Danyela Demir

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Post-Apartheid Melancholia in Contemporary South African Novels

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Dedication

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INTRODUCTION

MELANCHOLIA – FROM 'NOBILITATION' TO PSYCHOANALYTICAL CONTEXTS

Melancholia, in its classical meaning and according to the theory of the four humours during the Greek era, referred to "a state of sadness that involves heightened sensitivity, which was once defined as the excess of black bile" (Wald 3). In their introduction to *The Literature of Melancholia* Martin Middeke and Christina Wald illustrate this notion of melancholia with the following example:

> 'Why is it that all men who have become outstanding in philosophy, statesmanship, or the arts are melancholic?' This statement, which had been ascribed to Aristotle for a long time, can be regarded as the foundation of the long-standing cultural history of melancholia. (1)

Although this sense of melancholia is still detectable in many of its conceptualisations today, and especially in the quotidian use of the word itself, a shift has occurred throughout the centuries.

In its antiquated meaning, melancholia was related to the gift of being particularly creative and "has frequently been understood as a painful condition which opens up an avenue to deeper insight, to judiciousness and to creativity" (Middeke and Wald, 1). The notion which Middeke and Wald call "nobilitation" (1) persisted well into the era of Romanticism. In literature, perhaps the most striking example is John Keats' "Ode on Melancholy", in which melancholia is elevated to a near spiritual or supernatural phenomenon and falls "from Heaven like a weeping cloud". In Keats' poem, melancholia is regarded as a higher state which "provides a special sensibility that is only available for an elected few" (Middeke and Wald, 11).

The notion of melancholia as a 'noble' sentiment began to be questioned and reformulated in the twentieth century. Here, Sigmund Freud's essay "Mourning and Melancholia" – in which he distinguishes between mourning (as a healthy form of grieving for a lost object of love) and melancholia (a pathologised and unconscious ongoing attachment to one's lost object of love) – was groundbreaking in rethinking melancholia. Freud's notion of melancholia is one of three key concepts which inform my discussion of the novels in this study. Freud's essay puts less emphasis on melancholia in connection to

creativity or a particularly distinctive sensitivity, viewing it instead as an unhealthy form of grieving which ultimately leads to an impoverishment of the ego. In perhaps one of the most frequently quoted passages of the text, Freud states: "In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself" ("Mourning" 246). Freud's understanding of melancholia stands in contrast to Keats' romantic notion of a 'noble' sentiment and marks a turning point for the concept of melancholia.

Psychoanalysts such as Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich in *The Inability to Mourn*, as well as Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok have expanded Freud's notion of melancholia. While the Mitscherlichs look at melancholia in the context of post-World War II Germany, detecting an inability to mourn the loss of Germany as a nation of grandeur and power (Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich 12), Torok and Abraham identify melancholia as hereditary, that is to say, they regard it as a form of loss which can be passed on over several generations.

In post-structuralist theory Judith Butler, amongst others, has drawn on and criticised the Freudian concept of melancholia. In her seminal book, *The Psychic Life of Power*, Butler proposes that the concept of "gender itself might be understood in part as the 'acting out' of unresolved grief" (146). What cannot be grieved is, as Middeke and Wald pointedly observe, "the same-sex parent as object of desire" (8). According to Butler, this mechanism of repressed grief "produces a domain of homosexuality understood as unliveable passion and ungrievable loss" (135). In the field of literary studies Butler's concept of melancholia has proven particularly useful for the analysis of drama (see e.g. Wald).

While the Butlerian concept of melancholia has been seminal for a reformulation of the Freudian concept with regard to homosexuality and queer performativity, melancholic attachments and forms of desire were the focus of several books in the late 1990s and early 2000s. José Esteban Munoz's *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* focuses on queer artists and performers of colour such as Carmelita Tropicana, Ela Troyano, and Isaac Julien and looks "at disidentificatory performances of politics, acts that [can be described] as reformulating the world through the performance of politics" (xiv). He discusses queer performativity with regard to melancholic subject-formations not only in the context of queer theory, but also within the context of the connections between melancholia and racial rejections and desires.

Anne Cheng's *Melancholy of Race*, the second of the key theoretical texts of this study, focuses on melancholia with regard to racial rejections and passing,

identity crises, and introjected fantasies and forms of desire on the part of whites and non-whites. Cheng analyses texts by African American and Asian American writers, such as Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Maxine Hong Kingston's *Woman Warrior*, and Theresa Hak-Kyung Cha's *Dictée*.

The third key concept of melancholia that I shall draw on is Paul Gilroy's *Postcolonial Melancholia*, in which he focuses on the inability of England to mourn the loss of its former colonies. Based on the Mitscherlichs' observations in *The Inability to Mourn*, Gilroy convincingly shows that British society, following the win of two World Wars, is obsessed with the retention of the nation's image as heroic rather than working through the loss of its former colonies in order to relinquish ongoing attachments to ideas of power, grandeur, and racist ideologies, which would in turn begin the process of addressing the state of the nation's psyche.

Gilroy further suggests that his observations are not "uniquely relevant to Britain. The modern histories of numerous other European countries, particularly Belgium, France, Spain, Italy, and the Netherlands, might also be used to construct equivalent arguments amidst the wreckage of their colonial extensions" (Gilroy 100). In literary criticism, Gilroy's concept of postcolonial melancholia has, for example, been used by Elizabeth Kowaleski Wallace as a theoretical frame for the analysis of Ian McEwan's critically-acclaimed novel, *Saturday*. In *A Critical Psychology of the Postcolonial: The Mind of Apartheid*, Derek Hook employs Gilroy's concept of postcolonial melancholia in a broader context. Rather than focusing specifically on one country only (although, as the subtitle suggests, his observations are often based on South Africa), Hook uses Gilroy's concept in order to illustrate the complexity of the libidinal economy in postcolonial societies. Hook describes postcolonial melancholia as:

> a push-pull relation between amnesia and aggrandizement. This dynamic is the result of juxtaposition between two powerful yet contrary cultural imperatives. On the one hand, there is a largely unconfronted colonial past, an entire epoch of colonial dominance that remains repressed. […] Running counter to this cultural trend is another: the incessant imperative of rejuvenating a vision of British greatness. (147–148)

In the context of South Africa, which is the focus of this study, Hook's *(Post)Apartheid Conditions* in which he analyses loss, melancholia, and nostalgia through a psycho-social lens will be important for my analysis of Sarah Penny's *The Beneficiaries*. Interestingly, both Hook's work and Ross Truscott's essay "National Melancholia and Afrikaner Self-Parody in Post-Apartheid South

Africa", in which he analyses the Oppikoppi music festival with a Mitscherlichian approach to melancholia, are two of very few texts which discuss melancholia in post-apartheid South Africa.[1] Though very little research exists on the topic, I suggest that melancholia becomes a very useful tool when analysing post-apartheid literature; when viewed through such a lens, the dynamics of loss, racial rejection and desire, and the inability to cope with the country's apartheid past become apparent. Based on Freud's, Cheng's, and Gilroy's concepts of melancholia, I shall argue that South African novels after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) can be read as melancholic counter-narratives to the TRC's attempt to initiate a nationwide process of mourning that would provide closure from the apartheid past.

SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE AFTER THE TRC: POST-TRANSITIONAL, POST-APARTHEID, OR POST-POST-APARTHEID?

The literary output of the newly democratic South Africa was, at least during the first five to ten years, often characterised by a concern with rewriting the country's apartheid past while frequently envisioning an apocalyptic, or at least hopeless, future for the 'new' South Africa (Boehmer; Medalie). Critics such as Ronit Frenkel and Craig MacKenzie, or Michael Chapman and Margaret Lenta emphasise that South African literature, particularly after 2000, has become much less 'obsessed' with its past – rather, a creative shift towards new and more experimental trends, which is less characterised by the realist genre typical for apartheid writing, has occurred (Frenkel and MacKenzie 1). The demise of apartheid has led to an engagement with a broader spectrum of themes and concerns in South Africa. Margaret Lenta, who discusses authors who published their first novel after 2000, categorises this in the following manner:

> first, the will to give voice to 'previously silent communities'; second will be 'sex and gender', […] third, the mixture of languages now characteristic of novels by black authors; fourth, 'writing back', that is, responding to and taking issue with earlier works; fifth, the *roman a thèse*, implying a singleness of subject, to the extent that the work becomes fictionalised argument. The sixth element will be 'fusion', by which I mean that novels register the fact that people of dif-

[1] Another important study in the context of melancholia and post-apartheid South Africa, though not relevant for this study due to its sociological focus on the South African Indian community, is Thomas Bloom-Hansen's *Melancholia of Freedom*, which focuses on life after apartheid in Chatsworth, an Indian township in Durban.

> ferent ethnic communities are now free to know each other outside of their work and to form what ties they wish. (53)

Lenta's categorisations, which are open and fluid, point to a relevant development in post-apartheid writing, namely that of greater concern with the themes and tropes of quotidian life.

Black writing of the apartheid era was particularly concerned with the country's disenfranchised black and coloured population's struggle for freedom. The term 'Coloured', distinct from the word 'Colored' which is used to describe mostly the black population in the United States, has a specific meaning in the South African context. According to the *Dictionary of South African English on Historical Principles* the term 'coloured' as an adjective means: "Of mixed ethnic origin, including Khoisan, African, slave, Malay, Chinese, white, and other descent"; as a noun: "a person of mixed black (or brown) and white descent who speaks either English or Afrikaans as home language." (qtd. in Cornwell et al. xiv). The word is not always capitalised, especially because since the end of apartheid people have been cautious to use it at all, as for some it would mean a re-categorisation of the different ethnicities. In order to avoid this, I shall not capitalise this term during my analysis, following Grant Farred who maintains that: "The problematic of this designation, a term many coloureds themselves reject, is signalled by the use of the small 'c' rather than the capital 'C' of apartheid classification" (8).

The literary gap in representations of quotidian experiences of oppression was, even by 1984, a concern, as Njabulo Ndebele stated that South African authors were concerned with the spectacular representation of apartheid rather than focusing on the ordinary. For Ndebele:

> [t]he history of black South African literature has largely been the history of the representation of spectacle. The visible symbols of the overwhelmingly oppressive South African social formation appear to have prompted over the years the development of a highly dramatic, highly demonstrative form of literary representation. (*Rediscovery* 37)

Ndebele criticises that after reading many works of the protest literature of the 60s, 70s and 80s "what is deeply etched in our minds is the spectacular contest between the powerless and the powerful. Most of the time the contest ends in horror and tragedy for the powerless" (43). He draws attention to the necessity for the arts to return to less spectacular and more ordinary themes and tropes such as "the deepest dreams for love, hope, compassion, newness and justice" (47). It should be noted that Ndebele does not, of course, call for a move away

from representing injustice and the inhumane treatment of disenfranchised people. Rather, he suggests a focus on "the essential drama in the lives of ordinary people" (53).

The return to the ordinary in South African writing is, as Lenta's categorisation of themes show, perhaps most strikingly visible in post-apartheid fiction, which is often preoccupied with a focus on narratives of loss, oppression, and the effect that apartheid's segregationist politics had on people's daily lives. The TRC, which I shall focus on in more detail in the first chapter, can be seen as a public creation of a counter-history to the one upheld by the apartheid government, whereby racial oppression and political violence, often in the form of state-supported murder or abductions and torture of anti-apartheid activists, were made public. Meg Samuelson observes that "[t]he TRC offers an exemplary case study of post-conflict resolution based on memory and mourning" ("Melancholic States" 44). The TRC was established by the Promotion for National Unity Act in 1995 in order "to build a unified nation in the wake of the apartheid state's divisive strategies" (44). I shall argue, alongside critics such as Shane Graham and Samuelson ("Melancholic States"), that the TRC can be seen as a forum for public mourning that is a healthy form of grieving in the Freudian sense, which should ultimately facilitate the psychological closure of the past. After all, in the foreword to the TRC volumes, the Commission's chairperson, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, states: "Having looked the beast of the past in the eye, having asked and received forgiveness and having made amends, let us shut the door on the past – not in order to forget it but in order not to allow it to imprison us" (22).

If one reads post-TRC novels against the larger framework of a nation-wide process of mourning and attempts at closure, the concept of melancholia can be seen as a powerful counter-narrative in order to keep the past alive: the TRC "is a form of remembrance that, while disavowing amnesia, threatens to tip over into forgetting" (Samuelson, "Melancholic States" 45). For instance, the TRC mainly focused on the apartheid era from a political perspective. One might say that it revolved around the spectacular, the extraordinary violence and injustices inflicted upon the black and coloured population, as became most apparent in the media attention on unsolved murders and disappearances during the apartheid era. Therefore, quotidian narratives of loss, trauma, and violence often remained on the margins of public attention (Christiansë 373). Most of the fictional texts which I focus on in the subsequent chapters are concerned with aspects which were neglected by the TRC: the painful history of passing for white and the ensuing losses and crises of identity (central to

Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light*, which I discuss later), or the effect that the Bantu Education Act continues to have on a younger generation of black South Africans. The latter issue is touched upon in Kgebetli Moele's *Room 207*, which focuses on the struggle to survive in Johannesburg in a post-apartheid South Africa that is still in the grips of the past.

The TRC and its aftermath is, then, the timeframe of the texts discussed in the following chapters. The timeframe of this study is similar to Shane Graham's *South African Literature After the Truth Commission: Mapping Loss*, in which he discusses a wide range of novels, plays, collections of poetry, and memoirs with regard to the TRC. However, while using the term 'post-TRC fiction' highlights the importance of reading South African novels published after the TRC as counter-narratives, it puts too much emphasis on the TRC process. The TRC is of central importance to my readings of Wicomb's, van Niekerk's and Penny's novels. The term 'post-TRC fiction' also highlights the notion of the spectacular rather than the quotidian, while the latter is much more important for my understanding of post-1994 fiction.

Besides the term 'post-TRC fiction', concepts such as 'post-transitional literature' (Frenkel and MacKenzie), 'South African Literature Beyond 2000' (Chapman and Lenta),[2] or 'post-post-apartheid literature' (Chapman) have been employed in order to define and categorise post-apartheid writing.[3] Chapman describes 'post-post-apartheid' as "a phase in which books tangential to heavy politics, or even to local interest, have begun to receive national recognition" (2). He illustrates, for instance, that "J.M. Coetzee, in his quieter, suburban Australian novels […] appears to have gone beyond his traumatised vision of his home country: that is, beyond *Disgrace*" (2). While Chapman does at the same time emphasise that much of South African literature of the 21st century focuses on apartheid, the term 'post-post-apartheid' seems to suggest a greater distance from the country's past than the texts analysed in this study are concerned with.

Similarly, Frenkel and MacKenzie state that post-transitional writing:

> is often unfettered to the past in the way that much apartheid writing was, but may still reconsider it in new ways. Equally, it may ignore it altogether. Other features include politically incorrect and incisive satire, and the mixing of genres with zest and freedom. (2)

[2] While most novels that I analyse were published after 2000, André Brink's *Devil's Valley* was published in 1998, hence 'beyond 2000' would not be an accurate term here.
[3] Other terms that are less concerned with marking specific time referents, but that are more influenced by political, cultural, and sociological aspects are; 'complicity' (Sanders), 'The Seam' (de Kock, "Global Imaginary"), and 'entanglement' (Nuttall, *Entanglement*).

I agree that much post-apartheid fiction engages with South Africa's past in highly innovative and experimental ways. Wicomb's highly fragmented novel *David's Story* or Marlene van Niekerk's *Agaat*, which has four different narrative strands, are prominent examples. However, I argue that the novels that I analyse may disavow the past, such as Moele's *Room 207* where the word apartheid is barely mentioned. This disavowal or silence seems to suggest, in Moele's novel at least, not a motion toward a more hopeful future, but rather an inability to confront the losses and traumatic effects that segregation has on the protagonists' lives in post-apartheid Johannesburg.

Writers of, as Frenkel and MacKenzie refer to it, 'post-transitional literature' like Niq Mhlongo (*Dog*, *After Tears*), Imraan Coovadia (*The Wedding*, *Green-Eyed Thieves*, *High Low*), and Zukiswa Wanner (*The Madams*, *Behind*, *Men*) do tackle post-apartheid life in rather satirical, sometimes politically incorrect, and humorous ways. Interestingly, all three authors have, in their more recent books, turned to a less satirical and more disillusioned and serious writing style. Particularly Wanner's *London Cape Town Joburg* and Mhlongo's *Way Back Home* revolve around themes such as the difficulty to mourn personal losses and traumatising aspects of the apartheid past. The texts analysed in this study, while often bearing elements of humour and irony, centre predominantly around loss, despair, and the consequences of traumatic events. Besides, terms such as 'post-transitional' or 'post-post-apartheid' writing suggest a new era of South African literature in a democracy barely twenty-five years old. This seems somewhat problematic since much of contemporary South African writing is still very much concerned with its apartheid past. Because the six texts under discussion, as well as most of the other works that I touch upon, highlight the significance of apartheid for the present more than the terms 'post-post-apartheid' and 'post-transitional' writing suggest, I shall use the term 'post-apartheid literature' in order to emphasise the evident nature of attachments and the inability or unwillingness to mourn the past.

TRAUMA LITERATURE AND THEORIES OF MELANCHOLIA IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

While books on trauma, particularly in relation to the TRC and its aftermath, have flourished since the early 2000s, melancholia, especially within the discipline of literary studies, remains under-researched. More often than not, critics turned instead to a related but slightly different concept, namely that of nostalgia (Medalie; Klopper). Jacob Dlamini and Derek Hook (*(Post)Apartheid*

Conditions) have both also focused on nostalgia, although not in terms of literary criticism. Dlamini's *Native Nostalgia* is concerned with a yearning for township communal life and solidarity before the end of apartheid. It must be highlighted here that *Native Nostalgia* is far from advocating nostalgia for apartheid itself, but much more for a life within a caring community where its members supported each other despite the harsh conditions under which they lived. Hook's chapter on nostalgia is concerned with psychoanalytic questions of the phenomenon, particularly with forms of white nostalgia for apartheid. Both texts, as different as they may be, however, base their theoretical observations on Svetlana Boym's differentiation between restorative and reflective nostalgia, on which I also draw when I discuss the relationship between nostalgia and melancholia with regard to Wicomb's *Playing in the Light*.

While I discuss the interconnectedness of melancholia and nostalgia, my analyses are much more informed and shaped by critics who have focused on reading post-apartheid texts through a traumatic lens. Wald states that:

> [i]n its psychoanalytical meaning, melancholia can be understood as a specific traumatic formation, since it describes the psychic reaction to an experience of loss which the subject, as in the case of traumatisation, does not fully register. Rather than accepting the loss, the subject remains in a state of disavowed or suspended grief that keeps the lost object present by psychic means. (3)

Similar to Wald's description, I read melancholia as a traumatic formation, or rather, as a consequence of trauma on which I elaborate more fully later. Therefore, essays and books which revolve around trauma in post-apartheid South Africa, such as Gobodo-Madikizela and van der Merwe, Mengel and Borzaga, and Singh and Chetty are of importance for my readings of the post-apartheid novels in this study.[4]

Mengel and Borzaga's collection of essays has a very specific focus in that it draws attention to trauma in relation to South African novels. Most of the essays deal with post-apartheid writing. In their introduction, they critique western and post-structuralist models of trauma and argue for a redefinition

[4] Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela's edited collection *Memory, Narrative and Forgiveness: Perspectives on the Unfinished Journeys of the Past* has a wide interdisciplinary scope, ranging from discussions of societal trauma, the effects of the Holocaust on the descendants of both survivors, and perpetrators, traumatic experiences of child soldiers in Uganda and the attempts to reintegrate them into society, to trauma in post-apartheid South Africa, both in society as well as in fictional texts.

of trauma with regards to the 'postcolony'.[5] In their introduction to the interview volume *Trauma, Memory and Narrative in South Africa*, Borzaga, Mengel, and Orantes draw attention to the need to be critical of western models of trauma in the context of South Africa. They sum up some of their conclusions after having interviewed South African psychologists as follows:

> Conscious of our 'Western lens', the interviews seek to critically examine the way trauma is traditionally conceptualized in the West. All the psychologists who were interviewed, however, agreed that, although the DSM description of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a construction with limitations, it would be inappropriate to dismiss it, since its symptoms – avoidance, hyperarousal, and intrusive thoughts – are very much part of the South African syndrome. What most of the experts contest is the Western diachronic model of time in which an overwhelming event […], retrospectively seen as traumatic, seems to interrupt a temporality still perceived as linear. (x)

The essays collected in Singh and Chetty's *Trauma, Resistance, Reconstruction in Post-1994 South African Writing* focus on trauma from the vantage points of memory and identity, trauma and fictional representations of the TRC, fragmentation and silence, and trauma in autobiographies. While the essay collection does feature articles on critically-acclaimed novels such as Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story*, Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*, and J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*, it also focuses on lesser-known and under-researched works such as Sarah Penny's *The Beneficiaries* and André Brink's *Devil's Valley*.

Themes such as loss, memory, mourning, and the need to create counter-narratives to either the grand narrative of apartheid or the new post-apartheid narrative of reconciliation are the focus of most of the literature on trauma to which I continually return in my analyses. I suggest, however, that in addition to these, melancholia can be a very useful theoretical concept – at times even more fruitful than that of trauma – for the analysis of issues such as complicity, crises of identity, forms of resistance, and intergenerational memory.

Compared to writing on trauma, there are no extensive studies on melancholia in post-apartheid fiction. Few critics, such as Klopper, Samuelson ("Melancholic States"), and Sam Durrant analyse specific South African works with a particular recourse to mourning and melancholia. However, in his book *Postcolonial Narratives and the Work of Mourning*, Durrant, for instance, analyses

[5] In his essay "Provisional Notes on the Postcolony" Achille Mbembe defines the term in the following manner: "The notion 'postcolony' identifies specifically a given historical trajectory – that of societies recently emerging from the experience of colonisation and the violence which the colonial relationship, par excellence, involves. To be sure, the postcolony is chaotically pluralistic, yet it has nonetheless an internal coherence" (3).

novels by J. M. Coetzee that were published before *Disgrace* alongside novels by Toni Morrison and Wilson Harris. Rather than focusing specifically on mourning and melancholia within an apartheid or a post-apartheid context, he seeks to apply concepts of mourning, memory, fragmentation, and resistance to a broader postcolonial context. In contrast, my study, although tracing connections to works outside South Africa, where relevant, focuses on South Africa.

In her article "Melancholic States, Statist Mourning and the Poetics of Memory in Post-Conflict Fiction from Southern Africa" Samuelson provides an analysis of three novels from South Africa, Zimbabwe and Mozambique through the lens of melancholia. Like Shane Graham, she sees the TRC as a forum for mourning, which bears the risk of amnesia. Melancholic narratives (she focuses particularly on Wicomb's *David's Story*), in contrast, are a powerful tool to disrupt processes of amnesia and closure. Dirk Klopper's essay "The Place of Nostalgia in Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light*" again focuses on a novel by Wicomb. He argues that one can equate the concepts of restorative and reflective nostalgia with Freud's notions of mourning and melancholia whereby restorative nostalgia is related to melancholia and reflective nostalgia to a healthy form of mourning (148). While particularly Klopper's essay forms the basis for my argument in my analysis of *Playing in the Light* (Chapter 2.1), both Samuelson and Klopper focus on only one author and they do not work with concepts such as racial or postcolonial melancholia, which I consider crucial additions for the South African context.

In a somewhat more interdisciplinary context, both Ross Truscott and Derek Hook (*(Post)Apartheid Conditions*) have focused on melancholia in post-apartheid South Africa. While Hook, looking more closely at the Wits apartheid archive,[6] analyses processes of internalised racist ideologies, mechanisms of attachment, desire, and rejection from the point of view of whites, Truscott's illuminating essay centres around the Afrikaner's sense of loss and an ongoing melancholic attachment to the apartheid past which cannot be mourned and is instead internalised through parody.

As I have outlined above, my readings and argumentation shall be mainly based on Freud's, Cheng's, and Gilroy's concepts of melancholia. In my various analyses I shall employ other, more specific theoretical texts and concepts, such as Marianne Hirsch's intergenerational memory ("Postmemory") and Sigmund Freud's "The Uncanny" in Chapter 2.1, and Nicolas Abraham's and

[6] For further information on the Wits Apartheid Archive see "Apartheid Archives Project" on the Wits University's *Historical Papers Research Archive* webpage.

Maria Torok's intergenerational phantom theory in Chapter 3.1. Many of my analyses (Chapters 2.1, 2.2, 4.1 and 4.2) are also informed by the works of Frantz Fanon, particularly *Black Skin, White Masks*. Hook states that "the most influential historical figure in the endeavour to apply psychoanalysis to the colonial domain […] is still Fanon, particularly so in view of the psychoanalysis of racism he develops in *Black Skin, White Masks*" (*Critical Psychology* 97). Fanon, on whose observations both Cheng and Gilroy draw in their respective works, links racial fantasies, desire, and psychological illnesses such as trauma and neurosis to colonialism. Particularly with regard to (melancholic) attachments to blackness and whiteness, Fanon makes important observations as to the desirability of whiteness. Fanon attributes this desire for whiteness, which also lies at the heart of Cheng's concept of racial melancholia, to the binary oppositions of black and white produced by colonialism. In oppressive white discourse, Fanon illustrates poignantly, "good" things are related to whiteness, while everything that is undesirable is related to blackness. With recourse to the autobiography of Mayotte Capecia, a light-skinned Antillean black woman who, through her marriage with a white man, further internalises racist views and nurtures her desire to become white, he remarks ironically: "Indeed no, the good and merciful God cannot be black: he is a white man with bright pink cheeks. From black to white is the course of mutation. One is white as one is rich, as one is beautiful, as one is intelligent" (*Black* 51-52). These oppressive binary oppositions between black and white are important for what Cheng describes as "the desire for a 'never-possible perfection'" (xi), in the sense of an internalised racism by people of colour and black people and their desire to aspire for a white ideal.

In his later book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon adds another, more empowering layer to the binary oppositions. While *Black Skin, White Masks* deals with the deep-seated traumatic effects and consequences that colonialism has on colonised people, *The Wretched of the Earth* is also a call for a radical decolonisation. Fanon observes that:

> [t]he gaze that the colonized subject casts at the colonist's sector is a look of lust, a look of envy. Dreams of possession. Every type of possession: of sitting at the colonist's table and sleeping in his bed, preferably with his wife. […] The colonist is aware of this as he catches the furtive glance, and constantly on his guard, realizes bitterly that: 'They want to take our place.' And it's true there is not one colonized subject who at least once a day does not dream of taking the place of the colonist. (*Wretched* 5)

Thus, the racial introjections and desires that are at play in *Black Skin, White Masks* are evoked. However, a shift has occurred, in which the desire to be white is no longer regarded as merely pathological. The binary oppositions in which "[t]he white man is sealed in his whiteness. The black man in his blackness" (Fanon, *Black* 9) have become somewhat more fluid. Besides – and this is again similar to mechanisms that are at play in racial melancholia – while the desire to be white has to do with racial rejections that stem from a colonial environment in *Black Skin, White Masks*, the desire for whiteness in *The Wretched of the Earth* is linked to resistance and power. The colonised subject does not so much wish to be white, but rather he or she desires to be in "the place of the colonist" (Fanon, *Wretched* 5). This oscillation between melancholic racial attachments as pathologies and racial introjections as forms of resistance is at the core of many of my readings of melancholic representations in post-apartheid literature. Fanon's texts, then, and particularly his observations on internalised mechanisms of racism and the desire for resistance and a change of power positions, offer important theoretical additions for my readings.

With regard to the concept of postcolonial melancholia, Fanon's texts do not directly inform Gilroy's notion of melancholia. However, the binary oppositions, or the Manichaeism that is central to Fanon's work, serve as an important tool for Gilroy in order to outline ongoing practices of racism and colonial structures. Gilroy observes that:

> [r]ace thinking and the distinctive political forms associated with it – biopower, ultranationalism, ethnic absolutism, and so on – have sanctioned gross brutality in many diverse settings. Social and political theory have been reluctant to address this recurrence. It is not usually seen as a specific interpretative, historical, or ethical problem; it is never approached as a result of what Frantz Fanon described as the 'delirium' of race-friendly Manichaeism. (31)

Gilroy's *Postcolonial Melancholia* can be seen as addressing this gap. He interprets the effects of the binary oppositions caused by colonialism in the following manner:

> The emphasis that Fanon placed upon Manichaeism shows how the relationships between black and white, settler and native, colonizer and colonized, denies any possibility of a comforting dialectical resolution. The omnipresent violence of colonial administration creates the colony as a *frozen, immobile world of statues that is not in teleological or progressive motion toward freer, healthier, or more comfortable arrangements*. (51–52; emphasis mine)

This immobility – being frozen, as it were – is, although Gilroy does not directly correlate the two, the essence of a pathological form of melancholia. It is reminiscent of what Cheng describes as being "psychically stuck" (8) and unable to move on or to grieve losses and traumatic events. This is a further aspect I explore in my analyses as, more often than not, characters find themselves unable to move forward in time, to mourn losses that are directly related to the binary oppositions that are the result of the segregationist apartheid regime.

Gilroy's engagement with Fanon's work can be regarded as a critical continuation of Fanon's anti-racist project based on a "new humanism" (40). For Fanon, racism is a temporal problem that can be overcome once the binary oppositions of 'black and white', 'coloniser and colonised' are overthrown:

> The problem considered here is one of time. Those Negroes and white men will be disalienated who refuse to let themselves be sealed away in the materialized Tower of the past. For many other Negroes, in other ways, disalienation will come into being through their refusal to accept the present as definitive. (*Black* 226)

This would mean, in terms of mourning and melancholia, that, in order to move on and overcome racist structures, societies must let go of the past and move on toward a more egalitarian future. Gilroy rightly criticises, however, that:

> that decisive 'refusal to accept the present as definite' is not as easy as [Fanon] made it sound fifty years ago when failures of western European civilization were apparent to everyone and the destructive capacity of race thinking was impossible to ignore. (40)

Both Gilroy's and Cheng's concepts of melancholia address, although from different perspectives, precisely this temporal issue which proves to be more difficult to overcome than Fanon might have anticipated. Melancholic attachments – particularly in their pathological form – are, after all, the opposite of what Fanon advocates for at the end of *Black Skin, White Masks*. The complexity of the 21st century to which Gilroy alludes in the above quoted passage is central for a continuation of an engagement with Fanon's texts. Hook pointedly says of Gilroy's concept of melancholia (and I would suggest the same for Cheng) that it "helpfully extends the type of theorization offered by Fanon; it likewise helps bridge the time of Fanon's analysis and our own" (*Critical Psychology* 147). By drawing on both Gilroy's and Cheng's theories, with recourse to Fanon's texts where apt in my readings, I shall thus also address questions of time: temporal attachments, present losses, and the impossibility of a pre-

sent without the past. For most of the texts that I analyse, a Fanonian optimism – an attempt not to look back to the past and a hopeful outlook for the future – is not yet discernible. On the contrary, post-apartheid literature is, as David Medalie states, "inclined rather to a preoccupation with the past than an embrace of the future" ("The Uses" 35).

STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

In what follows I shall analyse six post-apartheid works through the lens of various theoretical approaches of melancholia. While the first chapter explores my three main approaches to melancholia (Freud, Cheng, and Gilroy), Chapter 2 will interrogate notions of complicity, passing, intergenerational melancholia, shame, and guilt with recourse to the concept of racial melancholia in Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* and Marlene van Niekerk's *Agaat*. Both novels deal with quotidian losses, the interstitial position of the coloured identity, and racialisation caused by apartheid ideology. While there are numerous articles on Wicomb's and van Niekerk's novels that deal with traumatic loss, memory, narrative, and dynamics of power, the two works have not been read in relation to each other. Besides, while van Niekerk's novel has been analysed through the lens of trauma and resistance, notably by Lara Buxbaum ("Embodying", "Remembering"), and *Playing in the Light* has been read with regards to passing, shame, and complicity (Dass; Klopper), I suggest a reading of both novels within a melancholic frame that emphasises aspects of resistance, in-betweenness, marginalisation, and ongoing painful though productive attachments to the past.

Chapters 3.1 and 3.2 discuss André Brink's lesser-known novel *Devil's Valley* and Sarah Penny's equally under-researched *The Beneficiaries*. Both novels focus on white people's roles during apartheid. Here, Gilroy's *Postcolonial Melancholia*, the Mitscherlichs' *The Inability to Mourn* and Truscott's and Hook's theoretical observations on melancholia will be of importance. While I read Brink's *Devil's Valley* as an allegory of an inability to mourn the loss of power and privilege during apartheid on the Afrikaner's part, *The Beneficiaries* shows mechanisms of repressed guilt and disavowal on the part of the English-speaking community in South Africa.

My last analysis focuses on works by younger writers who, although having grown up during apartheid, came of age or at least studied or worked in a post-apartheid South Africa. Both K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* and Kgebetli Moele's *Room 207* deal with urban spaces as sites of loss, repressed histories,

and melancholic attachments. My reading of *Thirteen Cents* again turns to racial melancholia, as I suggest that the protagonist's anger, and his various attempts to cope with injuries and violations, should be read as strategies of survival and resilience, pointing to a more productive, depathologised notion of melancholia. Moele's *Room 207*, in contrast, is the only text that I shall analyse mainly through a Freudian definition of melancholia. Here, I explore pathological attachments to lost images of masculinity, the characters' inability to confront the painful apartheid past, and, finally, the narrator's melancholic attachment to Johannesburg.

Most of the works that I analyse are critically-acclaimed South African novels and have won either one or more prestigious literary prizes. The exceptions are, perhaps, *Devil's Valley*, and, to a certain degree, *The Beneficiaries*. While both texts are relatively under-researched, however, Brink remains one of the best known and most read South African authors alongside J. M. Coetzee and Nadine Gordimer. Penny's novel, though it received little academic attention, was a set school text in South African high schools. The six novels, then, are to varying degrees representative of post-apartheid writing. By exploring different concepts of melancholia throughout my analysis of these six works, I hope to add new insights into recent observations on loss, mourning, and melancholia in post-apartheid writing.

CHAPTER 1:
AFTER TRAUMA – REFLECTIONS ON POST-APARTHEID MELANCHOLIA

> "Every South African has to some extent or other been traumatised. We are a wounded people because of the conflict of the past, no matter on which side we stood." (Desmond Tutu, Opening Address to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on 16 December 1995)

> "[She] came and showed you the rainbow cloth once more, with an odd sentence added to it. Break and be broken, she said, that is the law of life." (Marlene van Niekerk, *Agaat* 341)

In his essay "Mourning and Melancholia", Sigmund Freud distinguishes between mourning, which he defines as a healthy grieving after a devastating loss has occurred, and melancholia, that is a pathological state in which one finds oneself unable to overcome that very loss. According to Freud, the process of mourning seems natural and necessary in order to go on with life after having suffered a loss ("Mourning" 243). Melancholia, on the other hand, is defined as pathological, as the person suffering from it does not, in contrast to the 'normal' process of grieving, detach his or her libido from the lost object – which does not necessarily have to be another human being, but can be also something more abstract, such as a lost country or home. The melancholic's libido regresses somewhat narcissistically onto his/her own ego, producing a conflict of ambivalence. The melancholic person denigrates her- or himself, while forming at times a subservient and at other times a slightly hateful attitude towards the lost object of love. The melancholy person is, to put it in Anne Anlin Cheng's words, "psychically stuck" (8) and hence unable to overcome a loss which very likely was traumatic at a time in the past.

While Freud discusses the problem of melancholia in a rather personal light (that is to say, he gives examples of melancholia only in the context of individuals), Anne Anlin Cheng and Paul Gilroy, for instance, have considered the impact of melancholia on societies, although from slightly different perspectives. Cheng focuses on problematic topics, such as melancholia with regard to racial passing, stereotyping, and racial discrimination in the United States. Gilroy, in turn, considers melancholia in the context of England and its society. In his *Postcolonial Melancholia* he argues that England has never

properly mourned the loss of its empire. He further points out that this has led England to have a rather problematic attitude towards its former colonial subjects who have immigrated to Britain in the wake of World War II.

With the theories of Gilroy and Cheng in mind, one might ask to what extent melancholia plays a role in the process of overcoming traumatic events which happened in the postcolony. More precisely, the question is whether the oppressed have been able to overcome traumatic losses and identity crises on the one hand, and if the colonisers have dealt with feelings such as guilt, shame, and loss of power and privilege on the other hand. A further question would be whether the process of working through history has in fact ever taken place, or if it has been substituted by a national inability to mourn instead. If one assumes the latter, the inability to mourn can be considered a sign of an impossibility to reconcile with the country's past and, in cases where oppressed and oppressors live together under a newly established democratic rule, an impossibility of reconciling the two sides in order to (re-)build a 'new' society.

South Africa, with its history of trauma, apartheid, and its struggle for liberation from a white minority regime proves to be a particularly interesting and enriching example of thinking through melancholia in the context of redefining a nation in the wake of democracy as a result of liberation struggles. For nearly five decades the country was ruled by a white minority government which, shortly after 1948, enforced not only a drastic segregation between the country's different ethnicities (for instance through the Population Registration Act, the Group Areas Act, and the Immorality Act Amendment) but also established an unjust educational system. This, in turn, resulted in the Bantu Education Act, leaving the black and coloured majority highly undereducated throughout the whole time of the white minority rule. This was followed by the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 1995. The country's society was not only left to deal with its highly traumatic past but, above all, with the question of how two such divided parts of a society could live together in a relatively peaceful way without their democratic future haunted by the past.

The TRC grappled primarily with these problems, mainly focusing on politically motivated crimes committed in the period from Sharpeville 1960 to 1994. Amongst other things, the TRC was established in order to facilitate the healing of traumatic psychological wounds and injuries, a process that was considered to be the first step towards a democratic and equal society. Archbishop Desmond Tutu highlighted the importance of this issue in his introduc-

tion to the TRC volumes in a noteworthy rhetoric of wounds and healing: "However painful the experience, the wounds of the past must not be allowed to fester. They must be opened. They must be cleansed. And balm must be poured on them so they can heal" (7). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission aimed at reaching these goals in a twofold way: On the one hand, victims of politically motivated crimes had, for the first time after the fall of apartheid, the possibility to speak publicly about the atrocities done to them or their loved ones. Thus, the marginalised were able to create a counter-history to the one upheld by the country's ruling party for decades (Ndebele, "Memory" 20). On the other hand, perpetrators could apply for amnesty for crimes they committed, provided that first and foremost, the crime had been politically motivated. Secondly, the perpetrators had to agree to make a full disclosure about the crime and its circumstances (Bundy 11). This was to ultimately help the victims to deal with what had happened to them or their lost loved ones and to help facilitate the retrieval of lost bodies where deaths had occurred. This procedure was to ensure that the families of the deceased would be able to bury their dead. According to Shane Graham, the retrieval of missing bodies was initially not a part of the TRC proceedings. However, the exhumation of Phila Dwandwe, a former uMkhonto weSizwe (also known as MK, the military wing of the ANC) commander, who had been buried on a farm by the South African police after they had murdered her, inspired the Commission to try and retrieve about fifty more bodies of apartheid victims, so that they would be brought back to their families (Graham 135–36).

The amnesty process furthermore was to serve as a platform for dominant and benefiting white communities in order to deal with possible feelings of guilt and shame on the one hand, while ideally playing a part in the building of the country's 'new' democratic future on the other hand. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission can thus be seen as the officialised process of a countrywide mourning process, after which the wounds and traumatic experiences of the past should have healed in order to be able to build a democratic future, ideally embodying the metaphor of the so-called rainbow nation. This image was evoked by Archbishop Desmond Tutu in order to metaphorise the 'new' South Africa where people of so many diverse ethnic groups with different backgrounds should ideally live peacefully side by side: "My appeal is ultimately directed to us all, black and white together, *to close the chapter on our past* and to strive together for this beautiful and blessed land as the rainbow people of God" (Tutu 23; emphasis mine).

For months the TRC received wide public attention, both within and without South Africa. However, while foreign observers praised the commission's work, journalists and critics within the country reflected the TRC in a somewhat more critical manner (Bundy; Holiday). Especially the amnesty process was a reason for many complaints. Even if a full disclosure of the committed crimes had been made, who could ensure the honest acknowledgement of the deeds of the perpetrators? Besides, while the former beneficiaries could walk free again, how would the victim's damages and losses be repaired? While the hearings and the subsequent publication of the TRC volumes were realised throughout the relatively short time span of five years, "thousands of victims still [awaited] reparations ten years after the TRC began its work" (Moon 14). This led to further criticism of the TRC, as it seemed disproportionate that perpetrators received amnesty so quickly while those who were in dire need of financial reparations had to await long and arduous bureaucratic processes.

Critics also bemoaned that because the TRC was headed by Archbishop Tutu, the Commission used too many religious connotations and allusions, thereby excluding, or at least creating discomfort amongst, non-religious members of the society (De Kok, 60).[7] Moreover, the TRC only operated during a very limited timespan (it completed its process within four years, while the hearings lasted no longer than two years). This resulted in the complaint that many victims who suffered under apartheid did not have the chance to make their story known to the rest of the country.

The time frame was furthermore deemed problematic because the apartheid regime lasted from 1948 to 1994, but the TRC only dealt with crimes committed between 1960 and 1993. This is a very large timeframe, but it nonetheless excludes crucial aspects of the country's past. The infamous Group Areas Act, for instance, was passed in the 1950s alongside many of the other laws which discriminated the country's majority, such as the Immorality Amendment Act, and the Pass Laws (Nuttall and Coetzee, *Negotiating* 6). Finally, while the TRC was precisely set up in order to contribute to a new history for the country, where formerly marginalised people could for the first time speak freely and without censure, the TRC was fast becoming a new grand narrative. It ran the risk of newly excluding people who may have felt that their stories were not taken into account (Christiansë, 373). These examples of critical atti-

[7] Anthony Holiday, however, contests this view by stating that the TRC was actually far from being religious because Christian belief sees the act of forgiveness as first and foremost private, while the TRC turned forgiveness into an institutional matter, thus making it public and therefore obligatory rather than voluntary (55–56).

tudes towards the TRC seem to be an acknowledgement of a partial failure of fulfilling the set tasks on the commission's side. However, one can also regard the TRC's work as a basis for a painful, though finally rewarding engagement with the past and an optimistic vision for South Africa's future. It has often been noted that the TRC process has had a somewhat cathartic effect on the country. Ingrid de Kok has described it as "the rhetoric of national catharsis, promoting confession or some version of 'reliving' that will purge the perpetrators and restore the dignity of the victims" (De Kok 59).

Reliving the country's past and speaking of festering wounds and seemingly unbridgeable divided-ness within society can be done by different means. One very fruitful and productive way certainly has been to use literature and other forms of art as a tool. Since the advent of democracy countless novels, biographies, autobiographies, memoirs, poems, and plays were produced which dealt in more or less explicit forms with the country's past and with the process of the TRC. Many of these works can be seen as counter-narratives to, or at least as critical reflections on the TRC process (Ndebele, "Memory" 21). This becomes clear in novels such as Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story*, which deals with violations of women within the ANC ranks; J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*, which has the question of the authentic repentance of perpetrators as one of its central themes; or Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*, portraying a story of personal vengeance for past atrocities as a highly problematic alternative to amnesty. What most of these literary works have in common though, is a refusal to stop mourning for the victim's losses. While the TRC, especially its chairperson, states repeatedly that in order to heal one must speak, grieve and finally overcome the past, and look forward to the country's future (Frenkel, "Performing" 159), most literary works do exactly the opposite. Characters seem to hold on to the traumatic events of the past, thus making the work of mourning seem endless, transforming it into melancholia: "Rather than allowing South Africa to 'close the book on the past,' as many of the commission's proponents suggested would follow from its work, the TRC helped make possible the continual writing and rewriting of that book" (Graham 3). In proposing that the writing and rewriting of the country's history, including the TRC procedure, is a task that is often taken up by South African writers of fiction, I follow critics such as Nicholas Dawes, Colin Bundy, and Shane Graham. If the TRC is an attempt to mourn, and ultimately close the chapter of the past, then narratives which refuse to forget the country's violent history, negating the rainbow rhetoric, can be seen as powerful resistance narratives to the TRC. Here, especially Wicomb's complex and highly experi-

mental novel *David's Story* comes to mind. Unlike the TRC's idealistic approach to finding closure and healing through speaking, Dulcie, the main female character of the story, who is tortured and violated throughout the novel — probably by some ANC members, because according to David, "she's grown too big for her boots and they've had enough of her. She must give up her power, hand over her uniform and make way for the big men" (Wicomb, *David* 204) — does not speak out. On the contrary, she endures her torture silently (134), and her story can never be told in a chronological order, so that readers are confronted with a very fragmented account of her life. By the end of the novel, there is no closure or healing for Dulcie, whose dead body is lying wounded and distorted in the narrator's garden (212).[8]

After the demise of apartheid, the beneficiaries frequently seem to refuse to acknowledge their loss of power and privilege, which likewise might be called a state of melancholia as there are strong tendencies to hold on to the past. Here, a nostalgic stance towards the past is discernible — a past which is often portrayed to have been so much better, more secure, and far safer than the seemingly apocalyptic post-apartheid state in which white people feel threatened of losing their European style of life (Steyn 41). Many literary works focus on topics such as nostalgia, repentance, ethical responsibility for apartheid, and the guilt of perpetrators or beneficiaries.

In many novels written by Afrikaans speaking authors, such as André Brink and Marlene van Niekerk, and especially in Antjie Krog's semi-journalistic memoir *Country of My Skull*, one finds characters who choose to ignore the TRC entirely. Instead, they maintain that the Afrikaners were colonised people who freed themselves from the British, and apartheid existed mainly to defend the country from Communism and the 'Red Peril'. Claire Moon states that

> abuses perpetrated by security forces against what was perceived as a 'communist threat' were legitimated within the remit of such 'political objectives,' for example, in a testimony to the commission, one ex-conscript alleged that during basic training in the 1980's conscripts were told that 'this story that people tell you there is a Communist behind every bush is nonsense. There are in fact two.' (75–76)

Finally, while one of the TRC's main goals was to unite all ethnicities within the country, there has rather been a very opposite tendency of a "white

[8] Further counter-narratives which question the TRC are Gillian Slovo's *Red Dust*, in which one of the protagonists is re-traumatized while speaking in front of the Commission, and Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother*.

flight abroad and into gated communities and exclusive residential developments" (Graham 8). These issues are raised in novels such as Michiel Heyn's *The Reluctant Passenger*, for instance, where going abroad is portrayed as an alternative to continue living in an unequal society, such as South Africa. The choice to move abroad entails, of course, a certain privilege of movement which a large percentage of the population has only in theory. In some cases, such as in Carol-Ann Davids' *The Blacks of Cape Town* and Sarah Penny's *The Beneficiaries*, the flight abroad signifies the inability to confront one's own role in the country's apartheid past. Nadine Gordimer's *The House Gun*, in turn, traces the huge divide between black and white societies that still exists after apartheid, manifesting itself, amongst other things, in the fact that whites seldom venture into townships (127–28).

Most of the novels under discussion here thus have in common that they can be seen as counter-narratives to the TRC; firstly, they give voice to people who either were or felt marginalised throughout the TRC process and; secondly, hold critical attitudes by questioning the very idea of the TRC, the role it plays for the country's population at large, and how useful it is for South Africa's democracy.

COMMUNAL MOURNING, MELANCHOLIA, AND TRAUMA

In theory, the process of the TRC would be an idealised mourning process such as Freud delineates it for the healthy form of grieving. Freud describes the process of mourning as follows: During the period after a loss of a loved object occurs, the ego first consciously realises and acknowledges the fact of having lost somebody and can then, bit by bit, let go of the lost object, until finally replacing it with a new object of love. This process, however, is a very slow one: "We may perhaps suppose that this work of severance is so slow and gradual that by the time it has been finished the expenditure of energy necessary is also dissipated" ("Mourning" 255). The act of overcoming the suffered loss is not only painful and slow, but above all may seem like a brutal form of severing the ties to the lost object. In order to fully overcome the period of mourning, one must, according to Freud, figuratively kill the lost object:

> Just as mourning impels the ego to give up the object by declaring the object to be dead and offering the ego the inducement of continuing to live, so does each single struggle of ambivalence loosen the fixation of the libido to the object by disparaging it, denigrating it and even as it were killing it. ("Mourning" 257)

Thus, even though Freud does not categorise the process of mourning as pathological, it is nevertheless a painful experience as closure can only be reached after a long period in which small steps towards relinquishing the lost object are taken. If one transfers the idea of healthy mourning onto the TRC process, one may assume that the people who speak in front of the commission are starting a process of mourning, which has different forms. On the one hand, there are those who mourn for losses which they personally suffered while fighting against the apartheid regime, those who lost family or friends. On the other, there are the privileged white English and Afrikaans speaking communities who might mourn the loss of their status as beneficiaries within the society, while at the same time potentially repressing feelings of guilt. Ideally, victims and perpetrators alike start processes of public mourning through speaking in front of the commission by recognising and acknowledging the losses that occurred in the past. The second step would be a period of grief, whereby a closure of the past should ultimately be achieved. At the end of the process there should lie a common democratic and more hopeful future ahead. According to the Freudian concept of mourning, it would mean that the mourners have stopped holding on to their suffered losses which occurred in a devastating past, replacing the lost objects of the past with hopeful and positive feelings concerning the future. However, as I have already mentioned, the TRC was confronted with much criticism. In literature, most often in novels or memoirs, these difficulties and disadvantages of the TRC are also of concern. Narratives about the TRC process are often referred to as counter-narratives to the official version of the TRC (Gobodo-Madikizela and Van der Merwe, "Preface" XIV). One of the things that these novels and accounts seem to have in common (as different as they might be in form and content otherwise) is that, contrary to the ideal of the TRC, there is no letting go of the past. Thus, mourning does not take place and the future cannot be embraced as yet. Instead an endless mourning, i.e., a melancholy, can be observed. For instance, in Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* Lydia, the main female character of the story, refuses to talk in front of the TRC about her experience of having been raped by a white policeman, but rather keeps the memories of her violation alive through writing them down in her private diary. When Michael, her son and the product of the rape, finds the diary, closure becomes impossible even for the second generation, since Michael ends up killing his biological father.

If healthy mourning and thereby working through the past and finding closure are the main goals of the TRC, then melancholia in the sense of not letting go of the lost loved objects or an ongoing refusal or inability to forget past

injuries and traumatic experiences, may be seen as the basic resistant narrative mode to the TRC. As opposed to such a healthy mourning, melancholia is, in Freudian terms, a pathological form of mourning. Like mourning, it occurs after the loss of a loved object. However, in contrast to mourning, the ego does not relinquish the lost object, but rather incorporates it into the libido, thereby creating an ongoing conflict of ambivalence towards the lost object. Thus, melancholia also signifies a love-hate relationship towards the lost and yet desired object of love. However, the main differentiation between mourning and melancholia (in Freudian terms) can be seen in the assumption that mourning is a conscious process, while melancholy may be regarded as taking place in the subconscious, therefore remaining more difficult to control:

> This would suggest that melancholia is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious. ("Mourning" 245)

While Freud regards melancholia, in contrast to mourning, in a pathological light, more recent theoreticians such as Cheng, David Eng and Shinhee Han, or Neville Hoad, for example, have defined a more depathologised understanding of melancholia. Especially Eng and Han, following José Esteban Muñoz, in their essay on racial melancholia in the context of Asian American immigrants, have developed a concept of melancholia that does not constitute a permanent illness. First and foremost, they define melancholia as "an integral part of daily existence and survival" (363) for marginalised people, such as people of colour or persons who define their sexual identity as queer. In the context of the counter-narratives to the TRC, Eng's and Han's essay is of particular interest. If one assumes that melancholia is a productive, though painful engagement with daily conflicts in the form of not letting go of the past, one may state that in the context of the counter-narratives which often deal with loss, despair, and disillusionment with the present situation, the inability of the characters to forget the past leads to a melancholia which might be regarded as an endless process of remembrance, of memorialising. Mourning, on the other hand, stands for closure and, ultimately, such closure would entail the danger of forgetting the dead (Holiday, 44). Eng and Han argue that through melancholia — which is precisely a *not* letting go, the holding on to the lost object — those who refuse to mourn ensure that the past and the dead are not forgotten. They thus regard melancholia as a far more ethical than mourning:

> This preservation of the threatened object might be seen, then, as a type of ethical hold on the part of the melancholic ego. The mourner, in contrast, has no such ethics. The mourner is perfectly content with killing off the lost object, declaring it to be dead yet again within the domain of the psyche. (365)

Furthermore, while Freud's observations on melancholia focus on the individual, Eng and Han, like Cheng and José Muñoz, focus on melancholia as a psychological condition of marginalised or oppressed groups. Although applying the concept of melancholia onto groups entails the risk of drawing somewhat generalising conclusions, it nevertheless constitutes a productive mode for the interpretation of literary texts, especially in the South African context where the metaphor of collective mourning and healing exists as an official narrative. José Munoz describes the process of a collective mourning as follows:

> Communal mourning, by its very nature, is an immensely complicated text to read, for we do not mourn just one lost object or other, but we also mourn as a 'whole' – or put in another way, as a contingent and temporary collection of fragments that is experiencing a loss of its parts. (73)

In this light, one may also regard the painful mourning process of the TRC, the counter-narratives to which do not necessarily end in closure. Instead, communal mourning also entails the commemoration of personal losses, whereby these personal losses are viewed in the context of a larger frame — a country's past, for instance. A case in point here would be Elleke Boehmer's *Bloodlines* where private mourning for the imprisonment of a loved person fuels memories of the country's history, which reach back to the South African Wars, thereby aligning the memory of apartheid with other histories of suffering and oppression that the TRC did not focus on. Furthermore, in his illuminating book, *African Intimacies: Race, Homosexuality, and Globalization*, Neville Hoad argues that "melancholia is envisaged as useful for a storytelling that perhaps could mobilize militancy" (115). He thus does not view melancholia as disempowering, but as a form of being constantly and painfully, though at the same time productively, engaged with remembering and coping with the country's history. Therefore, according to Hoad, "fiction self-consciously becomes […] a way of never laying the dead to rest" (115). However, while I would strongly argue for the existence of a collective melancholia with respect to South Africa – apartheid and its aftermath has after all produced losses, traumas, and wounds throughout a greater part of the society – it is necessary to stress that there is not one single form of melancholia. On the contrary, melancholia man-

ifests itself in many diverse forms, depending on which part of society one considers.

Here, my understanding of melancholia departs from more recent observations on trauma specifically in a South African context. Since in many instances melancholic losses can be the results of one or many unprocessed traumatic events, I shall briefly outline the most important characteristics of trauma. Mengel and Borzaga, critiquing Cathy Caruth, posit that trauma is "an unclaimed (and unclaimable) experience" (Introduction xiii). Based on Freud's observations on trauma, as formulated in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" and "Moses and Monotheism", Caruth suggests that:

> [i]n its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena. (11)

In Caruth's understandings of trauma, which again closely follows Freud, the image of the psychological wound is central:

> the wound of the mind—the breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world—is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that […] is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly. (4)

Both Caruth's and Freud's image of the wound with relation to trauma can be closely linked to the portrayal of South Africa as a 'wounded nation'. This image was evoked by Desmond Tutu in his opening address to the TRC in December 1995. Tutu connects trauma and the image of the 'wounded nation' with each other when he states: "every South African has to some extent or other been traumatised. We are a wounded people because of the conflict of the past, no matter on which side we stood" (Forword 8). Tutu's statement is interesting for several reasons: Firstly, by referring to South Africans as "wounded" and "traumatised", he underlines a crucial difference to Caruth's understanding of trauma. Caruth, like Freud, focuses on how traumatic experiences (even if they were felt by many) manifest themselves in the psyche of individuals. Tutu, in contrast, speaks of a communal trauma, of the nation as a whole. Thus, critics who work within the field of South African studies, such as Ewald Mengel and Michela Borzaga and Leys, have called for a modification of, or move away from, a Freudian and poststructuralist model of trauma.

Mengel and Borzaga state that post-structuralist models of trauma, such as the one developed by Caruth:

> are insufficient instruments with which to analyse the more complex situation in a postcolony such as South Africa. The reason for this is that Western trauma concepts focus on the individual who has been traumatized by a single identifiable event that causes what is defined as PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.) It conceives of trauma as an illness or disease that can be described in medical terms. It also resorts to a linear time concept where past, present, and future are clearly distinguishable phases in the continuum of time. (Introduction viii)

The second point in Tutu's statement that is striking – not so much in relation to Caruth's definition of trauma, but in terms of the notion of trauma in general – is that he speaks of all South Africans, irrespective of their background, as being traumatised. Mengel and Borzaga sharply criticise this point and ask: "can he really speak on behalf of the majority of the black (and coloured) population, and in the same breath include the white Europeans? If so, how does the black population feel about this?" (Introduction vii). The inclusion of the white population with regard to trauma is particularly difficult. Mengel and Borzaga stress that one must differentiate between black and white trauma in South Africa (Introduction xi). However, the authors fall short of providing any elaboration as to how exactly white trauma manifests itself, and how it must be distinguished from black trauma, for instance. Besides, it seems problematic that they do not differentiate between traumatic experiences of the black and coloured population. After all, having been categorised in a "middle space" (Farred 58) by the apartheid regime must surely have resulted in different quotidian experiences of trauma?

With regard to literary studies it is thus perhaps more fruitful to ask which kinds of aftermaths of trauma occur and how these aftermaths impact on characters, plots, and narrative structures rather than attempting to define different degrees of trauma. In his article "The Next Chapter: Consequences of Societal Trauma", Vamik D. Volkan defines five main consequences or aftermaths of traumatised societies: "(1) a shared sense of shame, humiliation, and guilt, (2) a shared inability to be assertive, (3) a shared identification with the oppressor, (4) a shared difficulty or even inability to mourn losses, and (5) a shared transgenerational transmission of trauma" (2). Point (4), the difficulty or inability to mourn losses, that is different forms or degrees of melancholia, may entail similar consequences to trauma (e.g. intergenerational transmission of loss as well as at times the identification with the oppressor). Bearing

Caruth's notion of the wound and Volkan's understanding of an inability to mourn in mind, in the context of the TRC as a nationwide narrative of mourning one could thus fruitfully trace different forms of losses (most of them results of traumatic events) and consider them as melancholic counter-narratives which refuse and deny closure. Additionally, particularly Cheng's and Gilroy's concepts of melancholia provide a much more nuanced understanding of loss with regard to racial discrimination, identity formation, and power relations. The sense of collective trauma is, then, the larger frame in which to view my understanding of melancholia as a result of trauma, which will ideally provide a more detailed understanding of loss from the perspectives of both whites and non-whites. Lastly, while in South African trauma studies the clear-cut notions of victims, perpetrators, and bystanders are much more rigid, power relations become more fluid and complicated when reading texts with different theories of melancholia in mind.

The South African society portrayed in the novels under discussion is still regarded through the lens of the categorisations which stem from the apartheid system, and indeed many novels still depict characters who think along these very racial lines. These racial categorisations, however, are — especially with regard to literature by a younger generation of writers, such as K. Sello Duiker and Kgebetli Moele — troubled and further complicated. Moreover, in the works of these two writers the boundaries between collective and individual losses are much more fluid than in the novels by Brink and Penny, for instance. Besides, while the TRC serves as a frame against which many novels (directly or indirectly) write, Moele's and Duiker's novels do not write back to the TRC per se. Rather, racial segregation, social injustice, and individual losses become sources of anguish in an all but ideal 'new' post-apartheid South Africa.

RACIAL MELANCHOLIA

So far, I have, in speaking of the people who were disenfranchised during the apartheid regime, mostly referred to the black and the coloured population with little differentiation.

With regard to the coloureds of South Africa, however, one must take special circumstances into consideration. It has been often noted that their situation has been a rather difficult one, both during and after apartheid. As Mohamed Adhikari phrased it, many coloureds feel that "first [during apartheid] we were not white enough and now [in a post-apartheid state] we are not

black enough" (110). This statement might seem slightly generalising or indeed reductive, but it captures the problematic quite well; according to Adhikari, before and during the apartheid regime there were many attempts to include the coloured community in the larger black community, thereby emphasising or encouraging their engagement with the struggle against oppression (5–6). At times, coloured people who were involved in the struggle against apartheid did not define themselves as coloureds, but as black, in order to show solidarity with the even less privileged communities of the country. This meant that the coloured identity was marginalised in favour of the collective struggle. The opposite could also happen, however. There were – according to Adhikari, Erasmus, and Yvette Christiansë, amongst others – families who negated their coloured identity in order to pass as white. On the one hand, whiteness would ensure a more privileged life, for although coloureds may have had few more privileges than the black population of the country, in comparison to the white population, they still lived under extremely harsh conditions. According to Grant Farred, coloureds were supposed to have access to a slightly better schooling system and better houses than the black majority. On the other hand, unlike the black population, they did not have to carry a pass with them at all times. However, especially with respect to housing conditions, the privileges of the coloured population existed merely in theory (Farred 11).

The phenomenon of passing is, in South Africa, frequently called 'playing white'. However, as Zoë Wicomb put it in her novel *Playing in the Light* "there was nothing playful about their condition" (123), for as Christiansë shows with her example of the coloured family who passed for white, this led to detrimental identity crises. 'Playing white' meant not only aspiring to more privileges, but also having to deny one's own history and identity and, hence, any relatedness to the disenfranchised people of the country. Playing white could also include the severing of ties to family members who displayed more obvious features of colouredness (Christiansë 379). Finally, one might ask if passing for white does not also entail a certain complicity with the apartheid regime. In her introduction to *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place*, Zimitri Erasmus argues that because coloured people enjoyed certain privileges in comparison to the black population, they often regarded themselves to be "not only not white but less than white; not only not black, but better than black" (Erasmus, Introduction 13). This racial hierarchy, was, according to Erasmus, an act of complicity in affirming the racial categorisations that the apartheid regime had enforced on the country and "[f]or many coloured people this

complicity has meant a disassociation from all things African" (Introduction 16). Passing, then, which one may regard as an even more drastic form of reinforcement of the racial hierarchies, can be seen as another form of complicity. Even if one considers passing to be a powerful tool to undermine the categorisations of the apartheid regime (by disregarding or subverting boundaries set by the state), 'playing white' was frequently accompanied by a denial of any associations with an African heritage, culminating in an internalised racist attitude towards the disenfranchised black majority or even one's 'own' community. In Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light*, for instance, John, the protagonist's father, who, along with his wife, passed for white, demonstrates an extremely racist attitude towards black people: "I'm not talking about that lot, about terrorists. Remember Sharpeville, remember the kaffirs on our own doorstep in Langa?" (14).

Yvette Christiansë, in turn, does not view passing as a tool for subverting the apartheid regime at all, but instead states that it is first and foremost an act of denial, resulting from a deep-seated shame of one's colouredness (378). While I would agree that the act of passing does have detrimental consequences for one's identity, the idea of having misled the state, of having subverted the rules, is as much a subversive act as an act of complicity, and hence must always be regarded as being ambivalent.

In the wake of democracy, possibilities of freeing oneself from apartheid's rigid categorisations opened up by accepting 'colouredism' as a creolised form of merged and merging traditions and cultures, which can be seen to hold an extremely creative potential (Erasmus, Introduction 14). However, according to Adhikari, one popular sentiment during the transitional period was that coloureds felt newly marginalised by the emerging black elite in the country (110-111). The idea that coloureds did not feel white enough during apartheid and not black enough afterwards thus "very neatly captures coloured people's perennial predicament of marginality" (110). Hence, one might conclude that although there have been many attempts to reshape and redefine coloured identity in a more positive and creative way after 1994, feelings of in-betweenness and marginality have persisted within the coloured community.

In my literary analysis of the representation of coloured identity I focus on instances of identity crises set during or before apartheid and their consequences for coloured identity formation in a democratic South Africa. For this I draw on Anne Cheng's as well as David Eng's and Shinhee Han's concepts of racial melancholia, which were developed for the context of Asian American immigrants (Eng and Han) and with regard to Asian American and African

American literature (Cheng), respectively. Both approaches draw on Freud's concept of melancholia. However, while Freud completely disregards the possibility of identity crises as a cause of melancholia, these more recent theories do take such instances of identity crises, passing, and moments of dislocation into account.

Both Eng and Han as well as Cheng focus specifically on the melancholy of race within the context of the United States. Cheng distinguishes between the two different but interrelated forms of racial melancholia: dominant, white racial melancholia and the melancholy of the racialised subjects. The former refers to the negation and denial of white American society to accept responsibility for the discrimination of marginalised communities within the country, such as Native Americans, African Americans, or Asian Americans:

> It is at those moments when America is most shamefaced and traumatized by its betrayal of its own democratic ideology (the Genocide of Native Americans, slavery, segregation, immigration discrimination) that it most virulent and melancholically-espoused human value and brotherhood. (Cheng 11)

The act of exclusion on the one hand, and the tendency of retention by discrimination of the racial others on the other according to Cheng leads to a form of dominant racial melancholia. By denying the discrimination of the racialised subjects within society, they become a "ghostly presence" (xi). White racial melancholia, then, can be described as consequential to the loss of democratic values; by denying people of colour rights to equality whilst simultaneously maintaining the image of a just and equal society, feelings of guilt and shame arise and are retained in the subconscious mind of society. Cheng thus states that "white American identity is secured through the melancholic introjection of racial others that it can neither fully relinquish nor accommodate and whose ghostly presence non-the-less guarantees its centrality" (xi).

This form of 'exclusion yet retention' of the racial others found its most drastic form during apartheid in South Africa. The Population Registration Act, the Bantu Education Act, the Separate Amenities Act, and the Immorality Ammendment Act, for example, were very explicit methods of excluding black and coloured people while retaining control. Moreover, instead of admitting that apartheid was perhaps the most brutal form of racial segregation and a crime against humanity (which constitutes an act of denial of feelings of guilt and shame for excluding and discriminating the country's majority), the government frequently emphasised that the country was fighting a just course against Communism and for democracy. Furthermore, the phrase 'melancholy

of the racialised subjects' (coined by Cheng) is difficult to conceptualise because to see melancholia as the consequence of racial discrimination resulting in the shame and loss of people of colour risks naturalising their suffering:

> Talking about racial grief thus also runs the risk of repeating a tool of containment historically exercised by authority. The worry is of course that such a focus on injury might be naturalised and used against the plaintiffs […]. The path connecting injury to pity and then to contempt can be very brief. (Cheng 14)

However, Cheng asserts that "it is surely equally harmful not to talk about this history of sorrow" (14), for this would again be a form of denial and negation of a history of loss and oppression.

Cheng argues that although both phenomena, dominant racial melancholia and the melancholy of the racialised subjects, may manifest themselves differently, the two have to be seen as mutually defining:

> indeed, racial melancholia describes the dynamics that constitute their mutual definition through exclusion. The terms thus denote a complex process of racial rejection and desire on the parts of whites and nonwhites that expresses itself in abject and manic forms. (xi)

While dominant racial melancholia expresses itself through the aforementioned dynamics of exclusion yet retention of the racial others, the melancholy of the racialised subjects may be seen as the consequence of a desire for a "never-possible perfection" (Cheng, xi), that is, the desire to gain acceptance by white society by being recognised as equal. In other words, racial exclusion – in the form of non-acceptance of people of colour within society – may lead to the desire to strive for a white ideal, which in turn fuels a crisis of one's identity. While Cheng draws mainly on examples of racial melancholia in the United States and focuses on African and Asian American writing dealing with topics such as passing, the rejection of one's own identity, and the problematics of invisibility and displacement, I adapt the phenomenon of racial melancholia to the South African context. Here, the experience of the coloureds of South Africa will be of particular interest, for they were seen, to phrase it in Zimitri Erasmus' words, as having a "residual, in-between or 'lesser' identity" (Introduction 15–16), which has been regarded as a particularly difficult position.

Coloured identity has often been referred to as a hybrid identity (Bhabha; Erasmus, Introduction). Homi Bhabha, for instance, sees in the very fact of a hybrid identity in South Africa potential for acts of resistance and subversion

(he refers to the coloured protagonist of Nadine Gordimer's *My Son's Story* as an example in his introduction to *The Location of Culture*). It is precisely the fact that coloureds live in the interstices that, according to Bhabha, that offers the potential to resist the regime by accepting neither the label of whiteness nor of blackness. Bhabha begins his argumentation by describing how the African American artist Renée Green uses the stairwell as an interstitial space in which given designations and boundaries are erased:

> The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white […] This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy. (4)

Bhabha argues that Aila, the coloured protagonist of Gordimer's novel, places herself in an in-between space, firstly by transforming her home into a space for gun running. Secondly, and more importantly, she chooses silence as a powerful tool of resisting categorisation: "In her silence she becomes the unspoken 'totem' of the taboo of the coloured South African […] The silence that doggedly follows Aila's dwelling now turns into an image of the 'interstices', the in-between hybridity of the history of sexuality and race" (Bhabha, 14).

However, in the case of South African coloureds this causes one key problematic. It is not the coloured society which chose to be in a "middle space" (Farred 58), but apartheid's categorisations have placed them there and granted them drastically fewer privileges than they granted the whites, yet placed them above the black majority. Thus, I would agree with Zoë Wicomb and John Noyes in that it becomes problematic to speak of hybridity in overly positive terms "in a country that for many years codified 'hybridity' in the exploitable lability of a 'coloured' identity" (Noyes 52). Wicomb stresses that:

> Bhabha's theory of hybridity cannot account for the current coloured politics, where it is precisely the celebration of inbetweenness that serves conservatism, as in the use of the word brown, introduced into the unwieldy title 'coloured Liberation Movement for the advancement of Brown people', launched at the beginning of March 1995. ("Shame" 102–3)

Thus, the interstitial position is not only aligned with the possibility to resist apartheid's categorisations, as Bhabha would have it, but also leads to a severe identity crisis related to loss, displacement, and denial, and thus the desire to be included in, and accepted by, white society, again that "never-possible perfection" (Cheng xi).

One extreme measure to achieve this goal was the attempt of many coloureds to pass for white during apartheid. In her essay "Passing Away: The Unspeakable (Losses) of Post-apartheid South Africa", Yvette Christiansë, as mentioned before, has written extensively about this particular practice. She talks about one coloured woman, for instance, who severed her family ties with relatives who could – or would not – pass for white. According to Christiansë, her life was shrouded in secrecy. Even her husband "knew enough of her shallow family history not to ask questions, not to want to know more" (378). This secret act of passing, which was very often combined with a rather suspicious, if not internalised racist attitude towards the black majority of the country (380), constituted a crisis of subjectivity, for underneath this obvious display of racism there lies a desire for inclusion into the privileged (white) society. This could never be fully achieved, however, as the very act of passing meant being aware and frequently ashamed of one's identity. The question arises: Does displaying even an internalised racist attitude towards the African population imply an act of complicity with the white regime? (Christiansë 378; Erasmus, Introduction 16; Farred 64).

Returning to Cheng and Freud, one can observe that apart from the feeling of loss (through denial of one's subjectivity), the second constituting factor for melancholia is the feeling of ambivalence. Cheng writes persuasively about this process: On the one hand, there is a seemingly unconditional and unquestioning love for the lost object, while denigrating and criticising oneself most severely, but underneath that there lurks a hateful attitude towards the lost object, for if one looks more closely at what the melancholic dislikes about him- or herself, one will realise, according to Freud, that these negative characteristics belong to the lost object and not the melancholic subject (Freud, "Mourning" 248). However, while Freud does not consider the idea that this process of hate/love may have its origins in societal norms, Cheng does take the relationship between society and the individual into account. In Freudian terms the hate/love process ultimately leads to self-hate, while transforming the spiteful feelings towards the lost object – or the concept of a never possible whiteness, for that matter – into admiration. In her introduction to *The Melancholy of Race*, Cheng refers to Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* as a key example when she talks about the racialised subject's desire to become white. She maintains that the narrator's impulse to project her hatred of the blue-eyed, white dolls which she got for Christmas onto white girls, ultimately channelling it into love for the white ideal, is not a simple, pathological form of black people's self-denigration (see Cheng 17). Rather, this path of different (self-

)negations has very much to do with how both black and white societies perceive whiteness:

> White preference is not a phenomenon that simply gets handed down from society to black women and then to black girls; instead it travels a tortuous, melancholic path of alienation, resistance, aggression, and then, finally, the domestication of that aggression as "love." (Cheng, 17–18)

This description seems apt for the phenomenon of passing for white in South Africa. It is primarily (but not exclusively) the fact that the different ethnicities of the country were categorised according to their skin colour, which constitutes a reason for the desire to pass for white. In addition, it may have been a path of multiple stages of shame (for one's own origins, for being stereotyped as inferior subjects), denial of these very origins, resistance in the form of a right to claim whiteness for oneself, and, finally, the interior conflict of ambivalence, all of which resulted in a disproportionate admiration for whiteness and a denial of blackness.

In South African literature written after 1994, authors such as Marlene van Niekerk (*Agaat*), Zoë Wicomb (*Playing in the Light*), and Achmat Dangor (*Kafka's Curse*) have dealt with crises of subjectivity and passing in different modes and forms. While Wicomb's and Dangor's novels have so-called 'play whites' as central characters, Marlene van Niekerk portrays the intricate power relationship between a coloured woman (by the name of Agaat) and her Afrikaner surrogate mother, who ultimately becomes her "Madam", while always trying to suppress and yet retain Agaat's subjectivity as coloured.

By returning to my initial thesis regarding novels written in the wake of the TRC as primarily counter-narratives to the process of official mourning, I argue that by touching upon topics such as the complicity of coloureds during the apartheid regime, the practice of passing, and the topic of miscegenation, one must view these narratives as a form of resistance to the TRC. While the TRC dealt extensively with violations of human rights during apartheid, it never touched upon the fraught and difficult position of the coloureds during that time (Christiansë 380). By writing about these difficulties, however, the notion of grief and ultimate healing of the TRC is being questioned and racial melancholia can be seen as a powerful tool to challenge the grand narrative of a Rainbow Nationalism, which, by its claim to diversity and optimistic outlook for the future, may be seen as denying the coloured's difficult position, which can still be regarded as interstitial and hence in the process of grieving due to crises of subjectivity which may have occurred in the past but remain largely unresolved in a democratic South Africa.

THE INABILITY TO MOURN: POST-APARTHEID MELANCHOLIA AND WHITE GUILT

Thus far, I have argued for a departure from the Freudian definition of melancholia, taking into account the potential for melancholy as a counter-narrative against existing, overarching grand historical narratives. However, while more depathologised forms of melancholia seem appropriate within the context of formerly disenfranchised South African communities, a different picture presents itself with regard to the country's white population.

From the outset, one must make one significant distinction concerning the country's white population, which is by no means homogeneous. For my reading of South African literature, it will be necessary to distinguish mainly between two groups who call South Africa their home: the Afrikaans speaking community on the one hand and English descendants on the other. In my argument I shall, as far as possible, trace the manifestations for both groups alike, and specify my points where necessary by looking at both groups individually. My thesis is that in literature written by white English and Afrikaans speaking authors after 1994, an inability to mourn for the end of apartheid is discernible in a range of different characters in novels by writers such as André Brink, J. M. Coetzee, Marlene van Niekerk, Mark Behr, or Pamela Jooste. While within the formerly disenfranchised groups in South Africa, a struggle to come to terms with history and an overwhelming, ongoing grief for the losses suffered under apartheid are viable, white people who live under the new dispensation have to deal with radically different questions and problems. One of the key questions regarding white South Africans who live in a post-apartheid state is how they reconcile no longer being the privileged group under a white minority rule. Moreover, one might ask how white identities are (re-)shaped in a post-apartheid context.

These questions again relate to the theoretical approaches of Margarete and Alexander Mitscherlich's *The Inability to Mourn* and Paul Gilroy's *Postcolonial Melancholia*. The Mitscherlichs discern an inability to mourn after the end of the Third Reich within post-World War II Germany. The situations of post-war Germany and post-apartheid South Africa have been compared in several books and essays in which commentators have been vocal in emphasising that although similarities can be found, one must take the rather different historical developments into account (see e.g. Grunebaum and Robbins; or Moon). Firstly, whereas the TRC process emphasised the notion of truth seeking, forgiveness, and a possible reconciliation of the country's divided groups, the

Nuremberg Trials in Germany were a judiciary body which directly sentenced the perpetrators. Secondly, while South Africans continued to live in the same country, according to the Mitscherlichs, the majority of the surviving Jews in Germany left the country (31). Nevertheless, their insights can provide a useful tool to analyse South African texts written by Afrikaans and English-speaking authors.

In *Postcolonial Melancholia*, Paul Gilroy bases his observations on the Mitscherlichs' in stating that England has not been able to overcome the loss of the empire. Instead of actively mourning for the loss of its former colonies, finally accepting the end of England as a powerful empire, the English retreat into a glorification of their role during the World War II. Unable to face the post-imperial loss of power, they furthermore retreat, Gilroy states, immigrants from their former colonies as aliens who have come to invade their country. I argue that a similar phenomenon can be seen within Afrikaner society. Instead of dealing with the loss of power and privilege in a post-apartheid state, Afrikaners tend to portray themselves as victims of colonisation by the British. Here, the focus shifts from the apartheid state to the end of the 19th century when the Afrikaners and the British fought for the governance of South Africa during the South African Wars. The Great Trek and the South African Wars, both seen as struggles of 'decolonisation' on the part of the Afrikaans speaking population, were used to maintain a strong sense of Afrikaner nationalism. This persists within the post-apartheid state, where Afrikaners regard themselves as being in a threatened, minority position. This observation is confirmed by Ross Truscott's essay "National Melancholia and Afrikaner Self-parody in Post-apartheid South Africa". Drawing on the Mitscherlichs' *The Inability to Mourn*, he states that by perpetuating and performing parodies of Afrikaner stereotypes in the music festival Oppikoppi, a nostalgia for the apartheid past is acted out. This, according to Truscott, is a sign for the Afrikaners' inability to face the loss of power in a democratic South Africa. With these texts in mind, my thesis is that in literature written after 1994, a post-colonial melancholia is clearly discernible. Before going into theoretical details concerning post-apartheid melancholia, however, I turn to the question of how white identity changed after the end of apartheid.

The sociologist Melissa Steyn has formulated five different narratives of how white people see themselves and the black majority after the advent of democracy. These range from narratives in which people still display rather colonialist and racist attitudes, to narratives where people embrace the new situation, trying to get to know and embrace other cultures which have existed

in South Africa. The most radical attitude that Steyn discerns is the narrative she dubs "still colonial after all", which ties in with what I describe as a form of post-apartheid melancholia. According to Steyn the "still colonials" are of the opinion that the white race remains the superior one. Whiteness is still equated with power, "civilisation" and "intellect" in a paternalistic way. Besides, according to the narrative of the "still colonials", white people will suffer discrimination under the new government and will be a target of crime and corruption (60-61). This defensive attitude clearly shows that many of apartheid's beneficiaries may not have adequately dealt with feelings of loss of privileges that may have ensued after the advent of democracy.

Steyn's study was conducted in 2001 but in many ways remains applicable. In 2011, South African philosopher Samantha Vice sparked a fierce debate about whiteness in a post-apartheid nation. In her essay, "How Do I live in This Strange Place", Vice suggests that white people who have enjoyed and, in fact, are still enjoying so many privileges should start feeling ashamed for being beneficiaries and should thus live a life of "humility and in (a certain kind of) silence" ("Strange Place" 323) instead of voicing their opinions publicly, for instance. Vice's article triggered several responses by critics in the newspaper *Mail&Guardian* and a subsequent conference on Whiteness in South Africa was held in Johannesburg. In his response to Vice's article, political commentator Eusebius McKaiser imagines reactions to her suggestions by the white public:

> Vice's reflections should resonate with whites in general. But they will not. Shame and regret are difficult emotions to own up to. It is easier to focus attention on others, like pointing out how corrupt this black government is or how difficult it was for Johan, the neighbour's son, to get a job despite having an engineering degree. Confronting your own self, and being ashamed of benefiting unjustly from your whiteness, is too painful for many to manage. ("Confronting Whiteness")

The debate around whiteness was met with outrage by many white people. In an article published in September 2011, Vice sums up some reactions in the following manner:

> I have been characterised as a self-hating attention-seeker and directed to commit suicide. As a matter of course I have been labelled stupid, neurotic and blinded by – my favourite insult – 'womanly political views'. The university I work for has been criticised for allowing such 'bilge' to be published under its auspices – a casual attack on academic freedom. Some are sceptical I even exist: perhaps the shadowy and improbably named Samantha Vice is a figment of McKaiser's provocative imagination? McKaiser himself has been denounced by

> both ends of the political spectrum and, most disturbingly, Stellenbosch philosopher Anton van Niekerk was assaulted for his sympathetic discussion of my views. ("Whiteness")

These reactions to the debate around whiteness suggest that issues surrounding race, white privilege, shame, and guilt are still frequently met with denial, that is "a defense mechanism related to disturbing perceptions of external reality" (Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich, 27). This, in turn, results in an inability to acknowledge the fact of having benefited from a segregationist system.

In *The Inability to Mourn*, the Mitscherlichs state that the German society found itself unable to properly grieve the loss of World War II, not only in the sense of being defeated, but also considering the attachment to Hitler and his propagated ideas as a loss. Robert Jay Lifton, in his preface to the English translation of the book, states that they ask difficult and uncomfortable questions such as the following ones:

> what if one discovers evil in what one has lost – and by implication, in oneself? How does one reconcile evil with the sense of nobility one had originally associated with one's love? Is it then possible to mourn? If so, for whom and what? What is the relationship of guilt and responsibility to mourning, or not mourning? (vii)

Linking National Socialist ideas with narcissistic attachments to grandeur and adoration of Hitler, which reverted to hatred after the war, the Mitcherlichs maintain that Germans were not able to mourn the death of Hitler and thereby his National Socialist ideas, which had elevated the Germans to the state of being a "chosen people" (Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich 16). Instead of feeling complicit for what happened during the Third Reich, the feeling of being in love with the 'Führer' is converted into hatred and made the sole object of responsibility for National Socialism. Thus, one can say that this feeling of ambivalence, namely converting complicity and co-responsibility as well as guilt into an unacknowledged love for Hitler, is a distinguishing feature of melancholia. The Mitscherlichs state: "The inability to mourn the loss of the 'Führer' is the result of an intensive defence against guilt, shame, and anxiety, a defence which was achieved by the withdrawal of previously powerful libidinal cathexes" (23). Moreover, Germans did not work through their past, but instead they threw themselves into rebuilding their destroyed country with extreme zealousness (Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich 10–11). Had it not been for this effort of rebuilding, Germany might have fallen into a state of mass melancholia. Hence, the society's inability to confront questions of guilt and com-

plicity – by not working through the past, and thus being unable to express grief for it – leads to a pathologised, unhealthy form of melancholia:

> To millions of Germans the loss of the 'Führer' […] was not the loss of someone ordinary; identifications that had filled a central function in the lives of his followers were attached to his person. As we said, he had become the embodiment of their ego-ideal. The loss of an object so highly cathected with libidinal energy – one about whom nobody had any doubts, nor dared to have any, even when the country was being reduced to rubble – was indeed reason for melancholia. (Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich, 27)

As already stated above, one cannot compare the states of post-war Germany and post-apartheid South Africa without reservation. One main difference to bear in mind with regard to the Mitscherlichs' observations is that white South Africans were not, in contrast to the (post-)World War II population of Germany, attached to one single figure, as was the case in Germany. Instead, the Afrikaans speaking population was especially attached to the idea of being a chosen people of God, similar to the Israelites (Steyn 29). Thus, in the case of South Africa the object which can neither be fully relinquished nor mourned is not a person, but the very idea of the apartheid state which elevated the white population to a 'higher', privileged, and 'better' race. However, the Mitscherlichs' insights can be of value regarding South Africa. Here, their observations on what it is that cannot be mourned after World War II are particularly relevant:

> There are only two alternatives available to the German people: either to grow old without any work of mourning – after all, the evildoers and those who aided and abetted them are dying out – or else to work it through, especially in the details, *beginning with the minor things which in themselves were not acts of inhumanity, although by their countless widespread repetition they created the climate in which, for instance, the 'final solution' of the Jewish question could be planned and then grimly carried out*. (xvi; emphasis mine)

These observations, then, are useful in order to look at mechanisms of mourning and melancholia in a quotidian light. In South Africa, too, not every white person was a member of death squads such as Vlakplaas, but white South Africans had better access to housing, schools, and their movements were not restricted by pass laws, to name just a few privileges. It is this unacknowledged (and often ongoing) attachment to one's (lost) status of being a beneficiary of an exploitative system which often seems to be denied and remains unmourned by white South Africans. Samantha Vice observes that:

> [a]lthough an honest and sincere dialogue about race has not yet happened in South Africa – the subject is too close to the bone for many and too much is at stake and too confused – race is the unacknowledged elephant in the room that affects pretty much everything. ("Strange Place" 324)

This silence around the topic of race, although one might claim that it has started to break at the very latest since the 'Rhodes Must Fall-Movement' came into being at the beginning of 2015, also entails a silence around issues such as privilege and the denial of one's role as a beneficiary within the apartheid system.

Drawing on the Mitscherlichs' insights and using them for the South African context, Ross Truscott notes that the Afrikaners find themselves unable to face the loss of their privileged state first and foremost because, from a humanistic point of view, it would be unthinkable to mourn a crime against humanity: "Apartheid, for post-apartheid South Africans, cannot be anything but an unconscious loss, an unthinkable loss: how, indeed, does one mourn the loss of what has been officially declared a crime against humanity?" (Truscott 93). Besides, 'official' post-apartheid narratives, such as the TRC, seem to be very much concerned with the building of a united and 'new' South Africa (Truscott; Graham; Altnöder). Thus, on a larger scale there is no place for nostalgia or a melancholic yearning for the past. However, recent books – such as Jansen's *Knowledge in the Blood: Confronting Race and the Apartheid Past*, Derek Hook's *A Critical Psychology of the Postcolonial: The Mind of Apartheid*, or Truscott's own essay – point to the difficulties of a somewhat more pathologised grief for apartheid.

Particularly Truscott suggests that the farm seems to be one of the places where melancholia plays itself out in its most manifest form. Analysing the music festival Oppikoppi, Truscott draws attention to the farm as an important symbol of ambivalence, self-parody, and identification in the Afrikaner psyche. The music festival takes place on a farm, perhaps the most racially loaded place in South Africa. According to Truscott, Afrikaner Nationalist ideals are parodied and retained at the same time:

> Afrikaner self-parody has offered Afrikaners a way of being authentic post-apartheid South Africans by turning against the past and the past as it lives on in the present. This pattern of parodic selfhood is also a pattern of melancholic selfhood as the technique of self-parody preserves, as a spectacle, precisely what it negates. It is a rebellion against the social world that has occasioned the loss and has rendered lament for the object unavowable. (97)

Although during the festival the stereotypical, racist, and conservative behaviour of Afrikaners (especially male, patriarchal stereotypes) are being criticised in various musical performances, at the same time old structures which remind one of apartheid are being retained in reality. For instance, the hierarchical positions of black and white are largely maintained. While the festival is predominantly visited by white people, the workers, cleaners, and cooks are black. Truscott states:

> Not only do they not benefit economically, they are the nearly invisible nonfestival goers at the event, a different category of person very much in line with the order of apartheid. They are the stain the ironic reconstitution of the farm cannot remove, the excess haunting the picture of a legitimate post-apartheid event. (100)

This element of melancholic self-parody is, in all of the texts that I analyse, most visible in André Brink's *Devil's Valley*, where Afrikaner masculinist hegemony is destroyed by its own rules of withdrawing from the 'new' South Africa. This withdrawal turns the inhabitants of the Devil's Valley into a society plagued and literally crippled by incest, which can no longer survive in a post-apartheid South Africa.

Related to the theme of self-parody and the melancholic retention of the past is the refusal to deal with the apartheid past and the post-apartheid present, but instead to focus on the importance of the South African Wars and the Great Trek. In *Postcolonial Melancholia*, Paul Gilroy similarly argues that Great Britain finds itself unable to mourn the loss of the empire, let alone being able to actively work through that loss. Instead, the British revert to a glorification of their role in the Second World War. Gilroy observes:

> Tales of heroism by the brave pilots of spitfires and hurricanes were important to my postwar childhood. Their Anti-Nazi action established one dimension of my moral universe. Yet, when the World War II airplanes thundered overhead during the pageantry that attended the Queen Mother's burial in 2002, it was impossible not to wonder why that particular mythic moment of national becoming and community has been able to endure and retain such a special grip on Britain's culture and selfunderstanding. (87)

A similar phenomenon can be observed for the Afrikaans speaking society. I have already mentioned that Afrikaners tend not to see themselves as colonisers, but as having been themselves colonised by the British. Thus, the South African Wars – their wars of liberation, so to speak – and the Great Trek often serve as historical events in which the Afrikaners are glorified. In *Imaginings of*

Sand, for instance, the farmers who patrol their land, fearing violence and retribution on the part of the black population in a state of transition to democracy, uphold the image of the Afrikaners as a chosen people who were oppressed by the British and who had no choice but to defend their land. The construction of this heroic narrative serves as a tool for the denial of feelings of guilt, responsibility, and shame for having played a part – whether active or passive – within the apartheid regime. Again, here one finds parallels to Gilroy's observations about Britain. Drawing on the Mitscherlichs' concept of the inability to mourn he writes:

> I think that there is something neurotic about [the] continued citation of the Anti-Nazi war. Making it a privileged point of entry into national identity and self-understanding reveals a desire to find a way back to the point where the national culture – operating on a more manageable scale of community and social life – was, irrespective of the suffering involved in the conflict, both comprehensible and habitable. (89)

These thoughts can be transferred to the context of the Great Trek and the South African Wars. Lastly, Gilroy emphasises that the very denial of one's complicity with the colonial past comes at great psychological costs:

> Repressed and buried knowledge of the cruelty and injustice that recur in diverse accounts of imperial administration can only be denied at a considerable moral and psychological cost. That knowledge creates a discomforting complicity. (94)

In South Africa, the TRC, besides its various functions outlined at the beginning of this chapter, also served as a tool to uncover, thus making a burial of apartheid injustices impossible, as it were. However, this intention was met with denial and the refusal to acknowledge and take full responsibility for violent acts committed during the era of apartheid under the leadership of the National Party. This became most obvious when former presidents P.W. Botha and F.W. de Klerk:

> refused […] to accept full responsibility for the activities of the security forces. They claimed that abuses were 'transgressions' perpetrated by a few "rotten apples" rather than having ensued from state policies designed to eliminate systematically opposition to the regime. They denied that orders were given, for example, to assassinate key opponents of apartheid and blamed the liberation movements for some of their own actions. (Moon 13)

De Klerk's and Botha's attitude clearly reveals mechanisms of denial, deferral, and the inability to mourn as opposition to the TRC's aim of uncovering buried histories, confronting the past, and ultimately, to begin the work of mourning.

In my analyses of the literary representation of white post-apartheid melancholia, then, I discuss attempts of forgetting, denying, and deferring encounters with the apartheid past as an opposition to mourning. Moreover, I shall look more closely at how apartheid structures are retained in a post-apartheid state, especially on farms (as in van Niekerk's *Agaat*) and in what one might call an exaggeration of the farm structure (as in Brink's *Devil's Valley*). Lastly, I shall investigate to what extent feelings of unacknowledged responsibility and loss of privilege are hidden behind a facade of liberalism within the English-speaking community. Particularly in Penny's *The Beneficiaries*, guilt and shame are denied and avoided by the choice to leave South Africa and live in a self-imposed exile in England. One can, in some instances, even observe a repression of a South African identity in favour of a European lifestyle and the attempt to become British in order to avoid one's feelings of shame and guilt for having benefited from the apartheid system.

CHAPTER 2:
RACIAL MELANCHOLIA

> It may be true that being white, black or coloured means nothing, but it is also true that things are no longer the same; there must be a difference between what things are and what they mean. Those categories may have slimmed down, may no longer be tagged with identity cards, but once they were pot-bellied with meaning. […] How can things be the same, and yet be different? Is the emptiness about being drained of the old, about making room for the new? Perhaps it's a question of time, the arrival of a moment when you cross a boundary and say: Once I was white, now I am coloured. (Zoë Wicomb, *Playing in the Light* 206)

> 'You will find, […], that the people you strive so hard to be like will one day reject you because as much as you may pretend, you are not one of their own. Then you will turn back, but there too you will find no acceptance, for those you once rejected will no longer recognise the thing you have become. So far, too far to return. So much, too much you have changed. Stuck between two worlds, shunned by both.' (Kopano Matlwa, *Coconut* 93)

In the following chapter on Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* and Marlene van Niekerk's *Agaat* I shall explore notions of passing, in-betweenness, nostalgia, and white dominant racial melancholia. The main theoretical frame of this chapter will be Cheng's concept of racial melancholia as outlined in Chapter 1.

Playing in the Light revolves around the topic of passing and questions of identity formation, complicity, shame, and the feeling of being unhomed. I shall argue that the concept of racial melancholia proves particularly fruitful when one considers these themes in an intergenerational light. After all, Marion's (the protagonist) parents' decision to pass does have a profound effect on Marion's life after she discovers that her parents are, in fact, coloured and not white as she was brought up to believe. Throughout the novel it becomes clear that the effects the decision to pass had on Marion's parents' psyche must have been, at least in part, passed onto their daughter: In other words, Marion is marked by her parents' inability to mourn certain losses or traumatic events and can only partly come to terms with her family's past. She thus oscillates between a state in which she is working towards closure (mourning, that is) and a state of melancholia, in which she is unable to mourn what her parents and she herself have lost.

One topic that both van Niekerk's and Wicomb's novels certainly have in common is the representation of coloured identity as a state of in-betweenness, which is often regarded as what Grant Farred calls a "middle space" (58), that is to say, a category constructed by the apartheid state in order to classify people of both black and white ancestry. I shall show that in both texts coloured identity is presented as a highly problematic categorisation. Both novels focus and write against the notion of 'miscegenation' and the trope of shame which are both significant for a colonial and apartheid understanding of coloured identity as I have shown in Chapter 1.

Playing in the Light and *Agaat* both resist and write back to these tropes by various means: While in *Playing in the Light* it is only the second generation who can shed off notions of miscegenation and shame, in *Agaat* it is the eponymous protagonist herself who affirms her agency by performing mimicry. However, both texts also highlight mechanisms of an internalised racism against other coloured people. With theorists such as Frantz Fanon and Anne Cheng, I argue that this mechanism of internalisation on the part of people of colour must be regarded as an effect of colonialism and white dominance. By analysing mechanisms of racial (self)rejection, desire, and discrimination on the parts of whites and people of colour, I shall show that most protagonists in Wicomb's as well as in van Niekerk's novels can be seen as deeply melancholic characters who more often than not have been unable to cope with a traumatic event in either their own or their parents' past.

Besides the theme of coloured identity formation, this chapter also focuses on representations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. More than two decades after the TRC was established it continues to be of significance for South African politics as its criticism by members of the Rhodes Must Fall Movement shows:

> This creation of an alternative political space on campus for Black people reflects our calling into question everything white domination has taught us – we are un-teaching ourselves that we have nothing and that we are nothing, and that justice involves peaceful compromise with our oppressors. ("Is the SA TRC a desirable model of transitional justice?")

This statement shows a clear disillusionment with the TRC process. On the same webpage, the author continues and says that:

> data produced by the South African Reconciliation Barometer (SARB) 2013, reveals that South Africans' desire for a united South African Identity has in fact decreased since 2003 and that racial identities and divisions are actually becom-

> ing stronger. It appears that the negotiations and mode of transitional justice that ushered in South Africa's democratic dispensation are being reviewed, among much of South Africa's youth, with some disdain.

The Rhodes Must Fall Movement can be seen, then, as representative of a counter-voice to the narrative of reconciliation and national unity promoted by the TRC.

In this respect, both novels seem to be particularly topical despite having been published in the mid-2000s, since they can be read as a (sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit) critique of the TRC. By not reconciling with the past (in *Agaat*) and by keeping memories alive instead of seeking closure (which is the case for both texts), van Niekerk's and Wicomb's novels can be read as counter-narratives to the TRC's attempt to promote a narrative of nationwide mourning and compromise.

2.1 LOSS, STORIES OF COMPLICITY, AND THE DESIRE TO BE WHITE: ZOË WICOMB'S *PLAYING IN THE LIGHT*

Playing in the Light is Zoë Wicomb's third work of fiction and her second novel. *David's Story*, her much acclaimed debut novel, was preceded by the short story volume *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*. In all her fiction, and in much of her academic work, Wicomb foregrounds the problematics of a coloured identity in South Africa. She deals with themes such as the search for ancestral coloured roots, shame and 'miscegenation', the coloured's place within the liberation movement, and the intricate relationship of (female) coloured perceptions of the body and sexuality. In almost all her writing she emphasises the difficulty of a liminal existence, as coloureds were categorised by the apartheid system and forced to live in a middle space as neither white nor black. The emphasis on one's white ancestors in favour of an African heritage – which also entails a certain tacit complicity with the apartheid regime – is a topic Wicomb introduces early on with *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, a collection that centers around the coloured woman Frieda. Her father, for instance, is very proud of his English heritage as is the mother, who is intent on the British pronunciation of words. The concern with Britishness is further highlighted in *Playing in the Light*, where the protagonist's mother is obsessed with the idea of becoming British. Finally, instances of an opposite form of in-betweenness occur in *David's Story*, for instance, where both David and his female comrade Dulcie are marginalised within the liberation movement for 'not being black enough'.

Central to Wicomb's oeuvre, however, is the topic of 'miscegenation' and the subsequent shame of coloured women, not only for their bodies, but also for the stereotyping of their sexual behaviour. Almost all the protagonists suffer under these categorisations and stereotypes. Frieda is all too painfully aware of her body which is marked as coloured and tries to escape apartheid's categorisations by choosing to live in Europe. David, the protagonist of *David's Story*, searches for his ancestral roots as a consequence of finding himself in a marginalised position within the black dominated liberation movement.

The exception in Wicomb's work is her last short story volume, *The One that Got Away*, where coloured identity formation does play a role, but the topic is less central and must be seen in relation to a somewhat more global phenomenon of home, homelessness, belonging, and displacement. This is also due to the setting, which alternates between Scotland and South Africa. In her most recent work, *October*, which was shortlisted for the *Sunday Times* Barry

Ronge Fiction Prize, the story revolves around the coloured community in Cape Town. However, race is less central than in Wicomb's earlier works. The novel is much more concerned with topics such as homecoming, responsibility, family structures, and ageing. One theme that links *October* to *Playing in the Light*, however, is the emphasis on complicated family structures and secrets.

Nowhere are the intricacies of an in-between identity – linked with complicity, loss, and shame – as explicitly described as in *Playing in the Light*. The book revolves around a topic that is surprisingly scarce in post-apartheid novels – apart from in Achmat Dangor's *Kafka's Curse* and more recently, though less explicitly, in Shaida Kazie Ali's debut novel *Not a Fairytale*. Wicomb's novel is about the phenomenon of passing for white during the apartheid years. Marion Campbell, a young, successful travel agent, discovers that, contrary to what she has been brought up to believe, her parents, John and Helen (and therefore Marion herself), are not white, but coloureds. Helen's and John's decision to pass for white should ensure the family, and especially Marion, a more privileged life within apartheid's society. The novel depicts Marion's attempt to come to terms with the discovery that her family passed for white, as well as her parent's history, their reasons for a self-chosen reclassification as white, and instances of identity crises.[9]

In what follows, I show that the racial melancholia of the racialised subject, which manifests in Marion and her parents, is present on two levels in the novel. On the first level one finds thematic manifestations of melancholia. Here, I shall look more closely at the loss of home for Marion and John, and the phenomenon of what Eng and Han call intergenerational melancholia, which is transferred from Helen and John onto their daughter Marion. On the second level melancholia manifests symbolically. Here, the symbol of the mermaid as a sign for a negatively connoted hybridity, the sea as a metaphor for desire and loss, and finally Robben Island and its signification for the South African present are particularly relevant.

[9] Although apartheid's categorisations were fairly strict, people could find loopholes in order to be classified as white. For a particularly terrible account of the life of a woman who was born to white parents but was classified as coloured because of her outer appearance, see Judith Stone's biography of Sandra Laing, *When She Was White: The True Story of a Family Divided by Race*.

UNCANNY MEMORIES: STRUCTURE AND NARRATIVE VOICE

The plot of the narrative is structured around Marion Campbell, her discovery of her family's secret and her subsequent attempt to come to grips with it. Especially in the beginning, Marion appears to be the character-focaliser of the third person narrative as her most intimate thoughts, feelings, and fears are revealed to the readers. However, throughout the novel the narrative voice shifts between Marion and her father John and, later, to her mother, Helen, who is long dead when the story begins. Thus, readers are left unsure as to who is telling the story. The question of reliable narration becomes even more complicated when Brenda, Marion's coloured employee, tells Marion that she has in fact written the story of Marion's father. Therefore, Brenda may also be the narrator of the story. This uncertainty of narrative perspective leads not only to fragmented accounts of the character's inner lives, which highlights the impossibility of closure regarding the losses they faced, but it also can be seen as a melancholic counter-narrative to the TRC. The victims, through a detailed account of wrongs done to them during apartheid, should mourn for their losses, with the ultimate aim of closure and healing.

During the first half of the story, the emphasis is very much on Marion's discovery of her parent's secret. Her quest to find out more about her family's history is triggered by two things. Firstly, Marion has recurring dreams in which she finds herself in a loft she believes is haunted by an elderly woman:

> In the dream, Marion wanders through the house. It is still; there is no one. But in the kitchen there is the smell of coffee beans just roasted and the palpable absence of a woman who threatens to materialise, first here and then there, someone who moves between a central table and a black Dover stove, a darkening, a sickening outline perhaps, but no, then the air thins out, swept into uniformity. Marion keeps going out to the stoep to get away from the shape of the woman, but cannot tell whether it is the back or the front of the house, and so must return indoors. […] If only Marion could ask the dark shape who eventually settles on the bench with her coffee, an outline of an old woman who has not quite materialised, who does not speak and who does not want her to speak. (Wicomb, *Light* 30)

The second incident is related to the dream. Upon seeing a photograph of Patricia Williams,[10] a coloured resistance fighter who was tortured by the police

[10] The name is an allusion to "the African-American legal scholar, Patricia Williams, whose notion of 'alchemy', through which she works toward a transformative racial justice, resonates with Wicomb's protean poetics" (Samuelson, "Oceanic Histories" 553–554).

during the apartheid years, she finds similarities between Patricia's tortured face and the face of the old woman in her dream. In a moment of recognition, the photograph of Patricia Williams reminds her of Tokkie, her parents' old servant, who was too old to do housework, but came to see the family once a week. There, Tokkie lavished love and tenderness on Marion which stands in stark contrast to Marion's relationship with her mother, who treated her rather coldly:

> It is not until she goes back indoors that recognition beats like a wave against the picture window: Tokkie, it was Tokkie's face on the water. Not the smiling, doting woman who holds her tightly against a breast; but rather the stern face that the little girl […] glances up at. (Wicomb, *Light* 55)

Both Tokkie and Patricia Williams become ghostly apparitions whose connection signifies the resurfacing of a buried family secret that Marion rightly believes her parents hid from her. Having made this connection, Marion resolves to find out more about her family's history. She tries to talk to her father about it, but gets nowhere. Finally, after making inquiries with Brenda's family, Brenda and Marion – who, somewhat ironically for a travel agent, has an aversion to travelling – go to Wuppertal, where they meet a woman who knew Tokkie and it turns out that Tokkie was not, as Marion believed, involved in Marion's adoption by Helen and John. Instead, Tokkie is revealed to be Helen's coloured (thus denied) mother, and therefore Marion's grandmother: "O gits, it's like seeing a spook, because from down here with your face tilted like that you look the spitting image of Mrs Karelse my dear!" (97).

A number of critics have noted that these moments of recognition are uncanny, as right from the beginning the story is loaded with surreal, ghostly events: Certainly, the narrative structure is unsettling. Things are not as they appear to be, not for Marion, who discovers that her parents had led a double life, and not for the reader, who discovers that the story has a double story line, Marion's story but also Brenda's. (Klopper 150)

These surreal moments intrude into Marion's familiar world; a speckled guinea fowl falling dead at her feet when she is sitting at her balcony (Wicomb, *Light* 1), rats building a nest right in front of her cottage (23–24), and not to forget the intrusion of Patricia Williams' image in her bed (74). In these moments, one is reminded of Freud's observations on the uncanny, which "is nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" ("Uncanny" 13). Thus, the familiarity of a place is inhibited and

destabilised by something ghostly and unsettling. Consequently, places which are familiar (such as Marion's home or her bed) are rendered 'uncanny', for they have been transformed by uncanny events: "an uncanny effect is often and easily produced by effacing distinction between imagination and reality, such as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality" (Freud, "Uncanny" 15). Moreover, and this is my point of departure with regard to melancholia in the novel, these surreal, phantasmagoric elements within the novel are, as Meg Samuelson ("Oceanic Histories"), Andrew van der Vlies, and Dirk Klopper note in their respective essays, a sign for the return of the repressed. This is evident from the very beginning of the novel. As mentioned above, the plot begins with a dead guinea fowl at Marion's feet:

> She is at the balcony, the space both inside and out where she spends much of her time at home, that it happens. A bird, a speckled guinea fowl, comes flying at a dangerous angle, just missing the wall, and falls dead with a thud at Marion's feet. Amidst scatter cushions and a coffee tray and the smell and roar of the sea, it lies on the brown ceramic tiles. (Wicomb, *Light* 1)

Thus, the uncanny intrusion of the dead guinea fowl amidst the familiarity of Marion's balcony catalyses one of the central themes of the novel: in-betweenness. The guinea fowl, an animal which both belongs to the city and the country and which is speckled, neither entirely black nor white, and the balcony, a space between inside and outside, hint at and foreshadow Marion's position that could be described as negatively connoted hybridity.

While Klopper and especially van der Vlies focus on the link between the uncanny and the return of the repressed with regards to intertextual references,[11] I am more interested in how far these uncanny instances, and Marion's feeling of loss and shame, can be seen as a form of what Eng and Han call intergenerationally shared melancholia (354). My assumption is that Marion, having been deprived of her identity as coloured, suffers from intergenerational melancholia because of her parents' decision to pass for white, since this decision resulted in Marion's upbringing as very strict, isolated, and solitary. However, a less explicit, though still very direct inheritance of melancholia is still discernible: Marion's parents' feeling of displacement and loss as a result of their 'crossing the colour bar' seems to have been transferred onto their

[11] For example Nadine Gordimer's *The Conservationist*, which Marion reads while vacationing abroad. In Gordimer's novel a dead black man's body keeps resurfacing as a sign for the repressed, and Marion learns, through *The Conservationist* and J. M., Coetzee's *In the Heart of the Country*, to understand her own and her country's history better.

daughter. Marion is unwittingly taught to perform whiteness to the point of perfection. This is evident from the very beginning of the novel when she disposes of the dead guinea fowl on her balcony:

> Marion reaches for a shawl from the back of the rattan chair, spreads it on the tiles, rolls the bird over with her foot – it is surprisingly heavy – and wraps it in a shroud of sage green. Fortunately it is Thursday, cleaning day. She leaves the *girl* a note asking her to take the parcel of bird away. *One never knows what uses such people might have for a dead guinea fowl.* (Wicomb, *Light* 1; emphasis mine)

Firstly, she uses the word 'girl' for her domestic worker Maria. This term indicates a racist and patronising attitude towards black and coloured people, as white employers during apartheid (and sometimes still to this day) arrogantly refer to every black worker, no matter his or her age, as 'girl' and 'boy'. Secondly, the fact that Marion thinks of Maria and her family or community as "such people" (1) is indicative of Marion's perception of herself and Maria as inhabiting two incompatible worlds in the same city. The only reason for an encounter is the two women's employer/employee relationship. Marion's overly self-confident, at times arrogant behaviour is what I would describe as uncritical whiteness. Without defending her attitude, it is important to note that this behaviour is a result of her upbringing. During Marion's childhood, both her parents emphasise that she will grow up without being burdened by feelings of shame and insecurity due to her coloured origins: "it was wonderful to see [Marion] grow up *so confident in her whiteness*. John had to confess that his little mermaid was as *self-assured* as any Boeremeisie. The posh school brought the miracle of new knowledge, the lovely drawn-out vowels and Boer songs" (132; emphasis mine). This self-assuredness persists throughout her adult life. Marion confidently defines herself as Afrikaans and finds it annoying that people mistake her for an English South African due to her name (18).

However, her self-confidence is severely shaken after discovering her parents' secret. When she realises that she is in fact coloured, she feels "light and empty as a ghost" (105). This feeling of emptiness and displacement is a sign of crisis, a total loss of familiarity. In fact, it appears to be a compound loss. Firstly, she faces the devastating realisation that her whiteness has been nothing but a performance, perfected through her parents' decision to keep their act of passing a secret. Interestingly, it is only in the moment when her hitherto unquestioned privileged position as a white person is threatened that Marion perceives herself as having been white and privileged in an exploitative system, and as having lost her whiteness as a consequence of her discov-

ery of her parents' secret: "how can things be the same, and yet be different? Is the emptiness about being drained of the old, about making room for the new? Perhaps it's a question of time, the arrival of a moment when you cross a boundary and say: Once I was white, now I am coloured" (106). Moreover, her initial whiteness results in the irretrievable loss of a very different environment had she grown up coloured. This loss is very much aligned with being isolated, without a caring family, and ultimately, without motherly love. Before analysing Marion's crisis of identity in more detail, I shall elaborate on John and Helen's decision to pass and the consequences this has for their family life.

NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE, THE TRC, AND STORIES OF PASSING

In contrast to Marion's story, readers are not privy to such detailed accounts of John's, and even less so, of Helen's stories, which are fragmented and interrupt Marion's quest of coming to terms with her past. This leads back to the problematic question of who is the novel's narrator. As already mentioned, much of the novel is focalised through Marion, although the focalisation shifts quite early to John, whose thoughts interrupt Marion's point of view in a fragment-like fashion. At the very end of the story, Brenda reveals to Marion that she talked to John while Marion was vacationing abroad, and decided to write down his story (217). Thus, one might assume that the story is not written from Marion's point of view at all, but might rather have been the story of Marion's family's passing and her subsequent discovery of it, written by Brenda (van der Vlies 594–595). This interpretation seems plausible with regard to the question of the insights of John's story. However, the readers are faced with the riddle as to how Brenda could have found out about Helen's point of view, which is unknown even to John. Klopper proposes that it could be "Brenda's nationalisation of the circumstances of John's story" (Klopper 150), an argument which he himself almost dismisses as constructed. However, since one also gets short glimpses of Tokkie's life, it does appear rather logical that Brenda constructed the lives of the two women.

The question of narrative perspective and veracity of the different viewpoints poses a problem. Readers are unsure which side of the story they are presented with, an insecurity which is then amplified by the feeling that different narratives are superimposed onto each other. For example, Marion claims to know her parents' history, whereby John attempts to "correct the details" (Wicomb, *Light* 117), and if one assumes Brenda to be the narrator of the

story, then there is a third layer of perspective within the narrative structure. The question of narrative perspective cannot be resolved fully, but it is of importance when considering the novel's relation to the TRC, as it seems to purport the view that there cannot be one single, 'truthful' account of the story; rather that a story is inherently multifaceted and thus must be read between the lines of incoherence and instability.

Playing in the Light, alongside Penny's *The Beneficiaries*, is one of the texts in this study that very explicitly deals with the TRC. At the beginning of the novel, Marion assures herself that she "doesn't usually bother with newspapers. The tired old politics of this country does not divert her. She has no interest in its to-ing and fro-ing, and is impatient with people in sackcloth and ashes who flagellate themselves over the so-called misdemeanours of history" (Wicomb, *Light* 48). However, after she sees the story of Patricia Williams in the newspaper, and once she goes on the quest to find out about the Campbell's family secret, Marion's view changes drastically. While at first she dismisses Patricia Williams' story as "[a]nother TRC story" (49), she later finds herself sitting in front of the television, following the TRC process in the hope of seeing the image of Williams' torturer:

> she hears of the unimaginable, sees other brigadiers, ordinary men with neatly parted hair and dapper moustaches, confessing in the cosy diminutives of the language to acts that wrench a dry retching from the pit of her stomach. In this world of accusations and confessions, of secrets and lies, Marion is a reluctant traveller who has landed in a foreign country without so much as a phrase book. […] *She hears the voices of people saying that they did not know, that they had no idea; there is an impulse to say it aloud after them, as in a language lesson, but fastidiousness prevents her from doing so.* (74; emphasis mine)

Marion's reaction to the TRC points to a feeling of complicity with the apartheid regime, as this scene ensues before she finds out that she is coloured. The TRC incites the development of Marion's critical regard of her whiteness. However, in a broader context, the novel can be seen as a counter-narrative to the TRC process. Patricia Williams' case is a story of political violence and of a spectacular, unspeakable crime: "Williams had been imprisoned, […] she had suffered regular interrogations, […] her jaw and nose had been broken, […] she had been dangled out of high windows, […] she had been sexually abused in unspeakable ways" (54).

As outlined in my introduction and in Chapter 1, the TRC focused mainly on crimes that were politically motivated. The TRC was thus instrumental in rewriting the country's history by focusing on crimes committed during the

apartheid era. After the TRC it would be impossible for the privileged white population to claim ignorance of the atrocities committed, as this rewriting of the country's history was conducted in a public forum. Political crimes, involving torture, rape, incarceration, and other forms of inhumane treatment, are undeniably horrifying examples of the cruelty and injustice of South Africa's segregationist system. Although apartheid affected every black and coloured person in South Africa, not every black and coloured person was part of the struggle for liberation. The spectacle of the TRC hearings, although necessary, further marginalised the unspectacular and quotidian stories of oppression under apartheid, such as the apartheid laws which impeded and restricted the lives of the black and coloured communities.

Yvette Christiansë points out that certain "quotidian narratives of loss have themselves been lost by the official discourses" (375). In this context, Christiansë draws particular attention to the practice of passing, which ties in with the main topic of Wicomb's novel. Marion's and her parent's story cannot, in comparison to Patricia Williams' heroic story of loss, trauma and the struggle for freedom, be "construed as political" (373). The Campbells' story is, then, a story of the everyday and the unspectacular. And yet, Brenda passionately states that Marion's father's story is "the story that should be written" (Wicomb, *Light* 217), which ties in with Brenda's revelation that she has started to write Marion's family story. She is thus taking up the task of recounting what the TRC does not, or does very limitedly. By narrating John's and his family's story, the quotidian losses of apartheid are highlighted and commemorated. Wicomb's novel is thus a counter-narrative to the TRC to the extent that it contributes to "the continual writing and rewriting" (Graham 3) of narratives of the past.

Moreover, while one can detect a relatively clear dichotomy between the voices of victims and perpetrators within TRC narratives, this notion is complicated in the novel by its layered narrative structure. The different focalisers of the story (Marion, Helen, John, Brenda, and even Tokkie) serve, in relation to the TRC, to deconstruct the overarching grand narrative with only one view. The different foci of the story, which are at times contradictory (especially John's and Helen's versions) and at other times complement each other and strategically reveal information not known to everyone involved, highlight the fact that narratives are multifaceted and that many different versions of the past exist side by side.

Especially Helen's, John's, and Tokkie's versions of the past appear as fragmented glimpses that interrupt Marion's quest to find out the 'truth' about

her parents' life. Particularly in light of the fact that both Helen and Tokkie are dead and that John lives more in the past than in the present, these narrative intrusions can be viewed as ghostly reminders that despite calls by members of the Commission to close the chapters of the apartheid past after a period of mourning, the past very much invades post-apartheid life. Helen's and Tokkie's ghostly presences are, then, melancholic voices of the past which cannot easily be put to rest, highlighting the novel's function as melancholic counter-story to a nationwide narrative of mourning and closure.

The unstable narrative is not only important when reading the text against the TRC, but also when taking into consideration the central theme of the novel, which is the act of passing. The act of passing itself is a complicated, double storyline. On the one hand, one is confronted with the narrative of passing as a performance, while on the other, and simultaneously, there exists a second layer within the narrative, such as the reasons for the decision to pass, the private self, the person's social identity. This layer is only presented in fragments and can never be fully grasped, for it will always be overshadowed by the act of passing.

John's and Helen's story of passing reads in almost exactly the same way as the story recounted by Yvette Christiansë in her essay "Passing Away: The Unspeakable (Losses) of Postapartheid South Africa". Like Poppie, the coloured woman who passes for white, John and Helen also renounce their coloured identity in search of a more privileged position under the apartheid rule. At first, it seems to be John's idea to pass for white:

> Kembel, that was what the officer at the Traffic Department wrote down when John first said his name; and John, who could read and write perfectly well, knew that it would be a mistake to correct a man so dapperly turned out in khaki – […] *if that was all it took to turn him into someone new, a man of the city with prospects, who was he to complain?* (Wicomb, *Light* 5; emphasis mine)

However, it is Helen who perfects the plan to pass, and by literally sacrificing her body in the face of sexual harassment by the councillor who has it in his power to reclassify the family, achieves the Campbells' reclassification.

But what does the act of passing actually signify for them? First and foremost, it is not an overt or subversive act intended to undermine or mock the apartheid regime. This is made painfully clear when Vumile, a black South African whose family passed for coloured, recounts his story to Marion:

> His parents carried on pretending that no one knew they were Zulu; they threw parties that the family could ill afford, playing the lighter-skinned scum with expensive whisky. But at home, with the doors shut, they made sure that their children knew about their forebears, their Zuluness. (205)

This slightly different example of passing, which may well be seen as a successful attempt to subvert the apartheid regime, makes John's and Helen's complicity with the apartheid state and their subsequent losses even more apparent. Both John and Helen seek admittance into this very regime: John, having grown up on a farm and regarding farming and land as central for life, aligns himself – even after the end of apartheid – with Boer ideologies. He is extremely proud to be an Afrikaner and displays a harsh, internalised racist attitude towards blacks and coloureds: "Remember Sharpeville, remember the kaffirs here on our own doorstep in Langa? Well, I was one of those who volunteered as a reservist to defend South Africa against the blarry Communists" (14). He also repeatedly calls himself a Boer and unquestioningly parrots apartheid beliefs (126, 213). He is obsessed with denoting racial markers; (Afrikaner) whiteness meaning perfection and blackness being the epitome of poverty, criminality, and a pitiful existence (23, 59). To him, the colour of skin and the name of a person are defining keys to people's characteristics: "There was nothing evil about Tokkie, oh no, a very fine somebody she was – pitch black, you know, but a lady all the same" (59). And when Marion introduces him to her suitor Geoff, he proclaims: "Geldenhuys? Well, who could have a better name than that" (180). John's internalised racist attitude brings to mind Fanon's observations on Manichaeism in a world dominated by colonialism. Fanon describes this Manichaeism with painful clarity:

> The torturer is the black man, Satan is black, one talks of shadows, when one is dirty one is black – whether one is thinking of physical dirtiness or of moral dirtiness. It would be astonishing, if the trouble were taken to bring them all together, to see the vast number of expressions that make the black man the equivalent of sin. In Europe, whether concretely or symbolically, the black man stands for the bad side of the character. […] Blackness, darkness, shadow, shades, night, the labyrinths of the earth, abysmal depths, blacken someone's reputation; and, on the other side, the bright look of innocence, the white dove of peace, magical, heavenly light. A magnificent blond child—how much peace there is in that phrase, how much joy, and above all how much hope. There is no comparison with a magnificent black child: literally, such a thing is unwonted. (*Black* 189)

John's "disassociation from all things African" (Erasmus, Introduction 16) must therefore be viewed in relation to apartheid and colonial ideology. Fanon's descriptions of Manichaeism caused by colonial rule and white dominance are helpful in understanding John's and Helen's desire to become white in a segregationist system. The complicity with the apartheid regime is very palpable if one regards John's statements about whiteness and blackness. However, Fanon's statement that "[i]n Europe, that is to say in every civilized and civilizing country, the Negro is the symbol of sin. The archetype of the lowest is represented by the Negro" (Fanon, *Black* 189), draws attention to an important point: Both John and Helen were born into a racist, segregationist system in which survival (as a black or coloured person) perhaps necessitated the internalisation of racist attitudes, a strategy which bore a pathological incorporation of the white ideal as its consequence. The desire to strive for a white ideal entails a pathological disavowal of all things associated with one's coloured identity.

In contrast to John, who identifies as Afrikaner, Helen strives to be as English as possible. She regards English whiteness as 'refined', 'perfect' and 'civilised'. For example, she is obsessed with the quality of cloth, which recalls a Victorian tradition. The Campbells thus have lace curtains (Wicomb, *Light* 10), a linen tablecloth with flower embroidery, and Helen seems to be determined to turn their home into a shrine of Englishness. Also, Helen goes to the Anglican Church while John stops going to church altogether since he feels out of place in a church which is not Dutch reformed (126). While John seems to find himself in the business of passing rather haphazardly (126), Helen's plans are more carefully thought through:

> Besides, Campbell was a respectable English name, […] they would just be taking their rightful place in the world […] to pass in the city you must also be able to pass as English […]. They would have a big garden and a coloured boy called Hans to mow the lawn. Only, they would not be able to afford any children. (130)

What is interesting about this particular passage is that Helen dreams of a coloured, not a black servant to mow the lawn. Here, one is reminded of Freud's remark that melancholia is marked by a conflict of ambivalence. By degrading other coloureds there may be a subconscious hatred towards "the fantasmatic likeness of oneself" (Cheng 18). This passage seems quite revealing as to why Helen wants to pass for white. The notion of what Cheng calls "the strive for a never possible perfection" (xi) is very much at play here. Hel-

en knows that through the act of passing she may be able to aspire to material wealth. However, she also knows that this envisaged 'perfect' whiteness cannot be made entirely possible for her and John. That is also why she refuses to have children, and why later, when Marion is born, she treats her so unlovingly (Wicomb, *Light* 47, 60). Marion is, for Helen, the reminder of her and John's colouredness, a reminder of both the stereotyped female coloured linked with lasciviousness, and a reminder of the coloureds being perceived as a product of 'miscegenation'. Constantly obsessed with her child's skin colour, she forbids her to play in the sun: "Her mother urged her to keep out of the sun. Did she want to end up like mad Mr Moolman across the road, who was burnt pitch black like a coloured" (9). Besides, when it turns out that Marion's only childhood friend, Annie, is a 'play white' (to which her father admits after having been caught with his coloured lover), there can be no question of Marion playing with Annie again (194).

Helen is not only, as it might seem in the first instance, negating her colouredness, but more specifically disavows her female colouredness, which is related to 'miscegenation' and the "shame of having had our bodies stared at" (Wicomb, "Shame" 91). Ironically, however, it is only through the very act of 'miscegenation' that Helen can 'cross the colour bar': "Helen is willing to suffer sexual degradation for whiteness, but the exchange is doubly unfair: she must carry the burden of wanting the purity of whiteness; and she must (always) carry the burden of being an impure, sexually predatory coloured female who turns the heads of 'pure' white men" (Dass 139). This thought, however, is negated and repressed by Helen, for she tries desperately to forget the incident of sexual harassment by councillor Carter: "and once the papers were in order, the image of the man slobbering over flesh-pink satin was quite erased. Helen, artless as a sunflower, smiled warmly; her former self – the woman in the lemon blouse, the one obligated to Carter – was obliterated, was no more" (Wicomb, *Light* 145). By trying to get rid of her 'shameful' coloured identity, Helen sees herself forced to act as is expected of her by councillor Carter. Because he seems to consider women of colour in general as sexually lascivious, he mistakes her fear of and revulsion to him for admiration and the desire to have a sexual liaison with a white man. However, in church he of course "kept his eyes decently averted" (145) while standing opposite of Helen. Thus, by trying to escape shame, Helen involuntarily enacts complicity since she may be perceived as one of "those females who have mated with the colonizer" (Wicomb, "Shame" 92).

Yet, Helen's life does not consist of the material wealth she dreamed of or of a privileged place in society. On the contrary, hers seems to be the most melancholic story. Striving to imitate the English language, thereby eliminating her Afrikaans accent, she lives her life in a bitter marriage to John. They do not live freely, but rather behind curtains, playing out their private dramas inside their house, ever fearing a public display (Wicomb, *Light* 11). Moreover, Helen's disavowal of her coloured identity is marked by the loss of her family, most notably her mother, for even though Tokkie is present in Helen's life, she can only ever appear as a servant, sitting in the backyard (31). Interestingly, the loss of the mother is a recurring theme in most of the novels under discussion – whether it is the orphaned Azure in *Thirteen Cents* who has lost his mother, or Lally in *The Beneficiaries* who is unable to mourn the fact that she is separated from her mother due to the fact that she spends her childhood in a boarding school. However, it is in *Agaat* that the parallels are most notable. In *Playing in the Light,* Tokkie is only able to visit her daughter and grandchild in the disguise of a servant:

> It was Mamma's idea to wear the funny wrap-around apron when she came to visit at the new terraced house, to use the back gate; that way, in the role of servant, she could visit every week and at the same time provide a history of an old family retainer, which the types who were working their way up in that part of Observatory could not boast of. (Wicomb, *Light* 132)

While in *Agaat* the surrogate daughter is degraded to the status of a servant, in *Playing in the Light* it is the mother who, to outsiders and to Marion, appears to have this role. However, the assumption that this is an inversion of Agaat's situation must be made with caution. Kamilla, Agaat's surrogate mother/mistress does not in any way mock, but – to her own detriment – rather affirms apartheid's categorisations by degrading her coloured surrogate child to a servant. This has devastating consequences for Agaat's psyche, as I show in my analysis of van Niekerk's novel below. Tokkie's act of complicity with her daughter's endeavour to pass for white, in contrast, may be regarded as an act of defiance against the restrictive laws of apartheid, since by disguising herself as a servant, Tokkie not only keeps in touch with her daughter and grandchild, but also mocks the performance of race: "In the Observatory backyard she sipped coffee from an enamel mug, which embarrassed Helen, but no, Mamma said, it was her favourite mug; she'd had it for years, and *there was after all so little to this walk-on rule as servant to lesser whites that she enjoyed playing the part*" (Wicomb, *Light* 133; emphasis mine). Tokkie's act of mockery is

further highlighted by a scene which is reminiscent of what Fanon calls "dreams of possession" (*Wretched* 5) when he describes the desire of colonised people to occupy the place of the colonisers. While Tokkie serves her white mistress in Constantia she envisions Helen to take over the white Madam's position: "How often in that Constantia drawing room did she imagine her own darling Helen sitting on the sofa with her long legs elegantly crossed, having tea with dumpy Mrs Macdonald?" (Wicomb, *Light* 133). Yet, while Tokkie's masquerade as servant is clearly an act of subversion, it cannot fully compensate for the loss and disavowal that Helen's decision is accompanied by. After all, Marion knows her grandmother only as servant, never as a family member. Besides, Helen can only acknowledge her mother as such in the very private sphere of her backyard and when Tokkie dies, she does not attend her funeral, since she has relinquished all contact with the rest of her family (32).

Indeed, one may speak of multiple losses as a consequence of Helen's decision to pass, but it is not only the disavowal of her coloured identity which makes Helen a melancholic character. The loss of her family, the constant reminder of her colouredness, and above all, the fact that her plan to be recognised and respected as a full member of white society fails, all play a central role. Unable to relinquish the dream of being included and respected by white society, she cannot mourn the loss of her coloured family and environment. Similarly, she cannot mourn the loss of her whiteness, as she denies the failure of her dream to become an English member of society, ultimately denying the fact that she remains an 'outsider'. This becomes quite clear, for instance, when she fantasises about having a friend with whom she practices the correct pronunciation of difficult English words: "Execrable, she intoned in the broadcaster's voice. My dear, she said to her lady friend, all my life I have waited for this word" (149). Finally, while for Marion there seems to be a possibility of coming to terms with the past, even if only in part, Helen's story cannot be mourned, nor chronologically presented since she is already dead. She has, like Poppie in Yvette Christiansë's essay, passed away without acknowledging that there ever was an identity to mourn.

THE MELANCHOLIC OBSESSION WITH HOME

Several critics have focused on the connection of being (un)homed, displaced as it were, and the identity crisis in which Marion finds herself. Dass notes, for instance, that Marion's uneasiness even in her own flat reveals a sense of not

belonging (137). Homi Bhabha, however, seems to consider this situation of being unhomed as a coloured South African person as potentially empowering, enabling a person to elude fixed apartheid categorisations. In his introduction to *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha sees precisely in the coloured's state of interstitial a potential to resist the apartheid regime by reference to Aila, the protagonist of Nadine Gordimer's novel *My Son's Story*, who:

> displays the unhomely world, 'the halfway between … not defined' world of the coloured […]. The silence that doggedly follows Aila's dwelling now turns into an image of the 'interstices', the in-between hybridity of the history of sexuality and race. (14)

Bhabha analyses the novel in order to illustrate that the coloureds were able to, through their interstitial position, elude and subvert apartheid's categorisations. Wicomb has criticised this view in her academic writing ("Shame"), stating that Bhabha disregards the notion of shame and the desire to 'purify' one's coloured identity, and this novel seems to be a forceful, fictionalised criticism of Bhabha's views. Marion does not feel empowered by her in-between state. On the contrary, she feels helpless and vulnerable as she finds herself deprived of her privileged white identity: "Naked, slippery – that's me, that's who I am, she thinks. Hurled into the world fully grown, without a skin" (Wicomb, *Light* 101).

Klopper, in turn, has noted that Marion's nostalgia for a proper home can be equated with her unstable identity. He draws on Svetlana Boym's theory of nostalgia, linking it to Freud's conception of mourning and melancholia, and understands nostalgia to be a pathologised form of the yearning for a lost home that takes on two forms:

> Restorative nostalgia concentrates, [Boym] says, on *nostos*, on the impulse to reconstruct the lost home. As in melancholia, it is a longing that does not let go. Reflexive nostalgia dwells, on the other hand, on *algos*, on what she describes as the longing that has no habitation. As in mourning, it is a longing that acknowledges there can be no restitution for what has been lost. (148)

This definition seems very apt, particularly in the South African context. Connecting the terms melancholia and nostalgia, as Klopper does, provides important insights. Firstly, nostalgia happens on a more conscious level, while melancholia is often a subconscious process, the consequences of which are externalised. Secondly, while restorative nostalgia seems to be particularly useful in describing the longing for a reconstruction of the lost home (Klopper 148), melancholia captures the process of ambivalence which accompanies this

yearning in a more nuanced way, which in turn is a key characteristic of pathologised mourning (Freud, "Mourning" 251). The oscillation between self-loathing and the projection of the feeling of shame and self-hatred on one's own racial group, and the desire to be included into white society, seems best captured by the term ambivalence, such as Freud delineates, as a characteristic for melancholia.

Notably, when Klopper talks about nostalgia in *Playing in the Light*, he hardly discusses John, the character who most nostalgically, and most melancholically, yearns for a lost home. This yearning – not only for home as a place, but also home as thought in conjunction with family – can be described by the term restorative nostalgia, which, according to Klopper, entails melancholia. John is described as being extremely attached to his family and to land, as he sees himself as a farmer and keeps going back to his parent's farm, at least during Marion's early childhood (Wicomb, *Light* 109). Even when he lives in the city with Helen his great joy is gardening. This attachment to land might explain his feeling more comfortable with being mistaken for an Afrikaner than an English South African. Afrikaners were, and continue to be, associated with a strong attachment to land, given the historical circumstances.[12] Thus, it does not seem surprising that John, when trying to obliterate his coloured identity, identifies most strongly with Afrikaner ideology. Since passing (in the Campbells' case this act involves the desire to 'purify' themselves racially) always entails the desire for acceptance or admittance into the dominant society, John fiercely attempts to be included in Afrikaner society. However, although he ardently parrots Afrikaner beliefs until the very end of the novel (213), his passing for white is overshadowed by the irrecoverable loss of home. Throughout the narrative strand of the novel that focuses on the present, John's imagination nostalgically dwells on his childhood home, the farm where he grew up. Having left his beloved farm for Cape Town, and after having made the decision to pass for white, he rarely goes back there. Also, his brothers and sisters have all left home to live in the city, and there is an indication that the parents eventually lose the farm due to forced removals when Marion is about four years old. His father explains: "The Boere want the farm, John. It's the river – they want the water" (113). This is particularly ironic and painful, since what John holds dear (the farm) is taken away from his family by the very people of whose society he so desperately wants to be a part.

[12] This attachment to the land is represented in a particularly violent form in Brink's *Devil's Valley* (see Chapter 3.1). In Brink's novel, the Afrikaners' belief in being a people chosen by God leads the inhabitants of Devil's Valley to eliminate the coloured population and to reduce the contact to the world outside the valley to a bare minimum.

Aged, he suffers acutely from fits of restorative nostalgia, which manifest themselves in his imaginative transportations back to the farm, while in reality he is in his Cape Town house: "As the aroma of coffee rises, he panics: he has not chopped any wood, [...]. It's alright Pappa, Marion soothes, I've turned on the electric oven; we'll manage without the stove today" (186). These nostalgic fits in the narrative present seem to be, on the one hand, an attempt to recover a lost, idyllic past. On the other hand, John seems to be mostly aware (while at the farm when Marion is still a child) that his and Helen's decision to pass for white neither can nor should ever be fully perfected, as it entails the disavowal of, and the disconnection from, home. This is emphasised by examining John's relationship with his brothers and his sister, Elsie. Unlike Helen, whose maximum contact with her brother consists of sending him Christmas presents, John attempts to keep in contact with his family once all of them have left their parental farm. Again and again he claims that all siblings have a strong bond, but he especially seems to adore Elsie (111). However, after managing to be reclassified as white, John has to swear in the state oath to relinquish all contact with coloured and black people (157). This, at first, the siblings laugh off, and John keeps meeting his family – without Helen of course, who disapproves. When Elsie gets married to a politically active man who is pro-ANC, however, John eventually does relinquish all contact. Nevertheless, the loss of his family, being cut off and living behind curtains, results in an unacknowledged, suppressed mourning. He only acknowledges this feeling in a state of drunkenness – after he has totally lost control. Marion remembers that while she was a child, her father told her "[a]bout brothers and sisters, she remembers, his beloved brothers and sisters, and that it was a sin that his little mermaid should grow up alone" (61). Thus, in the present John oscillates painfully, and melancholically, between the longing to reconstruct an idyllic and impossible home, which includes his coloured family, and a white ideal that can never be fully achieved. He also displays an internalised racist attitude towards coloured and black people, whereby a rather subconscious conflict of ambivalence is created. I call it subconscious as it is never openly acknowledged. John has passed for so long, appropriating apartheid beliefs so radically that the restorative nostalgia from which he suffers can never turn into an acknowledging, reflexive nostalgia, which could initiate a healing mourning process; instead he seems lost in trying to reconstruct a lost family and a lost home. Aged, he finds himself unable to mourn for these losses, since this would mean the acknowledgement that his fantasy of family and home has long since ceased to be 'real' and is therefore irretrievable in the first place.

INTERGENERATIONAL MELANCHOLIA

When thinking of intergenerationally shared memories, losses, and trauma, it is helpful to consider Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory, which is also discussed by Klopper in his analysis of *Playing in the Light* (149–153). Klopper understands Marion's and her parents' experiences as being intergenerationally shared, "what Marianne Hirsch calls 'the intersubjective' and 'intergenerational' dimensions of memory, the way in which memories of a given place or people, […] accumulated over generations, are constitutive of subjectivity" (149). Hirsch argues that children of Holocaust survivors, for instance, witness their parents' memories intergenerationally:[13] "Postmemory most specifically describes the relationship of children of survivors of cultural or collective trauma to the experiences of their parents, experiences that they 'remember' only as the narratives and images with which they grew up, but that are so powerful, so monumental, as to constitute memories in their own right" (Hirsch, "Surviving" 8). Hirsch's concept of postmemory comes close to what Marion seems to undergo. However, Hirsch refers to memories which have been transmitted consciously from the first to the second generation ("Surviving"). Even in cases where parents refuse to speak directly about the traumatic event, the children of the survivors are conscious of their parents having suffered traumatic experiences. On the other hand, Marion, throughout her childhood and adolescence, remains wholly ignorant of what her parents have undergone. After all, she believes she is white. Her memories are rather subconscious and resurface only in her adult life. This form of subconscious inheritance of memories has been described by Eng and Han in their essay "A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia", in which they state that a traumatic experience or a loss, experienced by the generation of one's parents, can be inherited by the generation of their children (352). As examples, they cite fictional as well as psychological cases. Perhaps most striking and apt for the current analysis seems to be the example of a film produced by Rae Tajiri in which memories of the Japanese internment during the World War II are transferred from the mother onto the daughter, who was never told of these events by her mother. While the mother represses all memory of the camp, the daughter is depressed and her mother's repressed memories keep haunting her in her dreams:

[13] In her 2008 essay "The Generation of Postmemory", Hirsch states in a footnote that the term postmemory may also be applied for the South African context (104).

> Tajiri's video is a compelling example of the ways in which historical traumas of loss are passed down from one generation to another unconsciously. It illustrates Freud's maxim that the losses experienced in melancholia are often unconscious losses. Yet, at the same time it also diverges from Freud's conception of the disease insofar as it posits a theory of melancholia that is not individually experienced but intergenerationally shared among members of a social group. (Eng and Han, 354)

In Wicomb's novel, Marion's parents' repressed memories seem to be transferred onto Marion in rather uncanny and distorted forms. Firstly, Marion has recurring dreams about her grandmother, who was never acknowledged as such, but Tokkie sits in the backyard and is presented to Marion as an old family servant of Helen's (Wicomb, *Light* 31). Also, Patricia Williams, whose face reminds Marion of Tokkie, turns out to be a relation of Helen's, whom Helen, however, most credibly put forward by John's sister Elsie, would have nothing to do with, since she was a coloured military activist of the ANC (172).

Marion furthermore seems to share John's nostalgia for a lost home. Klopper accurately describes Marion's sense of being unsettled, yearning for a home, and her "absent mother" (154). The relationship between mother and daughter is certainly strained, and Marion feels unwanted by Helen. Marion remembers a particularly cruel scene from her childhood in which her mother interrupts her playing in the garden, which captures her relationship with Helen quite well:

> When Helen came to, she swallowed her scream and spoke quietly, hissing with rage and disgust. What kind of child was she? Where had she come from? How could she behave like a disgusting native, rolling half naked in the grass? Marion knew not to say that she was a mermaid; she knew not to point to the moon, not to ask why it was bad to roll in the grass. Because I say so: that was all the explanation she'd ever been given for the endless rules and restrictions and excessive fears. (Wicomb, *Light* 60–61)

However, I argue that the feeling of displacement and a longing for an intact family home seems to be a loss which Marion inherited specifically from her father. For instance, in Marion's dreams, which haunt her in the beginning of the novel, the farmhouse where John grew up appears as a place that Marion does not recognise as real. However, she wants to reach a room in the house: "she climbs the ladder because there is no other course to follow. When her head reaches the height of the loft door […] an old woman sitting on a low stool is illuminated […]. She is surrounded by a sea of peaches" (31). Marion does not actively remember having visited her grandparents' farm. However,

during a flashback in which John remembers a visit to his parents' farm, readers realise that the woman in Marion's dream is John's mother (112). Thus, like in Tajiri's film, this memory of a 'homely' place can only be an example of an intergenerationally shared memory which she has inherited from her father. Also, despite occasional sarcastic remarks of wanting to leave John in the solitary cottage that Marion buys in order to spend idyllic weekends at the sea, she feels much closer and more at ease with her father than she had ever felt with her dead mother: "Thankfully, her mother is dead, has died a self-willed and efficient death, and after that marriage of bitter bickering John has become her dear Pappa" (Wicomb, *Light* 4). This longing for a home across generations then, is one factor that creates an intimate and yet simultaneously difficult and ambivalent relationship between Marion and her father. Because the desire to create a home is not fulfilled, John invents mythical narratives of fairytale creatures, namely of mermaids, which serve as an alternative, dreamlike fantasy of homeliness for both father and daughter. The symbol of the mermaid, however, is filled with ambivalences and can be read as an image of melancholia.

SYMBOLS OF MELANCHOLIA: MERMAIDS, THE SEA, AND ROBBEN ISLAND

Throughout the novel it is often repeated that Marion has been called mermaid by her father "ever since she can remember" (Wicomb, *Light* 23, 46). Thus, the mermaid becomes a mythical figure which intimately connects John and Marion, since it is he who calls her that and invents stories of mermaids, while her mother strongly disapproves. The mermaid does not only stand as a sign for colouredness and a troubled hybridity, as Meg Samuelson argues in her illuminating essay "Oceanic Histories and Protean Poetics: The Surge of the Sea in Zoë Wicomb's Fiction" (554): By creating and responding to stories of mermaids, John and Marion build an illusionary narrative of belonging. However, this narrative is loaded with ambivalences. Firstly, while for John the concept of a mermaid seems endearing, mythical, and positively connoted, Helen associates it with colouredness: "Ashamed, said her mother, as they should be, of being neither one thing nor another. No one likes creatures that are so different, so mixed up" (Wicomb, *Light* 47). Here, feelings of distress regarding the supposed origins of colouredness in 'miscegenation' and consequently shame and self-loathing, are evoked and connected to the figure of the mermaid on the mother's side. Helen's internalised racist attitude towards her

own identity is obvious. She has developed a hatred towards a symbol which stands for her own origins.

Corollary to this, the mermaid symbol seems to tie in with the concept of passing. Throughout the novel, a direct link to Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale *The Little Mermaid* is forged: "There is a story, a fairy tale, she isn't sure of the details, about a mermaid who gets mixed up with humans and who may well have come to a sorry end" (Wicomb, *Light* 46). Samuelson states that Andersen's tale of a painful transformation from a mermaid to a human girl is an allusion for the author's own painful experiences of the attempt to pass in the aristocratic society (Samuelson, "Oceanic Histories" 554). But even without the biographical link, the mermaid's transformation in the fairy tale is described as a process of loss and suffering. After all, she not only loses all contact with her underwater world and her beautiful voice, but her feet bleed almost constantly when she moves. Here, one again encounters the link between novel and fairytale (Samuelson, "Oceanic Histories" 554). Helen observes that in order not to be found out as a coloured "her treacherous feet, her bete noir, had at all costs to be covered" (Wicomb, *Light* 147). Thus, in order to 'tame' and hide Helen's coloured origins, her feet are tended to by John in order to cut away the betraying, brown skin (147). The process of 'taming' Helen's feet is again filled with ambivalences. On the one hand, this is the only time when she and John seem close; ironically, they are close during a process which aims at the attainment of a common goal to pass for white. On the other hand, there is a scene which again evokes Andersen's description of a painful process of transformation: "his hand slipped so that the knife plunged to the quick, and bright red fairytale blood trickled through the white skin" (149). Interestingly, Marion's foot swells at precisely the moment that she discovers her parents' secret (96). This scene, in its imitation of Helen's distress, indicates a painful conflict of identity: Like in *The Little Mermaid*, the psychological agony of denying one's identity turns into physical pain. In a scene which starkly contrasts the pathological parallels drawn between Helen's feet and her identity, Tokkie's feet are tended to by her husband in an act which reveals that she is much less ambivalent about her colouredness: "he [Helen's father] tended to his Tokkie's tired feet […] she shut her eyes and was silent as he rubbed away the weariness. Then he massaged cooking oil into her feet until they were a lustrous black, were two live black starlings throbbing in his lap" (137). Contrary to Helen's attempt to make her feet 'white' Tokkie's closeness to blackness is emphasised here. Besides, while the moments where John is shown to tend to Helen's feet are loaded with tension, Helen's parents share a moment

of sensual and romantic intimacy. The disparity between mother's and daughter's connotations of identity thus emphasise Helen's (and thereby Marion's) loss.

While, at least superficially, John seems to view the mermaid symbol in a positive way, it is rendered even more ambivalent when one considers that the mermaid is an asexual being. This association between the mermaid and asexuality is not only made explicit by the link to the fairy tale (the prince considers the little mermaid to be his special friend, a little sister at best and a doll to play with at worst, in whom he confides his secrets but to whom he does not feel attracted), but also by the fact that John himself sees the mermaid, and thus his daughter, as an asexual being: "He does not know of any man Marion has been out with; he does not associate her with the roughness of men, […]. *She is after all a mermaid, her legs fused all the way down, sealed in the elegant lines of mother-of-pearl fishtail*" (179; emphasis mine). Thus, ultimately, although John tries to see his own, and thus Marion's, hybridity in more positive terms, he can only do so by desexualising the coloured woman. The mermaid symbol is then ambivalently constituted of the confirmation and denial of coloured identity. Being a symbol of hybridity and in-betweenness, it fits the condition of the coloureds who find themselves to be "not white enough, but not black enough either" (Adhikari 110). However, since the mermaid is seen as asexual, one of the most problematic constructs of coloured identity is negated, namely the shame of being associated with 'miscegenation' and lasciviousness. Lastly, if one remembers that the sea is the home of the mermaid, and thus the idyllic picture of home that John tries to paint for his daughter, the symbol seems to be problematised further. Samuelson argues persuasively that in Wicomb's fiction generally, and in *Playing in the Light* particularly, the sea is a place for the return of the repressed (Samuelson, "Oceanic Histories"). The image of Patricia Williams, for instance, which triggers Marion's memories of her grandmother, seems to surface from the depths of the sea: "Tokkie, it is Tokkie's face on the water" (Wicomb, *Light* 55). Besides, Cape Town and Robben Island, the latter being perhaps the most historically loaded symbol of trauma and suffering in South Africa, are bound by the sea. Robben Island belongs to the sea and seems to loom over the otherwise idyllic setting of Table Mountain. Thus, John's halcyon fantasy is founded on the most loaded archive, that of the sea, which hides repressed memories and unsettles Marion's feeling of being unhomed even further. She feels haunted in her own house, and the postcard view of Table Mountain outside is disfigured by the sea and by Robben Island, which both hold memories of trauma and loss. Hence the argument for Mari-

on having inherited her parents' feeling of loss and melancholia. Through the symbol of the mermaid and the sea as an archive of untold losses, Marion finds herself in the process of unravelling her parents' silenced pasts.

Eng and Han claim that intergenerational melancholia is a depathologised form of melancholia, since the task of mourning, and thus eventually coming to terms with one's history, is passed on to the generation of children (355). The question is, however, whether Marion finds herself able to: firstly, embrace or at least accept her coloured identity, and, secondly, whether she is able to properly mourn the losses that her parents could not acknowledge.

Throughout the novel, Marion is extremely averse to travelling. She firmly believes, for instance, that since she knows all the important sights in Europe from the travel brochures, there is no need for her to visit them:

> It is not exactly a phobia, that is too extreme a label, but Marion does have an aversion to travel. Why would anyone want to see the world from the discomfort of a suitcase? Let alone the dubious hygiene of hotels. These holidays that she enthusiastically arranges for others seem like nothing more than hard work, negotiating a foreign language and rushing about to see the sights in two or three short weeks. (Wicomb, *Light* 40)

Marion's aversion to travel does hint at her melancholic state of being "psychically stuck" (Cheng, 8). Her unwillingness to move beyond the boundaries of what is familiar mirrors her difficulty to cope with almost forgotten, repressed memories and her family's story. However, sometime after the discovery of her parents' secret Marion's attitude changes slightly. One may even state that her decision to travel overseas leads her to partly come to terms with her crisis of identity. Marion's desire to travel and her ability to come to terms with her 'newly regained' identity seems to be triggered by the transformation of the mermaid symbol. This happens at the moment when Marion imagines seeing the dugong, and not, as she initially believes, the mermaid:

> At first she thinks that Patricia Williams has returned, but then it seems to be a mermaid, holding like any mother a baby to her breast. The wind wraps strands of wet hair around the lump of baby, then when it grows fiercer the mermaid somersaults, clutching her child, and with her tail whips the water into a moonlit froth, in which she disappears. Marion would like to think that it is the sea mammal who suckles her young, the dugong whom sailors thought to be a mermaid, but the Cape is too far south for that. (Wicomb, *Light* 185–86)

Samuelson argues that the transformation of the mermaid into the dugong enables Marion to see her colouredness as less burdensome: "it leads her to a his-

torical understanding of identity and, ultimately, to the act of travel" ("Oceanic Histories" 555). This would partly tie in with what I have stated about the mermaid as a figure of asexuality and in-betweenness. In contrast, the dugong image evokes a close bond between mother and child, as it is natural for dugongs to stay with their mother for years. Additionally, the harmonious mother-child image may mean a reconsideration of the trope of shame within coloured identity. But, as Samuelson notes ("Oceanic Histories" 556), the moment is loaded with ambivalence, for Marion concludes that the image might after all just have been "a figment of her imagination" (Wicomb, *Light* 186). However, the mermaid's transformation leads Marion to finally shed her aversion against travelling and crossing oceans, and she travels to Europe in order to see the capital cities (Samuelson, "Oceanic Histories" 557). There, Marion undertakes a journey of self-discovery. Away from home, she reads novels about South Africa, namely Nadine Gordimer's *The Conservationist* and J. M. Coetzee's *In the Heart of the Country*. These lessons in reading, most critics argue (Samuelson, "Oceanic Histories"; Klopper; van der Vlies), guide Marion in the process of reconsidering her own and her country's history. She finds other "versions of herself" (Wicomb, *Light* 190), notably in South African fiction and thus may finally come to terms with her parents' decision to 'play white'. However, whether Marion really begins to take up the work of mourning for her own and her parents' past remains doubtful (Klopper 153). After coming back from Europe, her life seems to return very much to its old form: "When Marion sits at her desk, it's as if she had not been away. […] Could things really be so different, and also be the same?" (Wicomb, *Light* 212). In many ways, Marion finds herself in a transitional state between mourning and melancholia. On the one hand, she seems to have started to deal with her country's past. On the other hand, she slips all too easily into her formerly privileged 'whiteness'. Thus, one may agree with Klopper, who argues that the novel is as much a novel about mourning as about melancholia, as "the implied author knows there can be no nostalgic restoration of the past, but also that this yearning does not simply go away, that the psyche oscillates between holding on and letting go, creating fixed memorials of the past and writing fragments of remembrance on the flimsiness of paper" (155). Therefore, in contrast to her parents, who could not mourn for their losses, Marion has begun the process of grieving for, and coming to terms with, her history. One may argue that, like in Tajiri's film, Marion – embodying the second generation – has, in fact, taken on the task that her parents could not fulfil; she has not laid history to rest, but rather, uncovered what their generation negated and repressed.

2.2 "BREAK AND BE BROKEN, SHE SAID, THAT IS THE LAW OF LIFE"[14]: LOSS AND RACIAL MELANCHOLIA IN MARLENE VAN NIEKERK'S *AGAAT*

In her essay "Passing Away: The Unspeakable (Losses) of Postapartheid South Africa" Yvette Christiansë argues that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission neglected the daily narratives of loss in favour of the overarching process of coming to terms with apartheid politics: "That is to say, those losses that could not be construed as political, that were not the direct effect of the state's activities, even if they were indirectly determined or marked by them, are now under threat of remaining unarticulated" (373).

As I have mentioned in my observations on coloured identity, Christiansë focuses on the topic of passing as well as the unspoken and unmourned losses of coloured people who passed for white during apartheid. The devastating consequences of deciding to pass for white on one's psyche are central to the previous chapter on Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light*.

One fictional account which focuses on the impact that apartheid had on people's quotidian lives as well as the sheer impossibility of maintaining a close relationship 'across the colour lines' is Marlene van Niekerk's critically acclaimed novel *Agaat*. The original Afrikaans text was published in 2004, and the English translation by Michiel Heyns two years later. The novel focuses on the relationship between the white farm owner Kamilla de Wet, called Milla, and her coloured surrogate daughter/servant/nurse Agaat Lourier (whose mother was Milla's nanny and lived in the labourer's houses on Milla's mother's farm). Spanning over a period of fifty years – beginning with Kamilla's engagement in 1947 and ending with her death in 1996 – the novel tells the story of the women's lives on the farm Grootmoedersdrift in the Western Cape. After finding out that Agaat was mistreated and sexually abused by her brothers and father, Kamilla brings her to Grootmoedersdrift in 1953. Throughout the story, Milla attempts to turn the highly traumatised Agaat into a 'refined' coloured, educating her enough as to set her apart from the farm workers, yet always attempting to maintain control over her. This alienation also leads to various losses on Milla's part, especially the emotional loss of a

[14] The quote in the title is from van Niekerk's novel (341). Although I am quoting from the international English translation, entitled *The Way of the Women*, I will refer to the novel by using its original title, *Agaat*.

potential mother-daughter bond with Agaat which was tainted when Milla degraded her to a servant.

Because the story is told from Milla's point of view, Agaat's voice is largely silenced. The novel has four narrative strands: the first one depicts the dying, paralysed Milla, who suffers from motor neuron disease, chained to her sickbed in the year 1996 and nursed by Agaat. Significantly, the public TRC hearings also began in 1996, indicating that the novel can and should be read against the TRC. Additionally, it is characteristic of Agaat that events which are important for the character's private lives coincide with significant dates in South African history. For example, it is likely that Agaat is born in 1948 when the National Party wins the elections and apartheid officially begins, whereas Jakkie is born in 1960, the year in which the Sharpeville Massacre takes place.

In this first-person narrative, the present – which is always entangled with events of the past on Grootmoedersdrift – is described: Milla at times feels guilty, but more often than not her spiteful and suspicious feelings towards Agaat resurface. Despite the fact that Milla attempts to seek a reconciliatory attitude towards Agaat on her death bed, she also seems to be in need of justification for what has happened between them.

The second narrative strand consists of flashbacks, beginning in the year 1947, when Milla married her patriarchal, conservative, and radically segregationist husband Jak. The flashbacks lead up to the year 1985 when Milla's and Jak's son Jakkie deserts the army and flees the country. This narrative strand is particularly interesting as Milla remains the narrator. However, it is narrated in the second person singular. Second person narratives, according to Monika Fludernik, are narratives "as narrative whose (main) protagonist is referred to by means of an address pronoun (usually you)" and adds "that second-person texts frequently also have an explicit communicative level on which a narrator (speaker) tells the story of the 'you' to (sometimes) the 'you' protagonist's absent or dead, wiser self" (288). In the case of *Agaat* it certainly serves as a distancing tool, even a rejection of both Milla's present and past self, since the second person singular questions certain things that happened in the past. Thus, the second person singular narration places Milla's character and her actions under an even more critical lens. While Fludernik argues that a second-person narrative "provokes much greater initial empathy with second-person protagonists than with first- or third-person characters" (286), I suggest that it is the opposite case in *Agaat*. Rather than empathy with Milla, the second-person narrative strand provokes repulsion and an inability or unwillingness to empathise with the novel's protagonist.

The third strand consists of diary entries written by Milla in non-chronological order and a highly fragmented form with no regard for punctuation and often using ellipses. They focus on how Milla found Agaat, how she rescued her, and nursed her back to life. Subsequently, Agaat becomes a kind of surrogate daughter for the childless Milla, however the latter must maintain a clear boundary as she knows that a mother-child relationship between a white woman and a coloured girl is impossible in an apartheid state. Also, when Milla is pregnant after 12 years of marriage, she reinforces this boundary by pushing Agaat out of the house and into the back room – a space which has, in South Africa, always belonged to servants. Agaat henceforth has the role of childminder, housekeeper, and farm assistant for the white family. Milla's diaries, originally written as a testimonial of Milla's work in raising and forming Agaat, whom she prides herself on having humanised (van Niekerk, *Agaat* 403), are being read to her by Agaat in the present, despite Milla's request to have them burnt.

The last narrative strand is very different from the others in that it does not tell a story (whether linear or non-linear), but is Milla's stream of consciousness on the two protagonist's relationship, on Milla's health and Agaat's role as a nurse, written in lyrical style in which Milla's voice is still predominantly discernible.

The different narrative strands are framed by a prologue and an epilogue, which are both a first-person account of Milla's son Jakkie's journey to and from South Africa when his mother dies. Both pro- and epilogue form a significant frame for the novel since these are the only two moments in which Milla's and Agaat's relationship is commented on by a person other than Milla. Besides, Jakkie's "detached ironic voice introduces a necessary caveat to the liberatory potential of Milla's fantasy of reconciliation" (Rossman 34) that Milla has towards the end of the novel.

As the brief description of the four narrative strands already indicates, the novel both is and is not telling Agaat's story, since all of them are dominated by Milla's voice. Agaat is thus, even on a narrative level, marginalised. However, it has often been noted that Agaat uses mimicry in order to subvert her white mistress' rule over her (Carvalho and van Vuuren; Rossmann; Stobie, "Ruth"). Moreover, suffering from bulbar paralysis, Milla finds herself depending on Agaat, a dependency which has been considered symbolic of the gradual subversion of power structures on the farm (Buxbaum, "Remembering"; Carvalho and van Vuuren). Nonetheless, critics seem to have largely overlooked Agaat's discriminatory behaviour towards the other coloured farm

residents. By drawing on Anne Cheng's concept of racial melancholia, I argue that this behaviour can be seen as Agaat's attempt to painfully and melancholically repress and at the same time remember a part of her coloured identity which she has to negate in the first place in order to gain acceptance by Milla. The topics of melancholia and loss in *Agaat* may furthermore be seen as a productive counter-narrative to the TRC's attempt at mourning and subsequent closure.

Agaat is van Niekerk's second novel, preceded by *Triomf* and followed by *Memorandum: A Story with Paintings*, in collaboration with Adrian van Zyl. She has also written several short story and poetry volumes which have not yet been translated into English. In 2015, van Niekerk was shortlisted for the Man Booker International Prize for her oeuvre. In all her novels, there is a recurrence of two fundamental similarities, despite many differences in style, setting and central topics: First, one finds four protagonists in all novels who have intimately close relationships. In *Agaat* and *Triomf* two families of four are portrayed, while *Memorandum* focuses on two very different friendships between sick and dying men. What is also striking is the recurring topic of disabled, speaking bodies; *Memorandum*, a novel which is accompanied by paintings by Adrian van Zyl, is essentially about sickness and dying. In a conversation with the author, van Niekerk stated that *Memorandum* was predominantly a work of mourning, since Adrian van Zyl was already very ill by the time they began their collaboration (van Niekerk, Personal Interview). However, even more striking are the parallels between Agaat and the Benade's disabled son Lambert in *Triomf*. Both have a marginalised position within the family structure (they occupy the back room, for instance), and they both oscillate between being outcasts in their families and society and having an extraordinary amount of manipulative power and force over the lives of the other family members.

Agaat has, due to a prenatal injury, a deformed right arm, which she hides beneath a longer sleeve. She is also not able to have children, because of having suffered multiple violations at the hands of her brothers and father. Agaat's double disability – her dysfunctional arm and her inability to bear children – serve as melancholy markers to highlight her position as an inherently marginalised character. Her inability to bear children is closely linked to Milla's management of Agaat's identity, as connections can be drawn between Agaat's barrenness and Milla's attempts to maintain control over Agaat's colouredness, and thus of her attempt to desexualise Agaat's coloured body.

OF QUOTIDIAN LOSSES, POWER STRUCTURES, AND MIMING INJURIES: RACIAL MELANCHOLIA IN *AGAAT*

Recalling Cheng's definition of racial melancholia, one finds that both phenomena, dominant racial melancholia and the melancholy of the racialised subjects, though manifesting themselves in different forms, have to be seen as mutually defining. As I have outlined in Chapter 1, Cheng pointedly describes both the melancholy of the racialised subjects and white dominant melancholia as complicated processes of "racial rejection and desire on the parts of whites and non-whites" (xi). This becomes very clear within the novel: Milla's melancholic attempt of keeping Agaat under control triggers complex and ambivalent reactions in Agaat's psyche, but also bears Agaat's desire to internalise the white ideal as a consequence. Thus, both Milla's and Agaat's psyches are entangled, and their interdependencies must be noted.

These processes of interdependency are reminiscent of the writings of Frantz Fanon, especially his seminal *Black Skin, White Masks,* where he describes the intricate and complex relationship between the colonisers and colonised people. He emphasises, for example, that the desire of (formerly) colonised people for a white ideal is triggered by the racist and cruel behaviour of colonisers: "There is a fact: white men consider themselves superior to black men. There is another fact: Black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect" (10).

By putting these two facts into relation, Fanon implies that the second fact is merely a consequence of the first, that is to say, colonialism and racism trigger or lead to inferiority complexes and an internalisation of the white ideal on the part of people of colour. Dominant racial melancholia – that is, the exclusion yet retention of power over the racial others (Cheng 10) – resonates with Fanon's views and found its most extreme form during apartheid in South Africa. Cheng further describes dominant racial melancholia as "dominant, white culture's rejection of yet attachment to the racial other […] who has been placed in a suspended position" (xi). The apartheid regime's segregationist laws were very explicit methods of excluding black and coloured people, while still maintaining control over them.

In *Agaat* these dynamics of exclusion, retention, and suspension manifest themselves in a quotidian form. Milla tries to exercise control over Agaat during their very first encounter. After being alerted by her mother that things are not going right down in the labourers' houses on the farm, Milla visits her old nanny's home and finds Agaat in the cottage, close to the fireplace. After a

couple of failed attempts to speak to the totally scared and neglected child, a moment occurs between Milla and Agaat that is loaded with vampire motifs:

> You turned your head with you ear against the child's face and imitated the ggggg-sound. You could feel her breath on your face. This time you heard the ggggg clearly, like a sigh it sounded, like a rill in the fynbos, very soft, and distant, like the sound you hear before you've even realised what you're hearing. That was the beginning. That sound. You felt empty and full at the same time from it, felt sorrow and pity surging in your throat. Ggggg at the back of the throat, as if it were a sound that belonged to yourself. You stood back and clasped your arms around your body. Something convulsed in your lower belly. You put your hands to your face as if you wanted to trace with your fingers the expression that you felt here to make sure. You didn't want to go home right away, wanted to hold it fast a while longer. […] And you wanted to gather it, fold it away inside yourself in a place from which you could safely retrieve it, at night in your bed, in the half-hour of privacy while you were having your bath, on your evening walk. (van Niekerk, *Agaat* 589–590)

Milla is not only literally incorporating a part of Agaat, which foreshadows her state of melancholia, but she also sees herself as having gained something that she cannot name yet, but which belongs only to her now, something which she "could retrieve from inside [herself]" (590). This image of Milla sucking something out of Agaat and incorporating it into her own being is rendered even more vampiric if one considers the accompanying sound.[15] The guttural "ggg" that Milla discerns when she demands to know the girl's name is closely linked to Agaat's whole being; the harsh "g" in Agaat's name, as well as the occurrence of this sound in nature. During his last return visit from the army, before he deserts and emigrates to Canada, Milla's son Jakkie states: "Do you remember, Gaat? The sound of the sea in a shell? The sound of the wind in the wheat? Do you remember how you made me listen? And everything sounded like your name" (528). Thus, the guttural sound that Milla hears on first encountering Agaat is connected with life, movement, and uncontrollable elements of nature. Because Milla refers to the sound as "the beginning" of their relationship, and also because she incorporates something of that sound by symbolically sucking it out of Agaat's being, I consider this vampiric scene in which the child is left with the feeling that Milla owns her, as a key moment for understanding the two women's relationship. From the

[15] The vampire motifs have been overlooked by most critics. But in the conversation with Leon de Kok as well as in an interview with myself, conducted in April 2014, van Niekerk draws attention to this scene, describing it as loaded with vampire motifs (de Kok, "Intimate Enemies" 142; van Niekers, Personal Interview).

very beginning a power struggle is discernible (Milla demands to know the girl's name while Agaat cannot or will not answer) and Agaat shields herself from the approaching woman, while Milla sees herself as her 'saviour when she says: "'Tell me, then you come to me, then I'll stop them hurting you, the oumies says they do bad things to you'" (589). Milla tries from the very beginning to 'own' Agaat, to elevate herself to a saviour figure, and also to bend her to her will by punishing her. Hence, she threatens Agaat with asking her violent father instead when she does not tell Milla her name. The mechanisms that define dominant racial melancholia – the incorporation and retention by discrimination of the racial other, dynamics of desire and rejection – are already very much at play in this scene.

An essential component to their relationship, which becomes clear only when Milla takes Agaat to the farm, however, is the white woman's attempt of othering Agaat, of keeping a boundary between herself and the coloured child. This is visible on multiple levels, and is always accompanied by Milla's extremely ambivalent attitude towards her surrogate daughter. After taking Agaat to Grootmoedersdrift, for instance, Milla attempts to 'humanise' the little girl. On the one hand, she tries to heal the child's wounds and she also gives Agaat a private education in Afrikaans, not only in the daily language, but above all in music, rhymes, and folk tales:

> Milla teaches the intelligent girl from key texts one for each aspect of knowledge which she is expected to learn, allowing for no deviation from the one authority […]. Agaat's four master narratives are: The Bible for spiritual matters, a handbook for farmers for agricultural matters, an Afrikaans folk-song book for cultural matters, and a book on embroidery for a practical – and appropriately feminine and domestic – form of aesthetics. (Stobie, "Somewhere" 63)

Thus, Agaat's 'education' is marked by several ambivalences: For one thing, the texts from which Agaat learns symbolise the indoctrination of Judeo-Christian and Afrikaner nationalist beliefs which Milla propagates with no thought towards other modes of life and thinking. Milla sees this as her missionary duty; the 'humanitarian', 'civilised' white woman rescues a poor coloured child from devastation. She thus refers to the task of taking care of Agaat as "commission" and her "vocation" (van Niekerk, *Agaat* 438). Milla's attitude becomes even clearer, however, when one looks at the dedication which she wrote in her diary, which Jakkie finds after his mother's death and which emphasises Milla's self-stylising as saviour figure:

> *As directed by the Almighty God, Ruler of our joint Destinies and Keeper of the Book of Life, I Kamilla de Wet (nee Redelinghuys) dedicate this journal to the history of Agaat Lourier, daughter of Maria Lourier of Barrydale and Damon (Joppies) Steefert of Worcester so that there may be a record one day of her being chosen and of the precious opportunities granted to her on the farm Grootmoedersdrift of a Christian education and of all the privileges of a good Afrikaner home. So that in reading this one day she may ponder the unfathomable ways of Providence, who worked through me, His obedient servant and woman of His people, to deliver her from the bitter deprivation in which she certainly would have perished as an outcast amongst her own people. I pray for mercy to fulfil this great task of education that I have undertaken to the glory of God to the best of my ability. Let His will be done.* (609–610; italics in the original)

The dedication also shows Milla's arrogant attitude towards Agaat. By imagining herself as a saviour figure, she is able to overlook her cruel behaviour towards the child, believing that Agaat should be grateful for having been raised under the Afrikaner woman's care.

Although Milla believes that she takes care of Agaat as well as she can, even calling her "my child" (593), she treats the traumatised girl very harshly just before transporting her to the farm, displaying her ambivalent attitude towards the child: "You held the dropper of valerian at the ready and on entering grabbed the child, clamped fast her head, forced open her mouth" (603). This pattern of oscillation – between seeing Agaat as her child, yet distancing herself from her in the next instance – is repeated throughout Agaat's whole childhood and can be read as a sign of complicity with the apartheid regime on the one hand, and of dominant white melancholia that Milla feels towards the child on the other. For example, at one moment Milla crawls into bed with Agaat after a row with her husband, Jak (565), but then she refuses to transcend racial boundaries for Agaat's sake: "Too much intimacy not a good thing now. She must learn *to know her place here*" (506, emphasis mine). And according to apartheid's categorisations, Agaat's place is not one of a surrogate daughter, but of a servant. Milla prepares her for this role from early on: "I'm getting Agaat used to her role in the house. Put an apple box in front of the sink so that she can reach. Now washes the coffee cups every morning for me" (512).

Through this othering and through different means of verbal and physical violence, she attempts to control Agaat, shaping her according to her own preferences. This is where Milla's dominant racial melancholia plays itself out most drastically. On the one hand, Agaat is Milla's object of love whom she has incorporated from the very beginning of their relationship. On the other hand, Agaat is also always lost to her due to her position as the racial other.

Milla, who "can neither fully relinquish nor accommodate" (Cheng xi) Agaat, constantly attempts to retain her by discriminating against and marginalising her.

Moreover, within Milla's and Agaat's relationship, apartheid laws are implemented on a daily basis. For example, Agaat is not allowed to enter spaces designated for whites only. She must always remain outside, in the car, or in spaces where she cannot be seen by other white people. Milla is very aware that this could become "a problem" (van Niekerk, *Agaat* 512) from early on. When she takes Agaat to town with her in 1954, for instance, she asks "What about Agaat?" (516) when her friend Beatrice suggests that they go for a cool drink in the Good Hope Café. While Beatrice suggests cold-heartedly that Agaat should wait outside, Milla opts for a table close to the kitchen, which is shielded from the other guests' view so that Agaat's presence in the Whites Only café does not 'offend' (516).

During Jakkie's childhood and adolescence, the de Wet family often visits Witsands for a beach holiday and Milla reflects: "perhaps [Agaat] wants to swim. Please just at a time and place where she won't offend because the beach is for whites only. Not that I needed to say it. She knows her place" (283). This reveals both Milla's unquestioning subscription to apartheid's laws and her confidence in her training of Agaat, who Milla now believes knows her compound 'place' in the de Wet household – of owned object and marginalised, excluded other.

Consequently, it is out of the question that Agaat should carry Jakkie into the church at his Christening ceremony, although she is as close as his own mother to him, if not closer: she helps to deliver the baby, and besides she, unlike Milla, lactates and thus breastfeeds Jakkie clandestinely. Milla's reaction to Agaat's plea is quite telling: "I ask you! Won't I big-please get the Dominee's permission. Now obviously this is totally out of the question!" (197–98). She never eats with the family and has her own enamel dishes, which Milla marks "so that they couldn't get mixed up with those of the other servants" (522). Cheryl Stobie argues that Milla, by the mere fact of having adopted Agaat, can be seen as a person who finds herself situated between the marginalised other and the oppressive Afrikaner society. Borrowing the term from Trinh Minh-ha, she states that Milla is "not quite the same, not quite the other. She stands in that indeterminate threshold where she constantly drifts in and out" (Trinh qtd. in Stobie, "Ruth" 62). This is certainly true in the first months after Agaat's adoption, since Milla's decision to adopt the girl is met with criticism by the white community. For instance, her friend Beatrice lets her know that

her relationship with Agaat is regarded as abnormal (van Niekerk, *Agaat* 573). Also, Jak refuses to have anything to do with Agaat's upbringing (507). Thus, Milla finds herself alienated from society to a certain degree. However, as the text passages above show, she refuses to go against apartheid's rules for Agaat's sake. Thus, Milla is, from the very beginning, complicit with the apartheid regime and its racist ideologies. However, because Milla has no children of her own, and because she does invest a lot of time and effort in Agaat's upbringing (Stobie, "Ruth" 62), she becomes emotionally attached to Agaat and thus finds it difficult to maintain boundaries (van Niekerk, *Agaat* 570).

This, however, changes significantly when Milla becomes pregnant after 12 years of marriage and gives birth to her only son Jakkie in 1960. Agaat, who may have previously been regarded as a surrogate daughter by Milla, is now officially degraded to a servant. She is given the back room and will henceforth have the role of childminder and farm assistant to the white family. This has devastating consequences for the two women's relationship, which is loaded with tension, suspicion, and punishment. On Milla's side this punishment is open, while Agaat can only punish her mistress by silent acts of defiance and by drawing Milla's son closer to herself than he is to his own mother. For example, when Agaat is not allowed to carry Jakkie during his christening, she refuses to attend the ceremony altogether and she wilfully sets the farm into a state of disarray during the festivities:

> A. in a mighty huff. As good as her baking was for Dominee's visit so disastrous was everything for the christening tea. Deliberately upset a jug of milk on the tray & the guests' shoes were full of dogshit because she hadn't swept the garden path. Remained sitting in the car during the christening service even though Dominee had said she could sit in the side-room & listen to the service. Didn't even want to pose in the little church park with the blue cranes for a photo with Jakkie in his christening robe. (199–200; punctuation and abbreviations in the original)

The greatest punishment for Milla is, however, that Agaat has a closer relationship with her son than his parents. This is visible from very early on. Agaat does not only help to deliver the baby and thus develops a close bond with Jakkie from the start but, significantly, she also lactates and subsequently breastfeeds Jakkie clandestinely while Milla has "so little milk" (183). Milla discovers that Agaat is breastfeeding Jakkie by chance and describes the scene as follows:

> There is A. with her back to me on the apple box in front of her bed. Hr one shoulder bare the crooked bones of the deformed side wide open to view &c I look &c I see & I can't believe what I see perhaps I dreamed it the apron's shoulder band is off fk. the sleeve of the dress hangs empty &c her head is bent to the child on her lap. Could just see his little feet sticking out on the one side. Perfectly contented. […] I listen to the little sounds it sucks &c sighs it's a whole language out there in the outside room. (186; punctuation and abbreviations in the original)

The fact that Agaat lactates even though she herself is a mere child can certainly be read as a symbol for her closeness to and love for Jakkie. However, Agaat's breastfeeding also points to something else: Firstly, she defies segregationist apartheid laws by an act of motherly love 'across the colour line' since breastfeeding is perhaps the most intimate connection between a mother and a newborn child. Secondly, and more importantly with regard to acts of punishment and moments of tension between the two women, Agaat is able to do what Milla is not since the latter is unable to breastfeed her son. Milla is shocked, and finds herself almost unable to write down what she has seen in her diary (186). However, because she has witnessed the scene secretly, she does not confront Agaat about it. The fact that Agaat clandestinely breastfeeds Jakkie, however, is a relevant example of how she uses her emotional bond to the child in order to inflict a psychological punishment on her 'mistress'.

For Milla, in turn, Agaat's colouredness becomes a much more prominent issue after degrading her to the position of servant. Racial retention (Cheng 10) and desexualising Agaat are central concerns for the white woman during Agaat's adolescence. From the start of their relationship, Milla refers to racial markers which highlight Agaat's colouredness and all the ambivalences and stereotypical views that have circled around coloured identity in South Africa. From the very beginning of Agaat's adoption Milla seems to be repulsed by the coloured body of the child. In 1954 she writes in a diary entry: "I can't help it, sometimes she nauseates me (yes, I'm ashamed of myself, but it's true!). The long jaw, the bulbous eyes that can glare so coercively, the untameable woolly mop" (van Niekerk, *Agaat* 517–18). And when Agaat asks her whether she is Milla's child, the latter replies: "You're my little monkey" (514). Agaat is always racialised by Milla, who, as long as Agaat is still a child, cannot help but feel close to Agaat despite herself: "We are one, Agaat and I, I feel it stir in my navel" (468). The unity and oneness which she feels when she is with Agaat again indicates Milla's melancholic ambivalence towards her surrogate daughter. This closeness or oneness, the image of one having incorporated the other,

stands in stark contrast to the harsh treatment that Agaat receives at the hands of Milla. Milla thus ambivalently oscillates between love and hate for the child; between the incorporation and rejection of Agaat as her object of love since Agaat represents the racial other that must be rejected by apartheid's laws and ideologies.

When Agaat officially becomes the family's servant on her twelfth birthday, Milla actively tries to control Agaat's coloured body, more specifically her hair and her sexuality, which again points to the racial rejection of the young girl by her white 'mistress'. When Agaat is shown her future room, after a devastating experience in which she had to slaughter her own hanslammer,[16] Milla tells her what she expects of her in the future:

> And I opened the little curtain taterata-a-a! and showed the black uniform dresses. That's all you'll wear six days a week then you can save your house clothes I said & I showed they all had nice extra long right sleeves as she likes it *&c* I showed I had specially sewn on broad white cuffs for her. Explained about the aprons one for every day of the week. See that they're always clean *&c* stiffly starched & ironed. […] Underlined I don't ever want to see stains *&c* creases on hr uniform when she's working in the house […] The caps were the most difficult. I said I know you don't like things on your head but you'll just have to like it or lump it. Asked her nicely she must put on a clean one every day *&c* pin it up nicely. […] *I thought I'd show her how to put on the cap &c I said I don't want to see a strand of hair*. (111–12; abbreviations and punctuation in the original, emphasis mine)

It is noteworthy that she is intent on taming Agaat's hair, which had always been a source of annoyance for Milla. She is at times disgusted by it (512), and mentions at some point during Agaat's childhood that she "can't manage the woolly head all that well" (565). From Milla's perspective, the cap hides a racial marker, which, according to Mercer, "has been historically devalued as the most visible stigmata of blackness, second only to skin" (Mercer qtd. in Eras-

[16] This particular scene has been analysed by various critics, such as Stobie or Rossmann, for example. It does not become entirely clear to what extent Milla deliberately chooses Agaat's hanslammer in order to instruct her in slaughtering. Stobie writes that the coloured farm workers choose the hanslammer, because they are jealous of Agaat's privileged position in the de Wet household as a means of revenge (Stobie, "Ruth" 64). In any case, Milla does not defend Agaat, but forces her to slaughter the lamb, even though the little girl is clearly repulsed by the idea. I read this as Milla's attempt to show Agaat that the power structures on the farm will change now. By letting Agaat kill the hanslammer, Milla cruelly rips Agaat's childhood away from her, an act which simultaneously allows Milla to appease her own guilty conscience: Because Agaat is forced into adulthood, Milla no longer sees her as a poor, innocent child, and thus she can justify the marginalisation and exclusion of Agaat.

mus, "Hair" 381).[17] This indicates, for Milla at least, that Agaat has been properly 'tamed' and 'put in her place'. It is telling that Milla sees Agaat only once without her cap during her adult life:

> It was the first time in twenty years that you'd seen her without her cap. You felt as if you'd caught her naked […] The unkempt hair mass made her look feral. You wanted to look away, but you couldn't. The hair filled the otherwise tidy room like a conspiracy against everything in league with daylight and subordination" (van Niekerk, *Agaat* 415).

Alyssa Carvalho and Helize van Vuuren argue that "[t]he subservience inherent in Agaat's cap is therefore at odds with the unruliness of her hair and suggests that she has a binary identity, split between her role as compliant servant and bold dissident" (51). In encountering Agaat without her cap, Milla is confronted with the fact that the cap may hide what she does not want to see, but it certainly does not entirely restrain Agaat's 'untameable nature'.

It is not only Agaat's hair which Milla is bent on 'taming', but also her sexuality. From early on it is clear that Agaat will not be able to bear children. This is a consequence of her having suffered multiple violations at her parents' home. Milla's reaction – "all the better, we [Milla and the Doctor] both of us thought" (van Niekerk, *Agaat* 430) – shows that she does not want Agaat to have children, as she associates colouredness with 'miscegenation', that is, the shameful and violent encounter between the colonisers and the colonised black women in South Africa. This is further emphasised when she warns Agaat not to get pregnant:

> If you start bleeding between your legs every month I said to her you're a risk here on Gdrift you can bring to nought everything that we've done for you & I know you wander about after dark & if I ever catch you in the labourers' houses or discover you've been to D. & his crowd at night I'll give you the boot in the blink of an eye" (150; punctuation and abbreviations in the original).

Thus, Milla can only accept Agaat in her home if she is able to retain, hide, and 'tame' racial signs that would otherwise display, in the white woman's eyes, her 'shameful' coloured subjectivity. This is quite similar to John's attitude towards his daughter in Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* analysed above: Only by desexualising Marion's coloured body can he accept his daughter.

[17] For a detailed analysis of the importance of hairstyle for the formation of coloured identities see Erasmus ("Hair").

Despite the fact that she constantly others Agaat, Milla does not want her to mix with the coloured farm workers either (van Niekerk, *Agaat* 150, 563), instilling the idea in the child that she is too 'refined' for their company. Agaat is being maintained, trapped as it were, in an alternative, yet still racially categorised, space that is defined by Milla. This has devastating consequences for Agaat's psyche.

Cheng states that while dominant racial melancholia expresses itself through the aforementioned dynamics of exclusion yet retention of the racial others, the melancholy of the racialised subjects may be seen as the consequence of a desire for a "never-possible perfection" (xi), that is to say, the desire to gain acceptance by white society by being recognized as equal. In other words, racial exclusion in the form of the non-acceptance of people of colour within society may lead to the very desire to strive for a white ideal, which in turn fuels a crisis of one's coloured identity.

Agaat's in-between position (by the farm workers she is perceived as white, while for Milla she will ultimately remain coloured), leads her to constantly affirm, yet simultaneously negate, her coloured subjectivity. Van Vuuren and Carvalho have noted that despite the fact that Agaat's voice is largely silenced throughout the text, Agaat performs mimicry in order to subvert her white mistress's rule over her:

> Armed with the culture, or 'tools' of her foster mother, Agaat attempts to 'break down the house of the master', or to challenge the white woman's dominant perspective and provide another dimension to the story she tells. (40)

In his seminal essay "Of Mimicry and Man", in *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha explains that: "[t]he effect of mimicry is camouflage… It is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled – exactly like the technique of camouflage practised in human warfare" (85). With regard to postcolonial power relations and identity formation Bhabha defines the concept of mimicry in the following manner:

> colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. […] mimicry emerges as a representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry is, thus the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it

> visualizes power. Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate, however, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an imminent threat to both 'normalized' knowledges and disciplinary powers. (86)

Mechanisms of mimicry in *Agaat* are visible on two levels. Firstly, Milla provides Agaat with the "tools" (Carvalho and van Vuuren 40) to perform mimicry since she is at great pains to give her an education (albeit an extremely limited one in terms of precisely what she teaches Agaat). Here, Milla acts out her desire to turn Agaat into a "reformed, recognizable Other" (Bhabha 86). This is palpable when one considers how Milla gives Agaat her name. When Milla brings Agaat to the farm, she has no name for the child, since in Agaat's home she seems to be called by nicknames only (van Niekerk, *Agaat* 438). Hence Milla confers with the dominee a few months after Agaat's arrival on Grootmoedersdrift and the dominee suggests she call her Agaat: "it's Dutch for Agatha, it's close to the sound of Asgat with the guttural 'g', it's a semi-precious stone I say, quite, he says, you only see the value of it if *it's correctly polished, but that's not all, look with me in the book here, it's from the Greek 'agathos' which means 'good'. And if your name is good, he says, it's a self-fulfilling prophecy*" (438; emphasis mine). Milla's desire to make Agaat 'recognisable' thus reflects in her choice of naming the child. She is intent on making a 'good' person out of Agaat in order for her to "become human" (504). It is of course, however, only Milla's definition of 'goodness' and 'humanity' that counts because Agaat, as I have shown, remains excluded.

Agaat, in turn, uses the "tools" (Carvalho and van Vuuren 40) in order to subvert Milla's rules and regulations. This is evident, for instance, when one looks at Agaat's cap, which is embroidered with signs and symbols that are indecipherable to Milla.[18] Also, Agaat teaches Jakkie the folksongs and rhymes that Milla taught her, "but what she makes of it is the Lord knows a veritable Babel" (van Niekerk, *Agaat* 329). This is again reminiscent of Bhabha's observations since Agaat "speaks in a tongue that is forked, not false" (85).

Despite her being relegated to the back room, Agaat does have power over Milla. She does not only know what is going on at the farm, but she is always the first to spot signs of disasters that unfold on Grootmoedersdrift, after which she plays a central role in rescuing men, animals, and the farm itself – for instance, she is central in helping to prevent the farm from burning down when a fire breaks out on Jakkie's 25th birthday party, shortly before he leaves

[18] For a more detailed analysis of the role of embroidery and especially Agaat's cap see Stobie ("Ruth").

the country (van Niekerk, *Agaat* 553–554). When Jak becomes more interested in the upbringing of Jakkie, wanting to separate him from Milla and Agaat, Agaat throws herself into the middle of the manipulative battles fought between Milla and Jak and sides with whomever it is more convenient for her own good. For instance, during Jakkie's childhood Agaat excludes Milla from her activities with Jakkie. In a diary entry from October 1964 Milla writes:

> They disappear like mice nowadays. Only have to take turn away once &C to call when I miss them & then I know it's too late for searching they want to be GONE. Wind and cloud they are together fern & water. Long hours together &c full of secrets. Something about it makes me anxious. […] & Jakkie not yet five and so attached to her one would swear she is his actual mother. Perhaps she is. (265; abbreviations, punctuation, and ellipses in the original)

Agaat thus manages better than his parents to influence and shape Jakkie's identity – not only by genuine love, but above all by the same manipulative strategies Jak uses.[19] Jak attempts to distance Jakkie from both Milla and Agaat by, firstly, sending him to boarding school (349) and secondly, by organising trips to the mountains and other sports activities when Jakkie is around for the weekends or holidays (367). On one such weekend Jakkie says he has injured his leg during rugby training. Consequently, he cannot go hiking with his father. It turns out that the injury was a scheme and Milla wonders whose idea it was:

> Was it all Jakkie's scheme? Thought up on his own? Jak had just recently acquired television on the farm. Perhaps Jakkie wanted to stay at home watching sport rather than go mountaineering, or just wanted to relax at home? Perhaps Agaat wanted to watch television? Perhaps she wanted to get Jak away from there, because he'd forbidden her to watch television, didn't want her to see too much of the school riots in the north. (371)

Using her presence in Jakkie's life and other, more symbolic means, Agaat marks her 'territory' on the farm. Lara Buxbaum argues convincingly that Agaat, though marginalised by Milla, still affirms her "destabilising presence" ("Embodying" 40) on the farm, by planting fennel seeds all over Grootmoedersdrift. The seeds are given to her by Milla during her childhood. When Milla

[19] In a conversation with Marlene van Niekerk, Toni Morrison describes Agaat's and Jakkie's relationship as the only 'innocent' one, which consists of pure love (Morrison, "In Conversation"). I would argue that while it is true that their relationship is extremely close and perhaps the most tender one in the novel, it is not without ambivalences, especially on Agaat's part, who wants to alienate Jakkie from Milla as revenge for her own marginalisation (van Niekerk, *Agaat* 617–18).

orders her to remove the fennel, she refuses to do so and says: "they're my plants" (van Niekerk, *Agaat* 564). In one of Milla's diary entries from December 1966 she reports that Agaat even says that the fennel is her "trademark" (180). Jak ironically calls her "Minister of Fennel" (564) when she is still a little child. Buxbaum argues that "Agaat's fennel seeds exist as a means of challenging apartheid's cartographic discourse […]. The fennel, then, metonymically represents [Agaat's] body which exists as a 'blind spot' on the landscape, in Milla's narrative [and] in apartheid cartography" ("Embodying" 40).

However, I would like to argue that there is a somewhat more problematic side to the formation of Agaat's identity apart from her role as marginal figure who resists categorisation. In a deeply troubling way, where the novel reminds one of texts such as Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, Agaat repeats, or mimes, the injuries inflicted upon her by Milla. Agaat is, from the very beginning of her life on the farm, denied the possibility of, firstly, overcoming the loss of her familiar environment, for as violent as that life was, she was torn out of a familiar context without further explanation. Besides, she seems to have had an emotional bond with her older sister Lise. Secondly, while Milla ensures the child's physical healing from her childhood trauma, she never helps her to mourn or work through what happened to her, treating her harshly instead, inflicting punishment on Agaat until she bends to her will; for instance, she is frequently locked up in her room or denied food until she does what Milla demands her to do (e.g. van Niekerk, *Agaat* 423, 502, 503). During her childhood and adolescence Agaat mimes these injuries, which always have to do with power and marginalisation, punishment, and the deliberate infliction of pain, while her childhood trauma of having been maltreated by her father and brothers remains unspeakable, buried under the injuries caused by Milla (Buxbaum, "Remembering" 94). The first scene in which she mimes what Milla does to her seems comparatively harmless, but it needs to be read in line with the second, somewhat more unsettling scene, which is an extension of what happens during Agaat's childhood.

The first instance in which Agaat mimes Milla's cruel behaviour occurs after Milla threatens her with phoning the police in order to tell them that Agaat has misbehaved:

> Gave her a good fright, pretended to be phoning the police, made as if I was telling the constable on the phone how naughty she was, asked that they should come and take her away and lock her up in a cell with bars behind a great iron

> door without food and without pee-pot […] Now she's good and terrified of the telephone. (van Niekerk, *Agaat* 517)

A couple of days later, Milla realises that Agaat repeats this scene, that Milla repeatedly acts out to scare her, on a doll that Agaat plays with:

> Wouldn't there be an inquisition of the rag doll on the telephone stool! She deliberately places the doll filled with river sand in such a position that she *has to fall off. Then she falls off, then she gets a slap, then she falls off, then she gets a finger in the eye!* Sit, doll, sit! If you can't sit up straight nicely and look at me, and answer me when I speak to you, then I'm phoning the police! […] hello police? Come and fetch her, lock her up! She's full of stuffing! (518; emphasis mine)

It is not so much Agaat's words that accompany this scene which are unsettling, but rather the fact that she exerts physical and psychological power over the rag-doll by forcing her to fall off the stool and by slapping her and putting her finger into her eye. However, what is most unsettling about this telephone scene is, above all, the power struggle between Agaat and her foster mother, whereby in the repetition Agaat acts out Milla's part.[20]

This repetition of Agaat's trauma recurs again during her teenage years. However, this time, the object of her rage is not the rag-doll. In a scene reminiscent of Maxine Hong Kingston's bathroom-scene in *The Woman Warrior* where the protagonist directs her rage against "the fantasmatic likeness of [herself]" (Cheng, 18),[21] Agaat treats the coloured farm workers and their families with extreme aggression[22] after she is sent to them by Milla in order to hand out medication after pork measles had broken out on the farm:

> You [Milla] heard her scolding before you even saw her. You peered round the corner. You saw how she grabbed the children by the hair and pulled their heads back and clamped their noses until they opened their mouths. With every spoonful she scolded. This is what you get for shitting in the bushes like wild things! […] Rubbish! She screeched and she up and kicked, one, two kicks into the bundle with her black school shoes so that they dispersed chowchow. (van Niekerk, *Agaat* 258–59)

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[20] This scene invokes Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, where Claudia, the narrator, has fantasies about dismantling her blond, blue-eyed dolls.

[21] For a more detailed analysis of Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* see Chapter 2 of Cheng's *The Melancholy of Race*.

[22] Rossmann (39) is, to my knowledge, the only critic who focuses on the relationship between Agaat and the coloured farm workers, noting that she treats them tyrannically.

Here, Agaat mimes, in a traumatic repetition, Milla's cruel behaviour towards herself when she was brought to the farm (603). She may also be shamefully reminded of her own childhood when she refused to use the toilet, but defecated in the garden instead, for which Milla punished her (436). Milla's cruel attempt to 'tame' Agaat and to 'put her in her place' is repeated by Agaat who, in this scene, others the coloured farm workers, just as she has been othered by her white foster. Incidentally, Milla becomes complicit in Agaat's behaviour, since she witnesses her berating the farm workers and chooses not to intervene:

> You felt the people looking at you, at you and your child and Agaat. She jutted out her chin and returned their stares and you wanted to say, Agaat no, one doesn't glare like that, but you didn't know how. You smiled ingratiatingly at the people. You wanted to apologise for her, she doesn't know any better, you wanted to say, she's still a child herself, you wanted to say, but they didn't return your look and you didn't know how you could appease them. You thought you'd have a talk to her after lunch. You couldn't tolerate it, the irate eyes that refused to return to normal, […], the new apron that was too white and starched the cap that perched too upright on her head. You could have asked, what's the matter, Gaat? (van Niekerk, *Agaat* 260)

It would be too simplistic, however, to read Agaat's behaviour only as a pathological reaction, in the Freudian sense, to childhood losses of motherly love and her coloured identity which she had to negate in the presence of Milla and which leaves her irreversibly damaged and melancholic, as it were, unable to mourn this loss. Rather, within this melancholic repetition of her trauma something else is implicit: Agaat's miming of her own injury "offers the profound and disturbing suggestion that the denigrated body comes to voice, and the pleasure of that voice, only by assuming the voice of authority" (Cheng 75).

In the present narrative strand, when it is clear that the power structures on the farm have changed, Agaat confronts Milla for the first time with her rage, anger, and with her unmourned losses: the loss of her original home and her relegation to the backroom of the house which stands for her loss of Milla as surrogate mother. In chapter fifteen Agaat finally presents Milla with the maps of the farm and region that the latter has desired to see all this time. The maps, a sign of Milla's, her mother's, and her ancestors' power on the farm, play a significant role in the novel. They appear for the first time when Milla recounts Jak's initial meeting with her mother, during their engagement ceremony. Milla's mother displays the maps, hands them over to Milla – a symbol-

ic act of the fact that the next generation, Milla and Jak that is, are now responsible for Grootmoedersdrift (van Niekerk, *Agaat* 16). In the present narrative strand Milla tries to make Agaat understand that: "I want to see the maps of Grootmoedersdrift, the maps of my region, of my place" (36). However, it takes Agaat the greater part of the narrative to either comprehend or bend to Milla's wish (it does not become clear whether Agaat cannot comprehend or will not bend to Milla's desires). And significantly, Agaat also displays her disfigured right arm for the first time. The disfiguration of Agaat's right arm and leg is a consequence of the abuse she suffered at her parental home even before she was born. Her arm is, during her whole life, special cause for anguish and shame. Milla notices soon after her adoption that she tries to hide her arm from view, which is why Milla sows the right sleeves of Agaat's clothes slightly longer, so that no one is able to see her disfiguration (565). However, the readers are constantly reminded by Milla of Agaat's impairment, especially in moments of crisis that happen on the farm. For example, Jakkie's premature birth in which Agaat has to deliver the baby comes to mind: "her little arm hanging like something that had been loose all the time, something that had broken off that she was hiding. You thought, God help me, you need two hands for a delivery" (157).

In the present, however, when Milla is bound to her bed and unable to communicate apart from blinking her eyes, Agaat exposes her disfigured arm to Milla, thereby confronting her foster mother with her childhood traumas:

> She strips the sleeve of her bad arm up all the way to the elbow. As if she's preparing to grab a snake behind the neck. She looks straight at me. All the better to show you, my child. She shakes the little arm at me. (363)

Buxbaum states that "[f]or the first time in the novel, Agaat appears to lose her self-control as well as any embarrassment about her [arm] as evidence of her suppressed anger finally surfaces explicitly" ("Remembering" 96). In addition, the open display of Agaat's disfigured arm stands in stark contrast to, and even overshadows, the maps that hang on the wall for Milla to see. The maps stand for conquest and domination while Agaat's injuries are a reminder of the bitter and painful effects that colonialism and white domination have had on the colonised subjects.

Thus, while very little narrative space is given to Agaat, she lets her body speak in order to show that she has not overcome her traumatic past. Her arm may be viewed as symbol for the loss of her two homes: her parental home, which she had lost even before she was born, for she was not welcomed into it,

and her second home – Milla's farm – from which she was thrown out when she entered puberty. The display of her right arm is accompanied by words that point to these losses since they evoke either objects or scenes that are related to her injuries. This is the first time in the novel that Agaat speaks about her traumatic losses in her own voice:

> Mailslot! Lowroof! Candle-end! Lockupchild! Without pot! Shatinthecorner! Shatupon! Dusterstick on Agaatsarse. Au-Au-Au! Ai-Ai-Ai! Neversaysorry! Sevenyearschild. And then? Can-you-believe-it? Backyard! Skivvy-room! High-bed! Brownsuitcase! Whitecap! Heartburied! Nevertold! Unlamented! Good-my-Arse! Now-my-Arse! Now's-the-Time! (van Niekerk, *Agaat* 367; punctuation, abbreviations and ellipses in the original)

This account of her injuries and losses, however, is highly fragmented, indicative of her trauma, and does not hint at a new beginning or even at a process of speaking and thus healing, as was intended in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, for instance. Rather, it seems that Agaat has merely transformed her melancholia into anger, which may not give her a sense of closure, but does empower her to a certain degree to speak out against the injustices committed against her, if only in a fragmented form.

The only other, more coherent form in which Agaat's angry voice can be heard occurs in the epilogue. Here, Jakkie recounts the bedtime story that Agaat told him secretly. She narrates her own eviction from the farm house in the form of a fairy tale. But although this narration appears to be more coherent in its structure, Lara Buxbaum rightly observes that it is still distorted and incomplete. Jakkie never realises that it is Agaat's own story that she tells. And it seems unlikely that Milla would understand it, even if she had heard it (Buxbaum, "Remembering" 95).

It is highly significant that Milla does not answer or react to Agaat's outburst at all since the narrative shifts immediately after Agaat's fragmented speech to Jakkie's teenage years. If one reads the opening of the next chapter as Milla's reaction to Agaat's accusations, Milla's inability to listen and empathise becomes clear: Instead of displaying a sense of guilt or remorse, Milla uses the maps as an alphabet chart in order to question Agaat about past events on Grootmoedersdrift. She confronts her about having breastfed Jakkie, about Agaat's role during various disasters on the farm, and she refuses to acknowledge her faults (388–402). Agaat chooses to either not respond or respond by quoting the books from which Milla taught her, thereby affirming her agency. Milla's reaction to Agaat's outburst can be read as her rejection to

acknowledge Agaat's pain and a refusal to acknowledge her own complicity, guilt, and responsibility for Agaat's trauma.

MELANCHOLIA IN THE TIMES OF THE TRC

Both Milla and Agaat may be seen as two profoundly melancholic characters who, despite the post-apartheid present, cannot begin to mourn their mutual loss of a mother-daughter-bond – a loss which, although shared, entails different consequences for each of them. Although the farm officially belongs to Agaat after Milla's death in 1996, she remains trapped in an in-between space. Jakkie rightly observes that "her creator [Milla] is keeping remote control. Six feet under" (van Niekerk, *Agaat* 612). Jakkie's ironic remark points to the fact that Agaat's identity was significantly shaped by Milla's upbringing. Although Agaat at times resists her white 'mistress', Milla's lessons are too deeply engraved in her psyche not to influence her decision. This is evident by the fact that it is highly unlikely that Agaat's regime on the farm will be more egalitarian after Milla's death. While one can read the fact that Agaat (instead of Jakkie) will inherit the farm as a new beginning after apartheid and also as a writing back to the farm novel (or *plaasroman* genre), where the male heir must inherit his father's land,[23] it becomes quite clear that Agaat has internalised her foster mother's lessons and will thus rule rather tyrannically over the farm residence. This is not only hinted at in the epilogue, when Jakkie narrates that the farm workers had to sing the old national hymn instead of the new one because "[s]he would have no truck with the new anthem" (605), but becomes clear much earlier already: In chapter 13, in the present narrative strand, a fire breaks out and the labourers' cottages are partly destroyed. Dawid, the coloured foreman at the farm, negotiates with Agaat and she tells him in no uncertain terms what the farm will look like after Milla's death:

> One thing at a time, Dawid, she said, you must just make do until after the funeral. […] but I'm telling you now there are too many of you, I'm not building more than two new houses, in the place of the old ones that are falling to pieces and exactly the same size, but I'm not building extra houses […]. And those who stay on, they must stop breeding or I'll have the women fixed, sooner rather than later. (van Niekerk, *Agaat* 297)

[23] For a more detailed analysis of the novel as writing back to the *plaasroman*, see Rossmann and Stobie as well as de Kock ("Intimate Enemies").

Jean Rossmann observes pointedly that "[a]lthough Agaat has sublated herself from slave to master […] through Milla's death, master and slave still remain mutually authoring in their sado-masochistic bond" (39–40), as Agaat's choice of language in this quote shows.

This is at odds with how South Africa in the time of the TRC is envisaged in official discourse. Grootmoedersdrift will not become a microcosm of racial harmony after the white mistress' rule has ended; on the contrary, things will very likely stay the same under Agaat. I read this as one of the novel's many implicit criticisms of the TRC. In fact, there are a great number of allusions which hint at an ambivalent attitude towards the TRC process. For instance, the 16th of December, South Africa's Day of Reconciliation, is of importance in the novel: It is not only the day on which Milla finds Agaat in 1953 (the event which marks an ambivalent turning point in Agaat's life),[24] but it is also the day on which Milla dies in 1996 and which marks a new era on Grootmoedersdrift. However, on the farm there will not be a new beginning for the coloured labourers under Agaat's regime.

Milla, on the other hand, melancholically holds on to the long-lost child until the very end of the story. The final scene, where she pictures herself dying, "in my hand the hand of the small Agaat" (van Niekerk, *Agaat* 604), has been regarded as 'unlocking' a "spirit of generosity and reconciliation" by Cheryl Stobie ("Ruth" 69), which would tie in with the official mourning rhetoric of the TRC. However, I argue that this is Milla's melancholic refusal to let go of her lost object of love, namely "[her] child that [she] forsook after [she'd] appropriated her, that [she] caught without capturing her, that [she] locked up before [she'd] unlocked her!" (van Niekerk, *Agaat* 485).

When one considers the narrative structure, a critique of the TRC is evident: Agaat's voice is marginalised, almost silenced in favour of Milla's perspective, which hints, like many other contemporary South African novels, at an exclusion of certain voices during the TRC process.[25] What is more, despite the length of the novel, the narrative structure appears scattered into different strands, highlighted by the fragmented form of Milla's diaries. This indicates that, despite the TRC's attempt to be a platform where apartheid's atrocities are revealed, the country's traumatic past cannot be coherently articulated.

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[24] Van Niekerk states aptly that "if Agaat had stayed [with her family] she would have been rubbished for the rest of her life, but now she's being rubbished in the most subtle of ways, in the most pointed of ways that you can ever think up" (de Kock, "Intimate Enemies" 144).

[25] Kgebetli Moele's *Room 207*, for instance, or other texts such as Niq Mhlongo's *Way Back Home* and Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story*, which focus on the ANC's detention camps in Angola, come to mind.

This is further emphasised when one takes the non-chronological order of the novel into account: Each chapter shifts from the present to different points of the past. Significantly, the diary entries do not start in the year 1953 when Milla brings Agaat to her farm and starts recording her life with Agaat, but in the year 1960, which is when Jakkie is born and Agaat is relegated to the back room. 1960 is also the year of the Sharpeville Massacre, the starting point for the TRC's investigation into the country's past. The beginning of Milla's and Agaat's relationship is only narrated at the end, and only in the second person narrative, which Buxbaum sees as a "kind of confession" ("Remembering" 94) on Milla's part. Milla does not record the beginning in her diaries, however, despite her repeated assertions of wanting to do so. At the start of the narrative she wonders about the beginning of her relationship with Agaat: "The real beginning of it all I never wrote down. Never felt up to revisiting those depths. […] Where, in any case, does something like that begin?" (van Niekerk, *Agaat* 10). I read Milla's refusal or inability to write down the beginning as an implicit critique of the commission's decision to take the year 1960 as starting point for its investigations. Apartheid did not start in 1960, but 12 years earlier, and if one thinks of beginnings, one would have to go back to the time of colonial rule, on which the apartheid system was built. Equally, Agaat's greatest trauma, the abuse by her family, is overshadowed and buried under the loss of her foster mother with which the narrative strand of the diaries starts, whereas her adoption is only narrated in the second person narrative strand at the end of the novel. The fact that Milla cannot bring herself to write down the beginning of her and Agaat's story also points to her inability to face feelings of grandeur, dominance, shame, and guilt during the process of bringing Agaat to the farm. The second person narrative, a much more critical account of Milla's character and life, foregrounds these feelings much more than they could be highlighted in the diaries or the first-person account. Milla's arrogant and dominant behaviour is highlighted in the vampiric scene analysed above, for instance (van Niekerk, *Agaat* 588–89). When she violently prepares Agaat to travel to Grootmoedersdrift with her (the scene which Agaat repeats with the coloured farm workers), a moment occurs in which Milla feels guilty and ashamed for how she treats Agaat: "You felt something snapping in you over the way you were treating her" (603). However, the critical and distanced second person account, which highlights Milla's cold and manipulative behaviour, immediately draws attention to Milla's prevailing desire to bend the little girl's resistance: "Swallow, you hissed, swallow so you can calm down, swallow, I'm not taking any more nonsense from you" (603).

The narrative structure of entangled past and present suggests, then, that the 'new' South Africa is still deeply embedded in its history and can only confront it within limits. Even the metaphor of the rainbow nation, which represents hope and a more harmonious and egalitarian future for South Africa, is converted into a signifier of loss and absence: During Jakkie's first years at school, Agaat begins to embroider a huge cloth with a rainbow on it. She does this in order to fill the gap that Jakkie, whom she constantly had at her side, has left in her life. However, the rainbow cloth "can signify nothing other than its origin in emptiness" (Buxbaum, "Remembering" 95) and is a superficial form of consolation for Agaat. When she finishes the rainbow, she shows it to Milla and says: "Break and be broken […], that is the law of life" (van Niekerk, *Agaat* 341). This indicates that she has not overcome her separation from Jakkie while working on the rainbow, but rather, she has accepted that one is broken by various losses in one's life.

In the present, Agaat shows Milla the rainbow again after the latter has had a coughing attack. However, while the cloth is presented as a piece of beautiful art work, it can only briefly distract Milla from her surroundings which speak of death and decay (196). While the rainbow metaphor signifies hope and a new beginning for South Africa in political discourse, in *Agaat* it merely serves the superficial purpose of hiding the fact that Milla's health is deteriorating and that the room in which she lives speaks of death and hopelessness, which points to the impossibility of a reconciliation between the two women.

Milla's room has another side to it, though. It is not merely her sickroom where she is nursed by Agaat and which is filled with medical attire and Agaat's lists and charts which reflect her foster mother's state of health; Milla's room is also transformed into a space of active commemoration by Agaat. There, Agaat stores various objects which have different symbolic meanings for the two women's lives on the farm. She does this despite Milla's demands to have the objects thrown away: "Everything that I said she should throw away and burn and give away […]. Like a stage-prop store it looks in here. Beach hat, fish gaff, old black bathing costume from the year dot. From day to day the exhibition is changed" (300). Here, Agaat may again be read as counterpoint to the TRC, which aimed at closing the chapters on the past by the end of the process. Agaat, in contrast, refuses to let go of objects that symbolise her past on Grootmoedersdrift. In the epilogue Jakkie describes his mother's death chamber and the objects that have been stored therein in more detail:

> There were butterflies pinned to green felt, a copper pestle, the blue Delft birthplate, now in my suitcase, a spade, a tarred rope, a combine blade, *a dried-up sheep's ear*, […]. Also a worn *brown suitcase*, lichen around the locks, set up on the arm rests of a straight-backed chair right next to the bed, full of mouldering bits of cloth and paper and bone, a few marbles. (609; emphasis mine)

Undoubtedly, the brown suitcase and the dried-up sheep's ear hint at Agaat's two greatest losses and traumatic experiences in her life: the suitcase was given to Agaat by Milla in order for Agaat to store the things that her sister Lys packed for her the day of her adoption, and for a long time it contained her meagre possessions (86). The sheep's ear is a remnant of the day of Agaat's eviction to the back room of Milla's house (90). Thus, by refusing to throw these objects away, Agaat actively commemorates and remembers her and her foster mother's lives on the farm and forces Milla to confront them as well. The objects which stand most obviously for Milla's life are her diaries from which Agaat reads to her. This appears disturbing and unsettling to Jakkie, who describes the room as a "murky realm of mothers" (608), but this act of commemoration can also be regarded as a metaphor for a "melancholic yet militant refusal to allow certain objects to disappear into oblivion" (Eng and Han 366). By stepping away from the Freudian model of melancholia, which describes melancholia as a pathological state whereas mourning is healthy, one might argue, with critics such as Anne Cheng, David Eng and Shinhee Han, that melancholia can be seen as a painful, yet powerful tool of remembering quotidian narratives of losses on the part of marginalised groups. To put it in Eng's and Han's words:

> This preservation of the threatened might be seen, then, as a type of ethical hold on the part of the melancholic ego. The mourner, in contrast, has no such ethics. The mourner is perfectly content with killing off the lost object, declaring it to be dead yet again within the domain of the psyche. (155)

Agaat's melancholic holding on to and almost ritualistically remembering the injuries inflicted upon her may certainly be regarded as a powerful method of transporting her past loss(es) into the present and the future. If one reads this form of narrative against the mourning rhetoric of the TRC, it becomes clear that *Agaat* can be seen as a melancholic counter-narrative to the TRC by refusing ultimate closure for the protagonists, particularly Milla, who receives no amnesty for what she has done to Agaat. Moreover, in mourning and a subsequent closing of the past's traumatic chapter, as proposed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu in his introduction to the TRC volumes (23), there lies the dan-

ger of forgetting. However, by means of commemorative acts and the protagonists' refusal to put the past behind them, Van Niekerk's novel keeps alive the quotidian narratives of loss, which may have otherwise fallen into the realm of oblivion.

CHAPTER 3:
POSTCOLONIAL MELANCHOLIA

> An historic opportunity has arisen now for white South Africa to participate in a humanistic revival of our country through a readiness to participate in the process of redress and reconciliation. This is on the understanding that the 'heart of whiteness' will be hard put to reclaim its humanity without the restoration of dignity to the black body. We are all familiar with the global sanctity of the white body. […]. The white body is inviolable, and that inviolability is in direct proportion to the global vulnerability of the black body. This leads me to think that if South African whiteness is a beneficiary of the protectiveness assured by international whiteness, it has an opportunity to write a new chapter in world history. It will have to come out from under the umbrella and repudiate it. Putting itself at risk, it will have to declare that it is home now, sharing in the vulnerability of other compatriot bodies. (Ndebele, "Iph'indlela?")

The following chapter will revolve around questions of privilege, complicity, and white melancholia. As different as André Brink's *Devil's Valley* and Sarah Penny's *The Beneficiaries* are in style and thematic range, both texts address these questions with intensity. While Brink's text focuses on the Afrikaans speaking community and its members' refusal to mourn the loss of power and privilege after apartheid, Penny's text highlights the role of the English-speaking community in South Africa as beneficiaries of an exploitative system. In Penny's novel, issues such as white privilege, guilt, and responsibility are dealt with by paying particular attention to the TRC and the role of beneficiaries of apartheid with regard to closure, healing, and the building of a future in the 'new' South Africa.

In contrast, Brink's novel is, apart from K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents,* one of the only texts discussed in this study that does not centre around the TRC. Here, notions of whiteness, guilt, complicity, and the inability to face the loss of privilege and power after apartheid are powerfully represented by depicting a fictional community of Afrikaners that has been living in total isolation from the outside world since the time of the Great Trek.

By drawing on concepts such as postcolonial melancholia, the inability to mourn, and (self-)parody as a form of melancholia I shall suggest that, to a large extent, both Penny's and Brink's texts are representations of an inability to mourn a loss of power/privilege and the status of having benefitted from a

segregationist system. Furthermore, by looking closely at the protagonist's development in *The Beneficiaries*, this chapter will also discuss the process of overcoming melancholia and the transition to mourning. Here, I shall read the protagonist's melancholia with a Freudian definition of mourning and melancholia in mind.

Central to both texts discussed in this chapter – in contrast to the preceding chapter on Wicomb's and van Niekerk's novels where the racialised others were of central importance – is the topic of whiteness. Reading South African texts that focus on whiteness remains very timely. The year 2015 sparked various discussions around the topic of white privilege and guilt in South Africa. The Rhodes Must Fall Movement has certainly been a catalyst for this debate. The call for the decolonisation of South African universities has triggered a much-needed continuation of the debate around whiteness in South Africa. Achille Mbembe's essay "On the State of South African Political Life", published on the popular website *Africa is a Country*, in which he calls for a demythologisation of whiteness in order to "properly engineer its death" has brought renewed attention to whiteness in South Africa on a larger scale. Mbembe's article has prompted a response by Rhodes Must Fall member T.O. Molefe in the form of a blog post in which he criticises Mbembe for displaying an oversimplified notion of blackness in South Africa which overlooks experiences of marginalisation, disenfranchisement, and peripheral existences due to race, gender, and class disadvantages.

This chapter focuses, then, on the representations of white privilege and whiteness within post-apartheid literature. Both Penny's and Brink's texts, which have been somewhat overlooked within academia, are excellent points of departure for taking issue with South African whiteness from the perspective of literary studies.

3.1 "WE FUCKED THE WHOLE DEVIL'S VALLEY WHITE"[26]: POSTCOLONIAL MELANCHOLIA, THE INABILITY TO MOURN, AND HAUNTED MEMORIES IN ANDRÉ BRINK'S *DEVIL'S VALLEY*

Of all the writers that I discuss in this study, André Brink (1935–2015) was undoubtedly the most prolific. He started writing in the 1960s,[27] and his oeuvre amounts to over 20 novels as well as many short stories and essays. *Devil's Valley* – originally written in Afrikaans and translated, as were most of his other novels, by Brink himself – has received relatively little attention by academics and critics alike. His oeuvre deals with various historical phases of South Africa and is rich in its thematic foci. He has been, alongside the two Nobel Prize winners Gordimer and Coetzee, the most internationally recognised South African author.[28]

Some of Brink's critically acclaimed novels include *Looking on Darkness*, the first novel by an Afrikaans writer which was banned under the apartheid regime; *A Dry White Season*, which deals with detention and torture just after the Soweto Uprisings; and *The Rights of Desire*, "a text that engages with J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*" (Cornwell et al. 63–64). *Devil's Valley* can perhaps be grouped, together with *Imaginings of Sand*, *On the Contrary*, *The Other Side of Silence*, and *The Rights of Desire,* under the rubric of rewriting South African history, with a special emphasis on the female perspective. This is reminiscent of J. M. Coetzee's statement in "The Novel Today" that the novel can function to either supplement or rival historical narratives (2–3), whereby Brink's novels do the latter.

In his essay "Interrogating Silence: New possibilities faced by South African Literature", Brink argues for "new" and alternative narratives which can be read as counter- or alternative narratives to official histories. Since South

[26] The quote is taken from Brink's novel (*Devil* 321).

[27] At that time Brink was, alongside Ingrid Jonker and Breyten Breytenbach, a leading figure of a group called Die Sestigers "who, influenced by writers like Albert Camus, introduced new styles and themes into traditional Afrikaans literature. The group's bold engagement with prohibited subjects such as sex, religion, and politics meant that the works of the Sestigers were often banned for periods of time" (Cornwell et al. 63).

[28] Zakes Mda achieved a similar status after 1994, when he started writing novels, though it can be said that Coetzee, Gordimer, and Brink remain, until today, the best known South African writers. This is despite the fact that contemporary South African literature consists of many vibrant, exciting, and valuable texts for analysis and teaching within literary studies. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the 'holy Trinity' receives an extraordinary amount of critical attention, in contrast to the many 'new' voices which have emerged in recent years.

Africa, especially during the apartheid and colonial eras, was under the rule of a white minority and patriarchal regime, official narratives marginalised and sidelined the female perspective in favour of a predominantly male, colonialist point of view. Brink calls for an exploration of the female experience in South African history and a rewriting of that history in fiction by writing against a patriarchal nationalist narrative. He emphasises that "this kind of enterprise may serve as a starting point of a completely reinvented South African history: history, in fact, reimagined as herstory" (Brink, "Interrogating" 23). Brink focuses on 'herstory' in *Imaginings of Sand*, for example, which is an attempt of remembering the women's role in the colonial and apartheid history of South Africa from the 17th until the 20th century. He does this by having one of his protagonists, the dying matriarch of an Ostrich farm, Ouma Kristina, tell her granddaughter Kristien, the second protagonist who rushes home from exile in order to see her grandmother one last time, the farm's history from a female perspective. Eva/Krotoa's role as the *volksmoeder*,[29] the role of the women during the South African War and the Great Trek, and the marginalisation of women during apartheid and post-apartheid are highlighted in Brink's complex, non-chronological novel. However, the text has been rightly criticised for falling short of its own aims: Jochen Petzold argues that *Imaginings of Sand*, while attempting to paint an alternative picture, divides South African history along two separate lines again:

> What I see as […] problematic within the fictional universe created […] is the fact that Brink does not leave the choices to his readers. […] While the connection of history and textuality renders all versions of the past equally problematic […], Brink's novels set up an opposition between the official historical master narrative and an alternative version that, within the novel, is clearly accepted as somehow more truthful. (105)

This clear dichotomy, however, is given up in favour of a somewhat more complicated narrative in *Devil's Valley*. While the novel can still be clearly seen as an attempt to foreground the (silenced) female experience of South Africa,

[29] Krotoa/Eva was a Khoi woman who lived during the second half of the 17th century. She bore the role of translator between the Dutch East India Company and the Khoi and San people. Her tragic life, which was divided between her original home and her 'new' life with her Danish husband Pieter van Meerhoff and their two children, has been the basis for artistic explorations since the 1990s. After her husband's death, Krotoa's children were taken away from her. Krotoa herself was taken to Robben Island and was held captive there until her death while her "children grew up as part of Cape Dutch society, and became the founding members of many Afrikaner families" (C. Coetzee 112). According to Carli Coetzee, since the 1990s there has been a tendency amongst Afrikaners to 'reclaim' Krotoa as 'their' ancestral mother (113).

most of the male characters appear, despite their many flaws, as somewhat more humane than the cruel Kaspar in *Imaginings of Sand*, for instance. I argue that this is achieved by highlighting (self-)parodying elements of Devil's Valley's inhabitants throughout the story.

It is precisely these elements that lead to the observation that *Devil's Valley* is essentially a narrative of national Afrikaner melancholia such as Ross Truscott has observed it in his essay "National Melancholia and Afrikaner Self-Parody in Post-Apartheid South Africa". This melancholia is, in the Freudian and Mitscherlichian sense, pathological, in contrast to Cheng's non-pathological concept of racial melancholia, which leaves room for resistance and anger. The post-apartheid melancholia of the (male) inhabitants of Devil's Valley, as presented by a first-person narrator who is an outsider, is marked by an unacknowledged loss of power and privilege after 1994, the attempt to negate the presence of the racial others, and yet the pathological incorporation of, and desire for, the same racial others. The latter reminds one of Cheng's observations on white dominant racial melancholia and of Paul Gilroy's theory of postcolonial melancholia. Gilroy aptly describes the inability to mourn one's privileged position as a white person and unacknowledged feelings of guilt and complicity with colonial regimes as "Cultures of Melancholia and the Pathology of Greatness" (89).

I argue that this inability to mourn, and the unacknowledged guilt and complicity in the country's colonial past, play themselves out in manic, depressive, and self-destructive forms when one looks at the male characters of *Devil's Valley*. In contrast, the hitherto repressed female past of the valley that surfaces throughout the novel, the 'herstory', is transformed into a powerful force of resistance. However, this resistance is highly troubled since it is complicated by the women's own complicity in the valley's upholding of patriarchal structures and therefore their feelings of shame and guilt as well.

DEVIL'S VALLEY: A MELANCHOLY ALLEGORY OF DISAVOWAL AND LOSS DISGUISED AS A DETECTIVE STORY

Devil's Valley can be read, as John Highfield has pointed out, as a "hard-boiled detective novel" (133). Sometime shortly after the first democratic elections (and 30 years after he initially wanted to write his PhD on the subject), the failed historian come crime reporter Flip Lochner, who has always been interested in the history of the small Karoo town of Devil's Valley, which is cut off from the outside world in South Africa, meets Lukas Lermiet, an inhabitant of

Devil's Valley. Lukas has left the Valley in order to study at the University of Stellenbosch. It is rumoured that the town, a valley which is extremely difficult to enter since it is in the Swartberg pass, is inhabited by the descendants of a group who participated in the Great Trek in the 1840s.

During a night of excessive boozing, Lukas reveals Devil's Valley's history and its present state to Lochner, who, due to his drunken state, can remember only fragments of what Lukas told him (Brink, *Devil* 20–21). Yet, it is enough to reawaken his long-standing interest in the town's history. Shortly after their first meeting Lukas dies in a car crash and Flip decides to venture into the valley to find out about its history and also, to return Little-Lukas' ashes (32).

Flip discovers that the valley is a completely closed off community of Afrikaner people who live according to very nationalist, (pre-)apartheid Afrikaner beliefs: The valley's inhabitants see themselves as people 'chosen' by God to live in this place, which, despite obvious signs to the contrary, is considered to have been uninhabited before the Lermiets discovered it in the 1840s (106). After entering the Valley, on his way to his hostess', Tant[30] Poppie's, house, Flip describes the Valley, which seems to be a place outside of time and present context:

> There was something outlandish about the scene, although it took some time to register. Only much later, like the sight of a star that reaches the eye long after it's already expired, did I discover what it was: *nowhere in the Devil's Valley was there any sign of a black or brown laborer. It might have been somewhere in Central Europe, or on the moon, anywhere but in the South Africa in which I'd been living all my life*. (40–41; emphasis mine)

This strange absence of coloured and black people in Devil's Valley is one of the two great secrets that Flip is bent on resolving during his stay in the town, the other being the circumstances Maria's, Emma's mother's, death. Emma is Little-Lukas's lover, who is shunned by society and who Flip falls for in due course.

The secret absence of coloured and black people and Flip's resolution to solve the riddle sets the classical detective story in motion:

> As in a hard-boiled detective novel, the unrevealing of the secrets of the valley in the novel depends on an outsider asking questions from closed-mouthed characters, all of whom have something to hide. The novel also repeats the romantic cliché of the genre: the cynical world-weary hero tries to rescue a

[30] Afrikaans word for aunt. Used as a form of respectful address for older people.

> doomed, yet still innocent, woman [Emma] from a fate worse than death. (Highfield 135)

However, I agree with Highfield that "[b]eneath these clichés […] Brink is working with a larger question: how do settlers tell stories which place them firmly in the new landscape, particularly if they are guilty of genocide" (135). Thus, I am less interested in the way the detective plot unrolls or how Flip's and Emma's relationship unfolds. Instead, I am reading *Devil's Valley* as an allegory of national melancholia, a story which shows the inability of an Afrikaner society to let go of nationalist beliefs of being a 'superior' and 'chosen' people in order to begin to mourn this loss of privilege within the embrace of the 'new', democratic South Africa. This is further emphasised by the narrative structure of the novel, which can be described as a circular first-person account. As I have mentioned above, the story is a first-person narrative of Flip's journey to the valley, his discovery of its secrets, and his return to the outside world. It is a circular narrative in that Flip, who is at the point of returning home, recounts his experiences in Devil's Valley in flashbacks. The final scene picks up in the beginning of the narrative when Flip is waiting for Emma, who is supposed to leave the valley with him, and the subsequent tragic deaths of Emma and Lukas Death. Thus, the text may be read as Flip's journey of discovery after which he represents his version of the valley's history to the outside world. This may entail a notion of closure. However, firstly, the narrative begins and ends with death (Little-Lukas dies in the beginning and Emma dies in the end). The story is thus framed by losses which highlight the notion of melancholia. Secondly, and more importantly, while Flip returns home the inhabitants of the valley remain in their state of melancholia, stuck in the valley. After all, none of the valley's people who survive the various disasters choose to explore the outside world and the 'new' South Africa.

This melancholia is marked by a fierce exclusion of black and coloured people within the valley and at the same time by an equally fierce desire for the racial others. This ambivalence leaves the inhabitants psychically damaged from the first until the present generation. Here, as in my previous reading of *Agaat*, Fanon's observations on the relationship between coloniser and colonised are of importance: "The white man is sealed in his whiteness. The black man in his blackness" (*Black* 9). Fanon calls this phenomenon a "dual narcissism" (10), that is, it is not only the colonised's but also the coloniser's psyche which is affected by colonialism, though this psychic damage manifests itself in different forms and patterns. While *Agaat* deals precisely with this interdependent, dual narcissism that can be seen in the protagonists Milla and Agaat,

Devil's Valley is more concerned with the fact that the white man's 'pathological entrapment' in his whiteness (Fanon, *Black* 9) since the valley actively and violently excludes black and coloured people from within its boundaries and reinforces colonial and apartheid rules by actively ignoring the outside world (Brink, *Devil* 105). This also excludes them from the valley's history as the inhabitants see it; the Khoi and San's original presence is only manifest in the rock paintings that Flip sees on entering the valley. The inhabitants acknowledge only gradually that there was no *terra nullius* when the original trekkers arrived. Significantly, the story of the Devil's Valley mirrors a real place, even two: in his acknowledgements in the beginning, André Brink mentions that the Gamkas Kloof, or 'The Hell', also in the Swartberg range, was a source of inspiration for the Devil's Valley in terms of setting and its exclusion from the outside world (ii). However, in present day South Africa, 'The Hell' is connected to the outside world due to its value as a tourist site. The second place within the boundaries of South Africa which holds much more disquieting parallels than its geographical alikeness (and Brink does not mention it in his acknowledgements despite the clear similarities) is the town of Orania, a white enclave in the Northern Cape Province. The parallels to Orania underline my reading of the novel as an allegory of Afrikaner national melancholia and the rejection of the changes that have occurred in the 'new' South Africa.

The town of Orania was founded in 1991 by the grandson of the mastermind of apartheid, Hendrik Verwoerd. In a BBC documentary, Carel Boshoff, the mayor of the small town says that: "the intention is the growth and wellness of Afrikaner culture" ("Orania"). Despite Boshoff's claims that "Orania is not a sort of exclusive white paradise, but a community seriously looking after its people and trying to create something for them" ("Orania"), one cannot help but feel alarmed by the town's architectural and structural similarities to apartheid: Statues of former presidents DF Malan and Hendrik Verwoerd adorn the entry to the town, the flag of Orania is the old apartheid flag, and the town's inhabitants reject the new South African anthem in favour of the old one ("Orania"). More disconcertingly than these architectural details, however, is the fact that no black people live in the town. It is not explicitly stated that black people are not allowed to live in Orania, however, all the inhabitants who were interviewed clearly state that Orania is a place where Afrikaner culture and the language of Afrikaans are prerequisites to live in the town. Indeed, the town is in private hands, thus applications for residency must be approved by the town council. Boshoff emphasises that "black people are not banned in Orania. We live under a constitution that doesn't allow that"

("Orania"). However, the interviewees emphasise their desire to preserve their Afrikaner heritage in Orania, which they imply is separate from the rest of the country by referring to South Africa as 'outside' ("Orania"). Lastly, Orania's mayor stresses that "we do our own work. We are not reverting back to that relationship which lied at the heart of apartheid, of white bosses and black workers" ("Orania"). These are striking parallels to the fictional place of Devil's Valley. However, while in Orania the citizens of the town are chosen by a committee which decides who may reside in the town (thus excluding black people by structural rather than physical violence), the presence of black and coloured people in Devil's Valley was, as is revealed throughout the narrative, prevented by force, since the valley was inhabited by Khoi and San people before the arrival of the Trekkers. The Lermiet clan, in colonial fashion, conquered and claimed the place for themselves by nearly extinguishing the original inhabitants of the valley (Brink, *Devil* 106). Besides, although the inhabitants of the valley do know about the advent of democracy in the outside world, Tant Poppie explains to Flip that: "it only strengthens us in what we know" (106); that is to say, that the inhabitants of the valley refuse to accept any changes that diverge from their colonial ideology.

This similarity to Orania, the inhabitants' inability to accept the loss of their privileged status if they were to venture into the outside world, and the upholding of a grand (male dominated) Afrikaner history, makes *Devil's Valley* an allegory for the Afrikaner's refusal to search for a new, inclusive redefinition of their cultural identity in post-apartheid South Africa. This is further emphasised by the fact that the valley is almost completely closed off and exits, in comparison to the rest of the country, as a parallel universe.

UNEASY NARRATIVES: NATIONAL MELANCHOLIA, PATRIARCHAL HISTORY AND THE INCORPORATION OF THE RACIAL OTHERS

After finding lodgings with Tant Poppie, Flip immediately sets about to begin his investigations into the valley's history. However, this is not only made very difficult by the fact that the inhabitants of the valley are unwilling to reveal their history to outsiders, but there are also no written (historical) documents to speak of. The official narrative of the valley consists of the myth of how the founding father, Lukas Seer, discovered the place. When Flip asks Tant Poppie why there are no black and coloured people in Devil's Valley, she responds:

> '[…] there was no one else here, *this place was set aside for us from the beginning of time*, so God kept it clean for us.'
>
> 'At least there must have been Bushmen around at some stage.' I pressed the point. 'I saw their paintings up there.'
>
> 'So what?' She uttered an angry grunt. 'We're talking of *people,* man. Bushmen are vermin. Anyway, if there was any of them around it must have been long before the Lermiets came in.' (105–106; emphasis mine)

This founding myth, with all its racist and patriarchal elements, is repeated in only slightly varying forms by most other inhabitants when they are asked the same question by Flip. One legend-like element that is added to the story is the myth that Lukas Seer fought and brought about the Devil, who was hiding in the valley for fear of God, before being able to claim the valley as his own. Lukas Death, Little-Lukas' father and last descendent of the Seer says, when confronted by Flip (who, during his investigations, has found crushed skulls of children in an unmarked grave in the valley's graveyard):

> It was a battle like the world has never seen since. For three days and three nights it raged […]. But at long last it was all over for the Devil. As he blew out his last breath a ball of fire cart wheeled along the valley, splitting trees and rocks along the way, as if lightning had struck the place […] and at last Lukas Lermiet recovered. Except for his leg, which was paralyzed and had to be amputated in the end. That was the Lord's punishment because he'd fallen asleep instead of keeping watch. After that, the people flourished in the Devil's Valley. But just as in the time of the Israelites in the desert, the people of the settlement began to forget how God had saved them. And now, just to remind them, one or two children in every generation are born with a lame hip. Such children have to be removed from the bosom of the congregation. (183)

Firstly, this founding myth emphasises the inhabitants' alignment with the Israelites and it also shows how important religion and 'Godly providence' are for the valley's history. Secondly, it provides an 'official' explanation for the skulls of children that Flip finds in the back of the graveyard.

It is important to note that if one reads the novel as an allegory of the Afrikaner's present post-apartheid state of mind, one is undoubtedly drawn to Paul Gilroy's notion of postcolonial melancholia. In his eponymous book, Gilroy states that the British, instead of beginning to work through and finally mourn, the loss of the Empire, they glorify their role as heroic nation throughout World War I, but mainly World War II. In the beginning of his chapter on postcolonial melancholia, Gilroy says the following:

> We need to know how the warm glow that results from the nation's wholesome militarism has combined pleasurably with the unchallenging moral architecture of a Manichaean world in which a number of dualistic pairings – black and white, savage and civilized, nature and culture, bad and good – can all be tidily superimposed upon one another. […] Revisiting the feeling of victory in war supplies the best evidence that Britain's endangered civilization is in progressive motion toward its historic completion. These distinctive combinations of sentiment and affect result in the anti-Nazi war being invoked even now. This is done so that Brits can know who we are as well as who we were and then become certain that we are still good while our uncivilized enemies are irredeemably evil. (88)

Representations of Afrikaner nationalist narratives in *Devil's Valley* are, in contrast to what Gilroy looks at, not as much obsessed with the World Wars as they are with the Afrikaner narrative of persecution and that, like the Israelites, they are a chosen people.[31] The guilt, or at least the complicity for having benefited from the apartheid system is thus being repressed, superimposed as it were, with a different national narrative. This becomes clear when one looks more closely at the above quoted passages: Tant Poppie emphasises that the valley "was set aside" (Brink, *Devil* 105) for them, highlighting the inhabitants' (self-)perceptions of being a persecuted (by the English, mainly) people 'chosen' by God. This is further emphasised by the legend of Lukas Seer killing the devil. By using this powerful religious legend of the valley, the Lermiets and their descendants justify their claim as the rightful owners of the valley as well as their isolation from the outside world. This isolation becomes important if one considers the rules according to which the inhabitants of the valley live. While democracy in South Africa is based on one of the most liberal constitutions of the world, the valley's 'constitution' is a particular reading of the Old Testament, of which only one copy of its high-Dutch translation exists in the valley and can be found on the pulpit of the church (142). The various inhabitants of the valley often refer to the Bible when they justify their actions (see, e.g., 105, 107, 115). Also, Tant Poppie explains that they "live according to the Scriptures here" (106). The Old Testament, which the inhabitants of the valley themselves do not even understand since it has to be explained and translated to them by the valley's spiritual leader Brother Holy (106), symbolises the valley's anachronistic lifestyle in contrast to the outside world. The fact that the

[31] This is perhaps another evocation of Orania and the fictional place of Devil's Valley, since Boshoff states that the Afrikaner's situation "may be similar to the Jewish people of the world" ("Orania"). However, I would argue that in *Devil's Valley,* the biblical alignment with the Israelites as a 'chosen' people should be more attributed to Protestant fundamentalism and to the inhabitants' particular interpretation of the Old Testament.

Old Testament serves as 'constitution' also echoes the sense that the valley is stuck in time and unable to move forward and accept the changes happening in the outside world. This is evocative of the apartheid system at large which, despite internal and external anti-apartheid movements, continued to be dominated by a white government long after most of the other countries on the African continent became independent.

The valley is not, despite its anachronism, unaware of the changes that have gone on outside. When Flip, intent on shocking Tant Poppie, tells her that apartheid is over and that South Africa has a black president now, he tells her nothing new, since she merely replies: "Well then, you can mos see what God wanted to protect us from" (105). The valley is, then, a place which, melancholically, has left itself behind. It is not bound to its past because the outside world has abandoned it. On the contrary, its inhabitants have chosen to remain stuck in the past, instead of accepting that the valley is, just like the rest of South Africa, a place of hybridity, although it is an uneasy one at that. Highfield rightly observes that "the truth is that Devil's Valley is a product of hybridity, the stories, landscape, and even the ghosts emerging from an uneasy mixing of Afrikaner culture and the culture of San, Khoikhoi, Zulu, Xhosa, and all these who make up South Africa" (142–143). This uneasy hybridity is hinted at from the very beginning of the novel since Flip, on entering the valley, discovers rock paintings that might stem from the era of the Khoi and San next to which the name Strong-Lukas is engraved in a stone (Brink, *Devil* 24). Indeed, the stories and fairytales of the valley are identified by Flip as Khoikhoi, although the valley's inhabitants deny this (117).

In the course of the novel it turns out that the valley's inhabitants have negated this uneasy hybridity with much more violence than the simple denial of a Khoi origin of 'their' fairy tales. The skulls of the children that Flip finds, as it transpires towards the end of the novel, are not the children born with a lame hip as Lukas Death would have Flip believe; the children's bones that are scattered, shamefully discarded in the back of the Graveyard, lying in an unmarked, uncared for grave, are there because they are 'too coloured' — for they are not only descendants of Lukas Seer, but also descendants of Bilhah, his second wife, a Khoikhoi woman he raped. This is revealed to Flip by the ghost of Lukas Seer himself:

> 'They just too scared to tell you, man, don't ask me why. But there were Bushmen and Hottentots all over the place. We had to get rid of them to clear a spot for ourselves. […] And for some time things went well. But then my wife died. […].'

'Your second wife was Bilhah?'

'God knows what her real name was,' he said. 'I christened her Bilhah. I mean, how can a man sin with a woman's body if she doesn't have a name from the Bible? […] And there would have been no problem either, except then her bloody husband mos got difficult. Well, he left me no choice, we had to fight it out. […] And shall I tell you what I did next? I am a Lermiet, Neef Flip, I got my pride. Dog-tired as I was, I dug a hole and put the body in it. And then I told his wife to lie down on top of the grave and I gave it to her right there. The next day I built my house on that very spot. Seventeen children I made on that grave.' (319–320)

Here, the fierce exclusion and yet retention of the racial others of which Cheng (10) speaks is painfully visible: Lukas' burning desire for the other can only be justified through conquering and colonising techniques: Her rightful husband must be killed, she herself must be renamed in order to be 'properly' retained. These acts of violence, exclusion, and colonial power, however, have a haunting effect, not only on Lukas Seer who is so persecuted by his past deeds that he cannot bring himself to face Bilhah's murdered husband even in death (Brink, *Devil* 319). In fact, the denied, excluded, and retained matriarchal line only resurfaces in order to haunt the valley's men when Flip digs out the skulls of the murdered children.

The valley's inhabitants are, then, melancholic subjects on various levels: On the one hand, the negation of their partaking in colonialism and the grand narrative of being 'chosen' as God's people impedes the ability of the people to mourn their feelings of complicity and guilt. On the other, the violent exclusion and denigration of the racialised body through literally raping and murdering it, is a very drastic form of white, dominant racial melancholia. As Cheng describes it, through racial discrimination, exclusion and yet retention of the racialised body, the coloniser is also experiencing a deep loss of his/her self:

> Racialization […] may be said to operate through the institutional process of producing a dominant, standard, white national ideal, which is sustained by the exclusion-yet-retention of racialized others. The national topography of centrality and marginality legitimizes itself by retroactively positioning the racial others as always Other and lost to the heart of the nation. (11)

When Tant Poppie says that "[t]he dead are always with us" (Brink, *Devil* 107), this does not only mean that in fact the dead, like Lukas Seer and Giel Eyes, for instance, are present, even participating in meetings and having a certain amount of influence over the living. It also means that the denied bod-

ies of the racial others continue to haunt (from the margins) those who live in the name of purification. And even amongst the so-called 'pure' people this maiming or fragmentation of the body is visible. Physical and mental disabilities are frequent in the Devil's Valley. Indeed, it seems that the inhabitants with either physical or mental disabilities are at least almost as many as there are inhabitants without handicap. In the outside world, legend has it that the inhabitants of the valley consist of "a community of physically or mentally handicapped people in the mountains, *the sad outcome of generations of inbreeding*" (14; emphasis mine). During the preparations for Nagmaal, Flip observes that:

> [t]he most visible sign of something unusual was the increase in the numbers of mentally and physically handicapped breaking out from the dark hideouts in the houses where they were usually kept out of sight: the dim-witted and the maimed and the retarded, the waterheads, the mongols, the spastic, the blind, the cross-eyed, the crippled, the dribblers and babblers, the eaters of earth and grass and shit, some of them on foot if not on all fours, others pushed on wooden carts and wheelbarrows. They'd been around in the settlement every day, here and there, usually tended by a mother or an older sister or an aunt; but since the Friday morning they were coming out in fucking droves, like flying ants before a storm. It was getting on my bloody nerves, an all-too-blatant exhibition of sins better kept secret. (63)

Thus, the refusal to acknowledge the racial other, symbolised by incestuous relationships and disfigured bodies as a consequence thereof, and the rejection of hybridity, no matter how troubled that hybridity ultimately is, leads to self-destruction and a fragmented existence.

This is further emphasised by various, highly charged symbols: For one thing, Devil's Valley faces a disastrous drought and raging storms which have devastating consequences for all inhabitants of the place. Alvyn Knees, who steels water for his pregnant wife Annie, is flogged to death, and during the storms (and the raging fires as consequence of the drought) many houses of the valley are destroyed. The biblical allusion of these disasters as God's punishment for the inhabitants' way of life is obvious here, although the inhabitants are quick to find other reasons than their own faults for the punishment. Tant Poppie explains to Flip that: "'Some people say the drought is sent as punishment. If that is so, it can only be because of Little-Lukas. […] He always had ants up his arse'" (108). Thus Little-Lukas's 'betrayal' is used as a way out of having to face the valley's actual problems of denial, patriarchy and oppression.

Moreover, the fact that the valley is stuck in its past, doomed to remain an anachronistic space, is highlighted through such 'betrayals' as committed by young people like Little-Lukas, who is a member of the young generation, embodies the future and is unwilling to stay on, leaves the valley given an opportunity (100).

Lastly, and perhaps most symbolically charged: the Lermiet line does not only face its tragic extinction in terms of death (Little-Lukas is already dead by the beginning of the novel and Lukas Death is killed at the end), but also in terms of a compromised whiteness. It turns out that Emma, who had an unconsummated love affair with Little-Lukas while both of them were still living in the valley, is in fact Lukas Death's illegitimate child. Thus, had Lukas and Emma had sexual intercourse, the valley's terrifying and racist ideas of a 'pure' whiteness would have culminated in an incestuous relationship between brother and sister.

This chain of betrayals, secrets, and deaths also highlights Lukas Death's double standards since he openly denounces Emma as a 'femme fatale' from the very beginning of Flip's stay in the valley (37). He is at great pains to keep her and Little-Lukas apart instead of acknowledging her as his child, which again highlights the discrimination and marginalisation of the women in the valley and the hypocrisy and patriarchal dominance of the men. If Lukas had acknowledged Emma as his child, he would have admitted to having betrayed his best friend Ben Owl who himself was in love with Emma's mother (394). Additionally, the official male version of Maria having committed adultery by sleeping with an outsider would have been revealed as a lie.

HAUNTED HERITAGE: TRANSGENERATIONAL FEMALE MELANCHOLIA

While the men's inability to face the fact that the valley is stuck in time, too paralysed to move forward, leads to self-destruction, anger, and hatred among the community members, beneath the patriarchal discourse of a white dominant melancholia, which stands for an unwillingness or an inability to face the present situation in South Africa, there emerges – gradually, but ever more clearly – the female side of the valley's history.

The female side of the valley's history is repressed at first – Dalena, Lukas Death's wife observes that Flip will hear merely one side of the valley's history if he "only listened to Lukas and them" (232). However, once Flip becomes better acquainted with Dalena, Annie and Emma it surfaces gradually that, throughout the valley's history, the women have made either terrible sacrifices

for or have tried to revolt against the valley's men. The role of the women in the valley's history has played a much bigger part than men like Isaac Smouse, Lukas Death, or Jurg Water would have it. While women figure only as desirable objects or mothers in the male version of the valley's history, in fact their history is much more complicated: revolt, trauma, self-sacrifice, and complicity are only some of the topics which surface when one examines the history of the valley's women. However, it should be noted that the female version of the valley is filtered since it is an account told to a male narrator who, by recording it, fixes this history under the male gaze and thus has the power to distort and/or change it.

What is important for a melancholic reading of the novel is that this marginalisation of the female historical voice produces an intergenerational melancholia of the valley's women as a consequence.

The Hungarian psychoanalysts Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok note in their illuminating theory of the phantom losses and traumas that the parents can haunt second and third generations of that same family. They state: "Should a child have parents 'with secrets,' parents whose speech is not exactly complementary to their unstated repressions, the children will receive from them a gap in the unconscious, an unknown, unrecognized knowledge – a nescience – subjected to a form of 'repression' before the fact" (140).

Intergenerational losses and a shared transgenerational melancholia in *Devil's Valley* are particularly palpable in two instances. In fact, to almost every male version of historical events in the Devil's Valley, there is a female alternative. However, for the sake of illustration and in order to avoid redundancies and repetitions, I shall focus only on the following two women and their role for the valley. Firstly, in the story of Mooi-Janna which seems to haunt Emma, and secondly through the evocation of Talita Lightfoot of whom Henta can be regarded as a double in the present.

When Dalena-of-Lukas first talks about the part that the women played in the valley, both Mooi-Janna's and Talita's stories are, at least partly, revealed: While Talita sacrifices her body in order to make the last men who come from outside stay, since the valley "needed new blood" (Brink, *Devil* 297), Mooi-Janna sacrifices herself in order to save lives:

> It was Mooi-Janna who solved the problem. […] *She went down to the rock pool in the riverbed where she used to swim naked ever since she was a little girl* […] and when she was ready she stole up into the higher kloofs after the commando. […] When the commando was close enough for her to see the plumes on their hats appearing above the slope, Mooi-Janna got up from the rock where she

> was waiting. She stripped off her long silk dress and carefully folded it up into a small bundle which she put on the ground at her feet. […] If they let her father and his five men go, she said, they could do with her what they desired. 'Let go the hostages,' the officer ordered, […]. They went back at the pace of a tortoise. Mooi-Janna couldn't walk. Her father carried her on his broad back as he'd used to do when she was a little girl. Until they reached the place called Jacob's Ladder, just after you've passed Hard-Times Hollow and Breakyoke. There he stopped, and turned his back to the precipice, and shook her off. They all bowed their heads in understanding. (137–139; emphasis mine)

While the official history claims Strong-Lukas and his men as the triumphant victors over "a whole commando sent to establish the authority of the Cape government over the Devil's Valley" (237), Mooi-Janna's body, which is neither commemorated nor properly buried, is neglected.

The text suggests that this is a reason why Mooi-Janna's ghost, or phantom, is incorporated by Emma. There are striking parallels between the two women: Not only does Tant Poppie mention that the men in the valley want Emma as badly as Mooi-Janna was desired (108), but also, when Flip sees Emma, or Emma's phantasmagoric image for the first time, the encounter takes place in the rock pool, where Mooi-Janna used to swim (36). In this dreamlike encounter Flip is certain that Emma has four breasts, which, in the valley's history, was Mooi-Janna's trademark. Also, Flip thinks that Gert Brush is painting Emma when in fact he is attempting to paint Mooi-Janna (376). Whether Emma has four breasts like her ancestress or not remains a mystery until the very end. After she is shot by Lukas Death, however, Flip does see that she has two breasts (393). But she does have, as Tant Poppie calls it, "the mark of the Devil on her body" (109); a "mole on her left tit [which] looks mos just like a footprint of a goat" (365). Nevertheless, Emma's and Mooi-Janna's position as being "marked" (342) as Emma describes the valley's inhabitants, remains intact. Additionally, if one looks closer at how Dalena describes Mooi-Janna's physical appearance, there are other similarities to Emma, most especially the long black hair that is frequently referred to when Flip describes Emma (see e.g. 46, 158, 376); and lastly, both women's love for water: Emma not only dreams of bathing in the rock pool (which by now is long dried up) where Mooi-Janna used to bath, but she further ventures out into the devil's hole with Flip, a pool which is officially a no-go zone for the inhabitants of the valley since they believe that the Devil lives there (216–218).

Just as much as Emma's story is interlinked with Mooi-Janna's fate, Henta, Jurg Water's daughter, who is abused by him and yet represents the

force of the uncontrollable, sexual drive that exists in the valley, is related to Talita Lightfoot. Not only is Talita probably her Great-grandmother since Jurg Water is a descendant of the rebels who stayed in the valley, but Henta also inherits her passion for unrestrained dancing. It is Dalena who mentions Talita Lightfoot to Flip, but Annie tells her story in a more detailed form, which will make the parallels to Henta clearer:

> They said that when she danced it was like she wasn't a woman, she turned into wind or water or clouds or something. *A wild one*. […] in the end all she was good for was to catch the fancy of the two rebels that came to hide here in the Devil's Valley during some war or other. She had to make sure they stayed. *Shame, the poor girl thought they'd take her away with them*. But the men folk who planned it had other ideas. […] No one even remembers what became of her afterward. […] Only when the moon is full *she still gathers all the ghost girls of the valley to dance naked in the bluegum wood*. (297; emphasis mine)

Henta, it seems, has not only inherited Talita's talent for dancing (one of Flip's first encounters, more a dream-like vision, takes place in the bluegum wood where she gathers a few other girls from the valley and together they dance in quite a lascivious manner), but also her reputation for being 'a wild one'. Her way of dancing is strongly connected with her body and sexuality:

> A throng of young naked girls dancing among the trees. Except that dancing is not the right word: they were simply rushing about wildly, blindly, to and fro among the trees and through the clearing, arms and legs flailing. It was like a flock of night birds flapping about, crashing into the shrubbery or flying headlong into one another. But there was nothing exuberant about it: in fact, there was a kind of mute panic in their frenzy, which made it more unsettling than erotic. (66)

Additionally, Henta's natural smell is connected with "odours of the night" (346) and sex (374).

Most importantly, like Talita, Henta attempts to use her sexuality in order to escape the valley. She attempts to seduce Flip during one of their first encounters, and in the end – after Piet Snot, her brother, has been killed by their violent father Jurg Water and Henta herself has lived through sexual abuse by Jurg – she openly asks Flip to take her to the outside world (374).

Thus, both Emma's and Henta's bodies are inscribed with unmourned transgenerational losses and memories. What is striking is that – in contrast to the transgenerational melancholia which occurs in *Playing in the Light*, for instance, where loss and a troubled hybridity are complicated through the sym-

bol of the mermaid – Talita's desire to flee Devil's Valley and Mooi-Janna's negated bravery are much more explicitly transferred onto Henta and Emma. Both women have transgenerationally incorporated Talita and Mooi-Janna's losses so deeply that these losses have become their own, manifesting themselves in slightly different forms, yet remaining recognisable intergenerational repetitions of the original injuries. Abraham's and Torok's observations on the phantom are particularly apt in this context: "The buried speech of the parent will be (a) dead (gap) without a burial place in the child. This unknown phantom returns from the unconscious to haunt its host and may lead to phobias, madness, and obsessions. Its effect can persist throughout several generations and determine the fate of an entire family line" (140).

This is particularly visible in *Devil's Valley* since both Emma's and Henta's fates are transgenerationally marked and determined by their ancestors. Talita's unfulfilled desire to escape Devil's Valley is transferred on to Henta, and Mooi-Janna's act of sacrificing her body onto Emma. Emma is willing to give up her own dreams and ambitions so that Little-Lukas can go and study outside (Brink, *Devil* 229). When she does decide to flee with Flip in the end, her own father kills her in order to prevent her from bringing shame on the valley by eloping with an outsider. Thus, both Mooi-Janna's and Emma's bodies are sacrificed for the sake of ensuring the continuity of the valley's patriarchal system. However, in Emma's case the sacrifice of her body is avenged by Dalena who shoots her husband (392) and thus if not ends, then at least severely weakens the patriarchal system of the valley.

While the connection between Emma and Mooi-Janna is merely hinted at, Henta incorporates Talita to such a degree that by the end of the novel, the two cannot be distinguished anymore. This is emphasised by Flip's reminiscences after his last encounter with Henta in the bluegum forest:

> Without warning she turned around and ran off, effortless as a bird taking flight, leaving no scar. I stood bewitched. I wanted her to come back, *but to which name would she respond?* Henta? Talita? This time I didn't even have a bunch of bluegum leaves as an alibi. Who still remembered Talita Lightfoot? Who would remember Henta? *For how long must the circles on the surface of this dark pool still go on? What price must still be paid, what sacrifices brought, before she would be redeemed?* (374–375; emphasis mine)

Flip's question suggests, then, that Talita's loss and the marginalisation of her history (and memory) by the grand patriarchal narrative of the valley is repeated across several generations. Interestingly, while Emma has merely incorporated certain elements of Mooi-Janna's (like specific bodily features and

character traits), Henta and Talita gradually blend into one person: Flip is never sure whether his encounters with Henta are actually real or phantasmagorical. The fact that Henta seems to move mainly within the bluegum forest, the only place where Talita is supposed to appear when the moon is full, indicates that the latter's phantom is melancholically incorporated by Henta. Lastly, Flip's doubts as to whether or not anyone will remember Henta may lead one to assume that the circle of trauma, loss and disappearance from official narratives is going to be endlessly repeated, which is further complicated by Flip's assumption that Henta may be pregnant as a result of her father's abuse (374). However, despite these bleak transgenerational repetitions of loss, trauma, and disavowal, I argue that amidst this debris, both Emma and Henta create powerful ways to subvert the patriarchal regime. This subversion is not visible on a grand scale – neither of the two women manages to escape her father, for instance. Nevertheless, both women, like Mooi-Janna and Talita before them, also bear uncontrollable signs: After the first, phantasmagorical encounter with Emma, Flip is left astonished that the pool where he had seen Emma bathing just seconds before seems to have dried up. When he shares his puzzlement with Lukas Death, the latter responds that "there's no stopping her when she gets the urge" (37). This can be read as as a premonition of Lukas Death's tragic end since it is due to Emma's death that Dalena kills her own husband. Thus, Emma's death, her sacrifice, may also be seen in a somewhat more optimistic light since it is her resistance that triggers the extinction of the Lermiet line.

Henta, in turn, spends most of the time in the bluegum forest where she performs her dance rituals with the other girls. This group of girls seems to live on the periphery of the valley community and therefore they escape at least some rules and regulations. After a disastrous storm, for instance, everyone in the village helps to rebuild what was destroyed, but for the handicapped and Henta and her group of girls:

> Only the mad and the feeble still came and went as always, slobbering and yawning and dribbling and pissing themselves. And of course Henta and her gaggle of girls *who couldn't be contained by any natural or unnatural disaster: at unpredictable intervals they would still come hurtling past like a delinquent dust-devil, here one moment and gone the next, leaving behind only the improbable imprint of their bare feet and their smell of darkness and forbidden games*. (338; emphasis mine)

Emma, in contrast, is ostracised by the community for being Maria's child, who was stoned for allegedly having had a child from an outsider. Maria allegedly breaks the valley's rule which forbids women from inside the valley to

have sexual contact with men from outside without permission from the valley's people. This, as Lukas Death explains to Flip, is seen as committing adultery according to the rules of Devil's Valley (186). She starts an affair with Flip despite the dangers that this entails and claims that she has "nothing to lose" (217).

Besides, both girls occupy marginal spaces which they mark: Henta's domain, as I have already mentioned, is the bluegum forest. The bluegum forest is, throughout the text, a symbol for secret sexual activities. It is the contrasting point to the cemetery where not only the throwback children lie hidden, but it is also, alongside the church, the valley's centre. Death, illness and dying are of great importance for the community (see e.g. 77, 278). To the contrary is Henta's case. When Flip enquires after her health, she is the only inhabitant of the valley who says that she is very well (249). Also, while everyone prepares for Nagmaal, Henta and her group of girls remain in the bluegum forest, which emphasises once more that they are on the margins of the community. Although Henta's domain is marked by loss and trauma, then, with her dance she subverts the valley's Death Drive by openly living and celebrating her sexuality. Besides, Henta's connection with the night highlights her subversiveness: The night is not only connected to passion and sexuality, but also to secrecy, particularly in Devil's Valley. Thus, for Henta the night has an ambivalent meaning since it is also at night when she becomes the victim of her father's abuse (351–352). While everyone spies on everyone else during the day, at night many things occur under cover: not only several abuses, murders and deaths, but also Flip's and Emma's clandestine meetings (36, 171, 310), the hunt to which Flip is invited by the men of the valley (87–93), and phantasmagorical sexual intercourse that Flip has with several nightwalkers (93–94, 149, 172).

Henta, through her nightly activities, powerfully and subversively depathologises the transgenerational loss by which she is marked which may be seen as a tool of resistance, as a form of managing her quotidian life. For instance, the bluegum forest can be described as her sanctuary and her safe place to where she flees from her father's violent behaviour at home. Similarly, her position as a marginalised person within the community grants her a certain kind of freedom and autonomy. Lastly, while she repeats Talita's attempt to escape the valley by offering herself to a man (in Henta's case to Flip), in all likelihood she does not, in contrast to Talita, remain in the valley. After the outbreak of one of many fires in the valley that destroys most of the houses, Flip observes: "Henta was nowhere to be seen. I could only guess that she'd

already run away as she'd threatened to; But where in that burning night could she have found shelter?" (387). Henta thus shows resilience by not making her decision to run away dependent on Flip. However, whether her attempt at escaping is successful or if she is killed by the raging fire remains unknown.

In turn, Emma's character is not as connected with a blatant sexuality, but rather with life and fertility: While the valley is plagued by a horrible drought, which leads to several deaths and disasters within the community, Emma is closely connected to the symbol of water. Not only is she dreaming of, and appearing to, Flip for the first time at the rock pool (30), she also dares to venture into the Devil's Hole in order to swim there (219). Besides, she is responsible for Flip's feeling of revitalisation after having experienced so many failures in the outside world. At the same time, Emma feels trapped and hopeless in her endeavour to leave the valley despite her desire to live in the outside world (266). However, like Henta she is able to subvert the male dominated valley by educating herself (she and Little-Lukas read books that Isaac brings from the outside world) and by having a clandestine affair with an outsider (which goes against the valley's rules) despite her very restricted freedom.

Ultimately, Flip, who eventually manages to leave the valley and write down its history, finds out about the women's role because of the fact that first generation's suffering has been repeated by the present generation and this ensures that, if only in his documentation of the valley's history, women are being remembered. This commemoration, however, is rendered problematic given that Flip, who repeatedly says that his recording machine and camera broke down throughout the journey, cannot be seen as a reliable narrator. Even more problematic is the fact that the female version of the valley's history is again in a male narrator's hands, which lays a painful emphasis on the endless circle of trauma, repetition and melancholia mentioned above.

GUILT, COMPLICITY AND PARODY

The female side of the valley's history is, then, certainly a counter-history to official, patriarchal grand narratives. Nevertheless, while in *Devil's Valley* Emma's and Henta's stories can be regarded as transgenerationally haunted and yet resistant lives, this can certainly not be said about all women in the novel. Critics such as Osita Ezeliora, Highfield, and Petzold have emphasised that Brink challenges racist and patriarchal narratives by highlighting the importance of the female version of history (Ezeliora 90; Highfield 140; Petzold

101). However, all three of them have neglected the role of women's complicity in maintaining the racist structure and the patriarchal system of the valley. Dalena-of-Lukas takes a strong stand for Flip and Emma and ultimately overthrows the patriarchal system by shooting Lukas Death, the last descendant of the Lermiet clan. These acts point to an anti-patriarchal attitude, not, however, to a countering of racist beliefs. On the contrary, she is complicit in silencing the valley's racist practices of killing the 'throwback' children that are 'too coloured'. During a clandestine conversation with Flip she points out that she does not understand why Little-Lukas's name cannot be spoken in the valley anymore: "'What did [Little-Lukas] ever do wrong?' she asked angrily. 'I mean, he wasn't black or anything'" (Brink, *Devil* 229).

While this quote leads to Flip's discovery of the fact that the people in the valley have killed children "of the wrong color" (230), it also shows Dalena's complicity in upholding the silence of the valley's extremely racist practices. Dalena does reveal the secret to Flip. However, she does not do this out of the conviction that this is wrong, but merely because Flip offers her a bargain: He promises to give her Little-Lukas's ashes in return for information on the subject to which she agrees since "the mother in her [gets] the upper hand" (230).

The women's complicity in the valley's upholding of patriarchal and segregationist structures is also palpable when one looks at the characters of Ouma Liesbet Proon and Tant Poppie Fullmoon. When Flip and Ouma Liesbet talk, she recounts myths that he recognises as clearly Khoi or San, but she negates this.[32] Also, she is the one who unquestioningly recites the Lermiet line of male heirs for Flip:

> 'Lukas Seer begat Lukas Nimrod, and Lukas Nimrod begat Lukas Up-Above, and Lukas Up-Above begat Strong-Lukas, and Strong-Lukas begat Lukas Bigballs, and Lukas Bigballs begat Lukas Devil, and Lukas Devil begat Lukas Death, and Lukas Death begat Little-Lukas.' (117–118)

This allusion to Genesis 5:1–32, in which the male line from Adam to Noah is recounted, again highlights the importance of the Old Testament for the inhabitants of the valley. On the one hand, Ouma Liesbet's analogy between the Lermiet line and the line of Adam does not only once more exclude the female inhabitants, but it also points to an attempt at the 'elevation' or 'purification' of the Lermiet clan. Ouma Liesbet, who does not question this, or add a female version, is thus complicit in upholding the patriarchal structures of the

[32] For a more detailed analysis of the importance of legends and myths in the novel, see Highfield.

valley. Tant Poppie, on the other hand, displays, as I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, the extremely racist attitude of Devil's Valley's inhabitants who believe they are a 'chosen' people for whom a special place was set aside (106), which emphasises, once more, a fundamentalist Protestant attitude that many inhabitants of the valley share. Additionally, when the situation for Flip becomes dangerous, she is no longer willing to tolerate him under her roof (366), unlike Annie and Dalena who both offer him accommodation at their homes. Thus, although Ouma Liesbet's and Tant Poppie's attitudes may be overshadowed by the other women's more subversive and anti-patriarchal standpoints, their behaviour reflects women's complicity and guilt in the upholding of the racist and patriarchal structures of the valley.

Truscott rightly observes that, while the losses that stem from the apartheid era have often been discussed:

> few studies have examined a continued identification with or nostalgia for apartheid. Being nostalgic for apartheid in post-apartheid South Africa is frequently equated with being politically insane and morally questionable. Yet recent studies (eg., Jansen, 2007; Dlamini, 2009) suggest that the end of apartheid occasioned a complex loss for South Africans, which I propose was a melancholic loss. (91)

The fact that apartheid's end is considered a loss is frequently highlighted in the novel. Poppie Fullmoon, for instance, refers nostalgically to the old days where everything was better (Brink, *Devil* 105, 365). In particular, Tant Poppie laments that while in the old days the valley seemed to have been a place where young people lived, this is not the case in the present anymore. She says that young people who are "[b]arely ripe […] want to get out into the world" (100). Besides, while she speaks about having been a bride in her youth (43), thus relating the 'old days' to potential for fertility, she links the present to death, especially the dying out of the young generation: "death is hard on us. Particularly the young ones. You'll see many olive plants around every table, but only a few of them grow up" (100). Thus, in Tant Poppie's mind, the post-apartheid present in the valley is marked by death while the past is equated with life and the vitality of youth.

What is more striking in this context, however, is the way in which all men in the valley are, despite the ensuing disasters which spell out death and destruction for the inhabitants, melancholically attached to the grand narrative of the valley's (patriarchal) history. Interestingly, these judgements are made from a distance, since everything that the readers know of the valley is filtered through the narrator Flip's gaze, who observes the goings on around him with

irony. This ironic distance is underscored by the use of the narrative device of mock reports, which Flip imaginatively writes about the valley's inhabitants or certain events that happen around him (see e.g. 200–206, 221). For instance, the fact that he uses a mock report style in order to narrate the prayer meeting in which the valley's inhabitants try and fail to find a solution for the drought that plagues the place (200–206) highlights the farcical nature of the meeting as inhabitants take to insulting each other rather than finding solutions to their problems. This distancing device can also be read as Flip's strategy of imposing a boundary between himself and the valley's inhabitants.

Moreover, characters like Lukas Seer, Brother Holy, and Lukas Death, for instance, are portrayed in an exaggeratedly stereotypical, sometimes caricature-like form. Before entering the valley, Flip meets, for the first time, the founding father of the place and observes:

> there he was on the ridge, in his stupid old-fashioned skin trousers and waistcoat and floppy wide-brimmed hat, his back to me, staring out across the deep ravine, […]. He drew the skin waistcoat tight on his sinewy body, shivering briefly as if he could actually feel the cold. He looked fucking ancient, but very straight, kind of patriarchal, his angry grey beard stained with tobacco juice like a tuft of dry grass pissed on many times, the mouth caved in, chewing on his gums. Something left on a shelf well past its sell-by date. (4)

This representation can be read as parodic, which, instead of being understood as "a literary technique which imitates and ridicules (usually through exaggeration) another author or literary genre" ("AP English"), I understand instead as an ironic, exaggerated and farcical representation of flat characters that represent stereotypical images of, in this case, male Afrikaner figures.

The myth of the founding father, embodied in Lukas Seer; religion, embodied in the absurd character of Brother Holy; and the last patriarch, whose weak, irresolute manners foreshadow the end of the Lermiet dynasty, embodied in Lukas Death are symbols of a pathologically melancholic attachment to the past. This parodic representation of the valley's inhabitants, whom Flip also describes as "homemade" (Brink, *Devil* 74), thus clearly emphasises, once more, that Devil's Valley is an anachronistic space, melancholically stuck in time, looking backwards, unable to move on or to fight against the ensuing disasters by accepting the changes that have occurred in the rest of the country.

However, the way in which Flip describes the valley's inhabitants proves also to be revealing when one looks at the narrator and his own losses, melancholic behaviour, guilt, and complicity in connection to his country's past.

While the few critics who have written about *Devil's Valley* focus exclusively on the inhabitants of the place (Ezeliora; Petzold) or at most on Flip's role as a detective and journalist who is intent on uncovering the valley's history and the mystery around several murders that have occurred (Highfield), none of them pays great attention to Flip's own problematic relationship with South Africa's apartheid past.

In a post-apartheid South Africa, Flip, as an ageing white man, perceives himself as being on the margins of society.[33] Not only has he lost his family – shortly before going to Devil's Valley his wife Sylvia left him after an unhappy marriage and even his children, who won't have anything to do with him, emphasise that it is Flip who is to blame for the divorce (Brink, *Devil* 17) – but he is also very unsuccessful in his work as a sub-editor at a newspaper (17). Flip is not, in contrast to Vladislavić's protagonist Aubry Turl in *The Restless Supermarket* and to David Lurie in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*, averse to the changes in post-apartheid South Africa. On the contrary, there is indication that he intended to write critically about the apartheid government:

> Right up to the eighties there were moments when in a flush of misplaced romanticism or something I still thought I had a "role" to play. […] you look on while police set fire to the shacks of people who refuse to move elsewhere; […] you go back to the office and file your story with the news editor, […], who draws red lines through most of it and tells you to rewrite the piece […] And when you object, he blows his top and tears up the sheets. […] And after the incident has been repeated three times you give up trying. You cannot resign either, because jobs are scarce and you have a wife […] and two kids at varsity. (15)

What is more, in terms of class Flip sees himself as underprivileged, since his father worked as a shunter on the railways, while his competition (not only with regard to an academic position as a PhD fellow in history, but also when it came to Flip's wife Sylvia) Twinklettos van Tonda, comes from a rich Afrikaner family (11). Flip's Calvinistic upbringing was not only marked by poverty, but also by a difficult relationship with his parents: His father often beat

[33] The topic of the ageing white man who perceives himself as being marginalised in post-apartheid society, is not only explored in Brink's later novel, *The Rights of Desire*, where the protagonist loses his job to a younger black man, but it is most famously dealt with in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*, and Ivan Vladislavić's *The Restless Supermarket*. For a discussion of the 'the aging white man' as a trope in recent South African literature, see Nuttall (*Entanglement*, 44–48).

him up when he was still a child,[34] while his mother seemed to interfere very little or not at all (69). Due to his underprivileged position in terms of class, Flip seems to align himself rather with the disenfranchised people of the country than with the privileged white South Africans. He distances himself just as much from the apartheid system as he seemingly does from the men in the valley.

However, what of Flip's own role as a beneficiary of the apartheid system? The men in the valley are portrayed as patriarchal and conservative, upholding segregationist principles with a sickening fervour, while Flip stylises himself as the complex-laden ageing journalist who nevertheless is heroic enough to want to protect his lover Emma; Piet, the child that resembles him so much; and Annie, the widow of Alwyn, whose husband the community flogged to death for stealing water.

However, he never reflects upon his own role as a beneficiary of the same patriarchal system. For instance, he blames his superiors for not having permitted him to write critically against the apartheid system instead of acknowledging that as a white journalist he himself has occupied a privileged position during all his work life. This is why I suggest that Flip is as unable to mourn the loss of his privilege as the men in the valley are. Firstly, the mere fact that he stylises himself rather as a victim than as a beneficiary is reminiscent of one of the cases that the Mitscherlichs describe in *The Inability to Mourn*. They discuss a case study of a man who distanced himself vehemently from the ideology of the Third Reich. The Mitscherlichs state that:

> [h]e talked a great deal about the victims of this period, but actually more by way of showing how he himself had suffered through the dreadful deeds committed by other Germans. Putting it somewhat sarcastically, one might say that the patient was claiming sympathy for himself as one of the most pitiable of the Nazi victims. (42)

The fact that Flip disavows his position as a privileged white man during the apartheid system leads to a repression of and hence the inability to cope with and possibly mourn this (lost) unacknowledged privilege. Secondly, by looking at Flip's relationship with the men in the valley, one might say that Flip

[34] Flip's childhood reminds one of what Piet Snot has to suffer in the valley. The little boy is terribly mistreated by his father Jurg Water and Flip, rather involuntarily (since Piet follows him around wherever he goes) develops an emotional bond towards the child and feels (partly) responsible for Piet's death. On a metaphorical level, one might read Piet (and the fact that Flip calls him "my snotty shadow" (61)) as Flip's own painful childhood that haunts him.

shows signs of postcolonial melancholia as well. Here, Truscott's observations on self-parody with regard to melancholia are revealing:

> Afrikaner self-parody has offered Afrikaners a way of being authentic post-apartheid South Africans by turning against the past and the past as it lives on in the present. This pattern of parodic selfhood is also a pattern of melancholic selfhood as the technique of self-parody preserves, as a spectacle, precisely what it negates. It is a rebellion against the social world that has occasioned the loss and has rendered lament for the object unavowable. I am suggesting that Afrikaner self-parody, as a pattern of melancholic selfhood, both transgresses (through identification with problematized features of Afrikanerdom) and fulfils (by parodically negating these features) the injunctions of the post-apartheid nation. Self-parody figures, in other words, a form of what I want to call national melancholia, a form of melancholia cultivated in Afrikaner subjects by the post-apartheid nation. (97–98)

Thus, Flip can only find a place for himself in the "new" South Africa by distancing himself from and yet preserving traditionalist Afrikaner beliefs by parodying these very beliefs. On the one hand, he is extremely critical of the men of the valley, and on the other hand, he admits that most of them have endeared themselves to him in a rather complicated way: "In spite of my suspicion and resentment, I felt moved by something in the old fucker [Lukas Seer], perhaps in all of his breed" (Brink, *Devil* 321).

The question arises whether Flip does not see his own life as a privileged white man mirrored in the lives of the male inhabitants of the valley. Thus, describing the men in a parodic way might also be read as a form of self-parody. This suggestion is underlined when one looks more closely at Flip's troubled relationship with Henta.

I have mentioned above that Henta, echoing Talita's desire to escape from the valley, attempts to seduce Flip in order for him to take her to the outside world. However, Flip rebuffs Henta's advances (82–83). Later, in one of his erotic dreams or visions, Flip finds himself in the bluegum forest with Henta and finally he wonders whether there is any difference between himself and the child-molesting Jurg Water:

> And I suppose that was how I came to think of Henta at this wholly inopportune moment. The extraordinary paleness of her skin, the bluish whiteness of skimmed milk. Her little nipples like the pink snouts of rabbits. The curve of her belly with the deep inverted comma of her navel, and below it the small patch of reddish curls, too sparse to camouflage the cleft of her pussy. The mere act of dwelling so fondly on these details shamed me: the need for it, the hang-

> ups behind it. If there was any difference between myself and Jurg Water, I thought, full of self-loathing, it was only in degree, not in kind. (211)

After his last encounter with Henta, Flip is unable to shake off the feeling of guilt and/or shame that arises when he thinks of her and her origins which he finds himself unable to explain.

Thus, the only time in which Flip sees himself as the oppressor rather than the oppressed, as the privileged rather than the marginalised, is during his encounters with one of the characters who suffer from the most terrible form of abuse and injustice in the valley. His feelings of self-hatred, shame and guilt and the simultaneous feelings of repulsion towards Henta are signs of a struggle of ambivalence which is typical for end-phase melancholia in the Freudian sense: "each single struggle of ambivalence loosen[s] the fixation of the libido to the object by disparaging it, denigrating it and even as it were killing it" (Freud, "Mourning" 257).

Devil's Valley is, then, a narrative where different forms of melancholia are intricately connected. The fact that the characters oscillate between pathological and resistant forms of melancholia (and here I am thinking of the women in the novel) enriches my observations on melancholia in post-apartheid South Africa since it lays emphasis on issues such as complicity and intergenerational loss in a more nuanced way. The male, exclusively pathological form of melancholia is less complicated and yet it echoes very strongly what the Mitscherlichs, Paul Gilroy, and Ross Truscott have theorised for the privileged parts of societies who cannot face the losses and the new beginnings which ensue from great political change. This is then a very different form of melancholia to the one I have discussed in the previous chapter since it exclusively focuses on losses, complicity, and the inability to mourn on the part of white society and hence must be regarded as different from more de-pathologised versions of melancholia.

3.2 MELANCHOLIA OF THE PRIVILEGED: WHITE TRAUMA, REFUSED IDENTIFICATION, AND SIGNS OF MOURNING IN SARAH PENNY'S *THE BENEFICIARIES*

In his essay, "Memory, Metaphor, and the triumph of Narrative", Njabulo Ndebele observes that while there may be an "informal truth and reconciliation commission under way among the Afrikaners" (24),[35] the English-speaking white population is much more in denial about their complicity with the apartheid system:

> I am presenting, of course, the archetypal image of the bleeding-heart, English-speaking, liberal South African, who has no understanding of why he is hated so much when he sacrificed so much for the oppressed. […] Fellow South Africans of this kind are blissfully unaware that they should appear before the TRC. They are convinced that it is only the Afrikaner who should do so. ("Memory" 26)

Ndebele goes on to observe that the Afrikaner's informal TRC reflects itself in literature, such as Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples* and Jeanne Goosen's *Not All of Us*. Since the publication of Ndebele's essay there has occurred a shift within the white English-speaking literary scene in South Africa. Many novels by white English South African writers which circle around apartheid and complicity have been released: Michiel Heyn's *The Children's Day*, Pamela Jooste's *People like Ourselves*, Jo-Anne Richards' *The Innocence of Roast Chicken*, and Sarah Penny's *The Beneficiaries* are but a few examples. Therefore, it seems as though an informal TRC for the white English South African community has followed the publication of Ndebele's article.

As different as all of these works are, they do have one similarity: They focus on child protagonists who are bystanders during apartheid. In contrast to novels such as *Agaat* or *Devil's Valley*, for instance, there is emphasis on having benefited passively from the segregationist system instead of active complicity with apartheid.

Sarah Penny's *The Beneficiaries*, which focuses on Leticia's (Lally) attempts to come to grips with having been a beneficiary of the apartheid system during her self-imposed exile in London, is one striking example which deals with the position of the English-speaking white population during and after 1994. The

[35] Here, Ndebele alludes to confessional autobiographies, memoirs, and novels that Afrikaans speaking writers published in the 1990s.

novel focuses on topics such as guilt, complicity, the role of the English-speaking South Africans during apartheid, and the relevance of the TRC for the 'new' South Africa.

The Beneficiaries is Penny's second book. It was preceded by the memoir *The Whiteness of Bones*. Her third and latest novel, *The Lies we Shared*, a text about the histories of Kenya and Zimbabwe, was shortlisted for the Sunday Times Fiction Award in 2012. *The Beneficiaries* traces the life of Lally, a thirty-five-year-old woman who lives in self-imposed exile in London. The novel opens with Lally receiving a letter from the mother of a young man (an apartheid activist who vanished during Lally's schooldays), asking her to testify before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in order to shed light on his disappearance. Memories of her childhood and adolescence then begin to intrude into her present life in London. The novel thus consists of two narrative strands: The first strand shows Lally living in England in 1998, where she reunites with her erstwhile schoolmate and lover, Pim, on whose parent's farm she stayed during shorter holidays since her own parental farm was a great distance from her Eastern Cape boarding school. Pim – who by now is married, has two children and works as a banker – has settled very well into English life. This is in contrast to Lally, who does not tend to stay in the same place for long periods of time. When he and Lally begin their affair, the two lovers' past is – sometimes painfully and sometimes fondly – conjured up before them. But while these memories seem to be mere nostalgic reminiscences for Pim, Lally's past catches up with her and threatens to overwhelm her. The second narrative strand mostly follows Lally's memories of her childhood and adolescence, beginning in 1978 in South Africa. In short chapters, focalised through Lally's third-person narration, the present narrative is interrupted, and the young anorexic Lally, who is confused and nauseated by the apartheid system and more immediately by the hierarchical system of her boarding school, is the centre of the story.

Lally's present and her past are linked by three pivotal things: Her anorexia, which she continues to suffer from in the present, her relationship with Pim, which she resumes when they meet in London, and most importantly, her knowledge of the disappearance of Sipho Qhashane. Sipho, a young activist and son of one of the black servants at Lally's school, is hidden in a shed at the school by his mother Nomda. The 15-year-old Lally, due to her insomnia, finds out that he is on the school premises and sees herself as an accomplice of sorts in hiding Sipho. Not only does she have a special bond with his mother Nomda, who comforts her after a breakdown, but she also leaves food for the

young man outside his hiding place. One night, however, Sipho is discovered by the school prefects and is consequently taken away by the police and his whereabouts remain unknown until the present. During the TRC hearings, 20 years after Sipho's disappearance, Nomda enquires into her son's disappearance and Lally receives a letter from her with the plea to testify before the commission.

In this chapter, I shall argue that, firstly, Lally's intruding memories, her anorexia, and her tendency to run away from her past, are signs of a deep-seated Freudian melancholia and feelings of guilt and shame for having been complicit in the apartheid system. Her refusal to eat is a reflection of her inner turmoil and thus Lally's body is, like those of most of the other female protagonists of the texts that I discuss, a speaking body. Lally's eating disorder can be compared to Agaat's disfigured arm (a sign of the traumas she experienced in her parental home), or Marion's and Helen's injured feet which symbolise their troubled hybridity. I shall show that on the one hand, her anorexia points to an inability to process the loss of her home and family (most especially her mother), from which she was torn away during her stay at an all-white English boarding school. On the other hand, her refusal of food reflects her guilt and complicity with, but also a revolt against, the apartheid system – feelings which have inscribed themselves onto her body, and remain visible until the present. Secondly, I shall focus on Pim and argue that Pim's relationship with South Africa, its past and present, is ambivalent and oscillates between the need to forget and the wish to restore the past. By drawing on Derek Hook's concept of 'refused identification' (*Critical Psychology*), I suggest that Pim, who seems much more outwardly stable than Lally in terms of having left his past behind, is, at the end of the novel, the one who cannot face his past. This observation is complicated by the narrative situation since the readers are presented with both Pim's and Lally's perspectives on this matter. However, while some instances of the novel are focalised through Pim, Lally's perspective and her observations on the other characters prevail nevertheless.

COLLAPSED TIME: PAST, PRESENT, AND THE REPRESENTATION OF TRAUMA IN THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

As with most of the other books that I analyse, the narrative structure of the novel is an important indicator for unmourned loss(es), trauma, or the marginalisation of certain voices within official discourse. *The Beneficiaries* is, like *Playing in the Light*, *Agaat*, or *Room 207*, for instance, a highly fragmented nov-

el. The novel is divided into two parts, which both begin with letters addressed to Lally. The first part starts with the letter from Nomda, and the second part opens with an official letter from the TRC in which Lally is asked to submit a statement regarding Sipho's disappearance.

The two parts are divided again into many different subchapters that jump from the present to the past and back to the present, such as "A Letter" (Penny, *Beneficiaries* 1), "Standard Eight" (10), "A Second Letter" (111), and "The Concupiscence of Pim" (213), to name but a few. The short length of each subchapter gives the story a fragmented, filmic quality. These chapters are mostly told from Lally's perspective, with two exceptions: Two chapters are devoted to Nomda and one to Pim. While the third-person perspective largely tells the story from Lally's point of view, the narrative voice can be defined as omniscient, since the readers are presented with glimpses into various people's thoughts in both narrative strands, such as Ruth (Pim's wife), Mr Greenbow (Lally's boss in London), and Aunt Caroline (Pim's mother), amongst others. Both narrative strands are told in present tense, which highlights the unrelenting impact of the past on Lally's present.

The fact that the narrative switches between the present and the past after two, or at the most three, chapters gives the impression that Lally is undergoing an experience of belatedness, or *Nachträglichkeit*, which, according to Cathy Caruth who draws on Freud's observations on trauma, implies that a traumatic event, the psychic gravity of which one might not be fully aware of at the moment of injury, catches up with one at a later stage of life (17–18). This may occur in the form of nightmares, intruding memories or the subconscious wish to repeatedly act out the traumatic event (1–2). Lally's memories of her schooldays are clearly triggered by the letters she receives in London. Her memories, which speak of bewilderment and loss during her days at a boarding school in the Eastern Cape, return, like snapshots of film scenes, into her present. Thus, Lally's past catches up with her years after she thought that she had left everything behind.

Lally's school is described as "an institution that was part of an institution, a layering of institutions, one on top of the other" (Penny, *Beneficiaries* 190). The school is a microcosm of apartheid, where segregation is clearly visible. The school is an all-whites school and, though they work at the school, all the labourers are black and thus exist in a parallel universe: "Beneath the white hierarchy of the school – the headmaster, teachers, and hostel staff, school prefects, house prefects, ordinary pupils – there is another black hierar-

chy; a busy subterranean hive of groundsmen and gardeners and handymen, cooks and kitchen staff and cleaning staff" (25).

Lally's trauma does not consist of one single event, but rather of the knowledge that she lives in a racist, segregationist, and hierarchical society: one might speak of "different layers of traumas" (Krog et al. 123) here. Penny places Lally in quotidian situations at her school where she experiences the pain of being away from home, the repressive structure at school, and the distance and alienation from the black staff. Underneath the different layers of trauma, Lally's separation from her mother and loss of her home is the trauma which she cannot name, for it surfaces only belatedly. I suggest that the consequences of these painful childhood memories manifest themselves in the inception of Lally's melancholic state during her adolescence, which continues into her adult life. Unable to articulate or even name the losses that occur during her childhood and teenage years, she is not capable of either actively remembering or mourning them in a Freudian sense. Mourning, on the one hand, would entail an active confrontation of one's losses (in Lally's case first and foremost the loss of her parental home). Melancholia, on the other hand, is the subconscious refusal to let go of that loss and the subsequent psychological blockade which Lally experiences.

The Beneficiaries is one of many post-apartheid novels that are partly told through the eyes of a child.[36] This narrative perspective is interesting in many ways, since it highlights themes such as (political) awakening and the loss of one's innocence.[37] In her essay "Out of the Mouths: Voices of Children in Contemporary South African Literature", Susan Mann observes the following concerning the child narrator in post-apartheid fiction:

> It is my conviction that the child narrator has lost its innocence, but so far this is not a loss that detracts. If anything, it strengthens the child's voice, and reinforces its power to highlight injustice, as the loss of childhood innocence implies a traumatic experience and a breach of justice all of its own. […] [The child narrator] is one who has the unique gift of living in the shadowy borderland between the subversive and the brilliantly creative. (346)

[36] Prominent texts in which the narrators are children are Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples*, Jo-Anne Richard's *The Innocence of Roast Chicken*, Rachel Zadok's *Gem Squash Tokoloshe*, Christopher Hope's *Heaven Forbid*, and Michiel Heyn's *The Children's Day*.

[37] These narratives are reminiscent of the format for coming-of-age novels. However, while coming-of-age-novels in general can encompass a variety of topics, here the novels are mostly centred around a political awakening and very often they are written in a confessional mode.

In *The Beneficiaries* Lally hovers not so much between the subversive and the creative, but finds herself, already as a child, ambivalently positioned between the subversive (she is intent on warning Sipho when she sees that his hiding place is no longer safe, for instance) and the complicit (with the school establishment and apartheid, as she fails to stand up for her classmate who is unjustly punished, for instance). These scenes, which are recounted in stark, realist detail, can be seen as Lally's repressed memories which resurface belatedly since Lally has never worked through them. Instead, during her adolescence she constructs an emotional 'wall' so that she is not affected by what is going on around her:

> It is as if she had stepped into an enormous hollow block of ice and the walls had sealed behind her. After the first shock of adjustment it is easy to see that the ice chamber has clear advantages. She is shut away from all the hot fluster from the world beyond and there is an icy, contained stillness in her curious new abode that makes it easier to think. (63–64)

The 'ice chamber' as Lally's sanctuary may be termed by the fact that it is also the place where she symbolically 'freezes' that part of herself that is affected by her environment. Thus, the 'ice chamber' is the place of repression and disassociation from her surroundings within Lally's inner self. In her adult life, she chooses to flee from her past by travelling expansively and by evading questions concerning her life in South Africa (181). The narrative structure reflects, then, the inner turmoil of the protagonist. Loss, trauma, and confusion are palpable since the past is told through the eyes of a young girl who is bewildered by her surroundings: "She understands nothing. If she understands anything at all, it is only that she understands nothing. She doubts everything" (45).

The fact that the two narrative strands seem to blend into each other highlights more than anything that Lally is unable to come to grips with her past. Besides the novel's structure, this is especially evident in Lally's bodily memories and her refusal to eat.

OF THE GUILT-RIDDEN BODY: LOSS, THE REFUSAL TO EAT, AND LALLY'S POSITION IN THE INTERSTICES BETWEEN COMPLICITY AND REVOLT

From the outset of the novel, strong emphasis is put on Lally's eating disorder. When she is having dinner with Pim and his family, she says: "'Actually I

don't like eating much. Once I didn't eat at all for weeks and weeks and eventually I fell over and they put me on a drip'" (5). Additionally, Lally's fridge merely "holds a bottle of Evian water and half an iceberg lettuce" and she worked as a "catwalk model for lesser known designers, flaunting the clothes which hung from her *bird's wing shoulders*" (40, 41; emphasis mine). These facts, amongst others, lead to the assumption that Lally suffers from anorexia nervosa. Significantly, her eating disorder is already discernible during Lally's childhood and adolescence. In the first flashback chapter, which focuses on Lally's schooldays beginning in 1978, the readers are told that she is "down in Matron's register as a difficult eater – to be weighed on Saturdays, to be apprised more regularly of the situation of children in Africa who have nothing to eat in the first place" (11). Thus, Lally's anorexia begins during her childhood and continues until the very end of the novel, with only one phase of alleviation during her first stay in England after having left South Africa for the first time. Both in the past and present plot, Lally's anorexia is constantly highlighted. Particularly the fact that she seems to suffer from anorexia from an early age can be read as a textual indication that her eating disorder is, and will continue to develop, as a manifestation of her traumas and losses.

The exact causes of this eating disorder remain largely unknown. However, factors may include:

- Having an anxiety disorder as a child
- Having a negative self-image
- Having eating problems during infancy or early childhood
- Having eating problems during infancy or early childhood
- Trying to be perfect or overly focused on rules. ("Anorexia Nervosa")

It is never revealed when exactly Lally begins to suffer from her eating disorder. However the fact that she is "a difficult eater" (Penny, *Beneficiaries* 12) at school (15 years old at the very most) indicates that her eating difficulties began in her pre-adolescent years. It is particularly interesting that the text draws on anorexia as a means of representation of Lally's trauma. The 'original' cause for Lally's anorexia is unknown, thus mirroring the fact that her 'original' trauma is buried under 'layers of trauma'.

However, Lally's anorexia might be fuelled by her oppressive environment (namely her school), which enforces rules and regulations on her. This is particularly visible when it comes to attempts at controlling her eating habits: "[S]he always has to sit next to the prefect at the head of the table, who usually executes her duties by stabbing her fork suggestively at Lally's plate at sporad-

ic intervals" (27). These rules and regulations, though, do not help to alleviate Lally's state. On the contrary, shortly before she enters her final year at high school, her anorexia intensifies as she finds it impossible to accept the hierarchical squabbles that ensue over who in her year becomes a prefect and who remains a skulker (140). She cannot bear the charged atmosphere of her fellow pupils' (in)tense desire for power, and when the hierarchical order is installed, she stops eating all together (141). However,

> [t]he head prefects and the teachers force her to eat. Every meal is a crass burgundy blur of admonitions and fingers pointing at her plate. There is a rule that you have to eat what you take but now the food is spooned onto her plate and she has to eat it, even though she did not help herself. Apart from the nausea, she resents this bullying terribly and finds it intensely humiliating. So she starts to vomit after the meals although she is not a classic bulimic; she has no desire to binge – every mouthful she ever puts in her mouth feels foul, alien, infected. (141–142)

Lally's refusal to eat can be read as an attempt to refuse to internalise apartheid ideas. This is further highlighted by the equation of food with the bodies of the teachers and prefects that represent the upper structure of the school hierarchy: "It is as if what she is being forced to eat are nuggets of the prefects and the teachers themselves. To make herself vomit she pictures the authorities rotting on a gibbet–the diseased flesh coming away in lumps onto her plate" (142). In this instance food is very much aligned with apartheid ideology, and evokes the metaphor of feeding someone ideas, where the act of eating symbolises the internalisation of these very ideas/ideologies. This is, though less in relation to food, underlined by what Pim thinks about the role that schools play within the apartheid system:

> The chief purpose of every single day in your life is to teach you what to hate and what to adore. And to programme you to be terrified if you forget which is which and to be scornful and angry if other people look as if they have forgotten. That's what school is, Lally – it's a training house for citizens. (104)

Lally's anorexia can be read, then, as a refusal to internalise apartheid ideals during her teenage years, but certainly also as a consequence of losses caused by apartheid. As an adult, her refusal to process food certainly points to an inability to process her past. The fact that she continues to suffer from anorexia is a strong indication that Lally has not overcome these losses, on the contrary, she refuses to acknowledge, let alone mourn, the separation from her mother as a child. Throughout the novel it is revealed that Lally was not allowed to

attend a local school for coloured children and subsequently her mother was forced to send her to an all-white English boarding school in the Eastern Cape. Her role as a white beneficiary within the apartheid system (foregrounded by the novel's title); and finally, the foreclosed and lost opportunities of her life. Here, I am particularly thinking of her difficulties to imagine herself as a mother. When Pim asks her if she would like to have children, she thinks to herself: "the whole notion of mothering fills her with a kind of unspecific uneasiness" (180). This uneasiness is explained somewhat towards the end of the novel where Lally links it directly to having grown up in apartheid South Africa, in contrast to Ruth who is English. When she visits Ruth and Pim for the last time, a wave of envy towards Ruth overcomes her:

> she's so jealous, […], so bloodily viscerally jealous of Ruth. Not because Ruth has Pim but because Ruth has a past like a Merchant Ivory past. *How could Ruth not be a good mother with her milky-breath past, her crumbling cookies and hat-ribbons childhood? And how could Lally even begin to know how to treat a child? What could she ever have learnt about the gentler rhythms of life in an institution, that was part of an institution […] ?* (190; emphasis mine)

However, the loss which shapes and defines Lally's life most acutely – the impossibility of living with her mother – is only hinted at within the novel. By contrasting Lally's life with Pim's family by the short intervals of her stays at home, it becomes clear that over the duration of Lally's time at school, her relationship with her parents – her mother is mentioned more frequently, her father almost does not feature at all – becomes estranged and distanced:

> [Lally] prefers Pim's farm, where she doesn't belong, to her own farm where she doesn't belong either but has to sit at meals with her mother and father, the carriage clock ticking sonorously on the mantelpiece – all pretending they belong to each other when in the end of course, you only ever belong to yourself. (29)

Her estrangement from her mother is again highlighted when Aunt Caroline makes a feeble attempt to broach the subject of Lally's eating disorder. At this, Lally puts back most of the lunch that is on her plate and says:

> 'My mother says I don't have to eat anything I don't want to.' Although Lally's mother, who eats like a bird herself, has never broached the austere silences of the carriage clock dominated dining room so far as to make a reference to Lally's eating problems. (87)

This indicates that Lally may be miming her mother's eating disorder. This points to – as it is the case in *Playing in the Light,* where Marion subconsciously inherits her parents' traumatic losses – an intergenerationally shared loss. It indicates that both Lally and her mother share the silenced loss of a mother-daughter bond which surfaces as a physical manifestation.

It is only towards the end of the novel, however, that Lally's boarding school stay and the subsequent loss of the possibility of a mother-daughter bond is related to apartheid. Lally confronts her mother and demands to know why the latter did not attempt to send her to the local school for coloured children which would have been close to their farm. Her mother replies that she did try, but that her request was rejected in writing, whereby her correspondent reasoned:

> While many children experience some difficulties when first transferring from the home environment to a residential facility, I am sure you will appreciate the greater harm that would result to the well-being of the child were a situation allowed to occur such as that suggested by yourself. (206–207)

The fact that her mother discloses this secret to Lally only much later in their relationship points again to the possibility of their anorexia as a sign for an intergenerationally shared loss which is silenced throughout the greater part of the novel.

The Bantu Education Act and apartheid's segregationist system are again fuelling a loss at a very quotidian level: In Lally's case, it deprives her of motherly love on two levels since she is uprooted from her home and subsequently finds it almost impossible to share more than one instance of bonding with the only motherly figure who appears in the novel. This is an interesting parallel to *Agaat*, where, as I suggest in my analysis of van Niekerk's novel, apartheid affects the protagonist on a quotidian basis. In Agaat's case it is the fact that her relationship with Milla is legally prohibited and she will only be considered as the servant, and never as Milla's adopted child by the public. Earlier I alluded to the character of Nomda Qhashane, the 'siesie'.[38] Nomda unexpectedly comforts Lally in a crisis moment of powerlessness against the cruelty and injustice that Lally encounters at her boarding school:

[38] 'Siesie' is "a Xhosa/Afrikaans hybrid for little sister" (Penny, *Beneficiaries* 26). In the novel, the term is used by the school children who refer to the black staff as 'siesie'. While the meaning of the word is not openly derogatory, it is nonetheless quite patronising in this context. After all, the black staff members are considerably older than the pupils. It has thus a similar connotation to the terms 'boy' and 'girl' which white people used to refer to their black staff during apartheid.

> Unexpectedly the woman walks over towards her bed, sits down on it and puts both her arms around Lally. Lally is shocked. It is in her mind to struggle – to pull herself away from the woman's African-woodsmoke smell, mixed with odours of Brasso and Jik – when she realises that she is crying. (57)

This shared intimacy with Nomda is, as Georgina Horrell observes, pivotal for Lally's political awakening to apartheid's injustices: "Unavoidably mixed into the child's moment of nurture is the 'panic' of her adolescent awakening, the understanding of a system of law and cruelty" (175). While I agree with Horrell that this shared and complicated moment of intimacy (one of affection and complicity as Lally becomes aware of Sipho's hiding place) does make Lally (partly) aware of her position as a privileged white person, I am of the view that Horrell reads the text too sympathetically. She calls it "a legitimating narrative, a tale that focuses on the shared powerlessness of the vulnerable/strong black woman and innocent/guilty white girl" (176). While I do not intend to trivialise Lally's traumatic loss caused by apartheid, it must not be forgotten that Lally belongs, despite her repulsion for the apartheid regime and despite her loss of home, to the white population who benefited from the segregationist system, in contrast to Nomda, whose son disappears as a consequence of his resistant activities. Besides, Nomda is the sole provider for her family who lives in the township close to Lally's school and must continue working at Lally's school after her son's disappearance, despite her worry and panic (Penny, *Beneficiaries* 159). Once the situation becomes too dangerous for her, since her son's activities might be traced back to her, she leaves the school herself and her whereabouts remain unknown to Lally (160). Against Horrell's reading I argue that one cannot, never mind how intense one shared moment/episode of powerlessness with regard to the apartheid system may be, relate Lally's trauma to Nomda's loss.

This strongly resonates with Ewald Mengel's and Michela Borzaga's observation that "white trauma – which is certainly different from black trauma – is nevertheless and unavoidably 'entangled' with black trauma" (Introduction xi). Thus, although an entanglement of both characters' experiences with loss is certainly palpable – Lally's knowledge of Sipho's hiding place and his subsequent abduction, Nomda's loss which Lally strongly empathises with, and the foreclosure of ever being able to build a warm relationship within the segregationist system – it must be emphasised that loss and traumatic experience have different consequences for Lally and Nomda. Lally, after all, decides to leave the country after high school, since she has a British passport. Thus she, in contrast to Nomda who is denied mobility as a disenfranchised black wom-

an, is physically able to walk away from apartheid. However, the segregationist system has left a mark on her psyche which presents with physical manifestations since she continues to suffer from anorexia nervosa even during her self-imposed exile in London. Lally's position is perhaps best captured by Ndebele's observation of the white English-speaking population of South Africa, whom he sees as being "in the interstice between power and indifferent or supportive agency. […] With a foreign passport in the back pocket of the trousers, now they belong – now they don't" (Ndebele, "Memory" 26). While Lally is often aware of this difference, she is nevertheless, throughout the greater part of the novel, unable to acknowledge her privileged position as a beneficiary of the apartheid system. She is, in the Mitscherlichian sense, unable to mourn her own complicity with the apartheid regime and her guilty feelings for that complicity. Similar to Flip in Brink's *Devil's Valley*, she completely rejects apartheid ideology and, at times, stylises herself more as a victim than a beneficiary. She feels marginalised at school, and is almost invisible to her fellow pupils: "the worst they might say of her was that she was dull. And the boys leave her alone, not pretty enough to solicit but not ugly enough to taunt" (Penny, *Beneficiaries* 12–13). Besides, the adult Lally makes a very significant statement about guilt while she is having an affair with Pim: "She objects to feeling guilty about anything because she's paid already, paid in advance, for whatever future sins she might commit. Paid in blight. Blight, she says at her face in the mirror above the basin, a blighted life" (115–116).

Thus, it seems that Lally considers the loss of her parental home, and perhaps the fact that she suffers from anorexia, as a punishment which absolves her of her sins. This strongly echoes the case study conducted by the Mitscherlichs, which I discussed in the previous chapter in relation to Flip, where the patient feels as if he was a victim of the Third Reich while in fact he belonged to the beneficiaries (Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich 42). For the greater part of the novel, Lally is, then, like Flip, unable to consciously acknowledge or verbalise her privileged status during apartheid, let alone mourn its loss.

With these thoughts in mind, it is worth returning to the "entanglement" (Mengel and Borzaga, Introduction xi) of Lally's and Nomda's trauma and its representation. Sarah Nuttall defines 'entanglement' as:

> a condition of being twisted together or entwined, involved with; it speaks of an intimacy gained, even if it was resisted, or ignored or uninvented. It is a term which may gesture towards a relationship or a set of social relationships that is complicated, ensnaring, in a tangle. (*Entanglement* 1)

I suggest that in the case of *The Beneficiaries* the entanglement and also the different extents to which Lally and Nomda experience losses and traumas (although both sets of experiences are caused by apartheid) can be seen in the way in which both characters' physical appearances are presented as juxtaposing and yet complimentary. Horrell observes that "it is the 'stout', comforting physicality of the black mother that the narrative circles around; her strength in contrast to Lally's anorexic, 'elfin' childlikeness" (176). Nomda is, then, what Lally is not: a caring and grounded mother-figure. However, the representation of Nomda is problematic. Of all the novel's characters, she is represented as the most stereotypical figure. Despite playing such a huge role in Lally's life and despite the fact that two chapters are written from her point of view, she remains the only depersonalised, stereotypical character in the novel. Nomda's name is, until her letter reaches Lally, unknown to her. She refers to her merely by "the siesie" (Penny, *Beneficiaries* 159), whereby the other cleaning staff are referred to as the "second siesie" (159) and the "new siesie" (160). This depersonalisation is particularly palpable when one examines her physical description: "The siesie is *plump in pale blue overalls and a white doek*. She wears socks and battered tennis shoes" (56, emphasis mine). Nomda is thus reduced to her work uniform and stripped of her individuality, which is complicated further by the description of her 'plump' black body which echoes stereotypical white notions of the black female body. This is repeated in the description of the other unnamed cleaning lady whom Lally asks for information about Nomda and who is reduced to her "wide bottom and […] slippers" (159).

I suggest that Nomda's stereotypical representation functions to highlight Lally's position as 'marginalised' white girl/woman and while it shows the entanglement of white and black trauma, it above all reproduces stereotypical and problematic images of black domestic workers. I find this particularly problematic because Penny's novel is being read at a matric level in South Africa. Texts such as Penny's novel facilitate the reproduction and circulation of highly problematic, racist, and stereotypical images about black women that are deeply etched in people's minds anyway. In her book, *White Women Writing White*, Mary West points out that in white women's writing in post-apartheid literature, the reproduction of stereotypical presentations of blackness is frequent. She states that novels written by white women are often "appealing to a premature celebration of new South African rainbow nationhood without having to negotiate the real politics of white normativity" (38). One of the novels which West analyses in her study, *People like Ourselves* by Pamela

Jooste, reproduces racist notions of black people to a much larger extent than Penny's text. Nevertheless, I read *The Beneficiaries* as a novel, although having anti-apartheid views as one of its principal topics, which unconsciously reproduces stereotypical images while attempting to deconstruct those very images.

One factor which complicates Lally's position as a privileged and yet 'marginalised' white woman is her eating disorder. The fact that she is suffering from anorexia, a disease frequently attributed to white middle-class teenage girls ("Anorexia Nervosa"), as a result of her childhood trauma, is aligned with her privileged position. This appears illogical at first, but if one reads Lally's anorexia against Tsitsi Dangarembga's protagonist Nyasha's anorexia, which is not acknowledged as such by the white doctor in *Nervous Conditions*, this statement might become somewhat clearer. Nyasha, a black Zimbabwean teenage girl who, after her stay in England returns home with her parents, can neither adjust to Zimbabwean life, nor is she allowed to embrace western beliefs, and struggles with anorexia after her traumatic experiences. However, while Lally's eating disorder would not be questioned by anyone, Nyasha is denied treatment since, according to the psychiatrist whom her parents take her to see after she has a nervous breakdown, "Nyasha could not be ill, […] Africans did not suffer in the way we had described. She was making a scene" (Dangarembga 201). With this comparison to *Nervous Conditions* in mind, Lally's 'marginalisation' and loss must be relativised. Yes, her body is certainly a reflection of loss and melancholia, as most female character's bodies analysed in this study are. However, her illness marks her as privileged, as a white middle-class beneficiary of an exploitative system. Lally's melancholia is also, compared to the other women analysed in this study, the most pathological one (apart from Milla, perhaps). There is little room for resistance or a transformation of melancholia into a tool of anger, empowerment and commemoration, since her losses, though undeniably influenced by the apartheid regime, seem nevertheless to have a rather individual demarcation. However, of all the fictional characters discussed in this study, Lally is the one who does transform the state of melancholia into mourning and a possibility for healing and closure.

THE (IM)POSSIBILITY TO MOURN IN THE TIMES OF THE TRC

Horrell reads *The Beneficiaries* as "a plea for reparation which is both forgiving and recuperating" (176). This is true as far is Lally is concerned, but I propose that her development must be read in comparison to Pim's character when

looking at the question of healing, closure, and the possibility for mourning, and ultimately, letting go of the past. I suggest that Lally's attempt to face her past must be juxtaposed against Pim's decision to 'become English'. While Lally attempts to work through her past in order to find a place for herself in the 'new' South Africa, Pim denies any loss and oscillates between the sentiment of restorative nostalgia for his home country and the disavowal of it.

Lally, for the most part of the novel, is portrayed as someone who tries to outrun her past. She makes use of her privilege as an English South African and opts for England rather than South Africa. This becomes very evident when one looks at a passage, narrated towards the end of the novel. On her last visit home, during the period of transition from apartheid to democracy, the following is said about Lally's stay in South Africa and her departure to England:

> The outgoing white government squabbling and manoeuvring for the last scraps of privilege. And blood and killing in Natal and the Witwatersrand. Burgeoning stories of coteries of killers on whose shadowed lives spotlights began to focus. And then Chris Hani slaughtered on his doorstep. *Lally, in front of the television, felt afflicted by cancers within and without and flew out a week later. On the aeroplane she felt guilty and weak, but relieved.* (Penny, *Beneficiaries* 205; emphasis mine)

Lally's decision to leave the country and her privileged position that allows her to do so is evocative of what Ndebele calls "being in the interstices" (Ndebele, "Memory" 26); that is, the uncritical claim to the privilege of moving between South Africa and England. However, after receiving the letters from Nomda and the TRC official, a change begins to occur in Lally: For the first time, she decides not to run away, but to face her past instead. She travels to Brighton, with a bag of photographs that reconstruct her life and the TRC clippings, gathered from the *Mail and Guardian*, in her luggage in order to write a letter to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. She uses the photographs and the TRC clippings in order to reconstruct memories of Nomda and her son. Two documents (a photograph and one newspaper clipping) serve as a trigger for Lally's emerging work of mourning. The photograph shows her and her friend sitting outside the girls' quarters at school with another figure in the background: "a siesie is cleaning the dining room windows […]. The siesie has her back turned to the camera. Lally can't tell which siesie it is – hers or another" (Penny, *Beneficiaries* 198). The newspaper clipping shows the picture of the Brigadier, known to Lally because he was stationed close to her school, seeking amnesty during the TRC process. The Brigadier is also respon-

sible for the capture and possible murder of Nomda's son Sipho. Die Luiperd, as the Brigadier is called in the township, stirs up vivid emotions within Lally: "Even reduced to a picture viewed in a foreign land, he seems vital, controlling, capable of producing fear" (201). After confronting these images, Lally has a breakdown in the bathroom of the restaurant where she tries to write the letter. However, the confrontation of her past also leads to a realisation: "In the bathroom she cries for a long time in the toilet stall. Their faces rise up in front of her: the victims Sipho Qhashane, Mrs Nomda Qhashane; the perpetrator, Die Luiperd, *and the beneficiary of the system, herself*" (203, emphasis mine). The fact that she acknowledges herself as a privileged beneficiary of the apartheid system is her first step towards the ability to mourn. Lally begins to embrace the idea of the TRC as a means of moving on: "Maybe it will be all right if these commission people know the crying. Maybe that is why there is a Commission – to cry, to write the letters, to let the words out" (204). Significantly, her greatest loss, the loss of home caused by the apartheid system, is acknowledged two pages after Lally's breakdown and after she writes the letter to the TRC (205). Her last step towards a hopeful future within the 'new' South Africa is her decision to go home. This is further underscored by the fact that she travels with a group of teenage schoolchildren who also return to South Africa: the group consists of white, coloured, and black children (although it is only one black pupil travelling with the group) and points to a more inclusive future for South Africa. The novel's last sentence – "Lally picks up her own bag and follows in their wake" (215) – points to a new beginning for Lally herself as she follows the new generation of South Africa, towards a hopeful future of transformation and inclusivity.

In light of Lally's work of mourning and her acknowledgment of her position as a privileged white person one might read Penny's novel as optimistic and hopeful. However, I suggest that the text is somewhat more ambivalent since Pim, who also lives in self-imposed exile in London, is less reconciled with his country's history than Lally. While at first glance he seems to be living a 'perfect' life in England – he has a job at a bank, he is happily married to Ruth, they have two children and live in a spacious house – things become more complicated when Lally enters his life. When Pim ends his affair with Lally after deciding that he is not willing to compromise his marriage, he muses about the reasons he began this extramarital relationship in the first place: "Let's admit it, Pim says to himself, it was a background thing. But why? *After all the distancing, all the releasing*, why would he want to?" (212, emphasis mine). Pim's attempt to distance himself from his home country, on the one

hand, and his nostalgic reminiscences of South Africa, on the other, become very clear throughout the narrative. When Lally and Pim meet for drinks and bump into a friend of Pim's:

> [Lally] observes that he has become almost completely English. It shows in how he dresses and, most tellingly, in how he walks. He has lost the loose limbering swagger of the African boy she remembers and adopted a confined northern trot – as if he had grown up in a bitter climate, as if he really had learned to walk warding off the physical effects of cold. Yes, he has removed those parts of himself which are not English. And when he can't avoid admitting that he is, or was, South African he reinvents himself, creating the impression that he was one of those boys who attended select and austerely liberal private schools in Cape Town or Johannesburg. (42–43)

However, while Pim melancholically represses a part of his identity, he seems to yearn for South Africa at the same time. This is visible on many levels. For instance, Lally notices that Pim's "house is full of unobtrusive African things, […] – carved walking sticks, beadwork, footstools – only they do obtrude because they don't look right, nestling against the rugs and against the radiators. 'A zoo for artefacts'" (115). This does not only point to Pim's nostalgia for his country of birth, but it also reveals something crucial about Lally herself. After all, it is her view that the beadwork and the walking sticks "don't look right" (155). This might suggest that it is difficult for Lally to see London and South Africa as two places that speak to each other. The readers do not gain any insights into how Pim might feel about the 'unobtrusive African things' in his house, but Lally does not seem to view their presence as a successful attempt at evoking a part of Pim's old life in his new home. Instead, for her the beadwork and the carved walking sticks in Pim's house are a clashing of worlds which cannot coincide.

On a more abstract level, Pim can identify much better with South African politics than with English political life. In a discussion with Lally, who feigns disinterest for South African politics, he says that in England it is "mind politics", whereas in South Africa it is "blood and soul politics" (136). Although Pim had been conscripted into the South African Defence Force, he identifies with the ANC and its anti-apartheid struggle. When he talks about the struggle or the reconciliation process, he uses the first-person plural (136, 163). This is particularly noteworthy since, while Lally awakens politically in her early teens, Pim recognises apartheid's injustices while he is in the army. He returns home, bewildered and confused, with the knowledge that what is happening around him is wrong. However, he does not, contrary to the way

he portrays himself in London, join the anti-apartheid movement. Like Lally, he chooses to emigrate without joining the struggle for freedom. While Pim's reminiscences of his home country might be explained as melancholia for a lost home, his decision to disavow any connection to South Africa, points instead to what Derek Hook calls 'refused identification'. According to Hook, 'refused identification' is at play when:

> what has been loved and lost propels a need for compensatory identifications precisely not with the lost object itself. This trajectory of identification is directed towards a symbolic locus that lies beyond the relation between the grieving subject and the lost object. This symbolic identification […] helps disavow the painful significance of the loss and it enables the location of more suitable object-investment. (*(Post)Apartheid* 159)

Pim decides, after ending his affair with Lally, that he will focus on England and his life there, rather than thinking of South Africa as a lost object of love – a lost home. In fact, he disavows his South African-ness altogether. He sees himself as "[a]n English father, in England" (Penny, *Beneficiaries* 213). In contrast to Lally, then, Pim does not take up the work of confronting his past in South Africa and his position as a privileged subject within apartheid structures, but replaces one lost object of love (South Africa) with a different object (England). Juxtaposing the mechanisms of refused identification and melancholia, Hook states: "Rather than a mechanism of blockage that prevents further libidinal ties [which is the case in melancholia], this is a relation […] of repulsion, a rejection of the object whose value is now drastically diminished and denied" (*(Post)Apartheid* 159). Refused identification, then, in contrast to melancholia, logically forecloses the possibility for commemorating or reflecting on one's past, and ultimately, the recognition of one's loss as a loss in order to be able to mourn it.

Thus, I argue that Pim does not, in contrast to Lally, seek closure. On the contrary, by devaluing the meaning of South Africa as a lost home, he refuses to acknowledge his position as a beneficiary of apartheid, which lends the novel an ambivalent ending. Due to Lally's successful work of mourning, the text can certainly be read as a "forgiving and recuperating" (Horrell 176) narrative. An additional reading of Pim's development suggests, however, that the novel is also a text of denial, disavowal, and ultimately the inability to mourn one's lost object of love. *The Beneficiaries* can thus be read as a text that highlights both successful and unsuccessful mourning, the denial and repression of one's past, and above all, the (un)acknowledgement of one's beneficiary status in a fundamentally segregationist and exclusionary society.

CHAPTER 4:
MELANCHOLIA IN URBAN FICTION

> I know I'm thirteen but I'm not a boy. On the streets boys my age support their families. They give their mothers money so that they can buy drugs and feed them nothing. […] I've seen a woman being raped by policemen at night near the station. […] I've seen a couple drive over a street child and they still kept going. I've seen a woman give birth in Sea Point at the beach and throw it in the sea. A boy? Fuck off. They must leave me alone. I have seen enough rubbish to fill the sea. (K. Sello Duiker, *Thirteen Cents* 142).

In the last chapter of this study I shall explore notions of loss, survival, and resilience in *Thirteen Cents* by K. Sello Duiker and *Room 207* by Kgebetli Moele. Both belong to a younger generation of authors who started writing after the end of apartheid.

After the advent of democracy, literature on urban life in South Africa experienced something of a 'boom' and city literature continues to flourish until today. Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to our Hillbrow* and both Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* and *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* remain seminal texts. Authors such as Moele, Niq Mhlongo (*Dog*, *After*, *Way Back*), Futhi Ntshingila (*Shameless*, *Do Not*), Sifiso Mzobe, and, more recently, Songeziwe Mahlangu and Masande Ntshanga, amongst others, have focused on urban life in Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban respectively. Topics such as inequality, prostitution, strategies of survival, racial tensions, hustling, corruption, and drug abuse appear in many of the novels on city life. Besides, the majority of the texts are preoccupied with the visibility of the past during which time the city was a racially segregated space – a reality which continues to echo throughout present day city spaces. This trajectory of looking back, finally, often seems to have an influence on how futures in urban spaces are imagined. More often than not, and here Moele's and Duiker's texts are no exceptions, the future of the characters (and sometimes of the city itself) is imagined in grim, hopeless, sometimes apocalyptic ways.

Both *Room 207* and *Thirteen Cents* are novels of survival and disillusionment with both past and future, ultimately focussing on loss and failure. I shall thus read both texts through the lens of melancholia. In my chapter on *Thirteen Cents* I shall read Azure's troubled identity using Cheng's concept of melancholia, and explore notions of resistance, strategies of survival, and

forms and symbols of resilience. *Room 207*, in turn, can be read as a melancholic text in the Freudian sense. In contrast to *Thirteen Cents* – which is a story that, although it resists closure, also powerfully highlights the possibility of resistance and resilience within this melancholic state – *Room 207* does not represent melancholia as a form of resistance. On the contrary, I suggest that the novel's protagonists' attachment to the anti-apartheid struggle hero can be read as a crisis of their masculine identity. Also, the fact that the narrator of the story is faced with loss, failure, and having to return to his home village without having succeeded in his endeavours, highlights the difficulty of closure and an embrace of the future.

What both texts have in common, however, is the depiction of Cape Town (*Thirteen Cents*) and Johannesburg (*Room 207*) as sites of loss and unburied histories. While in *Thirteen Cents* the history and marginalisation of coloured people is central, embodied through the evocation of Sara Baartman, in *Room 207* the focus lies on Johannesburg's history of segregation and ongoing racial tensions. I shall thus read both Cape Town and Johannesburg as places of loss and melancholia in which South Africa's past shapes both the present and the future for the protagonists.

Interestingly, both novels are based on the personal experiences of their authors. *Thirteen Cents* is based on Duiker's experiences of living with street children in Cape Town for the duration of three weeks. In an article he writes:

> And then one day I followed a small circle of street children into their world. For three weeks I helped them look for a lost friend. Time enough for me to discover, that when you live on the street, the world is often a harsh, cold pavement with greedy pigeons competing for food with you, and a dangerous bully around the corner, ready to bludgeon you. (Duiker, "Streets" 9)

This experience is echoed in *Thirteen Cents* in which the harsh conditions under which street children survive in Cape Town are portrayed in an unflinching way.

Moele, in turn, said in a personal conversation that *Room 207* is based on his observations of a group of people who lived in a one-room apartment:

> There were four of them in that room, these guys are very interesting, the way they live. How is it possible that you can have sex in a room with your girlfriend and then some people are sleeping? […]. When I started writing, I didn't plan, I was like observing all these things. (Moele, Personal Interview)

The precarious living conditions of Hillbrow are central to *Room 207* where six men share a dilapidated one-room flat which becomes their ambiguously ren-

dered space of shelter for the duration of fourteen years throughout which they attempt to realise their dreams of an artistic career in Johannesburg.

Both novels thus portray, though in different ways, urban life as troubled not only by precarious living conditions and a harsh environment, but also as 'haunted' by the past on different levels. I suggest that it is this notion of experiencing both Cape Town and Johannesburg as sites of loss that lends itself to a reading of both novels through the lens of melancholia.

4.1 OF ANGER AND (SELF-)DESTRUCTION: RACIAL MELANCHOLIA IN K. SELLO DUIKER'S *THIRTEEN CENTS*

Sarah Penny's *The Beneficiaries* is, as I have outlined in the previous chapter, partly narrated through the eyes of a child. Lally's childhood memories provided a somewhat more 'innocent' account of the life of a privileged white child and the attempt at tracing a kind of political awakening. As I have pointed out, the child narrator is no scarce phenomenon in post-apartheid literature. *The Beneficiaries* or *The Innocence of Roast Chicken*, for example, are accounts of white girls who grow into guilty white women, recounting their awakening to apartheid's injustices from the vantage point of adulthood. In contrast to these narratives, K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* has its male child narrator Azure recount his life on the streets of Cape Town in the first person. Not only is he abused by several adults, but he is also without protection or help since he has no family to speak of. Azure is at the other end of the spectrum of privilege and wealth. In contrast to Lally, the boarding school child who was a beneficiary of apartheid, Azure remains, even in a post-apartheid South Africa, disenfranchised. Moreover, Azure can be described as a doubly marginalised figure since he is not only sexually exploited by (rich) white men who come to Sea Point for cheap sex, but he is also harassed by the coloured gangsters who rule the streets of Cape Town: First by Allen, a pimp who steels Azure's money, and then by Gerald, a powerful gangster who believes that Azure labels him as a black man and subsequently has Azure beaten up and violated for several days.

Thirteen Cents is Duiker's first novel and was followed by *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* and *The Hidden Star*, which was posthumously published in 2006. One manuscript remains with his family and is yet unpublished, as Duiker's mother, Angeline Duiker, reported in an interview (Demir et al. 31).[39] Sello Duiker took his life on the 19th of January 2005. He reportedly suffered from a bipolar disorder and felt that his medication interfered with his creativity (Raditlhalo, "Travelling" 96). He remains, alongside Phaswane Mpe, one of the most critically acclaimed writers of the early post-apartheid generation (Mzamane, xi).

[39] Kamogelo Duiker, Sello Duiker's brother, said in an interview: "There are a couple of floppy discs that we recovered from [Kabelo's] house. I have never actually looked at them. I forgot. A couple of books, short stories that he's got. There is a journal. My mum's got the bag. There are a couple of paintings in it. […] Let me say that we haven't quite unpacked it. So once I can get my hands on those floppy discs, I'll sift through them, but, out there in the sky, basically everything Kabelo had is with us" (Demir et al. 35).

Duiker can be seen as a precursor to the so-called kwaito generation. Different styles of music, particularly kwaito and hip-hop, feature prominently in his oeuvre, as do the following themes (that are also prominent in the novels of Niq Mhlongo, Kgebetli Moele, and Sifiso Mzobe, who are all seen as forming part of the kwaito generation): attempts to survive in a post-apartheid urban environment, negotiating (queer) identities, psychological breakdowns, drug abuse, and disillusionment with the post-apartheid government. What critics have mostly focused on in their work on Duiker's oeuvre is the topic of sexuality (Stobie, "Somewhere"; Munro), urban life, particularly in *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (Samuelson, "The City"; Graham), and Duiker's novels as coming-of-age fiction (Munro; Raditlhalo, "Victory"; Tsehloane). In comparison to *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*, *Thirteen Cents*, although it has been taught at various South African universities, still remains under-researched (see Demir et al. 31). Those who critically engage with the text, such as Brenna Munro, Timothy Johns, and Shaun Viljoen, focus on Azure's coming of age and his sexual awakening, reading the novel predominantly through a queer lens. In contrast, Olivier Moreillon interrogates *Thirteen Cents* in terms of space and place. Despite the fact that the question of race is often mentioned, it has not been analysed in detail. Johns even suggests that *Thirteen Cents* is much more about economic survival than about "cultural 'origins'" (251).

In this chapter, however, I suggest that the topic of race is indeed central in Duiker's novel. Azure's in-between position and the evocation of the figure of Sara Baartman during Azure's first stay on Table Mountain suggest that the racialised subject's quotidian experiences speak of violence, loss, and a subsequent melancholia. Azure is, much like Toni Morrison's protagonist Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* (Raditlhalo, "Travelling" 98), marginalised by both the black and the white communities alike.

With recourse to Sigmund Freud's and Anne Cheng's different concepts of melancholia, I argue that Azure is a melancholic character who cannot mourn the loss of his parents, particularly his mother. This suggests that his melancholia is very much gendered. Interestingly, one can draw parallels to the other texts considered in this study: In van Niekerk's, Wicomb's, and Penny's novels, the (symbolic) loss of the protagonists' mothers is central for Agaat's, Marion's, and Lally's character formation, respectively. In *Thirteen Cents*, however, it is a male child who loses his mother, not a woman or a little girl. I suggest that Azure's gendered melancholia is closely linked with his racial identity and that the loss of his mother may be considered as a source of anguish and pain while his father's absence (or the absence of any exemplary

male figure for that matter) ironically empowers him to develop various strategies of survival and resilience.

Furthermore, I argue that the 'mother city' (as Cape Town is affectionately known) itself can be seen as a place of melancholia and (self-)destruction. The hostile environment of Cape Town, particularly its cruel inhabitants, is given rise to by violent memories of segregation, evictions, and the exploitation of black and coloured people – memories which frequently resurface and make Cape Town a place of loss. Ultimately, it is Azure's disenchantment, his failure to find a home in Cape Town, and a sense of the city as violent which make it a place of losses and traumatic sights.

Of all the novels discussed so far, *Thirteen Cents* and *Devil's Valley* are the only ones that do not allude to the TRC at all. In contrast to most other works, I shall therefore read it outside the frame of melancholia as counter-narrative to the concept of mourning. *Thirteen Cents* is also the least explicitly political novel. As Timothy Johns rightly observes:

> *Thirteen Cents* comes across as strangely detached. Apartheid is never mentioned. In fact, there is very little notice of anything in the news. Current news, together with the politics of the past, seem to exist outside the novel's radar. […] Only the present and one's ability to survive in the present matters. […] The lack of political discussion in the novel is actually telling: foreclosure of direct involvement with politics suggests that many South Africans, such as the urchin hero of the novel […], remain excluded from any kind of meaningful relationship with the government. (254)

This not only criticises Azure's position of marginality, but also highlights the fact that melancholic characters in post-apartheid South African novels can be regarded as antagonistic to an all-inclusive 'rainbow nation' rhetoric.

UNSPEAKABLE LOSS: INCORPORATING THE MOTHER

From the outset of the novel, it becomes clear that the orphaned Azure is marginalised on different levels: On the brink between childhood and adolescence, he is without protection and must fend for himself on the streets of Cape Town. His parents, as readers find out in the very beginning of the story, were killed three years previously in Johannesburg. After the murders, Azure travelled, accompanied by his friend Vincent (who is not much older than Azure) to Cape Town in order to try and make a living. However, this proves to be extremely difficult. The almost 13-year-old boy works as a car guard during the day, but it is impossible to survive on the meagre 'salary' that he earns

watching cars — only a few coins here and there. In an attempt to make ends meet Azure thus sells his body to white men who look for cheap sex in Sea Point. This, as well as most other things which Azure recounts, is narrated in an extremely detached way: "I walk further along the beach till I come to the moffie part of the beach. I sit on a bench and wait for a trick" (Duiker, *Thirteen* 8). Again, the fact that Azure narrates his recourse to sex work with such nonchalance indicates that this work is not out of the ordinary for the narrator.

With regard to the detached narrative style, Azure's account of how his parents died is particularly noteworthy. This detached style is indicative of a traumatic loss which he has not yet processed, let alone begun to mourn: "My friend Bafana can't believe that I saw my dead parents and didn't freak out. But I told him. I cried and then it was over. *No one was going to take care of me*" (2; emphasis mine). Azure almost regards mourning his parents' deaths as a luxury he cannot afford, since he must make plans to survive on his own first. His tone here is rather cold and matter-of-fact, and particularly painful experiences that he is subjected to are related in the same detached way. Here, several encounters with his white clients, or the episode in which he is badly injured by Gerald's (a coloured gangster who subjects Azure to harsh violence after he mistakes him for Sealy, a black man who also lives under the bridge with Gerald) henchman, come to mind: "I get up, holding my broken ribs. [Sealy] punches me again with a strong left hook. I stagger and land on my face. He kicks me in the head and stamps on it, grinding me into the tar road" (38–39).

Brenna Munro states that "[w]hether his body is being sold or seized, Azure survives by removing himself from what is being done to that body and cauterizing his emotions" (202). This 'numbness' at instances of loss and injury points to an inability to mourn the various losses that Azure suffers throughout the novel: the loss of his parents, his psychological and physical sanity, ultimately his freedom and even his own name, as Gerald claims that he "owns" him, subsequently renaming him Blue – something which shocks Azure too much for him to do anything about it (Duiker, *Thirteen* 55–56). However, I suggest that Azure's greatest loss is his mother's death.

From the beginning of the novel it becomes clear that Azure must have had a close relationship with his mother. He states that his mother gave him his name and that this is the only thing he has left from her (1). However, only after Gerald captures him does it become evident how attached he is to his mother. When Azure is brought back to Gerald by Richard, a gangster who

holds Azure captive for days in his flat, subjecting him to terrible gang rape, the following conversation between Gerald and Azure ensues:

> 'I killed your parents because they were going to hurt you.'
> '*But I loved my mother and she loved me*.'
> 'You didn't love your mother. You feared that she would say no to anything you did. You did everything to please her. Your father hated you for that. He was going to kill you.'
> […]
> 'You must let your mother go. At night when you sleep she calls you. You dream of her, don't you?'
> '*Always*.' (69; emphasis mine)

While Azure's father is portrayed as a violent man who saw his son as a competitor and whose loss Azure finds less difficult to bear, it is his mother to whom he remains attached, she whom he claims to have loved, not his father. Besides, he constantly dreams of his mother. Apart from the allusion to a classical Oedipus complex which seems to be at play here, it is interesting that Azure seems to have even incorporated a part of his mother. In the Freudian sense, one criterion for melancholia is to incorporate the lost object of love, being unable to remove one's libido from that very object as would be the case during a healthy process of mourning. In the course of the same conversation just quoted, Gerald remarks:

> '[…] I know that you understand what it means to be a woman already. […] You bleed through the anus when you shit, don't you?'
> 'I've always been like that.'
> 'Your mother did that to you. She loved you too much. So much that you wanted to understand everything about being a woman.' (71–72)

Azure has, then, incorporated the symbol which is perhaps most closely linked to femininity: the blood of menstruation, of fertility. While Gerald describes this as "evil" (72), I argue that it can also be regarded as a symbol of Azure's continued attachment to his mother. It is noteworthy that here his lost object of love and what he symbolically incorporates from his mother make Azure's melancholia highly gendered. Since he also mentions that he has inherited his blue eyes, a sign of his mixed-race identity, from his mother, Azure's gendered melancholia and his marginalisation for being perceived as a child who does not belong, intersect in various instances.

Throughout the novel, it turns out that Azure is not only melancholically attached to his mother, but that the loss of motherly love that he finds himself

unable to articulate, although he constantly seeks it, is a recurring pattern. Munro rightly observes that "his emotional attachments to women fail" (203): His warm and special connection to Liesel, a sex worker who lives under the bridge near Gerald, changes after she believes that he has become a gangster; and Joyce, a waitress who feeds him and is supposed to be saving his money for him turns out to be stealing it instead. Perhaps the only significant connection Azure finds with a woman occurs in a dream. When he flees from the city onto Table Mountain after having been beaten up and gang raped, he encounters, in a dream, Saartjie, a woman who can be read, as Munro (204) and Viljoen (xvi) amongst others have noted, as an evocation of the historical figure of Sara Baartman: "At the cave I meet a woman who looks like she lived a very long time ago. She is short and her bum is big but she has the lightest smile I've ever seen. She wears only a leather thong and her long breasts are like fruit" (Duiker, *Thirteen* 119). In their ensuing conversation Saartjie indirectly refers to herself as his mother. Azure feels an inexplicable connection towards her and the need to defend and protect her (126–128).

While I partly read Saartjie as a lost mother figure whom Azure cannot mourn when he is awake and yet strongly feels a melancholic attachment towards throughout the dream, there is a second, more complex side to her character at play. Munro describes her as "a fellow melancholy lost soul; Baartman, after all, like Azure, was exploited for her racially exoticized body" (205). Saartjie's melancholic state is highlighted through the fact that she almost constantly cries, and, tellingly, she has a wound under her left breast, which Azure attempts to heal. There could be several reasons for Saartjie's melancholia. She says, for instance: "The eagles stole my babies. […] They fed them to T-Rex. But he didn't know they were his babies" (Duiker, *Thirteen* 127). Her melancholy could thus have been triggered after the tragic loss of her children who were eaten by her own husband. However, there might be a second, more complex layer to her melancholia. Saartjie is portrayed as a person who firstly does not belong; that is, she cannot answer Azure as to whether or not she lives alone in the cave (120). The fact that she looks as if she "lived a very long time ago" (119) makes her a person who does not belong to the temporal marker of the present, either. Saartjie, and the memory of her racialised body, cannot be laid to rest. Thus, she seems to be stuck in time. At the time of the publication of *Thirteen Cents,* the remains of Sara Baartman had not yet been repatriated to South Africa. This happened only a year after the novel

was published.[40] Moreover, in the dream sequences Saartjie's fate appears to be dictated by men only – by her husband, her father, and to a certain extent also by Azure. Mirroring the historical character of Sara Baartman, whose life was dominated by the men who sold and exhibited her in England and France, and even after her death by Georges Cuvier who dissected her remains, Saartjie in the dream is almost without agency. She finds herself in a constant position of waiting for her husband. When Azure asks her what she usually does, she answers: "I wait for T-Rex" (129). Also, she is afraid of the Mantis, her father, whom she describes as being angry with her for having had her babies stolen. The only person with whom she seems to be developing a somewhat closer relationship is Azure. After all, he heals her wound: "I take out a small bone from her ribs. I use it to take out the maggots under her breast. Then I sew up her wound with some string" (127). This scene can be read as an inversion of the biblical story of how God created Eve from Adam's rib (Gen. 2). On the one hand, the evocation of the Adam-and-Eve-story underlines Saartjie's role as maternal figure. On the other hand, the inversion of the biblical story, namely that it is the woman's rib which is taken out from her own side and not the man's (in the process of creation, and here, healing) could lend itself to a more hopeful reading. The fact that it is Saartjie's own physical body which alleviates her pain and the maggots in her wound – which in all likelihood was caused by Saartjie's father, Mantis (Duiker, *Thirteen* 126) – indicates her liberation from male oppression and domination. However, this scene must be read in an ambivalent light, for it is Azure, a male, who heals her wound. The fact that until their meeting she had been unable to heal herself, as well as the uncertainty of the fate of her physical body had Azure not dug the maggots from her side, points to Saartjie's troubled agency and foreshadows a change in their relationship.

Their relationship changes when Azure rescues her from Mantis. After Mantis vanishes, the following conversation between Saartjie and Azure ensues:

[40] After she died, Sara Baartman's remains were dissected by Georges Cuvier, "and her genitals were preserved in formaldehyde until her 2001 return to South Africa for burial" (Hoad 92). In the 19th and 20th centuries Sara's remains could be viewed in the Musee de l'Homme in Paris until 1985. In 1994, South African artists and activists began to campaign for her repatriation, but her remains were only returned in 2001 (Beukes 33). The Khoisan rights activist, Willa Boezak states that the poem "I've come to take you home", written by by Diana Ferrus in 1998 as a tribute to Sarah Baartman, was instrumental for the repatriation of Baartman's remains: "It took the power of a woman, through a simple, loving poem, to move hard politicians into action" (Davie).

'Why are you still crying?' I ask her.

'Because you killed my father.'

'But I was saving you. He was going to kill you.'

'*I didn't ask to be saved. 'You're not the only one who knows things.*' (128; emphasis mine)

By not taking Saartjie's wish into account Azure is complicit in robbing her of her agency. However, this is slightly relativised since Saartjie, though belatedly, criticises Azure for having saved her against her will, and he subsequently stays in the cave with her in order to keep her company while she is waiting for T-Rex.

Saartjie, then, is a marginalised figure who oscillates between past and present, the real and the phantasmagoric world, and who is almost stripped of her agency. The painful racialisation of her coloured body and her marginalised position strongly echo Azure's own experience of un-belonging, which he lives out between his white clients and the black people of Cape Town.

RACIAL MELANCHOLIA, RESILIENCE, AND RESISTANCE

Azure's blue eyes and his connection to Saartjie point to the topic of shame and 'miscegenation' of the coloured body in South Africa. Zoë Wicomb speaks about "the shame of having had our bodies stared at, but also shame invested in those (females) who have mated with the colonizer" ("Shame" 91). Azure himself says: "I wear my blue eyes with fear because fear is deeper than shame" (Duiker, *Thirteen* 19). Just as in *Agaat* and *Playing in the Light*, then, *Thirteen Cents* deals with the in-between position of coloured people in South Africa. However, while Agaat and Marion and her family oscillate between whiteness and being perceived as coloureds, Azure's case is much more complicated. Shaun Viljoen observes that "Azure troubles the main racial categories of apartheid identity, 'white', 'coloured', and 'black' – he is none of them and at the same time all of them" (xi). Azure clearly defines himself as black, however: "And then at the water's edge you find black people. *We* always seem to be scared of water" (Duiker, *Thirteen* 151, emphasis mine). Nevertheless, almost all the people who encounter Azure intend to categorise him as black but 'different'. Besides, he is often, and especially by his white clients, exoticised for his blue eyes. At one point Mr. Lebowitz, a client, asks him: "'You've got the most incredible blue eyes for a …' 'Darkie,' I smile […] 'Are they real?' That is the strangest question I've ever heard" (84). But the client does not only exoticise him for his blue eyes, he also stereotypically assumes

that black people must surely be listening to hip-hop while classical music is for whites. While they listen to "Carmina Burana" he says: "Carl Orff […]. He's like your … rap artists or whatever you listen to" (88). Here, forms of rejection, desire, and the attempt to retain the racial others, as Cheng (xi, 10) describes them for the melancholy of race, are at play. For his white clients, and during the encounter with Mr. Lebowitz from which I have quoted above, it becomes evident that he is a mere object of sexual desire who, although he fulfils his white client's needs, must be retained, 'put in his place', as it were. Mr. Lebowitz does not only make exoticising and racist remarks, he also emphasises that he is the one who is paying Azure for his sexual services (see Duiker, *Thirteen* 86) and thus he sees himself as being entitled to rule over Azure's body. Moreover, he treats Azure in an extremely patronising and condescending manner. Thus, Azure's marginalised position in terms of not only race, but also age and class is highlighted in this scene.

The retention of Azure's racialised body by discrimination is not only palpable on the side of the white men who sexually exploit him. His friend Vincent, one of his very few protectors, gives him the following advice:

> '[…] you have to be more black … like more black than all of us. You must watch what you wear. […] So now [people] look at your blue eyes and your shoes *and they think blue eyes, veldskoene, he's trying to be white. […] That's why people have beat you up all your life*. They think you're not black enough. (35; emphasis mine)

Azure is, then, always seen as not black enough, and certainly never as white enough. Richard, for instance, sees him as black and insults him with racial slurs while he holds him captive on the rooftop of his flat: "You're sleeping outside again. It's too hot in here en julle kaffirs stink" (54). Thus, Azure's racial identity consists of loss and negation. Never accepted within any community, he is denied feelings of home and belonging. On a private scale, Azure is a parentless child, but his loss is doubled since his racialised body is constantly rejected and desired at the same time: The white men who exploit him desire him for his blue eyes and yet they discriminate against him for being black and a marginalised street child. Besides, Gerald hates Azure precisely for having blue eyes. Shortly before Gerald has Azure beaten up Vincent explains to his friend: "[Gerald] thinks he's white because he's got straight hair and a light skin. If you show up with […] your blue eyes, he'll kill you. […] He'd love to have your blue eyes. Everyone knows that except you" (35). Gerald subjects Azure to physical and psychological violence to punish him for having pre-

cisely what he does not: the blue eyes which would bring him, in his mind, closer to whiteness. The symbolisation of whiteness and white acceptance through blue eyes is reminiscent of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. However, while in Morrison's novel the marginalised protagonist Pecola wishes for nothing but to have blue eyes which results in her being blue-eyed in her imagination, Azure sees his blue eyes as a burden while people around him desire them. Also, his blue eyes have led to racial humiliation and violent encounters which had started happening when he was at school in Johannesburg (37). Interestingly, the racial identities in *Thirteen Cents* are, in contrast to all the other novels under discussion here, more fluid and boundary-less. This is especially the case for Azure himself. Also, racial rejection, desire, and discrimination are less clear cut than in *Agaat*, *Playing in the Light* and most certainly in Penny's and Brink's novels.

All these violent encounters which encircle Azure's racial identity make him, as Munro observes, "a melancholy lost soul" (205). However, it would be too easy to describe him as a melancholic in the Freudian sense. On the contrary, I suggest that Azure's melancholic condition, similar to Agaat's melancholia in van Niekerk's novel, serves as a tool for self-empowerment and resistance. However, while Agaat actively undermines Milla's regime on the farm, Azure's resistance is never as strong or powerful as hers. Moreover, while Agaat always oscillates between mimicking her tyrannic mistress and being subversive, Azure does at no point resemble his oppressors by attempting to seize power. He is, until he flees to Table Mountain for the second time, quite clearly in a marginalised position. It seems at first that Sealy, after taking over Gerald's position of power under the bridge, grants him more freedom than his predecessor: "He takes me to his room. He lights a candle and closes the door but he doesn't lock it. Gerald would have locked it, I say to myself and don't know whether to feel relieved or anxious" (Duiker, *Thirteen* 140). It turns out that Azure's anxiety is not unfounded. He becomes Sealy's "second shadow" (150), forced to follow him wherever he goes. Still, he remains an outsider within Sealy's group of friends and is sidelined once Sealy completely succumbs to drugs. When the police arrest Sealy and evict the people who live under the bridge, Azure does not, as a way of appropriating the space in which he was held captive, claim the bridge for himself. Unlike Agaat, who inherits Milla's farm, i.e., the place which is associated with loss and humiliation, Azure turns his back on the bridge and flees to Table Mountain for the second time where the novel ends in an apocalyptic scenario.

What Azure has in common with Agaat, though, is an unwillingness and inability to forget and overcome losses and injuries. This makes Azure stronger, as he repeatedly states throughout the text in his attempts to fight back and avenge himself (see 46, 47, 49, 55, 67, 90, 99, 104). These instances of resistance include Azure showing his white clients that he is cleverer than they think he is. Moreover, he regards all adults as corrupt and untrustworthy. The notion of resistance is also highlighted in a somewhat more general, yet powerful way through references to music, especially hip-hop and kwaito. The role of music in the text has largely gone unnoticed by critics, but references to kwaito and hip-hop either serve to underline close connections between characters or they point, in more implicit and ambivalent ways, to the topic of resistance against and freedom from Gerald's regime. Firstly, kwaito in general seems to be a connecting point between Liesel and Azure when their relationship is still intact. Azure says that he and Liesel "talk about kwaito and whether the Rasta who brings her stop will get good stuff" (4) in order to avoid speaking about the hardships and violence from which Liesel suffers during her job as a sex worker. Here, music does not only serve to illustrate Azure's and Liesel's friendship (which does not know boundaries of age or gender), it also marks a moment of resilience or flight from both characters' daily experiences of hardship and loss. Kwaito, after all, has often been related to the 'new' post-apartheid South Africa and its youth's creation of a musical style which stands for an urban lifestyle and "the pleasures of the body" (Peterson 198).

Interestingly, Gerald allows kwaito, specifically the kwaito band TKZee, to be played in Ma Zakes' spaza shop:

> TKZee belt out 'Shibobo' from Ma Zakes'. Sealy bobs his head in rhythm. He's a bastard on the dance floor. He can outdance anyone and he's got style. That's why Gerald likes him. Gerald comes in with his white Ford Granada. […] 'Away, Gerald,' Sealy says and gets up to dance. (Duiker, *Thirteen* 18)

Gerald seems to connect kwaito with an urban style which entails partying, fun, and a carefree dance. The song "Shibobo", after all, is a homage to the South African football team, Bafana Bafana, and its lyrics do not seem to be loaded with political messages. What Gerald disregards, however, is that kwaito is a genre which can be seen as a mode of talking back to 'old' and conservative forms of life in South Africa. In his essay "Kwaito, 'Dawgs' and the Antimonies of Hustling", Bhekizizwe Peterson states: "In the area of popular culture, kwaito is one of the pioneering successes and phenomena of the post-apartheid period" (198). Thus, when Sealy dances to kwaito and Gerald ap-

proves, he fails to see Sealy's potential to endanger, let alone undermine, his position of power under the bridge, especially since kwaito is also related to hustling and street life: "the rough-and-ready sections of kwaito artists regard themselves as quintessential hustlers (olova, oguluva, majimbos, izinja — masters of marginality)" (Peterson, 198). The song by TKZee foreshadows Gerald's downfall and Sealy's future position of control over the bridge and the people who live there, for while Gerald admires Sealy's dancing style, he fails to connect Sealy's affection for kwaito with hustling and the danger of a change of power under the bridge.

While Gerald is tolerant about kwaito music, since he does not see its consumption as a threat to his power, he is more restrictive when it comes to other genres. When Azure descends from Table Mountain after having gone there for the first time, and realises that Sealy is the new leader under the bridge, he relates the following scene: "Ma Zakes opens her spaza and puts on some music. She plays that fuck-you song by Tupac. Gerald never wanted her to play that song. We were never allowed to listen to it" (Duiker, *Thirteen* 136). The fact that Ma Zakes plays a song which was banned under the regime of Gerald points to a new era and seems to manifest a momentary freedom from a tyrannical regime, at least for Azure, Ma Zakes, and above all for Sealy and his two friends who now control the bridge. However, if one considers which Tupac song is actually meant by the "fuck-you song," things become more complicated and ambiguous: The allusion refers to Tupac's 1996 song "Hit 'em Up" from the album *All Eyez on Me*. The song, described as "the most memorable diss track of the East Coast/West Coast rivalry" ("Hit 'Em Up"), is full of direct threats and hate speech on the part of Tupac, The Outlawz, and Prince Ital Joe, who feature in the song, directed at East Coast rappers such as The Notorious B.I.G., Puff Daddy, Lil' Kim, and Little Cesar. On the one hand, "Hit 'em Up" can be seen as Sealy's answer to Gerald's regime under which black people were discriminated and hated. On the other hand, the hatred is not exclusively directed at Gerald. While they listen to "Hit 'em Up" the following conversation ensues between Sealy's friends, who seem to be his henchmen under the bridge:

> 'We raped all their women after Gerald died. All the coloured bitches,' he says to the other and they laugh.
>
> 'Why?'
>
> 'They wanted destruction.'
>
> 'They wanted to meet their maker through the back door,' the one with one eye says. (Duiker, *Thirteen* 140)

This conversation and the Tupac-song strongly suggest that Sealy's regime is not going to be less violent than Gerald's. Shockingly, it is based on as much racial hatred as Gerald's leadership was. However, while one can clearly see traces of racial melancholia in Gerald – he yearns for what Cheng calls the "never possible perfection" (xi) of whiteness and desires to have Azure's blue eyes – it is even more complex with Sealy. The fact that coloured people no longer live under the bridge under his regime and the conversation quoted above point to violent racial conflicts between black and coloured people under the bridge. Thus, to a certain extent, Sealy violently mimics Gerald's racial melancholia. However, if one reads the gang's violence with Frantz Fanon's observations on decolonisation in mind, a more complicated picture presents itself. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon convincingly argues that "black on black" (15) violence must be seen as a result of colonialism: "Violence among the colonized will spread in proportion to the violence exerted by the colonial regime" (47–48). Fanon regards this phenomenon as a phase that comes before decolonisation. The violent outbreaks amongst the colonised can be read as moments of deferral, as phases of transition which come before the process of decolonisation: "as if this collective immersion in a fratricidal bloodbath suffices to mask the obstacle and postpone the inevitable alternative, the inevitable emergence of the armed struggle against colonialism" (18). Sealy's regime, then, might be seen as a gesture of transition from an oppressive to an anti-colonial structure under the bridge. This is underlined by the fact that not only are there no coloured people left under the bridge, but the few white people who live there are regarded as "harmless" (Duiker, *Thirteen* 137) and without power. This suggests that whiteness is no longer equated with power and, as in the case of Gerald, with the desire to be regarded as white. However, this must again be viewed in an ambivalent light, since the text suggests that Sealy, like Gerald before him, desires Azure's blue eyes for he frequently "swims" in them (137). Sealy's regime is, then, despite its potential for change, as violent as his predecessor's, though perhaps slightly less dominated by internalised racial rejections and desire.

Tupac's song, like "Shibobo" by TKZee, also foreshadows another downfall, this time Sealy's addiction to drugs and his subsequent imprisonment. After all, "Hit 'em Up" is also about being hunted by the police and is concerned with drug abuse. Finally, Sealy himself goes so far as to draw a connection between himself and Tupac. After he reveals himself to Azure as an angel, he states: "Tupac was an angel […] Tupac was the angel of destruction" (137). The fact that Sealy describes Tupac as the angel of destruction, an allusion to

Revelation (Rev. 9:11), hints at Sealy's own role as an angel of destruction, or a fallen angel. When Azure asks him if he believes in God, he answers: "I'm way past that. I know him" (Duiker, *Thirteen* 137). This might allude to the biblical reference to the prophecy of the fall of the King of Tyre (Ezek. 28:1–19), which describes Lucifer's expulsion from Eden (Ezek. 28:13–16). Interestingly, Sealy's vanity (Azure observes that "he starts buying flashy clothes"), his arrogance, and his hunger for power bring about his downfall (Duiker, *Thirteen* 152), which is reminiscent of the fallen angel's vices that are described as follows in Ezekiel: "You were filled with violence […] your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor" (28:16–17). Sealy's tragic end is also mirrored in Tupac's tragic life of clashing with the law, drug abuse, and, finally, his violent and still mysterious death (he was shot in Las Vegas in September 1996). Music is, then, a symbol which subtly underlines the theme of resistance, but not in a clear-cut way. On the contrary, music is just as ambivalent a symbol as the other signs that stand for resistance and which are more closely linked to Azure than to any other character.

There are several key symbols of Azure's painful, almost (self-)destructive journey of resistance that warrant attention. Azure learns the art of resistance through different experiences of sexual and racial humiliations. The first symbolic moment occurs after Azure has been beaten up by Gerald. He is subsequently taken to hospital and afterwards held captive for several days, first in a small room in what appears to be a brothel and then on the rooftop of Richard's flat. Richard, one of Gerald's henchmen, locks Azure out for several days during which he gets hardly any food or drink. During his time in the room of the brothel Azure begins to build an inner resistance to what happened. Here, music plays an important role again. This time it is not a specific song by a band or an artist, but singing itself which gives Azure strength:

> For three nights I listen to my wounds, my bruises. For three nights I feel my body healing. […] I'm getting stronger, I tell myself, even though my stomach grumbles. When I start to feel weak, I sing. Made-up songs that have nothing to do with words, just nonsense sounds that keep writing themselves in my head. […] *Destroy, destroy, the music plays on in my head. Destruction begins to form.* (Duiker, *Thirteen* 46; emphasis mine)

In his imagination, Azure subsequently destroys the room in which he is held prisoner. Thus, singing serves a twofold purpose in this scene: Firstly, it is a source of resilience since Azure manages, through singing, to bear his pain

and hunger. Secondly, the music turns into a song of destruction for Azure imagines that he is burning down the room. However, just as in so many other instances where Azure's resistance from within his marginalised position is palpable, this scene must be read in an ambivalent light since, although it may strengthen Azure to imagine the destruction of his prison, he himself still inhabits the place which he destroys and thus he dooms himself to the same destruction. This ambivalent form of resistance is repeated throughout many instances in the novel. Save for the symbolic meaning of the seagulls, which I shall discuss below, Azure's (imaginative) acts of resistance and retaliation thus often border on self-destruction.

Three days later Azure is taken from the brothel to Richard's flat in a coloured area of the city and he is locked out on the rooftop. It is here, amidst Azure's isolation where he encounters the seagulls, which symbolise, in a powerful way, feelings of resilience, resistance, and strength throughout the novel:

> I'm about to fall asleep when a strange thing happens. Seagulls fly by. They make a lot of noise and terrorise the pigeons. I get up and watch the pigeons clumsily flying off, some of them falling over each other. […] It takes only a few seagulls, nine of them, to scare away maybe thirty stupid pigeons. They are beautiful seagulls. […] Seagulls have pride, they always wash at sea with cold water. Like me. […] They're not stupid like pigeons. Pigeons are stupid because they let themselves get used. Where did anyone ever see a seagull being used as a messenger bird. Never. (51)

The seagulls are, in contrast to the pigeons that are associated with dirt and weakness, strong and beautiful. Additionally, it is telling that the seagulls, whom Azure likens to himself, overthrow the pigeons, which are associated with Gerald. The pigeons are, in fact, Gerald's messengers. At a later point in the novel, Vincent warns Azure not to speak badly about Gerald since the pigeon which hovers around might relay what Azure said to the latter (64). In this powerful scene the seagulls have agency and Azure perceives them as extremely strong and independent animals. They are the only living creatures on the rooftop and, later (in Azure's mind), also in Richard's flat which give the otherwise helpless child some comfort.

After three days on the rooftop, Azure is allowed to enter Richard's flat. However, what at first appears to be an act of kindness, since he is allowed to clean himself and Richard offers him food and drink, ends up as probably the most traumatic and disturbing encounter of the book, as Azure is subjected to a gang rape by Richard and his mates: "Soon they all join in and take turns

with my mouth. […] In my head I hear seagulls screeching violently, swooping over the sea as waves come crashing down. They are giving you their salt, I tell myself. Eat it, be strong" (54). This scene of utter violence, humiliation, and traumatic injury, though painful for Azure, is at the same time an ambiguous symbol of resistance and self-empowerment in a moment of loss. The seagulls, a sign of resistance and strength, point to Azure's capability of resilience in a moment of traumatic loss. When he imagines eating "their salt", an image of incorporation, ambivalently placed between self-destruction and survival, is evoked. Azure imagines that by incorporating something of his rapists, their salt that is, he will emerge stronger. Thus, one can read this scene as a melancholic refusal to let go of one's violent memories and at the same time of turning these very memories into a tool of self-preservation and resistance.

Another sign which is ambivalently placed between (self-)destruction, hope, and resistance is Azure's connection to light, mainly fire, and, to a certain extent, the sun. Azure says that from very early on he has always been drawn to fire. He mentions an incident in which he burnt his parent's bed:

> When I was a child I used to like playing with matches. I used to strike a match and watch the fire burn the little stick until it was black. […] Once, when I was small, […] I burned the bed by mistake. I was playing with matches and somehow the bed caught on fire. I tried to put it out. I remember using my spit but the fire had its own mind. It wouldn't listen. (47)

Azure remembers this incident while he is locked up in the room in the brothel, after he imaginatively destroys his prison with fire. The fire appears as an element to which he has always felt attracted. At the same time, its destructive and uncontrollable potential is also highlighted. While the little boy is not able to control the fire yet (he must call his father in order to put it out), in the present he has greater control over fire – for instance, he imaginatively uses "half circles of fire" (46) in order to destroy the room in the brothel.

The symbol of light becomes even more important when Azure realises that Gerald owns him and that Vincent, his sole protector and friend in Cape Town, is leaving the city, and consequently he leaves Azure as well. During their last conversation Vincent advises Azure in the following manner: "If you're ever in trouble, always go towards the light" (97). When Azure flees atop Table Mountain for the first time shortly after Vincent has left, he heeds his friend's advice and follows the light (105). During both of Azure's stays on the mountain light becomes an element of power and (self-)destruction. How-

ever, while his first stay can be seen as a time of powerful resistance, which is connected with fire, the other symbol for light that is one of the central motifs during Azure's second stay on the mountain, namely the sun, must be viewed in a more ambivalent light since it threatens to not only destroy Cape Town, but Azure himself. Thus light, like music and the moment in which Azure incorporates something of his rapists, oscillates between self-destruction and a powerful rage against those who wronged him. Besides the seagulls, which are an unambiguous sign of resistance and power, it is the fire which Azure makes on Table Mountain in order to (symbolically) destroy Gerald, that is a sign of rage; an outburst against others without a notion of self-destruction. In general fire is, as I have mentioned above, represented as equally destructive and powerful. In the following scene, however, Azure stands outside the danger zone:

> I feed the fire slowly, making sure that all the branches are on fire. And when the ends are not on fire, I push them into the flames. It burns slowly at first. I watch it, my eyes smiling with fire. When I see that the fire is burning properly I bring in the first victim. I bring in a branch that looks like an arm. […] It burns easily. It was begging for destruction. […] *It is hell in here and I'm the devil*. (108–109; emphasis mine)

Here, in contrast to when he was younger and burned his parents' bed, Azure is in control over the fire. This is emphasised by the fact that he describes himself as being the devil and the cave in which the fire burns as hell, that is, the cave is Azure's domain, his kingdom where he subsequently (symbolically) destroys Gerald:

> I go outside again and return with a branch that looks like a monster's head. I put it on top of the arm. There is some dried fluff around it. It is the first to burn. Ja, Gerald, I say as I look at the monster's head. Burn. You want fire, don't you? You want me to burn you. (109)

I read this scene as a powerful moment in which Azure transforms his grief into rage against Gerald. The fire is not only an element of destruction and power, but it also reflects Azure's coming of age, an instant of positively connoted transformation from the little child who cannot handle the dangerous element and who must seek his father's help, to the near adult who controls the fire purposefully, an aspect that is discussed in greater depth by Moreillon (167–170) Both instances of transformation lend the child narrator a moment of agency which he is frequently denied while he is in Cape Town. The city then

stands, much more clearly than the symbols discussed above, for loss, painful memories, and failure.

CAPE TOWN: LOSS, (UN)INHABITABILITY, AND APOCALYPTIC VISIONS

For all of Azure's painful encounters, for his development as a character, and to a certain extent as a reflection of his emotional state, Cape Town itself is an important reference point. The city stands for loss, trauma, and homelessness. At the same time, it is the place where Azure learns the art of resistance. The evocation of Sara Baartman and the displacement of the coloured people who live under the bridge with Gerald and who flee after his death point to the city's history of loss and of Cape Town's ambivalent position. On the one hand, the metropolis is seen as the 'mother city' and yet its coloured citizens have had to endure being placed in the liminal spaces between black and white. This "middle space" (Farred 58) led to losses and complications within coloured subjectivity formation. On the other hand, for Azure himself, Cape Town signifies loss, trauma, and failed hopes and dreams. He travels to Cape Town after his parents' deaths in the hope of a better future. His hopes, however, are quickly eradicated through his experiences in a harsh environment, sexual and financial exploitation, betrayal, and physical and psychological violence. In a conversation with Vincent both boys agree that it is actually the city itself which is "fucked up" (Duiker, *Thirteen* 37), even more so than its inhabitants. Azure directly connects the city with loss and disorientation when he says: "Fuck knows how many things I've lost along the way. The way in Cape Town, it's a long road, winding. I'm always lost" (65).

However, he does claim to have found a home in the 'mother city'. When he climbs up the mountain for the first time and shares his cave with a white man who lives in Hout Bay, he responds to the latter's assumption that he is homeless: "We have a home. It's just not your normal kind of home with a kitchen and all that stuff but it's still a home" (116). Thus, Azure has managed, to a certain degree at least, to transform an uninhabitable space like Sea Point into a place of habitability, such as it is described by Abdoumaliq Simone for many inhabitants of African and Asian cities:

> Without denying the ravages of longterm structural impoverishment to which many African and Asian cities are subjected – what if what sometimes looks to be uninhabitable does not necessarily point to a depleted form of urban life, but simply a different form of urban life, one that is constantly lived under specific threats and incompletion?

The oscillating relationships between uninhabitable and habitable spaces, Simone argues, point to a potential for change within urban spaces. The idea of making an uninhabitable space habitable for oneself becomes persuasive when one looks at Azure's attitude towards Sea Point. The ocean is, as Meg Samuelson points out, "cast as source of danger, contamination and predation and of protection, purification and strength" ("Sea Changes" 20). At Sea Point, Azure experiences harsh treatment by the men who abuse him (Duiker, *Thirteen* 29–30). However, the sea provides temporary relief from his physical pain afterwards: "I sit in a shallow pool and let the cool water cover me up to my waist. I sit for a while until my bum feels numb" (30). More important than the ambivalent meaning of the ocean with regard to the question of (un)inhabitability is how Azure himself describes his connection to Sea Point. It is the only place in which Azure feels safe and in control of his movements in Cape Town. When he muses about the things he has lost in the city, he says: "I'm always lost, that's why I hide out in Sea Point. Get it 'See point'" (65). His pun suggests that at Sea Point, where he lives before Gerald captures him, he has a better sense of clarity, stability, and, above all, freedom.

Nevertheless, the sense of having failed in the city, as well as of Cape Town having failed him, prevails in the end. During his encounter with the white man who lives in Hout Bay on Table Mountain, Azure speaks of Cape Town as if the city were a person: "She's bad, Cape Town. She takes you in, in the beginning, but be careful. She'll destroy you if you're not watching" (116). The city is not, as it is in Moele's *Room 207*, another protagonist of the novel, but its temporary personification is an allusion to the city's relevance to the plot. It is striking that Azure speaks of Cape Town as a woman. Despite the fact that his losses and hardships are mostly meted out to him by men, he describes the city, which often reflects his hopelessness and his melancholic state of mind, as female. This suggests that his gendered melancholia – the loss of his mother and the impossibility to form bonds with other women throughout the narrative – is deeply embedded in the subconscious realm and emphasises Azure's inability to mourn his mother's death, whereas the injuries he suffers at the hands of men provoke more conscious emotions such as anger, rage, and the lust for revenge. The image of the city-as-woman which Azure conjures up here is troubling also insofar as he equates Cape Town with the archetypal image of a 'destructive seductress'. This is also the case in Moele's *Room 207*, in which Johannesburg has a seductive, almost poisonous hold over the novel's protagonists.

Azure's disenchantment with Cape Town and its adult inhabitants is even more palpable once he descends from Table Mountain. Shortly before the novel's ending which finds Azure on Table Mountain again, he recapitulates, in a rare moment in which his matter-of-fact tone is underlined with feelings of despair and bitterness, his experiences and the things he has seen in Cape Town:

> On the street boys my age support their families. They give their mothers money so that they can buy drugs and feed them nothing. They break into cars and steal small change from dashboards so that they can buy needles to inject themselves with poison. […] I've seen a woman being raped by policemen at night near the station. I've seen a white man let a boy Bafana's age get into his car. I've seen a couple drive over a street child and they still kept going. I've seen a woman give birth in Sea Point at the beach and throw it in the sea. A boy? Fuck off. They must leave me alone. I have seen enough rubbish to fill the sea. I have been fucked by enough bastards and they've come on me with enough come to fill the swimming pool in Sea Point. (142)

Azure's portrayal of Cape Town as a place which houses nothing but injuries and traumatic loss points to a different kind of loss which is related to the female image of Cape Town as a 'terrifying seductress'. In Cape Town, due to the fact that he has been exposed to these horrifying scenes, Azure loses the freedom and innocence of a child. This is a development which can be traced throughout the whole text (after all, he emphasises from the very beginning that he does not wish to be seen as a child anymore and the transformation from childhood to adulthood is palpable in many instances).[41] It is in this scene, however, that he irrevocably gives up childhood for adulthood. Cape Town, then, has corrupted Azure's childhood and has left him with nothing but disenchantment and despair.

Consequently, Azure flees to the mountain for a second time, and the novel ends with Azure atop Table Mountain. In an apocalyptic scenario – which might also be read as an evocation of the destruction of Babylon – Azure feels that, perhaps as a result of his anger and disappointment towards the city, Cape Town is destroyed. The allusion to Cape Town-as-Babylon underlines Azure's aversion towards the city. The evocation of Babylon also highlights the image of Cape Town as 'dangerous seductress' and city of corruption and violence. Munro reads the ending as "a manifestation of [Azure's]

[41] For further details on *Thirteen Cents* as a Bildungsroman see Raditlhalo ("Victory") and Munro.

fury, or even AIDS, and it is difficult to say what is meant to be read as 'real'" (206).

I propose a reading with no special emphasis on what is "real" or imaginary for Azure during the apocalyptic scenes, but rather a focus on Azure's feelings and his expressions of loss, despair, and resilience. Taking Azure's emotions strongly into account, Viljoen argues that the end can be interpreted as hopeful: "Still completely alone, but with clarity of mind, he can, the ending suggests, begin again on the clean slate emerging beneath his feet" (xvii). Viljoen's point seems persuasive at first, especially if one takes into consideration that by repeating, over and over again, like a mantra "My mother is dead. My father is dead" (Duiker, *Thirteen* 154–155), the realisation that Azure has lost his parents emerges from the subconscious into the conscious realm, and thus he might be beginning the work of mourning. However, very few critics have commented on the fact that it is not only Cape Town below the mountain which is destroyed, but Table Mountain as well: "The deafening sound of destruction fills the air. I put my fingers in my ears and close my eyes tight. The mountain shakes and the wind tears through everything" (163). Here, all elements function as destructive, even the sun and the fire, the light that is, gradually become dangerous and threatening:

> Above me the sun shines like the ruler it is. It dominates the sky with light. A ball of fire comes from it. It splits into smaller balls as it comes tumbling down at a mad speed. I crawl under a fallen rock and see balls of fire falling around me like blazing razors. (163)

If one reads the apocalyptic scenario as an outcome of Azure's melancholia, the ending may be seen as a powerful moment of retaliation from within the margins and of subverting structures of power. His desire to destroy, the control he takes over the fire when he climbs up Table Mountain for the first time, and the fact that he witnesses the destruction of the city may tempt one to read Azure as another angel of destruction. At the same time, however, Azure's melancholic condition is as self-destructive as it is powerful since his rage (symbolically) destroys his place of safety as well. Rather than reading Azure as following in the footsteps of Sealy as an angel of destruction, then, I suggest a reading which takes the self-destructive elements into account. Consequently, one might see Azure as an angel of (self-)destruction. Meg Samuelson pointedly observes:

> The deluge destroys the town that has accommodated his abuse, […] and Table Mountain returns to its prior state as "Hoerikwaggo" ("Sea-Mountain"). Land

> and sea are drawn together within the indigenous perspective, but for Azure in this post-apartheid present from which there is no return, the effects of this conjunction are terrifying and compound his sense of loss. ("Sea Changes" 20)

In conclusion I suggest, then, that Azure's melancholia can be read as a tool of self-preservation and resistance. It is not, as it would be in a Freudian sense, a debilitating or pathological condition. Rather, his melancholia is "an integral part of daily existence and survival" (Eng and Han 363). However, I also caution against reading Azure's melancholia as too celebratory. Rather, readers should always be aware of the various traumatic events in the child narrator's life. And in the end, Azure finds himself alone and with no support or shelter in a hostile situation. However, one glimpse of hope that one might read into the novel's ending is that Azure refuses, until the very end, to be categorised: He resists from within his marginalised position and hence my argument here is to read melancholia as a depathologised form of resistance. Besides, in the novel's last sentence Azure claims: "I know what fear is" (Duiker, *Thirteen* 163). Thus, the knowledge of fear, his ability to fight back, and survive traumatic events suggest that Azure ultimately will not be overwhelmed by his feelings of loss and displacement. He finds himself in a state where hopes for closure are nonexistent, but where melancholia is "part of dealing with all the catastrophes" (Eng and Han, "Dialogue" 363) that happen in his life.

4.2 "WELCOME TO JOHANNESBURG"[42]: MELANCHOLIA AND FRAGMENTATION IN KGEBETLI MOELE'S *ROOM 207*

While in the previous chapter I discussed Cape Town in *Thirteen Cents*, I shift the focus now to the city of Johannesburg as portrayed in Kgebetli Moele's novel, *Room 207* .

As the economic hub of the country, Johannesburg has been a source of inspiration and fascination for writers. As a result, the city has been, and continues to be, a central component of countless novels. The Witwatersrand Gold Rush in the nineteenth century enhanced the myth of the metropolis which inspired two primary reactions to the city. On the one hand, excitement and opportunity, and on the other, the fear of being seduced and lost to its dangerous and 'sinful' ways. One genre that deals precisely with this ambivalence is the now prototypical 'Jim Comes to Jo'burg' novel (see Heywood 25, 104). The most famous examples are Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* and Peter Abrahams' *Mine Boy*. A recurring pattern of the genre is that the novel's hero, a young man from rural South Africa, leaves his home in order to make his dreams and ambitions of success and riches come true in Johannesburg. As the novel unfolds, however, the hero falls into the city's many traps and becomes criminal or corrupted. As Hein Willemse points out: "Most of these novels bear an anti-modernisation message of urban decay, personal neglect and debauchery, often ending with the redeeming insight that the city is a bad place" (437).

In post-apartheid writing, authors like Phaswane Mpe in his novella *Welcome to our Hillbrow*, Perfect Hlongwane in *Jozi: A Novel* and Kgebetli Moele in *Room 207*, have drawn on, and written back to, this genre in various ways. While the contrast between rural and urban life is still central to the plot, Johannesburg, and especially Hillbrow, is not described as a capital of sins anymore – instead it is "just a residential area, where people are living and trying to make a living" (Moele, *Room* 65).

Moele's *Room 207* focuses on six young black men who share a flat in the notorious city centre. Most of them come from rural areas to Johannesburg in order to pursue their ambitions of an artistic career. In a post-apartheid state the young men are, theoretically at least, free to move from their flat to any

[42] The quote is from Moele's *Room 207* (56).

part of the city whenever they wish to do so since pass laws and segregation are no longer in place. However, the end of apartheid does not equate to the end of trauma as the younger generation, which would have come of age around the time Nelson Mandela was released from prison, is unable to leave the country's past behind. On the contrary, the novel depicts this generation of young people, who no longer have to fight against apartheid's injustices, as deeply scarred and haunted nonetheless. This image opposes the rainbow nation rhetoric of mourning, new beginnings, and a brighter future for all South Africans.

In this chapter, I shall argue that *Room 207* – despite its repeated claims that post-apartheid Johannesburg is a city of freedom, and in contrast to most other works discussed in this study – is a deeply melancholic narrative in the Freudian sense, where memories of South Africa's past are repressed and then resurface as melancholy echoes or silences in the text. By drawing on Freud's concept of mourning and melancholia, I shall show that *Room 207* refuses closure and rejects official narratives of laying apartheid's ghosts to rest. This is visible on two levels: firstly, in terms of content and plot, and secondly, on a narrative level, due to the text's fragmentation, non-linearity, and unreliable narration.

Room 207 was Moele's first novel and it won both the debut category of the University of Johannesburg Prize for Creative Writing and the Herman Charles Bosman Prize. *The Book of the Dead*, a text partly narrated from the perspective of the anthropomorphised HIV/AIDS virus, is his second book and was published in 2009. His latest novel, *Untitled*, focuses on the 17-year-old Mokgethi, her life in a rural township in Limpopo, her desire to study abroad, but above all, on the abuse and sexual harassment of young girls by so-called 'role models' of the township community.

Moele has, alongside authors such as Niq Mhlongo, Sifiso Mzobe, and K. Sello Duiker, been labeled as belonging to the so-called Kwaito generation (Chanda). As I pointed out in my chapter on *Thirteen Cents*, kwaito is a specifically South African music genre; a mixture of Jazz, African Gospel, Hip-Hop, House, Bubblegum, and various local sub-genres ("Kwaito Generation"). It developed around the beginning of the 1990s, thus embodying youth culture at the threshold of post-apartheid South Africa. The kwaito generation has often been accused of not caring enough about serious topics, an accusation often brought against the music scene, which is said to be preoccupied with fashion, dancing, and trendy outfits rather than current political affairs ("Kwaito Generation"). However, kwaito has also been regarded as "an elo-

quent testimony of the agency of young blacks, especially their desires to create their own narratives and meanings in response to the harsh and hostile urban landscapes in which they find themselves" (Peterson 197).

Thus, there exists a raw and explicit underbelly to the kwaito music scene. This rawness is a fundamental characteristic of the South African kwaito literary genre, and can be found in texts by Niq Mhlongo or Kgebetli Moele, for instance. Mhlongo defines the kwaito generation as a "new national, hybrid generation that is united in a new kind of struggle: against Aids, poverty, xenophobia, unemployment, crime etc" ("My Voice").

Moele, in turn, emphasises that it is predominantly loss and unrootedness which define the kwaito generation:

> The previous generation had its roots somewhere. And now you find out that here's a generation where the family structure has decomposed in a way. The generation is lost because they don't have links to anything. And if you see the characters [of *Room 207*], they're struggling, and then there's no help that they're getting from anywhere. So they're actually lost in Hillbrow. (V. Dlamini)

Certainly, loss, disappointment, and a sense of disorientation are central to Moele's work, most especially in *Room 207*. The text revolves around the six young black men sharing a dilapidated one-room flat in Hillbrow and their struggle to survive. In this one-room flat, which used to be a hotel room, 'normal' boundaries of intimacy collapse. A space where no privacy is possible (Moele, *Room* 108), Room 207 is simultaneously a "safe haven during the lighted dark night of dream city" and thus a "refuge" (13) for its inhabitants. The ambiguity of Room 207 as a living space invokes, like Sea Point in *Thirteen Cents*, Abdoumaliq Simone's notion of (un)inhabitable spaces. Just as Azure transforms Sea Point, a seemingly uninhabitable space, into a habitable one, the roommates who live in Room 207 transform the dilapidated place into a space of, to a certain extent, safety, comfort, and shelter. Thus, the one-room apartment might point to what Simone describes as "simply a different form of urban life, one that is constantly lived under specific threats and incompletion". The notion of "threat and incompletion" (Simone) is painfully visible in *Room 207*, not only by the run-down state of the apartment, but also by the fact that its inhabitants often face the threat of eviction since they are unable to pay the rent on time (Moele, *Room* 75–77).

When *Room 207* was published, it received extremely mixed reviews. Sam Raditlhalo states that "[i]ssues of overcrowding and the lack of proper living spaces have rarely been so grimly described" ("Proletarian" 95), which points

to the notion of (un)inhabitable spaces. Michael Titlestad, in turn, criticised it as being an "unfinished work" with a plot of little coherence which "meanders from one seemingly unmotivated encounter to the next". However, against Titlestad's reading of the text, I suggest that it is precisely the novel's deliberate fragmented and 'incoherent' structure which convincingly translates the feeling of loss and melancholia in a post-apartheid South Africa.

Written as a first-person account, *Room 207* is centred around Noko's – the narrator – and his five flatmates' (D'Nice, Molamo, Matome, Modishi, and the Zulu-boy's) lives in Hillbrow. With some roughness, it describes how the six men move into Room 207, the subsequent development of their lives and their shared experiences in the apartment over a time span of 14 years, and how each of them finally leaves Room 207. During their time in Hillbrow, the abuse of alcohol, drugs and constantly changing girlfriends are integral to their daily lives. Also central to the plot are urgent post-apartheid issues, such as the AIDS epidemic (to which the Zulu-boy ultimately falls victim), the stark contrast between poverty and richness in Johannesburg (it is the characters' aim to become rich and leave Hillbrow in order to move to better parts of the city), and xenophobia and 'tribalism'.

The thread of the storyline within the novel is the roommates' attempts to make it in Johannesburg. In this regard, Moele's novel may be seen as a post-apartheid 'Jim comes to Jo'burg' novel. The contrast between rural and urban life is also central to the plot of *Room 207*. This is highlighted, for instance, when the narrator recounts D'Nice's university career:

> D'Nice survived Wits by his own will and sometimes, when he looked back and thought about how he made it, it puzzled him. From a high school in the rural areas, where not that much matters and the school didn't even have a proper office. From a place where what matters the most is to see a smile on your face. He came into the heart of the dream city with his dreams, putting on a smile with a promise: I am going to show them the best of me and they will think I'm from a private school. Three months into the thing, peer pressure ran him down, and he realised nobody gave a shit about the smile on his face. (Moele, *Room* 35–36)

This quote illustrates how far apart urban and rural life are for the characters. D'Nice's story suggests that when imagined from the rural village, Johannesburg is a place of opportunity, but once arrived this 'dream city' turns into one of disillusionment and base-level survival.

Another contrast between rural and urban life becomes particularly clear when Noko faces returning home at the end of the novel: "I don't know much

of what I'm going to do at home. There is nothing much to do there" (Moele, *Room* 233). The rural area is thus related to stagnation and hopelessness in contrast to the city which stands for constant action and endless possibilities: Johannesburg is described as having "buzzing streets with neon lights" (49) and of Hillbrow the narrator says that it "doesn't sleep" (110).

Nevertheless, the roommates' ultimate goals are to have their "out-of-Hillbrow Party" (14) and to become successful, one mark of which would be to live in the richer suburbs of Johannesburg. This also includes the desire to succeed in their respective artistic careers (Molamo is a poet and script writer, Noko also writes film scripts, and the others are musicians or music producers).

However, this ambition is complicated by overwhelming post-apartheid difficulties. Although the space for a free and democratic future now exists in post-apartheid South Africa, apartheid and its detrimental consequences are felt acutely by the roommates. As a result, they suffer a conflict of ambivalence: the inability to face apartheid, on the one hand, and the loving retainment of certain images of the anti-apartheid and anti-colonial struggle, which they glorify, on the other. I argue that this phenomenon is characteristic of the Freudian definition of melancholia, whereas most other texts of this study may be read according to theories which seek to depathologise melancholia.

Melancholia in *Room 207* is the protagonists' inability to mourn not only apartheid's wounds, but also the loss of a supportive family structure that, for them, does not exist in the city. First and foremost, the characters seem unable to face the apartheid past. Indicative of this is the fact that the word 'apartheid' is barely used (only twice throughout the book, on pages 94 and 157) although the characters often refer to this time period. Frequently, ellipses appear in its place, or the men refer to it as "Back in the Days" (Moele, *Room* 13, 17, 90). The silence around the word makes it clear that South Africa's history cannot be mourned or laid to rest; it is an ungrievable loss (lost opportunities, loss as a consequence of injustice or inhumane treatment) that cannot be faced or overcome by the characters, at least not yet.

Indeed, the text "disavows the past all together" (Frenkel and MacKenzie 2), silence being a sign of repression. Nevertheless, it becomes clear that the consequences of apartheid are very real for the characters, even if they choose to avoid the source of injury. The Bantu Education Act, social inequality, and the lack of a support system play a crucial role here. Most of the six men are from rural areas and have lived through poverty due to the deliberate under-education of their parents by the apartheid state:

> Your mother works as a washerwoman. Your father, at fifty-one, is on the blue card, leaving his house every morning to take refuge and comfort with his mates in the war against alcohol. If you're lucky you have a grandparent or two and through them, some pension money, which doesn't really help with anything, but is better than nothing. Then there are seven of you. (Moele, *Room* 34)

Thus, even after apartheid's dismantlement, freedom and equality remain elusive concepts to the characters as the far-reaching effects of the exclusionary and segregationist system definitively and irrevocably altered their and their parents' lives. Consequently, the characters seem to dwell in transition, free of the apartheid laws, yet still burdened by the country's oppressive past.

The above passage is reminiscent of some of Jacob Dlamini's observations that he makes in his book, *Native Nostalgia*. He states that with the end of apartheid, "social orders and networks of solidarity that made the struggle [against apartheid] possible" (17) are disappearing in post-apartheid South Africa. However, Dlamini is quick to warn that although black communities may yearn for the support structures of the past, this nostalgia does not have to present pathologically: "Nostalgia does not have to be a reactionary sentiment. It does not have to be a hankering after the past and a rejection of the present and the future. There is a way to be nostalgic about the past without forgetting that the struggle against apartheid was just" (17).

However, in *Room 207*, although a nostalgic yearning for such "networks of solidarity" is palpable, I suggest that the roommates' prevailing condition is a melancholic one. This is due to their troubled relationship with the past, which impedes their forward movement throughout the greater part of the novel. Jacob Dlamini's nostalgia, on the other hand, does not impede one's ability to embrace the future (17). This is an important distinction to make since the roommates appear to be "psychically stuck" (Cheng 8), one typical characteristic of melancholia – making melancholia a particularly apt lens through which to view this novel.

The inertia – which keeps the roommates simultaneously tethered to, and running from, the past – is a powerful counter to the TRC's rhetoric of movement and forward progress. Despite official attempts by the TRC to mourn and ultimately achieve closure against apartheid, the 'rainbow nation' remains an unattainable dream for the men in *Room 207;* through the explicit silencing and disavowal of the past, it is clear that the characters have not begun to mourn the past losses and thus can never reach psychological closure.

MELANCHOLIA AND MASCULINITY

The silence around apartheid within *Room 207* is further complicated when one considers the topic of masculine identity during and after apartheid. The roommates have a "wall of inspiration" where they put up pictures of men "who, in their very own ways and byways, made it to the top" (Moele, *Room* 16). The wall is, amongst other things, plastered with pictures of anti-apartheid struggle heroes, Maasai warriors, and freedom fighters, such as Che Guevara. The narrator emphasises that the image of the male freedom fighter is iconic and something to hold on to: "these brothers are [on the wall of inspiration] for their spiritual and soulful support only" (18). As the story unfolds, it becomes clear that in a post-apartheid present, the role model of the anti-apartheid freedom fighter and masculine hero is no longer available. Noko says, for example, that "I loved Mandela the freedom fighter and I miss that Mandela" (17). In a post-apartheid South Africa, where the image of the freedom fighter belongs to the heroic anti-apartheid past and not to the future, the male characters of the novel find themselves in a crisis of identity. Their lives revolve around alcohol (more often than not, they cannot pay the rent for having drunk away all their money), unfulfilled artistic dreams, and the abuse of their female partners: Modishi, for instance, regularly beats up his teenage girlfriend Lerato who, on one occasion, has to be taken to hospital by Molamo and Noko (206). D'Nice also abuses his girlfriend Lebo, the mother of his children, once he has moved out of Room 207 (203).

The men's misogyny is also visible on a linguistic level: The roommates (almost without exception) casually refer to women as "whores" (47, 56, 59, 121) or "gold-diggers" (59) and "bitches" (59, 140).

In her article, "Translating cultural translation in Kgebetli Moele's *Room* 207", S.S. Ibinga states that all men with the exception of Matome display misogynistic attitudes:

> [Matome] epitomises a transformed image of the new black man who wants to redefine gender identity. Unlike his friends who believe that their womanising and misogynistic attitudes determine their masculinity, Matome has true love and respect for women. (70)

While I agree with Ibinga that the characters, due to their crisis of masculinity, define their identity by womanising, I do not see Matome as a "humanist character because […] he is non-sexist" (69) as she does. On the contrary, he seems to be just as sexist and misogynist as the other characters, though it should be noted that this character trait is only revealed towards the end of the

novel. While Matome does not, in contrast to Modishi and D'Nice, for instance, display physical violence towards women, he objectifies women for their procreational purposes. Of his wife Basedi he says to Noko: "For me, she's a *golden incubator* and I hope *it* hatches golden chicks" (Moele, *Room* 200; emphasis mine).

Throughout the novel women are regarded as the weaker of the sexes. Interestingly, all the male characters find themselves in a crisis of masculinity where they try to maintain control over the much more independent and successful women in their lives. Significantly, all their steady girlfriends have better jobs than they themselves have at the time of entering the respective relationships (Tebogo, Molamo's girlfriend, is a lawyer, and Basedi a doctor, for instance). Although their strength is apparent, the women are treated as though they were weak; if they cry or show any form of emotion, it is regarded as the usual behaviour of the 'weaker sex' (139).

However, if one of the six inhabitants of Room 207 display any emotions, he will be either ridiculed or the situation will be mishandled by the others due to their lack of (or unwillingness to display) emotional empathy. A case in point is the scene after Modishi's girlfriend, Lerato, confesses that she had two abortions without prior consultation with Modishi since she knew that the latter wanted a child:

> When [Modishi] came back, unable to eat, he had the conversation with the television and told us the whole story and still we had no comforting thoughts. How do you comfort a man? It's not there in komeng,[43] there is no lesson for comforting darkie brothers. (56–57)

Noko further emphasises that he was taught to view crying and the need for comfort as something 'unmanly'. Recalling the day of his father's funeral he says:

> When my old man was buried and everyone was feeling sorry for me, trying to comfort me while I cried, my uncle came to me, took my hand and squeezed it very hard. […] 'He is dead. Stop crying and be a man' […]. So, from that day on, I never had a reason to cry or the need for comforting. (57)

Moreover, the struggle hero, a remnant of the apartheid past, seems, in the post-apartheid present, to be an icon upon which the characters dwell melancholically, and which may be seen as a negation of masculine identity crisis. This crisis becomes ever more acute because the ideal image of a post-

[43] Northern Sotho: Initiation school (Moele, *Room* 237).

apartheid masculine identity is, for most characters at least, impossible to live up to: Instead of revolutionary ideals, masculinity in the 'new' South Africa seems to be defined by capitalist values which attribute importance to social mobility and, above all, economic success and status symbols, such as expensive cars and big houses. While Matome, one of the characters who becomes economically successful in the end, can move without impediments through any part of the city, choosing which car to drive and where to live, Noko, who fails to realise his dreams, cannot identify with this new image of masculinity. Despite his promise to himself that when he leaves Johannesburg "[he] will be driving [his] own car" he remains dependent on taxis or other people who have cars in order to move through the city (45). It is telling that every time he visits one of his former roommates in the suburbs, he is subsequently taken to wherever he has to go by his respective host. When he hurriedly decides to shorten his visit at Modishi's place because he cannot stand the feelings of jealousy towards Modishi for having been able to leave Hillbrow while Noko himself remains stuck there, "father and daughter had to drive [him] back to Joubert park" (208). Also, when he meets Matome for the last time, he is taken to Melville by the latter "in a sports car" (200). These two incidents emphasise quite clearly that both Matome and Modishi are, through their higher economic status, much more independent. Matome, the prototype of a self-made man, has not only managed (all on his own) to establish a company, own a house in the suburbs, and marry a highly educated woman, but he also owns a sports car, one of arguably the most significant symbols of masculine power, sexual potency, and upward mobility within the novel. It is also noteworthy that the young men regard women as just another status symbol that a successful man should 'own'; for example, Matome, as I have mentioned, views his wife, Basedi, as merely a vehicle for procreation (201).

In contrast to Matome's success, Noko's dependency on other people's cars, taxis, or other means of transportation (as well as his jealousy of his roommates) shows that he has not managed to overcome his crisis of masculinity by the end of the novel. This contrast between Noko and his former roommates indicates that post-apartheid Johannesburg is not only segregated along racial lines, but also along economic lines. This is an additional factor which further complicates the characters' various struggles to realise their ambitions and hopes for a better future.

JOHANNESBURG: A PLACE OF MELANCHOLIA

Due to its relevance for the story development, Johannesburg itself can be seen as another protagonist of the novel. The metropolis has been described as a city of surface and depth by scholars such as Achille Mbembe ("Aesthetics") and Sarah Nuttall (*Entanglement*). The latter, for example, states:

> [i]n Johannesburg, it is rather, or at least in a related but unique vein, the intertwining of surface and depth — in its historical and psychic senses — that defines the life of the city. Surface and depth exist in a set of relations in which each relies on the existence of the other, in which they are entwined or enfolded, suggestive each of the other, interpenetrating, and separating out at different points. (*Entanglement* 83)

On the one hand, this image may allude to the city's mining history, which is ever present in the inhabitants' minds (see Mbembe, "Aesthetics" 38–68). In Zulu, for instance, Johannesburg is called Egoli, city of gold, which refers to the historical importance of gold mining for the city (Steingo 353). On the other hand, it describes the present living conditions of the population: While Johannesburg is the economic hub of South Africa, according to Sarah Nuttall, marginalised figures such as "the migrant worker, the ageing white man, the 'illegal immigrant', and the hustler"[44] emerge out of the underneath structures of the city ("Literary City" 199). The image of surface and underbelly may also refer to Johannesburg's historical change from being predominantly a mining city during the period of colonialism to having become one of Africa's largest and most cosmopolitan metropolises where people from all over the continent go to in order to seek their fortune. The narrator of *Room 207* observes that after various historical changes, the city belongs to the black population now:

> The British had their time here and it passed. The Afrikaners had their time; they enjoyed it, and then it too passed by. Now Johannesburg is under the control of the black man, his time is here and, by the looks of things, his time will never pass. (Moele, *Room* 69)

Interestingly, this passage recalls the racial power struggle in *Thirteen Cents*, in which the question of control and 'ownership', although not of entire Cape

[44] While Nuttall discusses the figure of the hustler with particular recourse to Mhlongo's debut novel, *Dog Eat Dog*, it must be noted that this figure has been widely discussed with regard to South African urban life, with a particular focus on kwaito. Bhekizizwe Peterson, for instance, draws attention to the importance of 'hustling' to kwaito artists who "regard themselves as quintessential hustlers […], masters of marginality" (Peterson 198). This may be viewed as a particular form of urban lifestyle, which is echoed in the attitudes of most characters of *Room 207*.

Town, but rather the bridge under which Azure lives, is of importance. However, while the above quoted passage describes the shifting power dynamics from colonialism to apartheid to post-apartheid, in *Thirteen Cents* the power struggle that is depicted mainly occurs between two disenfranchised groups of the country, namely the black and coloured population. Similarities between the two texts become more palpable when one takes the Zulu-boy's attitude into account. Noko observes that:

> [i]f he had the chance, he would have made everybody in Johannesburg a Zulu. […] He associated every individual with their tribe or the land that they were from. For him, the Zulus were the supreme race and after that everybody was subhuman, […]. Don't blame him, *he inherited that from somewhere in our past*. (65; emphasis mine)

As in *Thirteen Cents*, when Sealy rules over the people who live under the bridge after Gerald's death, the Zulu-boy's attitude can be read with Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* observations in mind. Like Sealy's and his henchmen's violent behaviour towards the coloured people who live under the bridge, the Zulu-boy's 'tribalist' and xenophobic attitude might be viewed as a painful consequence of a (self-)destructive repetition of colonialism (Fanon, *Wretched* 17) and apartheid structures – an implicit idea in the text where Noko suggests that the Zulu-boy's attitude may have grown out of the country's past structures (Moele, *Room* 65).

Besides, underneath these representations of 'ownership' of the city, apartheid and its detrimental consequences resurface time and again. After all, the characters are themselves marginalised figures (most of them can be described as hustlers), who live a precarious life in Hillbrow. This precarious existence is, as I have mentioned above, caused by the fact that the characters all grew up during apartheid and were thus underprivileged in terms of education and economic status (34–35). Noko emphasises that this is the main reason why most of the six men do not manage to obtain a university degree since they "[fail] at trying to keep up with [their] peers" (64). When he describes these accounts of failed dreams and desires, Noko refers to them as "sad black stor[ies]" (17, 40, 48, 50). This is reminiscent of Mbembe's observations on Johannesburg in his essay "The Aesthetics of Superfluity", in which he states that:

> the collage of various fragments of the former city is opening up a space for experiences of displacement, substitution, and condensation, none of which is purely and simply a repetition of a repressed past but rather a manifestation of traumatic amnesia, and in some cases, nostalgia or even mourning (38).

In the case of the characters of *Room 207* I add the manifestation of a melancholic loss due to what Mbembe calls "experiences of displacement" (38). This is due to the fact that the characters are faced with the city as a place of ambivalences: Often referred to as "dream city" (see e.g. Moele, *Room* 13, 15, 16, 18, 30, 44), Johannesburg is both a place which holds hopes for a brighter future and a new beginning after apartheid and a place of hopelessness, death, and devastation. This becomes apparent during a moment in which Noko takes a walk through Hillbrow, for instance: "Here, as you can see, a darkie brother bled to his death […]. Let's hope he survived? No. He's dead. He is dead and hoping doesn't change the facts here" (162–63).

Besides, the characters observe that Hillbrow has become run down ever since the whites left it and moved to the suburbs. Thus, the young men perceive Johannesburg as still a racially divided city. Its history of segregation has not been overcome (or worked through), but, on the contrary: "Walk around Hillbrow and you are bound to find a red map, where someone, probably a black man, died" (94–95).

Another indicator for Johannesburg still being a racially segregated city is the fact that the black characters hardly interact with white characters. This is particularly noticeable when one looks at the character constellation: There are only two white characters in *Room 207*. One of them is Michelle, one of D'Nice's girlfriends who lives in a rich suburb of Johannesburg and ventures out to Hillbrow in order to see her boyfriend. The narrator claims that Michelle is the first white girl who enters Room 207 (39). He also emphasises that Michelle's family would never accept her relationship with D'Nice:

> Michelle loved D'Nice. She loved the darkie brother. It went on and on, despite the fact that they both knew that the relationship was a cul-de-sac from the beginning – she was from a very powerful family and the music was just a way of killing time between now and when she found Mr Right. (39)

This indicates once again that apartheid's segregationist laws are no longer officially in place, but the younger generation still seems to be affected by them. The only other white character apart from Michelle is David, Noko's former Professor, who looks at the latter's film scripts, declares them to be extraordinarily good, but still refuses to give Noko the chance to prove himself

as a film scriptwriter and director (145–147). The fact that racial and social boundaries still exist within the city, then, underlines the inability of finding closure in a post-apartheid state.

Moreover, the characters' precarious living conditions within Johannesburg make it extremely difficult to let go of the anti-apartheid past (which can be seen by the aforementioned crisis of masculinity and the retention of the image of the freedom fighter as an icon) and hope for a better future in the city. Not only are the buildings in Hillbrow run down, but, on a tour through the district with the narrator, hustlers, drug dealers, and someone who "bled to his death" are presented as quotidian occurrences (162). Apartheid's official segregation and pass laws seem to have been merely replaced by other boundaries, this time set by a democratic state:

> Pass through that once grand entrance. It used to be the only door here when apartheid was the greatest security guard to all white people, but not anymore. Democracy is here with its security gates, iron bars and security guards. (157)

Tightened security measures make it impossible to move freely through the city, thus emphasising the replacement of apartheid boundaries by other, capitalist boundaries. Although segregation may no longer be officially in place, it does exist, adding the economic to the racial factor: The possibility of moving out of Hillbrow, like Matome does by the end of the novel, largely depends on economic factors. Thus, while the city holds promises of a brighter future, just as it did in the times of Abrahams' and Paton's protagonists, in the present it is buried under memories of failure and loss, and cannot fully be claimed as a place for successful new beginnings.

This is further emphasised by the fact that Noko has to return empty-handed to his village, where an even more hopeless future seems to be awaiting him: "Life is never fair, I tell myself, choking to even get into the taxi. I am leaving all alone on this afternoon" (235). Noko, however, has not completed his return journey, as the book ends with the quoted scene. Still dependent on public transport (in contrast to his former roommates), he is melancholically drawn towards the city, despite the fact that he was unable to realise his dreams, and in spite of having lost all his friends and meagre possessions. Indeed, Johannesburg itself might be regarded as Noko's object of love which he loses at the end of the novel. This is suggested by the fact that (similar to the representation of Cape Town in *Thirteen Cents,* though with much more intensity), Johannesburg is perceived as a 'dangerous seductress' by Noko. He states that the metropolis "will city-ise you, *hold you, lovingly caress you and or-*

gasmify you and, by the time you wake up, it's too late" (50). This melancholic attachment is emphasised by the fact that he still seems unwilling to leave Johannesburg after all the hardships he suffered therein: "I've been here since half-eight and now it's fourteen fifty-two. Can a goodbye last that long?" (234). At the same time, he is overwhelmed by the place and states that he "can't hear anymore" because of all the noise around him (234). Shortly before leaving, he declares himself to be "de-city-ised" (231), a condition synonymous with the utter disillusionment felt towards his life in the city and which shows his conflict due to ambivalence. Thus, Noko's feelings towards Johannesburg can be seen as ambiguous and deeply melancholic in the Freudian sense ("Mourning" 257). Although he has "lived fourteen years of hard nothing" (Moele, *Room* 235), he has also experienced the city as a place of fast, energetic, and intense living and opportunities. This is probably the reason why it is so hard for him to leave: Letting go of Johannesburg also means abandoning his hopes for the future.

FRAGMENTATION AND MARGINALISATION

The aspect of melancholia is further reflected on a structural level. At first glance, the narrative appears to be linear since the novel starts by recounting how the characters have come to live in Room 207, and it ends by portraying how each of them leaves the apartment. If one looks more closely at the narrative structure, however, it appears fragmented since it is a non-linear account of the characters' lives. It consists of seven chapters, which have headings like "Refuge", "Mortals," and "Noughts and Dreams" (Chapters 1, 2 and 3). The number seven highlights a sense of circularity through the recurring reference to the seven days of the week. However, the plot appears much more fragmented when looking at the different chapters in more detail. Reminiscent of a film script, each chapter consists of various, small sub-chapters, sometimes merely fragmented scenes, making the plot appear incoherent at times.

Although the novel has a timeframe of fourteen years during which the six men live in the apartment, one does not know when precisely the recounted scenes occur. Thus, past and present seem to blend into each other, and a refusal of chronology and coherence is discernible. According to Sally-Ann Murray, "there are evident motifs which hold the narrative together" (87). Yet, those recurring motifs – such as boozing, or the reappearance of certain people (like Justice, a homeless man who is given shelter by the roommates) – do not seem to contribute to a sense of stability or linearity. Because of the first-

person narrative focalisation, the story is – even though Noko is recounting the other characters' lives as if told from a third person perspective – always told from Noko's perspective, which makes it highly unreliable and questionable at certain moments. For instance, Noko explicitly states that he does not accompany Molamo when the latter visits his girlfriend Tebogo towards the end of the narrative (Moele, *Room* 214). However, he gives the readers a detailed account of what might have happened in Tebogo's flat (215–219).

Additionally, the narrator implies that the person to whom the story is recounted is another black man. By the beginning of the novel, the addressee is given a tour through the apartment, and Noko ends it with the words "brother, you are home" (15). Furthermore, when Noko talks about white people, he refers to them in the third person plural, not including the addressee (125). When Noko guides the addressee through Hillbrow he also refers to the notion of ownership of the city again: "Walk like it [Hillbrow] belongs to you, because me and you, we have inherited this" (158). However, in spite of these invocations of similarity, the addressee seems to have a very different lifestyle to the narrator and his roommates. He does not seem to know his way around Hillbrow since Noko is giving him a tour at some point during the narrative: "We'll buy something later, this is not the only twenty-four-hour supermarket around here, there's another one in Highpoint" (158). He also does not seem to take drugs, for instance: "We are going to sit here together, roll a smoke, puff and be happy for a couple of minutes – all courtesy of me knowing how to survive in Johannesburg. You don't smoke? Too bad" (168). These dialogues between the male first-person narrator and a male addressee can make the narrative highly uncomfortable for female readers, as they might feel excluded and marginalised during the reading process. After all, female readers not only witness a dialogue exclusively between two men, but, during the reading process, they will also have to cope with the fact that all flatmates, including the narrator, are incredibly derogatory towards female characters.

The narrative perspective, the fragmented form of the novel, and the male addressee are relevant when reading *Room 207* as a melancholic counter-narrative to the TRC's mourning paradigm. In contrast to Wicomb's and Penny's texts, for instance, *Room 207* refers explicitly to the TRC only once: every Sunday, the roommates hold a so-called 'kangaroo court' in which everything that happens during the week is under review: "Here, lies and half-lies, truth and half-truth, conclusions and observations are all on the table" (109). Undoubtedly, this is an allusion to the SABC's weekly programme presented by journalist Max Du Preez, in which the week's events during the TRC hearings

were summed up and reviewed.[45] The TRC Report went on for almost two years. It ran every Sunday night, and it was one way of keeping up to date with the developments of the Commission in a condensed form. Thus, South African readers may even associate the roommates' Sunday evening 'kangaroo court' more immediately with the TRC than non-South African readers.

Against the TRC's attempt at closure, coherence, and a detailed account of the various events of the country's apartheid past, the fragmentation and incoherence of the text point to the important refusal of closure on a narratological level. The narrative perspective of the novel raises some questions that were raised during the TRC process: Whose truth is being told? Who tells whose story and which voices are being marginalised in favour of others? It is especially this marginalisation of certain groups' stories in favour of others' which runs the risk of the TRC becoming a grand national narrative for the 'new' South Africa.

Observable here is a similarity to Wicomb's and van Niekerk's texts in which "quotidian narratives of loss [that] have themselves been lost by the official discourse" (Christiansë 375) are central. However, while in *Agaat* and *Playing in the Light* a particular attention is drawn to such narratives by the fact that they are central to the plot, in *Room 207* it is the marginalisation of the female version and the technique of exclusion on a narratological level that can be read as an implicit critique of the TRC.

With regard to the narrative situation in the novel, Kerry Bystrom remarks in her essay "Johannesburg Interiors": "It is for a reason that the reader/guest is gendered male, or 'Brother', from the very beginning of the novel" (9). She pointedly argues that the "invitation" and the feeling of being at home in *Room 207* turns out to be very ambivalent, given the specified addressee and the way the women characters are treated. But she also emphasises that "regardless of such discomforts [the specified addressee, and the dilapidated state of Room 207], however, these interiors remain, as we read the novel, our temporary refuge" (9). And yet, it is precisely due to the fact that the addressee is thus specified that women are openly excluded from and marginalised in *Room 207*, for instance. This indicates that despite an inclusive TRC rhetoric there are excluded and marginalised groups and voices in the 'new' South Africa who feel encouraged to participate in neither the country's rewriting of its history, nor in the envisioning of its future.[46]

Like the narrator's failure to make his dreams come true, which stands in

[45] All the TRC reports can be watched online ("Truth Commission").
[46] Heidi Grunebaum and Steven Robins have written extensively about the marginalisation of coloured people during the TRC process, for example (149–173).

opposition to a 'rainbow nation' rhetoric, the narrative structure stands against the TRC's grand narrative of mourning. Instead, it can be seen as a counter-narrative of melancholia, which, because of its painful past, cannot be shaped into a coherent form, or made sense of – at least not yet. Furthermore, by the end of the novel, Johannesburg itself appears as a place of loss and suffering instead of as a city where people can realise their dreams. After all, Noko not only has to face the fact that he has no chance of making it in the city, having lost his dreams to it, but now he has the feeling that he has lost his friends to it (Moele, *Room* 231).

Thus, despite its disavowal or negation of the past, *Room 207* is a text that is, as David Medalie observes for many other post-apartheid novels, "inclined rather to a preoccupation with the past than an embrace of the future" (36). However, while other novels that I analysed in this study, such as *Thirteen Cents* or *Playing in the Light*, can be read against more recent theories which attempt to depathologise melancholia, *Room 207* appears as a melancholic text in a rather Freudian sense, given the silences and fragmented structure which hint at the inability to face the past instead of forming a resistance to it, such as it is the case in *Agaat*, for instance. Finally, the Freudian sense of melancholia manifests most visibly through Noko's unresolved attachment to Johannesburg and the hopeless prognosis for his future.

CONCLUSION

In this study I have read six post-apartheid novels with different manifestations of melancholia in mind. As I have outlined in the Introduction and Chapter 1, melancholia is the inability to mourn a deep-seated loss that, very often, has resulted from a traumatic experience or "different layers of traumas" (Krog et al. 123). Additionally, melancholia, in its resistant form, refuses the onset of amnesia as "[i]t displays the ego's melancholic yet militant refusal to allow certain objects to disappear into oblivion" (Eng and Han 355). Finally, melancholia is, particularly in the context of formerly colonial societies, also the pathologised refusal to acknowledge a loss of power, a position of privilege, and/or an act of complicity on the part of a dominant white group within society. This form of melancholia plays itself out in mechanisms of rejection, retention by discrimination of, and yet the desire for, the racial others (Cheng xi).

Based on Freud's, Cheng's, and Gilroy's concepts, I have read most novels as melancholic counter-narratives to the TRC's attempt to initiate a nationwide process of mourning with the aim of subsequent closure of the apartheid past. Moreover, concepts of melancholia have proven particularly useful in order to analyse issues such as complicity, crises of identity, forms of resistance, and intergenerational memory.

I grouped my six analyses into three chapters that comprise two analyses each. The first analysis chapter (Chapter 2), which focused on Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* and Marlene van Niekerk's *Agaat*, discussed questions of coloured identity and loss. By drawing on Cheng's concept of racial melancholia, I have sought to show that the apartheid category 'coloured' and the fact that the coloured population was positioned in an in-between space that was constructed by an oppressive regime, led to various forms of a melancholic self-rejection. This, in turn, has triggered mechanisms of an internalised racism of and against coloured and black people.

Both texts represent these manifestations in various ways. Wicomb's novel focuses on issues of passing and intergenerational melancholia. I have read John's and Helen's (the protagonist's parents') decision to pass as white during apartheid as an internalisation of the white 'ideal' caused by apartheid and colonial ideology. This internalisation can be read as John's and Helen's "introjection of a lost, never- possible perfection" (Cheng xi). This loss, in turn, is transferred onto their daughter Marion, who only learns about her parents'

decision to pass for white when she is an adult. By reading Marion's transgenerational loss as a depathologised form of loss, by drawing on Eng and Han's observations on intergenerational melancholia, I have argued that it is possible that Marion remembers the losses that her parents could not acknowledge.

In *Agaat*,[47] the fact that both dominant racial melancholia and the melancholy of the racialised subjects, although they manifest differently, must be seen as interdependent (Cheng xi), is central to the story. I posit that the white farm owner Milla's attempts to retain her coloured surrogate daughter/servant Agaat's racialised body, and the subsequent foreclosure of a mother-daughter bond, in fact trigger Agaat's racial melancholia. This melancholia plays itself out most drastically when Agaat repeats, or mimes, the injuries that Milla inflicted upon her by inflicting similar injuries upon the coloured farm workers. However, rather than seeing this behaviour as merely a pathological reaction to her own injuries, I suggest that Agaat's melancholia be read as a painful, yet powerful tool of resistance against both closure and the domination of her white 'mistress' on the farm.

Both texts can also be read as "quotidian narratives of loss" (Christiansë 375) that are counter-narratives to the TRC's focus on political crimes, state brutality, and disappearances in that *Playing in the Light* and *Agaat* focus on the daily, 'unspectacular' effects that apartheid had on South African citizens. As I have outlined in my introduction, the notion of what Njabulo Ndebele has referred to as the 'rediscovery of the ordinary' is particularly important in post-apartheid writing. In *Playing in the Light* it is passing which is central to the plot – an issue that, according to Christiansë, was not dealt with during the TRC (375) – while in *Agaat* these quotidian losses are depicted through the representation of a relationship 'across the colour lines' that is rendered almost impossible and that must be viewed as ambivalent due to dynamics of power, retention by discrimination and complicity.

Furthermore, I have suggested a reading of *Agaat* as a counter-narrative to the TRC since its protagonist refuses or is unable to find closure. This is most visible by Agaat's various forms of refusal to let go of objects that are connected to her past on the farm. Some examples are Milla's diaries in which the white woman has 'documented' Agaat's life on the farm or clothes and pieces of embroidery that are related to Agaat's painful story of having lost

[47] This novel is, perhaps due to its length, complexity in style, and richness in plot, the text in which many forms of melancholia that I have discussed throughout this study are palpable. Hence I will often recur to it in order to illustrate some of the examples more clearly. I will, however, also indicate parallels, similarities, and differences in manifestations of melancholia within the other texts discussed in this study.

both her original home (from which she was taken by Milla) and the possibility of a mother-daughter bond once Milla begins treating her as a servant. These objects, which Agaat stores in her mistress' sickroom, are a symbol of a refusal to "'close the book on the past,' as many of the commission's proponents suggested would follow from its work" (Graham 3).

In Chapter 3, which focuses on André Brink's *Devil's Valley* and Sarah Penny's *The Beneficiaries*, I have focused on a very different notion of melancholia. With concepts such as Gilroy's postcolonial melancholia, the Mitscherlichs' inability to mourn, and Ross Truscott's notion of Afrikaner National melancholia in connection to self-parody, I have read André Brink's *Devil's Valley* as an allegory for Afrikaner postcolonial melancholia. In my reading of Devil's Valley as an anachronistic space that is stuck in its colonial and apartheid past rather than embracing, or at least accepting, the changes that have ensued in post-apartheid South Africa, I have suggested that the valley's inhabitants are viewed as melancholic, unable to mourn the loss of power and privilege that would follow a decision to venture outside Devil's Valley. What is more, the inhabitants' belief in the Afrikaner people as a 'chosen' people highlights notions of complicity within a white racist and patriarchal system (on both national and local scales) on the part of the valley's women. However, the female characters must always be viewed in an ambiguous light: Suffering from transgenerational losses and traumatic memories that have been transmitted over several generations (Abraham and Torok 141), some of the female characters attempt to resist the patriarchal regime, although none of them is bent on undermining racist beliefs that are central to the valley's ideology. Afrikaner whiteness is thus represented as stagnant, lost in the past, and, as yet, unable to hold a critical position towards white privilege and complicity with a segregationist system.

The issue of guilt and complicity is also central to Sarah Penny's *The Beneficiaries,* the second novel that I have analysed in this chapter. By reading this novel with Ndebele's description of the white English-speaking community as a privileged part of South African society – who "[w]ith a foreign passport in the back pocket of the trousers, now they belong – now they don't" (Ndebele, "Memory" 26) – in mind, I have sought to outline notions of loss, complicity, and guilt within the novel. Lally's (the protagonist's) development can be read along Freudian lines of melancholia. This melancholia is, by the end of the novel, transformed into a healthy form of grieving, during which Lally acknowledges her status as a beneficiary of apartheid. For this development, the TRC is vital. While I have suggested that Wicomb's, van Niekerk's, and

Moele's novels should be read as counter-narratives to the TRC, *The Beneficiaries* can be seen as a text that gestures towards an embrace of the TRC as a forum for mourning and an attempt at closure.

In my third analysis chapter (Chapter 4), the focus shifts to a younger generation of writers and their predominantly urban stories of Cape Town and Johannesburg. I have argued that both *Thirteen Cents* by K. Sello Duiker and *Room 207* by Kgebetli Moele are stories of loss and survival that represent urban issues in post-apartheid South Africa in a stark and unflinching way. Both stories, although very much grounded in the present, are also haunted by the country's colonial and apartheid past, which triggers mechanisms of melancholic attachments and/or unprocessed losses in the protagonists' psyches.

In my analysis of *Thirteen Cents* I have again turned to Cheng's notion of racial melancholia. I have suggested that the fact that the protagonist Azure "troubles the main racial categories of apartheid identity" (Viljoen xi) by his physical appearance leads to racial rejections and forms of desire on the part of white, coloured, and black people alike. Unable to process the loss of his parents who were killed before he came to Cape Town, and particularly his mother's death, leads to mechanisms of incorporation and a 'gendered' melancholia on Azure's part. Azure's melancholia is compounded by his ongoing traumatic experiences at the hands of the adults who control the streets of Cape Town and who discriminate, violate, and at the same time desire Azure's racialised body. Azure's melancholia, however, as painful as it is, also leaves room for resilience and strategies of survival. His refusal or inability to overcome the violations done to him is transformed into anger, which becomes a powerful survival tool in a harsh environment. This echoes, to some extent at least, Agaat's refusal to lay the past to rest, which can be seen as a gesture of forcefully refusing closure to her white 'mistress'.

In my final analysis I have turned to an exclusively Freudian reading of Moele's *Room 207*. I have argued that Noko's (the narrator) failure to realise his dreams in Johannesburg, and his melancholic attachment to the city itself – which is characterised by a conflict due to ambivalence – can be read as unprocessed, unmourned losses. Furthermore, the silence around the word apartheid throughout the text, and the characters' attachment to the iconic image of the male freedom fighter, suggest both an inability to face the traumatic apartheid past and a devastating crisis of masculine identity in the present – the combination of the two impede the embrace of a positive future outlook, highlighting both attachments to, and avoidances of, the past.

On a narratological level, the novel also refuses closure. Like Wicomb's, van Niekerk's and Penny's texts, *Room 207* can be read against the TRC. The novel's fragmented structure, the fact that the addressee is gendered male, and the narrator's unreliability all lend themselves to a reading of the novel as a counter-narrative to the TRC. It is particularly the exclusion and marginalisation of both the female characters and readers (within the story and on a narratological level) which hints at a critique of the TRC's potential to become a grand narrative which excludes some voices in favour of others in post-apartheid South Africa.

Indeed, the fragmentation on a narrative level is a common thread linking together all the novels with a focus on the TRC that are analysed in this study. I have argued that fragmentation, unreliability, and a non-chronological narrative construction can be seen as signs of refusing closure, refusing to accept the TRC as an overarching national narrative of reconciliation, and the representation of unspeakable losses and traumatic injuries. This is a feature that is common to Wicomb's, van Niekerk's, Penny's, and Moele's texts, as different as they might be in style and content otherwise. This is also something that links melancholia to trauma since representations of trauma are often concerned with attempts to represent the unrepresentable in connection to highlighting instances of silence, fragmentation, and incoherence on a textual level.

Furthermore, I have shown in my study, along with theorists such as Cheng, Buxbaum, and Samuelson, that melancholic losses, traumatic injuries, or intergenerational melancholia are frequently mirrored on the bodies of the characters, manifesting in bodily pain, physical handicaps, or intergenerationally transmitted (psychological) illnesses.

Whether it is the fact that Marion's foot swells, in an uncanny repetition of her mother's bleeding feet when she discovers her parents' secret decision to pass for white in Wicomb's novel, or Lally's and her mother's eating disorders which hint at a shared loss of a mother-daughter bond, these bodily illnesses all point towards unprocessed losses. Moreover, Henta's and Emma's bodily and psychological similarities to their ancestors in *Devil's Valley* underline the intergenerational loss that has been transferred on to them by their forebears.

Nowhere, however, is the 'speaking body' as manifest and visible as it is in *Agaat*. Agaat's physical impairment (particularly her disfigured right arm and the fact that she cannot have children) highlight her various traumatic experiences at her parental home. Moreover, the fact that she, as a coloured woman who has been given 'shelter' by a white woman, is unable to bear chil-

dren, raises issues of miscegenation and shame with regard to coloured identity. Agaat's inability to bear children is significant when one thinks of an internalised racial (self-)rejection. After all, Agaat makes it very clear, perhaps as a repetition of her own unprocessed loss, that she orders the coloured farm workers to "stop breeding" (van Niekerk, *Agaat* 297). Above all, however, Milla's view of coloured identity, Agaat's disability, and how Milla reacts to it is quite revealing: She is not worried about Agaat. On the contrary, she is relieved when she finds out that the latter cannot bear children (430), which underlines her attempts at maintaining control over Agaat's coloured body and her sexuality.

Finally, what should also be viewed as a common thread within the analyses of this study is the melancholic loss of the mother, either a loss occasioned by the actual loss of one's mother (*Thirteen Cents* and *Playing in the Light* come to mind) or the loss of a potential mother-daughter bond that has been rendered impossible to maintain due to the segregationist system. Here, *Playing in the Light* must be mentioned for both cases; after all, Marion's relationship with her mother is troubled from the beginning since Helen cannot view Marion as anything other than a reminder of her 'shameful' coloured identity that she has sought to eradicate.

In *Agaat*, it is the impossibility of maintaining intimate relationships 'across the colour lines' and above all Milla's complicity with apartheid ideologies which lead to both protagonists' unretrievable mother-child bond. In *The Beneficiaries*, finally, it is the regulation of the Bantu Education Act which impedes Lally from attending a local coloured school in favour of a boarding school that physically separates and psychologically estranges her from her mother and which is a central reason for their distanced relationship. These examples are powerful representations of quotidian losses that were the result of a segregationist system. One of this study's aims has been to demonstrate that, regardless of the level of occurrence (whether intimate, familial, societal, or national), the novels' characters' losses and traumatic injuries are, more often than not, consequences of an oppressive regime which sought to control the lives of all individuals of South Africa's disenfranchised majority. This rigid form of retention by discrimination, however, also affected the psyches of those whom the regime meant to strengthen and 'protect'. After all, as Penny's novel powerfully demonstrates, acknowledging one's complicity is often accompanied by psychological damages.

While I have read texts that were published during a very short timeframe (*Devil's Valley,* the oldest text, in 1998 and *Room 207*, the most recent

text discussed here, in 2006), South African literature has experienced many exciting developments over the last decade and further discussions about melancholia might focus on the question of how whiteness is represented and negotiated in more recent works which might possibly be subsumed under the rubric of speculative fiction. This genre might be particularly interesting with regard to notions of white melancholia since most authors whose works have been classified as speculative fiction, such as Lauren Beukes, Lewis Greenberg, Andrew Salomon, Sarah Lotz, and Charlie Human (to name but a few) are themselves white.

In their article on Human's *Apocalypse Now Now* and *Kill Baxter* Olivier Moreillon and Alan Muller suggest:

> to tie [the] personal journey [of the novel's protagonist] to the larger issue of South African whites having to (re-)locate themselves within the country's new dispensation, a process, as the novels' contemporaneity suggests, that is still ongoing […]. (20)

Future studies that might focus on issues of melancholia within the realm of speculative fiction could thus – based on Gilroy's, Cheng's, and the Mitscherlichs' observations, for example – ask to what extent "speculative fiction and the non-realist potential that it offers" (Moreillon and Muller 20) are concerned with issues such as white privilege, loss of power, and forms of rejection of and desire for the racial others. Moreover, it might be fruitful to investigate if and how the white inability to mourn ongoing attachments to apartheid is also represented in a genre which breaks away from realist conventions.

Lastly, I have mentioned above that many of the analysed works of this study can be read against the attempt to incite a nationwide process of mourning embodied by the TRC. More recent works that focus on issues of loss, however, such as Niq Mhlongo's *Way Back Home* or Carol-Ann Davids' *The Blacks of Cape Town* write against different grand narratives. In their novels on betrayal, traumatic experiences, and (un)mourned losses, Mhlongo and Davids powerfully and courageously demythologise the grand narrative of the ANC's struggle for liberation in that they put an emphasis on betrayal and violence within the movement.

Davids' novel, similar to *The Beneficiaries*, foregrounds a process of mourning which begins during the protagonist's state of self-exile in the United States and which continues after her return to Cape Town. Thus, *The Blacks of Cape Town* might still be read through a Freudian lens of melancholia. However, Mhlongo's novel, which troubles notions of psychological illness as de-

fined by Western psychiatrists and where 'traditional' and spiritual representations of loss and trauma are interpolated with a post-traumatic stress disorder that results in the protagonist's bipolar condition, might call for a re-evaluation of all concepts of melancholia discussed in this study. In such a hybrid text, the analysis of ghostly apparitions, dreams, hallucinations, but above all the role of traditional healers as figures who facilitate processes of mourning, would have to be foregrounded.

Nevertheless, by analysing these six texts of post-apartheid fiction, I have sought to point to different forms of and contribute to the debate on melancholia within South African literature. Although one can, with more contemporary texts in mind, constantly redefine and question the lines between mourning and melancholia, complicity and resistance, guilt and shame, this study has foregrounded the possibility of highlighting these tropes within post-apartheid literature with regard to loss and 'uncomfortable' though urgent themes surrounding racial rejections, desires, and white privilege.

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This book focuses on six post-apartheid novels, namely Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* (2006), Marlene van Niekerk's *Agaat* (2004/2007), André Brink's *Devil's Valley* (1998), Sarah Penny's *The Beneficiaries* (2002), K Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* (2000), and Kgebetli Moele's *Room 207* (2006). It aims at highlighting different manifestations of melancholia that are visible in these texts in particular and in post-apartheid writing more generally. Mainly based on Sigmund Freud's, Anne Cheng's, and Paul Gilroy's concepts of melancholia, most novels are regarded as melancholic counter-narratives to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission's attempt to initiate a nationwide process of mourning with the aim of subsequent closure of the apartheid past. Moreover, concepts of melancholia prove particularly useful in order to analyse issues such as complicity, uncritical whiteness, crises of identity, forms of resistance, and intergenerational memory.

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