmediated by social norms. This is an exemplification of her split position, in which the disparate parts of herself remain unconsolidated. Her performance of sexuality is without context, both socially and within Mary's normal presentation of herself.

Sex and the Savage

Whether or not Moses and Mary consummate their relationship is never resolved. The physical and emotional intimacy witnessed by Tony Marston and Charlie Slatter respectively indicates to them that she has "broken their biracial sexual taboos" (Fishburn 2), even though this remains open-ended. While to Slatter, this indicates a non-consensual relationship, it remains unspecified for Marston, who has

read enough about psychology to understand the sexual aspect of the colour bar, one of whose foundations is the jealousy of the white man for the superior sexual potency of the native. [...] Yet he had met a doctor on the boat coming out, with years of experience in a country district, who had told him he would be surprised to know the number of white women who had relations with black men. (230—231)

The resolution of this mystery is not important, however. The human relationship between a black man and a white woman is forbidden because "'white civilisation' [...] will never, never admit that a white person, and most particularly, a white woman, can have a relationship, whether for good or for evil, with a black person. For once it admits that, it crashes, and nothing can save it" (30). The society relies on rigid othering and separation, and a somatic, human breach of this renders that symbolic division void. It is for this reason that Slatter refuses to acknowledge the possibility of truth in Marston's suggestion that it "takes two to

make a murder – a murder of this kind” (32). If Mary has chosen to associate intimately with Moses, she is admitting his humanity and thereby posing a threat to the societal structure. This is true even of Mary as an outcast. She is still white and, in a community which depends on race as divisive, she must be prevented from “sink[ing] lower than a certain point” (221).

In Michelle Wender Zak’s words, “Lessing is not depending on that worn conception of the superior sexuality of the black male, nor is she implying that Mary’s mental health required only that she be sexually overpowered by a dominating male – black or white” (488). Instead, their relationship when compared to others in the novel, such as Mary’s parents’, or the Slatters’, appears to be the most equal. Moses’ blackness and Mary’s womanhood place them on relatively equal ground, so that Mary feels simultaneously superior to Moses, because of her whiteness, and submissive to him, because of his conventional masculinity. That is, because they are both subjugated by the colonial patriarchy, they are in some ways allied against it. Additionally, they are each deprived of power as a result of a respective quality: Mary’s womanhood and Moses’ blackness. This means that their mutual domination and submission is on a far more equal footing than any other relationship in the novel, in which both parties are white, rendering the power dynamic determined exclusively by gender, and therefore one-directional. Of course, their ‘equality’ is a form, nevertheless, of complicity in the pathological unconscious of the symbolic colonial order.

The fact that Mary is capable of dominating Moses, does not mean, however, that he is not a powerful man. He is seen as entirely masculine, especially in contrast to Dick. This is partly due to Moses’ “powerful, broad-built body [which] fascinated her” (175), but also to the outspoken manner in which he addresses her. This dynamic is made possible by the shift in power brought about by Mary having begged Moses to stay (186). She cannot continue to “use that biting voice” or sarcastic tone. When she attempts to, he “looked at her straight in the face and said in a voice that was disconcertingly hot and reproachful: ‘Madame asked me to stay. I stay to help Madame. If Madame cross, I go’” (188). Moses’ directness is a sharp contrast to Dick’s subservience in that Moses’ masculinity is manifest. He is clearly “a man stronger than herself” (156). This is something of which she is aware of since “the moment of fear she had known just after she had hit him and thought he would attack her” (174—175). Even though his “demeanour was the same as in all the others [‘houseboys’]” she feels “uneasy in his presence” (175) as a result of their history. It is not his physicality that motivates the commencement of their relationship that breaches contemporary morality,

however. The fact that she has *asked* – rather than commanded – him to stay and that he has obliged, results in the shift in the balance of power. He has remained as a favour to her, and she has incurred an obligation toward him.

Their relationship is not acknowledged – even by the generally omniscient narrator – until Tony Marston witnesses Moses dressing Mary, though there are clues. Once he has returned to work after his illness, “Dick became to her, as time went by, more and more unreal; while the thought of the African grew obsessive. It was a nightmare, the powerful black man always in the house with her, so that there was no escape from his presence. She was possessed by it, and Dick was hardly there to her” (206). While Mary professes to consider Moses’ proximity ‘a nightmare,’ her dreams offer insight into her more complex and nuanced feelings. In her dreams, her father and Moses become interchangeable so that “[i]t was the voice of the African she heard [...] but at the same time it was her father, menacing and horrible, who touched her in desire” (203—204). When she first dreams of Moses, he

had stood over her, powerful and commanding, yet kind, but forcing her into a position where she had to touch him. And there were other dreams, where he did not enter directly, but which were confused, terrifying, horrible, from which she woke sweating in fear, trying to put them out of her mind. She was afraid to go to sleep. (192)

Mary’s previous denunciatory treatment of ‘natives’ which caused Dick to describe her as a “virago” (83) has been replaced by an obsession: “[o]ften [...] she watched him covertly, not like a mistress watching a servant work, but with a fearful curiosity, remembering those dreams. And every day he looked after her, seeing what she ate, bringing her meals without her ordering them, bringing her little gifts of handfuls of eggs from the compound fowls, or a twist of flowers from the bush” (192—193). While he shows her compassion and concern, she begins to accept Moses’ presence as a person rather than the “black animal” (147) she has perceived him as. Eventually his intrusion serves, ““not as a mere symbol of color [sic] conflicts, but as the agent of a disruptive life force’ and triggers Mary’s long-repressed emotions to act out her traditional female role, helpless and dependent on him” (Aghazadeh 115). While it is true that Moses comes to stand for all of Mary’s repressed sexual desires, it is inaccurate to suggest that she has not displayed a desire to perform the role of a subservient woman. It is this, in fact, that causes the difficulties in her marriage to Dick, who does not assert his patriarchal power over her in a manner which Mary can recognise as similar to her father’s domination of her mother within the socially prescribed gender roles of the day.

Later, once Mary has understood that there exists a “new human relationship between them” and goes out of her way to avoid behaviour that will “allow Moses to strengthen” this relationship (193), she dreams of her father, “the little man with the plump juicy stomach, beer-smelling and jocular, whom she hated, ” in a sexual embrace with her mother (200). While this is described as a dream, there is a sense that it is a memory: “[s]he was a child again, playing in the small dusty garden in front of the raised wood-and-iron house, with playmates who in her dream were faceless” (*ibid.*). It might be that this dream is one of the “things she did not care to remember; she had taken good care to forget them years ago” (46). It is relevant that Mary has this dream while Moses is in the house overnight to care for Dick after Mary has spent two nights watching her malaria-ridden husband (196). Moses and Mary’s father are linked by their masculinity as well as the taboo nature of Mary’s desire for a sexual relationship with either. As Sima Aghazadeh observes:

The color [sic] bar does not admit her dark desire for Moses as the only man who could stimulate her sexually and this law is so strongly internalized that this desire seems inadmissible to herself, in the same way that the infantile oedipal conflict is inadmissible in society. (117)

Her feelings towards Moses are similar to her unresolved oedipal desires for her father. The similarity of their positions – as sexual partners Mary simultaneously desires and is repulsed by – cause their conflation in her dreams. As Gül Büyü explains, according to Freudian theory, “[d]reams express the wishes which cannot be revealed in normal life because of the social norms” (33). Mary, who cannot address her taboo feelings consciously, dreams of her unresolved dilemma.

After half-waking, startled by her dream, she has another dream in which “the conviction grew that Dick was dead – that Dick was dead, and that the black man was waiting next door for her coming” (201). In the dream, she feels “only relief and exultation” to feel his cold corpse, but “[a]t the same time she felt guilty because of her gladness, and tried to arouse in herself the sorrow she ought to feel” (203). This is an acknowledgement of the lack of intimacy and genuine feeling between Mary and her husband. The fact that Mary symbolically kills Dick in her dream indicates her unconscious wish to be free of him (Büyü 40). Without her husband, she is free in her dream to be united with the conglomerate figure of Moses and her father, simultaneously expressing her oedipal fantasy and the comparably taboo desire for Moses. The person who provides her “comfort” in her dream is Moses who “approached slowly, obscene and powerful, and it was not only he, but her father who was threatening her. They advanced together, one person, and she could smell, not the native

smell, but the unwashed smell of her father” (203). Where Mary perceives Dick as emasculated and weak, Moses is assertive. The fact that she dreams of this with horror indicates the depth of her vexation at the thought of intimacy with Moses, as well as her desire to escape the confines of her marriage and the farm. Additionally, it is interesting that the adjective ‘threatening’ is ascribed to her father rather than Moses. This subtlety might suggest that while she continues to perceive her father’s advances as unwelcome, this does not apply to Moses.

The Native and the Land

The theme of the characters’ relationships with the land is of import and often indicative of social positionings. Dick hates the idea of “those meaningless block-like buildings stuck on top of the soil” and longs to live in a house “with wide verandahs open to the air” (56). He “looked after his soil [...] He loved it and he was part of it” (151), which indicates his personal, meaningful relationship with the land. Mary, by contrast, “loved the town” (53). She has distanced herself from “the country of her childhood [...] surrounded by miles and miles of nothingness – miles and miles of veld” (*ibid.*). On her arrival at Dick’s house, she is startled by “a wild nocturnal sound, and she turned and ran back [towards the house], suddenly terrified, as if a hostile breath had blown upon her, from another world, from the trees” (63). Mary is “bewildered by the strangeness of it all” (63—64) but “forced herself to smile” because she knows “Dick was watching her face” (64). This is the commencement of their pattern of hiding their feelings from one another which, once established, disallows the possibility of a genuine relationship. Mary feels alienated by the landscape she associates with her childhood, while Dick, who was raised in Johannesburg, turns to the land for solace.

Moses and other black characters are associated with the land. As Katherine Fishburn shows, for Mary and other white colonialists, “Africa = native = bush = evil” (8). These are convoluted and entangled so that all four elements become one and the same. This is part of the conventional binary thinking characteristic of the period, in which whiteness is always tied to goodness, and England is idealised as a homeland. For Mary, ‘bush’ and the land itself are equivalent. From the outset, she seeks to maintain the distance she has enforced between herself and the land she hates as a result of her memories of similar landscapes as a child. Likewise, she longs to continue to exclude black people from her life as she has done until her marriage. Before, race “meant to her the office boy in the firm where she worked, other

women's servants, and the amorphous mass of natives in the streets whom she hardly noticed" (42). After Mary whips Moses' face, she is "furious to think that this *black animal* had the right to complain against her, against the behaviour of a white woman" (147, emphasis added). She perceives blackness to be a marker of a bestial nature, and thereby excludes blackness from humanity which is intrinsically associated with whiteness. Even after Mary has formed a relationship with Moses that transcends her perception of him as a sub-human animal, she continues to remain inside the house, cut off from the farm, the land, and the district in general. It is only after she has shunned Moses in favour of Marston when he witnesses their intimacy, and when she knows her death is imminent, that she

realized, suddenly, standing there, that all those years she had lived in that house, with the acres of bush all around her, and she had never penetrated into the trees, had never gone off the paths. And all those years she had listened wearily, through the hot dry months, with her nerves prickling, to that terrible shrilling, and she had never seen the beetles who made it. (244)

This indicates that Mary, like her parents, does not consider the space she inhabits her 'home.' For her parents, "the word 'Home' spoken nostalgically, meant England, although both her parents were South Africans and had never been to England" (37). While England does not hold the same significance for Mary as it did for her parents, she feels unhomed in her space and similarly rejects the space in which she lives in favour of the idealised alternative of the "girls' club" (43) of her youth. It is to the club and the town that she flees when she feels she can no longer live with "[t]he soil, the black labourers, always so close to their lives but also so cut off, Dick in his farm clothes with his hands stained with oil – these things did not belong to her, they were not real" (119).

Paradoxically, although Mary keeps away from the land, staying inside the house, she is also unhomed by that space. She does not occupy the domestic sphere which she – as a woman – is expected to do. She had, until the interruption of her childish demeanour by her friends – lived a solitary, independent life. She had rejected the home-space as one in which women are subjugated, as she believes her mother had been, and as she expects to be by Dick. As a result, when she attempts to assume the traditional female role, she fails. She feels alienated by Slatter's wife's social advances, and incapable of adequately performing household tasks like cleaning and cooking. So, while she is distanced from the land, she is simultaneously uncomfortable in the house. This replicates her position in society. She had, prior to overhearing her friends' conversation, believed that she fitted into society. She then set about finding a way to conform to their expectations of her, and marries Dick, where she feels alienated by the dynamics of their relationship, as well as the errands she cannot perform. She

seeks solace in her relationship with Moses, in which there is a measure of equality, in which she can feel superior, as a white person, while submitting to Moses' masculinity. However, this is precluded as a lasting possibility by the racist society in which it occurs. Their interpersonal relationship will inevitably be interrupted by the social context in which it occurs, and ultimately, the only escape either Mary or Moses has is in death.

Dick, who, as has been noted, is perceived as being aligned with 'native' sensibilities is more unified with his surroundings, which is rare among white South Africans, even the farmers. He "liked the slow movement of the seasons, and the uncomplicated rhythm of the 'little crops' she [Mary] kept describing with contempt as useless" (151). The idea of farming as a kind of communion with land is foreign to Charlie Slatter and other farmers. In spite of Dick's holistic notions of farming, his crops continue to fail so that he has earned "the cruel but apt nickname of 'Jonah'" (Fishburn 3). Still, he resists Slatter even when "[h]e spent three hours trying to persuade Dick to plant tobacco instead of mielies and little crops. [...] And Dick steadily refused to listen to Charlie" (98—99). Dick insists on maintaining his "tree plantation" of "young gums"²⁶ and the narrator notes that part of Slatter's annoyance at Dick is "an unacknowledged feeling of guilt that he himself never put back in his soil what he took from it" (105). Mary is not taken in by Dick's romantic notions, however: she feels that "[t]he trees hated her" (243) and avoids being near them until she is waiting for her death.

It is of import that Moses is the only character who exhibits an interest in the world outside of the farm: he asks Mary questions about the war and Jesus (191). This is a moment of rare insight into Moses' character into which even the omniscient narrator lacks access. It seems as though the narrator shares Tony Marston's inability to "even begin to imagine the mind of a native" (33). The fact that Moses asks philosophical and political questions, while the other characters are preoccupied only with themselves and the farm, shows him to be the most complex and inward character in the novel. The fact that it is "impossible to say" even for the narrator whether Moses experienced "thoughts of regrets, or pity, or perhaps even wounded human affection [...] compounded with the satisfaction of this completed revenge" (256) indicates our inability to comprehend Moses' rationale.

²⁶It is relevant here that the information that Eucalyptus, or 'gum trees,' are invasive and consume excessive amounts of water was not known in the 1930s when the novel is set, or even the 1940s when it was written.

As Fishburn observes, “Moses’s motives [for killing Mary] are of genuine interest only to someone outside of Lessing’s text” (11). For the characters in the novel, “his motives are known in advance: he murders because it is in his nature to do so” (12). Moses remains “[l]ike the bush [...] [...] impenetrable, inexplicable, and dangerous” (Fishburn 4) even after his humanity is made obvious, to both Mary and the reader. Fishburn argues that the novel is partially a Manichean allegory in that it reinforces the racial stereotype of the ‘violent savage:’ the feeling of satisfaction experienced by white people when “natives steal, murder or rape,” “as if some belief has been confirmed” (9). This is reinforced by the lack of explanation for Moses’ actions. While it may be argued that Lessing is implicated in a political unconscious that does not see value in questioning Moses’ motives, and that the novel replicates this disinterest, it may also be argued that Lessing respects Moses’ alterity and resists recolonizing him in her novel.

Agency and Power

It is important that both Mary and Moses, deprived of access to power by their sex and race respectively, have their possibilities for action limited and shaped by their circumstances. Their transgression of the “*esprit de corps*” (11) represents “a threat to the colonial status quo, one that must be contained, removed, or eliminated” (2). For Charlie Slatter, this means removing Mary from the situation in which she has access to Moses, while also gaining ownership of Dick’s land after which he has hankered for a long time (211), when he insists that he will “buy [Dick’s] farm from [him, and allow him to] [...] stay here as a manager” (221). His condition is that Dick “must go away first for a holiday, for at least six months. You must get your wife away” (*ibid.*). He is protecting the “first rule of South African society” (11), which is to maintain white patriarchal rule. Slatter’s decision to intervene rather than to address Dick is interesting. It is possible that he wants to protect Dick from his wife’s unforgiveable transgression, or perhaps his motivations are born of his desire for Dick’s land rather than genuine compassion, as suggested by his admission that “[i]t was the grazing [he] wanted” (211).

The fact that Mary appears to turn to Tony Marston for protection from Moses after he witnesses their relationship indicates the extent of her confusion after the fracturing of the rigid frames around which she had structured her life, and her consequent uncertainty. In spite of the closeness between Mary and Moses, Mary sides with a white man who is a stranger.

Tony believes he is assisting Mary who seems to be trapped when she says, “[h]e won’t go away” (233), and he assumes Mary is “trying to assert herself: she was using his presence there as a shield in a fight to get back a command she had lost. And she was speaking like a child challenging a grown-up person” (*ibid.*). The shift of power in their relationship is clear to Tony although he cannot understand how it came about, or know the complexity of Mary’s relationship with Moses as a result of her relationship with her father and the history of colonial racialisation. He sees only the distilled polarity of Mary’s fear of Moses, without understanding the tenderness Moses has shown her. When Moses asks, “Madame want me to go?” (*ibid.*), Mary *must* answer in the affirmative because of Tony’s presence. This is why she cannot answer his next question: “Madame want me to go because of this boss?” (*ibid.*). Tony reacts, “half-choked with anger,” by threatening to “kick [Moses] out” if he does not leave (*ibid.*):

After a long, slow, evil look the native went. Then he came back. Speaking past Tony, ignoring him, he said to Mary, ‘Madame is leaving this farm, yes?’
 ‘Yes,’ said Mary faintly.
 ‘Madame never coming back?’
 ‘No, no, no,’ she cried out.
 ‘And is this boss going too?’
 ‘No,’ she screamed. ‘Go away.’
 ‘Will you go?’ shouted Tony. He could have killed this native: he wanted to take him by his throat and squeeze the life out of him. And then Moses vanished. (*ibid.*)

Tony is acting out the role of the patriarchal white protector against the dangerous black savage, in spite of his “‘progressiveness’” (231). Mary feels obliged to realign herself with the power of the *status quo* which Tony represents, but as soon as she has played the necessary role of a woman “hysterical with relief” at being saved, she “pushed him away, stood in front of him like a mad woman, and hissed, ‘You sent him away! He’ll never come back! It was all right till you came!’ And she collapsed in a storm of tears” (234). Here, Mary’s ambivalent relationship with Moses is evident: she has feared and hated the ‘bad,’ causing Tony to witness her genuine distress, but simultaneously loved the ‘good’ which is why her disposition switches. In short, the position Mary has come to occupy is inevitable: it *had* to happen that her prohibited relationship with Moses would be discovered, and in that moment, she *must* assume the position of a compatriot, a white. Mary has isolated herself from the social symbolic order that insists on the superiority of whiteness and masculinity, and only as a result of that has been able to create and maintain a close physical relationship with Moses. When she is reinserted into this symbolic framework, she suffers a ‘breakdown’ because of the incompatible ideas about the world with which she now struggles.

Mary's resentment of Tony is a result of her belated achievement of a fulfilling, human relationship, and one with a man at that, in spite of her socialisation. Her "furtive, sly, yet triumphant" repetition of the phrase "[t]hey said I was not like that, not like that, not like that" (232) indicates that the words of her friends have stayed with her. She expresses her victory that she has managed to foster an intimate relationship with a man. To Tony, it seems at first as though she is "mad as a hatter!" but he changes his mind because

She doesn't behave as if she were. She behaves simply as if she lives in a world of her own, where other people's standards don't count. She has forgotten what her own people are like. But then, what is madness, but a refuge, a retreating from the world? (*ibid.*)

It is true that it is Mary's isolation and Dick's lack of involvement that allow Mary's transgression with Moses. In a more densely populated area, their closeness would have been problematised far earlier than it was on the farm, where it is only when Charlie Slatter and then Tony Marston bear witness to their relationship that the 'first law' intrudes.

It is in spite of the various choices Mary makes that this situation comes about. She is not in complete control of her life. She is subject to the patriarchal control of men, a pattern which began with her father and his perceived suppression of his wife, which results in her rejection of him and all men, but her acquaintances' suggestion that she won't marry because "[s]he just isn't like that, isn't like that at all. Something missing somewhere" (48) triggers her desire to be assimilated, which means, to Mary, to marry. Thus, she subjects herself to marriage in which "patriarchal culture expects every woman to perform to preserve the patterns of male domination in family" (Aghazadeh 109). While Dick is less dictatorial than her father was, Mary sees this as weakness rather than reprieve. As a result of Dick's perceived inadequacy as a farmer, he is in turn subject to the control of Charlie Slatter, who exerts this power on both Dick and Mary, insisting that they leave.

Moses' motivations, as Fishburn notes, "are of genuine interest only to someone outside of Lessing's text" (11), and the narrator accordingly does not have access to any information. It is possible that as a result of Moses' history as a "mission boy" (*Grass* 191) he has been educated to think of himself as equal. Some imperial missions educated their converts in the humanity of black people (Comaroff 661), which would explain Moses' manner of addressing Mary almost as an equal. Consequently, after she has shown him compassion and recognised his humanity, her rapid abandonment of this in front of Marston may indicate to him that her kindness may not have been genuine. When she rejects him, she is not merely rejecting their relationship, but also his humanity. She must know that he will be punished for transgressing

the boundary between white women and black men, and by making it appear that this was not consensual, she is damning him. Moses may have determined that he will be hanged for his crimes anyway, and decided to kill Mary in order to punish her too.

Mary is subject to Moses' power. Having compromised the structural inequalities in their relationship, so that race is rendered irrelevant, Mary is, as a woman, subordinate to Moses, as a man. Paradoxically, it is this strength that initially attracts Mary to him: he exhibits a similar kind of masculinity to Mary's father. It is this outward strength that Dick lacks. Lalbakhsh and Wan Yahya observe that "Mary falls a victim in the hands of Dick, Slatter and Moses who are all trying to dominate her in one way or another" (33). It is only through her death that Mary can escape the inherently oppressive system that has determined her life until this point.

It is fundamentally important, then, that Mary – knowing intuitively Moses will kill her – does not passively wait, but actively seeks him out: "despite all oppressive pressures it is Mary that, at the end, determines her own destiny. She uses her prescience as a light to find her way out of domination and suppression" (*ibid.*). The source of this prescience is not explained. It is possible that it is as a result of their comparable oppression at the hands of white patriarchy, and their subsequent separation *by* white patriarchy, which has somehow unified them against it, so that they have a transcendental means of comprehending one another. Through her death, Mary nullifies

Slatter's decree that she and Dick should be away from the veld [...] deconstructs the most established power center [sic] of the society. She disobeys the greatest patriarch of the society and decides to stay even if it is by her dead body. While we know that Mary's staying at home would give no chance to Moses to kill her she goes outside and by relying on her prescience finds the murderer and invites her death indeed. (*ibid.*)

While to suggest that Mary 'decides to stay' is to ascribe too much agency to a situation in which she has very little control, it is true that she has accepted the inescapability of her death and has chosen to welcome it. Mary's final act anticipates Moses' actions and welcomes them. Mary has chosen to stay on the farm where she has finally achieved that which was presumed to be impossible for her, even if it has required a transgression she once found repulsive. Even this achievement, however, has not been on her own terms: she conceded her power to Moses and it is through his assertion of agency rather than hers that their relationship is possible. Her *only* truly independent act is to accept her presence in the corporeal realm – in the country she has until now read as being inherently tied to blackness, savagery and darkness, she finally realises the physical sensuality of her experience: "[h]er

feet firmly planted on the tepid rough brick of the floor, her back held against the wall, she crouched and stared, all her sense stretched, rigidly breathing in little gasps” (253).

Conclusion

Using psychoanalytic and historical-materialist frameworks, this dissertation has explored the identities of the protagonists in three novels in terms of their personal, familial and societal identifications. Though they have not been the focus, the standard concerns of identity politics (race, class and gender) have emerged thematically from the analysis, which indicates that identity politics are consistently relevant to, and remain direct concerns of, each of the three novels, in spite of their different socio-historic locations. Mikhail Bakhtin's conception of the chronotope is useful here in understanding fictional characters as "always concretely embodied within a specific temporal-geographical location; a human body as a material thing must occupy a physical and temporal space" (Morris 18).

My intention was to explore the shifts in personal and familial experience in relation to social and historical changes, but the novels nevertheless exhibit several similarities when it comes to depictions of racial, gendered, and class differentiations. Although the novels depict different historical periods, the ways in which identities are conceived are informed, in part, by these intersecting facets of identificatory practices. As noted in the Introduction, this is in line with the understanding of South African literature as concerned with how personal identities are influenced by societal issues.

Race functions as a determinant for the possibilities of each of the characters in all three of the novels. Although all of the protagonists are white, they are either marginalised by or ambivalent about hegemonic whiteness. Rosa is associated with the struggle against apartheid, and thereby forfeits part of her participation in white privilege. It might be argued that part of Zwelinzima's capacity to cause Rosa to return South Africa is his blackness, as well as the points he raises about racial inequalities, which reconstitute Rosa to the struggle which she had abandoned. Alternatively, this capacity may derive from the fact that he is the last living member of her childhood family, and her conversation with him returns her emotionally to her father and his ideals.

Faith is at first too young to understand the racial implications of her alliance with Nomsa, but is nonetheless alienated from the community as a result. Even in the new 'rainbow nation,' race still serves as an identity marker. Faith mentions that when Ketso moved into their 'white' block of flats, in approximately 1990, "[m]eetings were called by the body

corporate, but the flow of change would not be stemmed” (*Gem Squash* 212).

Mary, although white, is seen as someone who is at risk of breaking the “first law of white South Africa [which is that] [...]: ‘Thou shalt not let your fellow whites sink lower than a certain point; because if you do, the nigger will see he is as good as you are’” (*Grass* 221). She lives up to this by coming to accept Moses’ humanity and thereby transgressing this ‘first law.’

The recurring theme of race in the novels is one of privilege, as the protagonists are all white and therefore have access to hegemonic power, even while they are variously dissociated from the oppressive racial dominion. The protagonists certainly interpret race differently, which is visible in the different reactions to Mary and Faith’s relationships with Moses and Ketso respectively. Mary risks being shunned by society for the transgression of having an interracial relationship, while in Faith’s sexual relationship with Ketso their races are not mentioned. Although the attitudes and responses to the protagonists’ transgressions vary according to socio-political context, the prevalence of assumed racial determinism is clear. Their failure to conform to archetypal whiteness, and the responses thereto, show the expectation firstly that there *is* an archetypal whiteness, and secondly that their symbolic distance from this hegemonic whiteness represents a threat to its structures.

The protagonists’ relationship with their gender varies quite widely, although all three novels explore the intersections between race and gender and the related oppressions.

Most vividly, Rosa attempts to find refuge in a gendered unity at the women’s meeting after deciding to distance herself from the race- and class-focused struggle in which her parents were invested. The meeting fails to present a genuine alternative, however, because race divides the women to the extent that their goals are entirely different. This sentiment echoes Nadine Gordimer’s feelings that feminism is “piffling” (Gordimer, quoted in Lazar 784). Lazar asserts that “Gordimer’s politicisation around issues concerning women is not in synchrony with her (more conventionally defined) ‘political’ radicalisation” (784). Racial and class equality are Gordimer’s motivators, and Rosa seems to embody this attitude.

Faith’s experience of gender is one which is informed by a patriarchal society. Although she is not overtly restricted by gendered oppression, it is clear that Bella has been traumatised by

her relationship with her husband, and this is exacerbated by his leaving. Bella is so attached to the idea of having a masculine figure in her life that she associates herself romantically with Oom Piet, a man for whom she had previously shown disdain and disgust. Additionally, Oom Piet's attempted rape of Bella and his rape of Nomsa are indicative of the inequality in power between men and women. These circumstances contribute to Faith's formative environment, but as an adult, Faith does not appear to be determined by her gender.

Mary is expected to conform to social norms – initially, marriage, but later cooking, cleaning, and socialising – but fails to comply. The “arid feminism” she inherited from her mother (*Grass* 41) prevents her from unquestioningly accepting the role the patriarchal society expects her to play, but the constraints of that society deny her the possibility of an alternative role.

While all the novels contain characters who problematise gendered norms, these characters all seem incapable of escaping these roles: for Bella, it results in madness; for Mary, death; for Rosa, a disinterest in gender, akin to Gordimer's own. It is possible that Faith's independence of a gendered normative role is an indicator of progress in the social context between the time of her mother's experience and her own, or perhaps Faith's concerns are with her own personal and familial traumas rather than her gender identification.

Burger's Daughter is the novel which is most overtly concerned with class, as a result of Rosa's Marxist parents' involvement in the struggle. Rosa actively argues in favour of communist ideas, and espouses the view that racial oppression in South Africa is essentially class based. The other novels explore the intersections between these oppressions less certainly: while the relationship between race and class is certain, the extent of this relationship varies.

Faith's childhood naivety, exhibited in her assumption that Nomsa's parents, as black people, have the potential to be landowners, is something which amuses Nomsa for its absurdity. For Nomsa, it is a given that they could not occupy this position, presumably as a result of their blackness. When Faith returns to the farm, she fulfils the expectation of the white ‘madam’ come to assert her will over the longstanding inhabitants based on her formal ownership. This is necessarily tied to her whiteness, but is also a class issue, in that Faith has assumed that this relatively arbitrary inherited ownership of the land is prior to the experience of the people she

finds living on the land.

In *The Grass is Singing*, part of Slatter's motivation to intervene is born of the desire to keep his fellow whites from sinking "lower than a certain point" (221) in order to retain the apparent superiority of whiteness. Class and race are intrinsically linked here, so that if a white person were to sink below this particular point, it would result in the possibility that the "nigger will see he is as good as you are" (*ibid.*). Importantly, the Turners cannot be considered "poor whites" – although they are both poor and white – because this is a term reserved for "Afrikaners, never British" (11). To label them as such "would be letting the side down" (*ibid.*).

So class is tied to race, but also to social groupings. While class is less visible – and therefore less finite – in its determination of social identities, it seems that it remains an important identifier throughout all the novels.

The locatedness of each of the protagonists is important, because of the chronotopic relation between their identifications and their spatio-temporal situation. The protagonists' physical and temporal placement – and their sense of being unhomed by their respective marginalised positions – affects the way in which they construct their identities.

Rosa feels herself to be an outsider in what she calls "Lionel's country" (*Burger* 210), and initially feels far more comfortable in Europe where her disconnectedness is normalised. There, her lack of rootedness is the norm, which she initially appreciates. However, she comes to long for a more embedded identity, in which her personal and familial identity can be consolidated with her societal identification, and eventually returns to South Africa as an active citizen who is willing to embed herself in a space with which she identifies. This is not a simple return to the space of her childhood, though: she has forged a relationship with her location, so that her relationship with it is personal, rather than inherited.

Faith felt at home on the isolated farm, and uncomfortable in Johannesburg where she "still [has not] got used to the broken sky" (*Gem Squash* 192). This is not simply resolved with her return, however. She finds that on the farm, "where [she] thought [she] belonged, [she is] city folk" (267). While she has longed for a straightforward, nostalgic return to her childhood home, she finds herself unhomed. In fact, her desire to belong cannot be simplified to a

physical location as she is inhibited from forming a complete identity as a result of her childhood trauma. When she has begun to resolve these traumas, she starts to negotiate a new relationship with the space, so that while she has physically returned to the house, her relationship with it is formed anew. She and the house have addressed the family's trauma so that they are no longer "untouched by the passage of time and politics" (277).

Mary's relationship is dissociated from the land. She feels at home in the ambiguous town-space, which could be located anywhere, as opposed to her husband, who has an embedded relationship with his farm. Dick's unusually cognisant relationship with the land, and his desire to live in communion with it, alienates him from his peers and partly causes his farming to be a failure. He differs from Mary in this. It is possible that her lack of embeddedness and relationship is part of what leads to her "nervous breakdown" (*Grass* 228). Mary longs to return to the "girls' club" (43), where she had been happy, but, after running away from Dick, finds that she cannot return: surprised, she describes the "unchanged setting, which was yet so very strange to her" (122). She has forgotten the club's rule against married women, and – realising that she cannot get her former job back – she acquiesces to Dick's pleas for her to return (124). Mary longs for a nostalgic return to a time before her marriage, and the denial of this possibility results in the "beginning of an inner disintegration in her" (125). Realising she cannot return to this moment, Mary sets about determining another to recreate in order to restore a sense of order. She begins to assume the position of her mother, longing for a child with whom she can share her burdens (166). Dick denies this possibility and thereby denies Mary any sort of familiar solace. Instead, she is constrained to the almost inevitable act of turning to Moses. Mary's alienation from the landscape she inhabits mirrors her isolation and dissociation from the community.

Spaces in the novels appear to replicate and represent the social connectivity in the characters' lives. Rosa and Faith, who are able to resolve their respective problematic difficulties, come to find comfort in the spaces they once found alienating, while Mary, for whom resolution is not an option, remains isolated and distant so that her only escape is in death. It might be that space performs the function of a reflective marker, indicating to the protagonists the psychic spaces they have repressed, so that Faith, for example, longs to return to her childhood home, but is inhibited from occupying the same position by time as well as her trauma, and must return to the repressed trauma. The gap between her expectation of the space – as a nostalgic return to a familiar home – and her lived experience of the space

as changed, catalyses her inward reflection. While she is never able to return to that space – in terms of time and because the trauma changed her – she is able to reconstruct it, as she experiences it, as a hospitable place.

The physical spaces described within the novels – “that house,” and France for Rosa, the farm for Faith, the bush for Mary – evoke the specific spatio-temporal embeddedness of each narrative. Contiguously, the intimate embodiment of the protagonists (that is, their identifications and relationships) evokes their lived experience. This dissertation has framed these conceptions as the symbolic and somatic respectively, and has understood them as entangled into a ‘structure of feeling.’ This conception unifies the intertwining, distinct elements of a “‘structure’ [...] with specific internal relations,” and the “social experience [...] [which is] private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating” (Raymond quoted in Lazarus, *Postcolonial Unconscious*, 234 fn. 150). The manner in which the contemporary ‘political unconscious’ informs the lived realities of the characters is made visible through this structure of feeling.

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